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Suárez's Argument against Real Universals

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In his *Metaphysical Disputation 5*, Francisco Suárez offers a concise argument to the effect that all that does or can possibly exist is singular and individual, and that a commitment to real universals would entail what he calls a 'manifest contradiction'. According to a recent interpretation of this Master Argument against realism, it reveals that Suárez was committed to a hylomorphic version of the principle of the identity of indiscernibles, and ruled out the possibility of perfectly similar yet numerically distinct entities. In this paper, however, I argue that (1) at least for fundamental items in his ontology such as immaterial forms and matter-form compounds, Suárez was not committed to the identity of indiscernibles, and (2) a reading of the Master Argument that does justice to this is available. On the basis of this reading I provide a reappraisal of the argument, and conclude that (3) it rests on a premise that the realist would have good reasons to challenge. Hence, while the argument seems consistent with the possibility of indiscernible yet numerically distinct immaterial forms and matter-form compounds Suárez wishes to allow for, it is doubtful whether it can accomplish what it sets out to do, and undermine the case for realism.

In his *Metaphysical Disputation 5*, Francisco Suárez offers one of the most detailed discussions of individuals and individuation by any early modern Aristotelian philosopher. The opening section of this work claims that all that can possibly exist is singular and individual. This claim has understandably led many of his readers to wonder how universal concepts originate, and what justifies our use of them.¹ A question that has received little attention in comparison, however, is exactly why Suárez believes that all that can exist is singular and individual.

Recently, Jorge Secada has drawn attention to what he calls Suárez's Master Argument against real universals. According to Secada, this argument bears close examination, not only because of the problem it raises for realism about universals, but also because it reveals a metaphysical commitment in Suárez that has gone unnoticed in the literature so far. According to Secada, indeed, a close examination of the

¹ For instance, [Ross \(1962\)](#), [Noreña \(1981\)](#), [South \(2002\)](#), [Heider \(2014\)](#), pp. 24–95).

argument reveals that Suárez was committed to a version of the principle of the identity of indiscernibles. While we are accustomed to associating this principle with early modern rationalism rather than Jesuit Aristotelianism, Secada submits, the premises and line of reasoning Suárez deploys in his Master Argument rule out the possibility of wholly similar yet numerically distinct entities.²

This paper provides a re-examination and reappraisal of the Master Argument. I argue that, at least for fundamental items in his ontology such as forms and matter-form compounds, Suárez was not committed to the identity of indiscernibles. Moreover, I argue that a reading of the Master Argument that does justice to this is available. On the basis of this reading I provide a reappraisal of the argument, and argue that it rests on a premise that the realist would have good reason to challenge.

The paper proceeds as follows. §1 briefly discusses Suárez's characterization of the distinction between universals and individuals. §2 provides an outline of the Master Argument and introduces Secada's reading. §3 raises two problems for that reading, and discusses cases where Suárez commits to numerically distinct yet wholly similar individuals. §4 offers a new reading and appraisal of the Master Argument.

1. Universals and individuals

According to Suárez, all and only universals are communicable to many beings, or are such that they can be found in many beings:³

That is called common or universal which is communicated to many, or found in many according to a single concept. On the other hand, that is called one, or singular, or individual, which... is not communicable to many. (DM 5.1.2)⁴

On one reading, when Suárez writes that all and only universals are such that they can be found in many, he is saying that all and only universals are such that they are 'capable of being wholly present in more than one place at one time' (Shields and Schwartz 2019). On this reading, what makes universals such as Human Nature different from individual men such as Peter is that, whereas Human Nature can simultaneously

² See Secada (2014).

³ See also Gracia (1982, pp. 2–6), McCullough (1996, pp. 91–3), Heider (2014, pp. 24–5).

⁴ References to the *Metaphysical Disputations* (DM) are given by disputation, section, and paragraph number. Translations are mine.

be wholly located where Peter is as well as where Paul is, Peter cannot be present at more than one location at the same time.

This, however, cannot be what Suárez has in mind in claiming that all and only universals can be found in many. For while, as we will see, he holds that the notion of a being that can be found in many 'amounts to a manifest contradiction', he denies that the notion of a being that is wholly present in more than one location at the same time does. Thus, in *De angelis* he argues that it would be possible for God to place a single individual in several locations at the same time. He writes:

If we proceed to consider the division or distinction between locations, so to speak, we find that no repugnancy or contradiction follows if one thing is placed in distinct locations. (*De angelis* 4.10.2. OO 2, p. 463)⁵

Clearly, then, being found in many and being wholly present in more than one location at the same time are different predicates, for Suárez. So what can he mean in defining universals as beings that can be found in many? I propose the following. According to Suárez, something is a universal if and only if many beings can instantiate it. Thus, Human Nature is a universal if and only if there can be many beings, such as Peter and Paul, that instantiate it. On this account, we may perhaps illustrate the difference between universality and simultaneous multiple location as follows. To say that Human Nature is a universal is to say that many beings can instantiate Human Nature, each of which will normally be at no more than one location at the same time.⁶ To say that Peter is bilocated, by contrast, is to say that a single being instantiates his nature, but that this single being is simultaneously present at more than one location. While simultaneous multiple location involves a single being with multiple locations, universality would involve multiple beings that normally have a single location each.

