

Suárez and Salamanca: *Magister* and *Locus* of Pure Nature

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the thinking of some Salamancan theologians regarding the notion of pure nature. In particular, I address Suárez's thinking on this subject and locate it within the context of the debate over whether human beings have a desire for the beatific vision. Insofar as a number of Thomists and Suárez think that there is no natural desire for a supernatural end, human beings are, by nature, left only with a desire for natural beatitude. The theoretical possibility of a human nature created without any order to a supernatural end and also falling outside the economy