Suárez also distinguishes between universals and individuals in terms of the different ways in which they may be divided. Here his proposal is that we conceive of universals as wholes and of their instances as parts into which they may be divided. On this proposal, we may conceive of Human Nature as a whole that is divisible into several instances. Once we do this, we will see that a universal is divisible into parts, each

⁵ References to works by Suárez (1856–78) other than DM follow the internal divisions of these works and cite volume and page numbers in the *Opera omnia* (OO).

⁶ A divine intervention is required to actualise the possibility of simultaneous multiple location. *De angelis* 4.10.16. OO 2, p. 467.

of which is entirely such as the whole it came from. After all, whatever defines Human Nature will be found in Peter and Paul as well: if Human Nature is defined by animality and rationality, these features will be found in each and every one of its instances too. But individuals cannot be divided in this way. When Peter is divided into parts, what we obtain is a number of body parts none of which is wholly such as Peter. Universals are divisible in a special way that individuals are not:

Man as such is not an individual, because it is divisible into many entities in each of which the whole nature of man is found. By contrast, this quantity of two feet is an individual because, even though it is divisible, it is not divisible into many entities each of which is such as the divided whole was. (DM 5.1.3)

Again: all and only universals are ‘divisible into many such as themselves’ (DM 5.1.3).

2. The Master Argument

According to Suárez’s Master Argument, universals as defined above do not exist. This section will provide a first outline of the argument and introduce Secada’s claim that it commits Suárez to a principle of the identity of indiscernibles.

2.1 Outline

Suárez’s Master Argument for the individual unity of all that exists is as follows:

Whatever is an actual being, or whatever exists or can exist immediately, is singular and individual... We prove this statement as follows. Whatever exists has a certain and determinate entity. But whatever has a certain and determinate entity necessarily has an added negation. Therefore, it has singularity and individual unity as well. (DM 5.1.4)

In outline, the argument proceeds as follows:

- (1) Whatever exists⁷ has a certain and determinate entity.
- (2) Whatever has a certain and determinate entity, has an added negation.
- (3) Whatever exists has an added negation. (1,2)

⁷ For concision, I will typically suppress the addition ‘or can exist’.

- (4) Whatever has an added negation, has individual unity.
 (5) Whatever exists has individual unity. (3,4)

To understand this line of reasoning, some unpacking will be necessary. First, we must say a few words about what, according to Suárez, constitutes the entity of a thing, and what it means to say of an entity that it is determinate.

In Suárez's vocabulary, the entity of a thing just is the set of metaphysical parts that composes it. Consider, for instance, the cases of material and immaterial substances. The main metaphysical parts of material substances are matter and form. Matter is the metaphysical part in virtue of which a material substance is a body. Form is the metaphysical part in virtue of which a material substance is a body of this or that kind. But in addition to matter and form, material substances also have what Suárez calls a mode of union. A mode of union is the metaphysical part in virtue of which the matter and form of a material substance are united to one another to form a single whole. Indeed, we may think of a mode of union as the hylomorphic 'cement' that makes the difference between a unified material substance and mere co-located matter and form (Anfray 2019, p. 323). The entity of a material substance thus includes matter, form, and a mode of union:⁸

This matter and this form, united to one another, are the intrinsic principles of the whole entity of a composite substance. (DM 5.6.15)

For concision, I will in what follows say simply that the entity of a material substance is the compound of matter and form that composes it.

In contrast to material substances, immaterial substances such as angels and the rational souls of human beings have but a single metaphysical part. They consist of pure forms with no matter. Accordingly, the entities of immaterial substances are entirely formal as well. Immaterial substances have 'an entity that is not composed out of essential parts – that is an entity that is not composed out of matter and form' (*De angelis* 1.7.2. OO 2, p. 32).

Now that we know what constitutes the entity of material and immaterial substances, we can proceed to ask what it means to say that (1) the entity of all that exists is determinate. According to Secada, the point of this claim is that no entity could ever be just that: an entity, but not determinately such or such an entity. Thus, applied to the case of material substances, the claim is that no material substance could

⁸ On modes of union, see also Schmaltz (2020) and Perler (2020, pp. 160–4).

ever be composed of a matter-form compound that was just that: a matter-form compound, but not determinately such or such a compound. In the same way, no material substance could ever be composed of an immaterial form that was just that: an immaterial form, but not determinately such or such an immaterial form. In short: the entity of every possible material or immaterial substance must have some determinate character or other.

According to (2), whatever has a determinate entity has an added negation. According to Secada, ‘the added negation in the cited text is the denial of divisibility or communicability’ (Secada 2014, p. 225). On this reading, the second premise of the Master Argument says that whatever has a determinate entity is such that it cannot be divided into many beings such as it, or such that it cannot be found in many.

From these two premises, (3) follows straightforwardly, and says that all that exists is such that it cannot be divided into many beings such as it, or such that it cannot be found in many. Premise (4) simply rehearses the definition of individuality we have already encountered: whatever cannot be divided into many beings such as itself and cannot be found in many, is an individual. At this point the final conclusion again readily follows: (5) Whatever exists, is an individual.

2.2 *The Identity of Indiscernibles*

According to Secada, perhaps the most remarkable feature of the Master Argument is that it ‘argues for individuality from determinacy’ (Secada 2014, p. 227). But, Secada seems to assume, if having a determinate character is what makes an entity an individual, entities with the same determinate character must be the same individual (Secada 2014, p. 227). Hence Suárez must disallow the possibility of indiscernible, yet numerically distinct entities:

He is committed to a principle of the identity of equally determinate entities. Let us call it a Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles. (Secada 2014, p. 227)

Again:

Suárez argues that all that exists is determinate, and that all that is determinate is individual. His Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles is obtained from the identity of identically determined entities. (Secada 2014, p. 234)

If we apply this to what was said above about the entities of immaterial and material substances, we find that this principle says the following:

If a and b are immaterial substances, and the forms that compose a and b are of identical character, $a = b$.

And:

If a and b are material substances, and the matter-form compounds that compose a and b are of identical character, $a = b$.

Suárez's Master Argument on this reading turns out to be a double-edged metaphysical sword. In taking us from determinacy to individuality, the Master Argument in just a few steps eliminates the possibility of real universals and wholly similar yet numerically distinct entities alike. As we will see, however, this reading of the argument runs into at least two problems.

3. Two problems

It is certainly true that, according to Suárez, many entities are determinate in Secada's sense. Thus, we are told that accidental forms are determinate insofar as no accident is ever just that: an accident, but not determinately such or such an accident. A colour, for instance, is always such or such a colour, and a shape is always such or such a shape. In general, accidents:

give a specific being, such as being white, as well as a generic being, such as being coloured. But there is no accidental form in reality that gives only a generic being and not some specific being. (DM 13.3.17)

And just as there could be no accident that was just an accident, there could be no immaterial form that was just that: an immaterial form, but not determinately such or such an immaterial form.⁹

There cannot be, and indeed it is impossible to conceive of, a form separated from matter that is an immaterial substance and which in reality has only this incomplete and generic nature. (DM 13.3.17)

In the same vein, there could not be a material substance that was not determinately such or such a material substance. It would be impossible, for instance, even to conceive of 'some real animal that was not any kind of animal' (DM 15.10.8).

⁹ Cf. Des Chene (1996, p. 89) and Pasnau (2011, p. 65).

But even if all accidental forms, immaterial forms, and compounds of matter and form may be determinate, this does not mean that all actual entities are. Prime matter is an actual entity, (DM 13.4.13), which God could keep in existence independently of any form if he wished (DM 15.9.5). Even so, it is indifferent to any determinate way of being and becomes determinately this or that kind of entity only upon the arrival of a substantial form: ‘it is determined to some particular character through form’ (DM 13.3.18).

But even if we leave aside the special case of prime matter, a second, and arguably even more serious, problem remains for Secada’s reading. As we will see in the remainder of this section, there is evidence to the effect that Suárez rejected both the identity of indiscernible immaterial substances and the identity of indiscernible matter-form compounds.

3.1 *Angelic individuation*

That Suárez rejects the identity of indiscernible immaterial substances is clear from his critical review of an early modern Thomist account of the individuation of forms. This account aims to answer the following question:

Given two forms *a* and *b*, what makes *a* non-identical to *b*?

According to Thomist philosophers such as John Capreolus and Chrysostomos Iavellus, there are two possible answers to this question. First, one formal entity can differ from a second on account of its internal character, or on account of those internal features of the entity that make it belong to this or that class of forms.¹⁰ Second, the fact that two forms are non-identical may be due to the fact that, while they share the same internal character, they inform different quantities of matter. In the first case, the difference between *a* and *b* is a specific difference: *a* and *b* are not forms of the same kind. In the second case, *a* and *b* are forms of the same kind, but are numerically distinct members of that kind. As we will see below, in the first case, the difference between *a* and *b* is said to be a ‘difference in form’ or a ‘formal difference.’ In the second case, the difference between *a* and *b* is said to be merely a difference ‘between forms.’

In some cases, the application of this account is straightforward. If *a* is the form of whiteness and *b* the form of blackness, that $a \neq b$ is due

¹⁰ A form and the features that make it the kind of form that it is are inseparable in reality. As a referee points out, the distinction between a form and its kind-specific features is best understood as a rational distinction.

to a difference between the internal characters of a and b . If form a is the whiteness of the wall and form b the whiteness of the door, a and b are numerically distinct members of the same kind because both are whitenesses, but a informs the stones of the wall and b informs the wood of the door.¹¹

In other cases, however, the story is slightly more complicated. To see this, assume that a and b are angelic forms. Assume, for instance, that a is the form of the angel Gabriel and b the form of the angel Michael. What makes a non-identical to b ? The answer cannot be that a informs this quantity of matter and b informs that quantity of matter, because angelic forms do not inform any matter. So the answer that remains is that $a \neq b$ because the internal character of a differs from that of b . But this means that a and b will differ in kind, not only in number. Indeed, Capreolus and Iavellus reason as follows. Given any two angelic forms a and b :

- (1) If $a \neq b$, a and b differ in internal character.
- (2) Any forms a and b that differ in internal character differ in kind.
- (3) If $a \neq b$, a and b differ in kind. (1,2)

As Capreolus puts it:

Things that lack dimensions can differ in form only. But a difference in form makes for a difference in kind. And so, in the case of angels, there are as many species as there are individuals. (II *Sententiarum* 3.1.2. [Capreolus 1589](#), p. 117)¹²

And according to Iavellus:

In beings abstracted from matter, a difference between forms is always a formal difference. In material things, there is a difference between forms without a formal difference only in virtue of matter, the subject of the form, or quantity. And because we have none of these in the case of beings abstracted from matter, any difference

¹¹ This account raises the question what would individuate a and b in the case where God decided to destroy the wall and the door, but to conserve a and b . On one understanding of the account here, a and b in such a scenario remain distinct individuals in virtue of their distinct material origins, that is, in virtue of the fact that a was educed from this matter and b from that matter. For Capreolus on the individuality of the human soul after its separation from the body, see his II *Sententiarum* 3.1.2. [Capreolus \(1589\)](#), p. 117).

¹² References to scholastic works by authors other than Suárez follow the internal divisions of these works and cite page numbers in the relevant editions.

between such beings is a formal difference, and hence a specific difference. (*Metaphysica* 12.24. [Iavellus 1568](#), p. 901)

While there are many elements of this argument that would merit closer attention, what matters most for now is the fact that its first premise in effect amounts to a principle of the identity of indiscernibles. For the converse of (1) is:

If a and b are indiscernible in internal character, $a = b$.

According to Suárez, (1)–(3) was a ‘common argument’ for the conclusion that no two angels belong to the same species (DM 5.6.18). Since Suárez rejects its conclusion, he must reject either one or both of its premises.

His strategy is to accept (2), according to which any two forms that differ in internal character cannot belong to the same kind, but to deny (1), and hence the identity of indiscernible angelic forms. According to Suárez, Gabriel and Michael are non-identical because Gabriel is this formal entity a , Michael is that formal entity b , and formal entities a and b are non-identical. More precisely, a and b are non-identical in and of themselves. But from the fact that they are non-identical in and of themselves, it does not follow that there is some characteristic that a has but b lacks, or that a and b are different kinds of form in any way. On the contrary, a and b may be non-identical in and of themselves even if they are wholly similar to one another:

The common argument according to which these substances necessarily differ formally and essentially if they differ in their entities has already been answered... For these entities, however formal they may be, can be wholly similar in their essences. And hence, even though they differ from one another by themselves, their distinction is numerical... They are said to differ from one another by themselves, not because they are dissimilar, but because every one of them is from itself such that it is not another one. Indeed, similarity does not exclude distinction, as we will see below. (DM 5.6.18)

As Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra has pointed out, when Suárez says that similarity does not exclude distinction here, ‘perfect similarity is clearly what is intended’ ([Rodriguez-Pereyra 2014](#), p. 41). Angelic forms may be numerically distinct and yet perfectly indistinguishable, even by God, on account of the features that make them the sort of forms they are.

In the last sentence of the passage, Suárez announces that his claim that perfect similarity does not rule out numerical difference will be

further developed later on. As we will see, his development of that claim in later sections suggests that it concerns matter-form compounds as well.

3.2 *The individuation of effects*

Suppose a natural agent ignites a portion of matter. According to early modern Aristotelian natural philosophers, a complete account of what happens in this situation requires that we ask two questions. The first is a question about the specification of the effect that the agent produces. What are the properties of the fire that will be produced? The second is a question about the individuation of the effect. Given that the agent will bring about in the patient a fire with some given set of properties, which individual fire with these properties will be produced?¹³ For an answer to the first question, it was widely agreed, we must look to the natures of the agent and the patient.¹⁴ Facts about the agent and the matter it acts upon will determine, for instance, how hot the fire will be, and how large an area it will ignite. But they will not determine what individual fire with these properties gets produced. The agent and patient may determine the character of the fire form to be produced, but are of themselves indifferent to any given individual fire form with that character:

A fire, for instance, of itself is able to produce many forms that are similar to one another in kind but distinct in number. And yet, here and now, and in this matter, it introduces numerically this form and no other. This determination cannot proceed from the fire itself, as it is a natural agent that of itself is equally capable of bringing about any one from among these forms... Nor can it proceed from the prime matter, as this of itself is just as indifferent to any one from among these forms. (DM 5.3.31)

But if this is the case, in virtue of what is it that this fire form gets produced and not that one? By the late sixteenth century, two standard answers to this question had crystallised.

The first was the theory of individuation by divine volition. This theory says the following. Assume that, at some given place and time, an agent acts to produce a fire form in a portion of matter. At this place and time, the agent will be indifferent to the production of any one from among a number of fire forms with the same properties. Likewise, the

¹³ See DM 5.3.28. On Suárez on effect individuation, see Schmid (2015, pp. 116–7).

¹⁴ See Hattab (2000, pp. 104–5 and 110–1).

material patient will be indifferent to the reception of any one from among these forms. The reason that this one from among the range of possible forms gets produced by the agent in the patient is that God willed that, at this time and place, this form be produced and not one of the other forms with the same properties. Principal proponents of this theory include Francis of Toledo and Pedro da Fonseca. Toledo states the theory as follows:

Given suitable conditions for the production of, for example, a fire form, no reason other than the divine will can be given for why numerically this form is produced – why, for example, this fire of two feet is produced and not some other fire of two feet. For this individual fire form is not more fitting for this time and place and for these conditions than another. (*Physica* 8.3.2.3. Toledo 1593, p. 219)

In the same vein, Pedro da Fonseca argues that, when an agent acts upon a patient, the agent and the patient will determine the character of the form that will be produced, and indeed that some individual or other of that character will be produced. But they will not determine which one from among these individuals will be produced:

The determination of a species as well as of a vague individual can come from the secondary causes. For nothing is ever produced by anything that does not belong to some given species and that is not an individual. However, that determinately this individual is produced and not a numerically different one is to be attributed to the first cause only. (*Metaphysica* 5.2.9.5. Fonseca 1615, p. 150)

Opponents of the theory of individuation by divine volition objected that natural effects, such as the production of this form in this matter, require natural explanations. Thus, according to Domingo de Soto:

A natural cause must be given in these worldly matters for why this thing is produced now and not some other thing distinct in number but the same in kind. (IV *Sententiarum* 43.1.3. Soto 1583, p. 403)

This led Soto and others to adopt a theory of individuation by spatio-temporal conditions. This theory says the following. Again, assume that an agent acts upon a portion of matter to produce a fire form. Like the theory of individuation by divine volition, the theory of individuation by spatiotemporal conditions says that, considered in and of themselves, the agent and the patient are indifferent to respectively the production and reception of a range of fire forms with the same properties. But it

also says that, considered as located at a determinate place and time, agent and patient are no longer indifferent in this way. Given that the agent acts upon the patient here and now, for instance, necessarily this form will be produced instead of any other form with the same properties. Conversely, this form could not have been produced by the agent in the patient at any other place or time.

In his early works, Suárez too prefers individuation by spatiotemporal location over the 'unphilosophical' theory of individuation by divine volition.¹⁵ By the time of the disputations, however, Suárez has come to conclude that place and time are too 'extrinsic' to determine which form gets produced (DM 5.3.34). When an agent acts upon a patient, there is nothing about the place and time of this event that somehow makes one form more fitting for production than another form with the same properties. The reason that this form is singled out for production rather than that one is that God willed that this form be produced rather than that one:¹⁶

When God sees that this agent is here and now disposed to bring about in this subject such or such a form in kind, and that of itself the subject is indifferent to this or that form in particular and that it cannot choose one of them or determine its action to this one rather than that one, he himself decrees by his will to concur so that this individual in particular is produced at this instant and in this subject. (DM 5.9.7)

The later Suárez, then, is committed to the following. When an agent here and now acts to produce a fire form in matter, it will produce one out of many possible fire forms. As a result, the matter-fire form compound that so comes about will be one out of many possible compounds. Thus, when an agent here and now acts to produce in matter M one out of possible fire forms $F_{1...n}$ the matter fire-form compound that so comes about will be one out of many possible compounds. This is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Which form, and hence which compound in fact comes about, is determined by divine volition.

Now the matter-form compounds that may so result would seem to be wholly similar to one another. That they are wholly similar on the side of their matter is clear: the same portion of matter M serves as the material

¹⁵ A statement of Suárez's early position can be found in *De mysteriis vitae Christi* 44.6.8. OO 19, p. 763.

¹⁶ See also DM 22.1.13 and Schmid (2015, pp. 116-7).

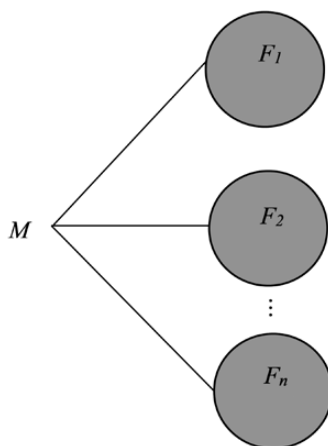


Fig. 1. Possible matter-form compounds.

component in all three compounds. But they seem to be wholly similar on the side of their formal component as well. After all, the idea behind the commitment to individuation by divine volition here is not that, for instance, F_1 makes for a slightly hotter and larger fire than the other two forms, and that an act of divine volition is needed to determine precisely how hot and large a fire will come about when M is ignited. How hot and large a fire will come about is determined by the agent, the matter, and the natural conditions under which they interact. The appeal to divine volition is motivated by the fact that, given the specifications of the fire form that the agent will bring about in the matter, there is a range of possible fire forms that meet these specifications, and the agent and the matter of themselves lack the power to single out any one form from among this range. Hence, an act of the divine will is needed to select one out of many forms that are ‘similar in kind but distinct in number.’

That the theory of individuation by divine volition invokes God to make a choice from among wholly similar forms is clear as well from the way Suárez applies it to cases like the following. Imagine a stone S that gets heated by a fire. Once the stone has been heated by the fire, it is removed from the fire to cool down to its original state. Once cooled, it is heated by the same fire a second time. According to Suárez, when the fire is first applied to the stone, there is a set of possible hotnesses $H_{1...n}$ that may result in it. Because of the indifference of the fire and the stone, an act of the divine will is needed to single out some one hotness from this set. But when the fire is applied to the stone the second time,

other things being equal, the same set of hotnesses will be available for production. The stone will be just as indifferent to receiving any particular hotness as the first time, and the power in the fire will extend to the exact same hotnesses the second time as the first:

Its power remains as whole and perfect as if it had produced nothing at all. Hence, having produced an effect once, it will remain in its power to bring about the same effect again. (DM 5.9.9)

Nature, however, aims at the multiplication of individuals, and God promotes this aim when selecting individual effects for production:

Natural powers are ordered to, and by nature aim at, the multiplication of individuals. Hence, it is more in accordance with their natures that they should always receive cooperation for new effects. (DM 5.9.10)

Even though the same set of possible hotnesses is available both times the stone is heated, God will not select the same hotness twice over, as illustrated in Figure 2 below.

According to Suárez, this means that when the same fire is applied to the same stone two times in a row, the stone will successively take on two hotnesses distinct only in number:

I say not only that it is possible for accidents distinct only in number to be successively produced in the same subject, but also that this in fact happens in the order of nature. (DM 5.9.4)

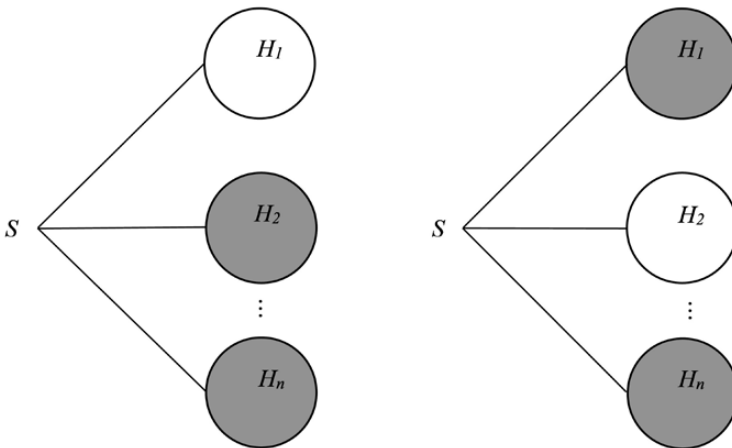


Fig. 2. A white area marks a form selected for production.

This reveals something important about the individuals in the set of available hotnesses. After all, from the fact that God successively selects two different hotnesses from the set of possible hotnesses it follows that the stone successively receives two hotnesses distinct only in number only if the hotnesses in the available set are distinct only in number. The theory of individuation by divine volition invokes God to make a choice from among wholly similar forms.¹⁷

What about the modes of union of our initial matter-fire form compounds? Are they wholly similar as well? Nowhere in the Disputations is this question raised in so many words, but it seems plausible that they are. Modes of union, according to Suárez, modify forms, the idea being that a form such as F_1 needs to be modified in a certain way in order to unite with matter M .¹⁸ But then it seems that any other form that is wholly similar to F_1 would have to be modified in just that same way in order to unite with M . Even if the evidence with regard to their modes of union remains indirect, then, I conclude that it is very plausible that our matter-fire form compounds are indiscernible with regard to matter, form, and union.

4. The Master Argument revisited

If the Master Argument indeed commits Suárez to the identity of indiscernible entities, then, it will be in tension with his allowance of numerically distinct yet indiscernible angelic forms and his account of the individuation of effects. In this section, I revisit the argument step by step, and offer a reading that avoids such tension.

According to premise (1), whatever exists has a determinate entity. As we have seen, the entity of a thing is the set of metaphysical parts that composes it. But according to Suárez, a thing is nothing over and above this set.¹⁹ Hence, we may reformulate (1) as follows:

(1') Whatever exists is a determinate entity.

¹⁷ According to Suárez, God does not need a reason to choose this one rather than that one from among such forms. Indeed, the fact that he is able to choose one from among such forms in the absence of a reason to prefer one over the others, provides an 'illustrious mark of the freedom of the divine will' (DM 19.6.13). According to *De voluntario et involuntario* 8.4.11, God has reason to make the kind of entity he makes, but 'from among two equals, he chooses the one he wants for no other reason than that he wants it' (OO 4, p. 264). On Suárez on the relation between reason and will in free choice, see Penner (2013).

¹⁸ See DM 13.9.13. According to DM 15.2.15, it is by means of a single action that a form is educed from and united to matter.

¹⁹ See DM 36.3 and Anfray (2019, p. 316).

I propose we read this claim, not as saying that whatever exists has some determinate character, but simply as saying that whatever exists has to be some one entity or other. It can be this one or that one, but it would be nonsense for anything to exist yet not to be some entity or other.

According to premise (2), whatever is a determinate entity has an added negation. As before, we can read this as the claim that whatever is a determinate entity has an added negation. Also as before, I take the point to be a fairly simple one. Whatever is determinately this or that entity has an added negation in the sense that, the moment we say that something is determinately this or that entity, we are denying that it is any other one. Or as Suárez himself prefers to put the point: that a determinate entity has an added negation:

is evident, because every entity, for the very reason that it is a determinate entity, cannot be divided from itself. (DM 5.1.4)

Accordingly, we can restate his second premise as follows:

(2') Whatever is a determinate entity cannot be divided from itself.

The first conclusion that now follows, that (3) all that exists has an added negation, on this reading says that:

(3') Whatever exists cannot be divided from itself.

At this point Suárez introduces the premise that serves as the linchpin of his argument. In view of the above, I propose that we restate his claim that (4) whatever has an added negation has individual unity as follows:

(4') Whatever cannot be divided from itself has individual unity.

Here the idea seems to be that what is indivisible from itself cannot be divided into many instances of itself either:

Every entity, for the very reason that it is a determinate entity, cannot be divided from itself. Therefore, it cannot be divided into many such as it either. (DM 5.1.4)

But since all that exists is undivided from itself, Suárez can now conclude that:

(5') Whatever exists has individual unity.

Read in this way, the argument seems consistent with the metaphysical commitments we encountered in the last section. Its opening premise allows for the actuality of prime matter in and of itself deprived of any

determinate character, and in taking us from determinacy to individuality the argument in no way rules out the possibility of wholly similar yet numerically distinct individuals. But if the argument has these virtues, can it also accomplish what it aims to do, and undermine the case for real universals?

4.1 *An objection*

To answer this question, we must do one final review of the steps of the argument. Premise (1') says that whatever exists is some determinate entity or other. Is this a premise the realist could accept as the starting point of an argument? That depends on what is included in the domain of possible entities. If that domain is taken to include individuals only and no universals, the premise will say that whatever exists is some individual or other, and the Master Argument will beg the question against the realist from the first step onwards. If the Master Argument is to speak to the realist at all, then, it appears that its first premise must be taken to mean something like the following:

Whatever individual exists is determinately this or that individual, and whatever universal exists is determinately this or that universal.

So stated, the premise is neutral as regards the truth of nominalism or realism. It is a premise Suárez may reasonably ask that his opponent accept.

The premise that (2') whatever is a determinate entity cannot be divided from itself likewise allows for a reading that does not already assume the truth of either nominalism or realism:

Whatever is determinately this or that individual is not some other individual, and whatever is determinately this or that universal is not some other universal.

But if the premises so far do not stack the deck in favour of either nominalism or realism, it seems that Suárez could also expect his opponent to accept the first conclusion that follows from them, namely that (3') whatever exists is undivided from itself, where this is understood along the following lines:

Whatever individual exists is determinately this or that individual and no other, and whatever universal exists is determinately this or that universal and no other.

But while Suárez may so far demand that his opponent go along with his line of reasoning, matters begin to look different the moment we come

to the crucial premise (4'). Indeed, at this point the realist will want to know how it can be true that whatever is undivided from itself is an individual, given that it was just granted that universals are undivided from themselves as well. The realist will insist that an argument be provided here.

Suárez has one. In the following passage, he reasons that whatever is undivided from itself for that reason cannot behave like a universal and be found in many:

Otherwise the whole entity would be in each of them, and hence, insofar as it is in one thing, it would be divided from itself insofar as it is another, which amounts to a manifest contradiction. (DM 5.1.4)

The argument proceeds as follows. First we are asked to assume, for reduction, that some being is found in many. Assume, for instance, that:

- (i) Redness is in *a* as well as in *b*.

According to Suárez, because *a* is in one thing and *b* in another, the assumption that Redness is in *a* as well as in *b* would mean that Redness is divided from itself. This suggests that his reasoning relies on a premise to the effect that:

- (ii) Whatever is in one thing is divided from what is another thing.

From this, the division of Redness from Redness can be derived as follows:

- (iii) If Redness is in *a*, it is divided from what is in *b*. (ii)
- (iv) Redness is in *b*. (i)
- (v) If Redness is in *a*, it is divided from Redness. (iii, iv)
- (vi) Redness is in *a*. (i)
- (vii) Redness is divided from Redness. (v, vi)

From this point, it takes but a few steps to complete the reduction:

- (viii) Nothing is divided from itself. (3')
- (ix) We have a manifest contradiction. (vii, viii)
- (x) Redness cannot be in *a* as well as in *b*. (i–ix)

Redness cannot be found in many.

Presented with this argument, I think the realist would be within her rights to challenge the principle that (ii) whatever is in one thing is divided from what is in another thing. After all, this principle, far

from being an innocent truism, is a substantial metaphysical claim. In fact, it is the very claim that the realist about universals brings to the table. The realist, by definition, is someone who believes that there are certain beings, universals, which can be found in one thing as well as in another. To assume without argument that whatever is in one thing must be divided from what is in another, therefore, is to assume the truth of nominalism from the start.²⁰

To be sure, the realist may well grant that something like (ii) holds for individuals. In particular, she may grant a principle to the effect that:

(ii') Individuals found in one thing are divided from individuals found in another.

But this principle does not seem to have any particularly worrisome implications for the realist. Consider Human Nature. Assume that Human Nature as it is found in individual human beings is individual so that the Human Nature found in Peter is one individual and the Human Nature found in Paul another.

On this assumption, (ii') says that the Human Nature in Peter will be divided from the Human Nature in Paul. Hence, if the Human Nature in Peter were found in Paul as well, the Human Nature in Peter would be divided from itself. This would contradict the general principle that no being is divided from itself. Therefore, if Human Nature as it is found in individual human beings is individual, the same Human Nature cannot be found in many.

But this implication need not worry the realist. For according to Suárez, the realist is someone who denies that Human Nature as it is found in individual human beings has individual unity:

In reality, man exists in Peter and in Paul, and as such, it is not some individual or singular thing. Hence, not all that exists in nature has individual unity. (DM 5.1.1)

According to Suárez, even philosophers who maintain that Human Nature as it exists in Peter has an added haecceity are committed to this.

²⁰ Ehring (2002) argues against immanent universals as follows: in virtue of their instances in multiple locations, immanent universals will have properties such as being exactly two feet away from me at time t and being exactly three feet away from me at t . However, being exactly two feet away from me at t implies not being exactly three feet away from me at t . Hence, immanent universals will have inconsistent properties. Like (ii), however, the premise that being exactly two feet away from me at t implies not being exactly three feet away from me at t seems to be a premise the realist need not accept. For her very point is that there are entities such that being exactly two feet away from me at t does not imply not being exactly three feet away from me at t . Compare Peacock (2016).

For on this view, as he understands it, the Human Nature in Peter and the haecceity added to it:

are distinct in reality, and accordingly make for a true composition in the thing itself. (DM 5.2.9)

Again:

In the thing, the nature and the haecceity are two, if not as two things, then at least as a thing and a mode. (DM 5.2.9)

But if that is the case, we can consider the first of these two items alone, and see that it has universal unity:

On this view, we must say that the nature, insofar as it is separate in reality and distinct from the individual difference, has universal unity. (DM 5.2.9)

But a philosopher who holds that Human Nature as it is in individual human beings has universal unity can safely take on board the claim that, if Human Nature as it is found in individual human beings is individual, the same Human Nature cannot be found in many. Since she denies the antecedent of this conditional, she remains free to maintain that the same Human Nature is found in all human beings.²¹

This leaves us with the following problem for Suárez. In order to conclude that realism contradicts the general principle that no being is divided from itself, it appears he needs some such premise as (ii). But that is a premise the realist cannot in fairness be asked to accept. The realist may well accept a weaker premise along the lines of (ii'). But it is hard to see why the implications of that premise would need to worry her.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have provided a new reconstruction of Suárez's Master Argument against real universals. I have argued that, while the argument is consistent with Suárez's denial of the identity of indiscernibles

²¹ Suárez's own view is that 'human nature as it exists in real things is individual' in and of itself (DM 5.1.8). According to him, Peter and Paul are both human in virtue of individual yet similar natures (DM 5.2.32). The similarity among these natures suffices to make scientific claims about human beings in general (DM 5.2.31). Hence, real universals are superfluous for a science of human beings.

for fundamental items in his ontology, it is hard to see how it can accomplish the reduction of realism that Suárez promises.²²

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²² This paper has benefited from the comments of two anonymous referees for *MIND*, and from discussions with audiences in Berlin and Groningen. Special thanks to Lodi Nauta and César Reigosa Soler for comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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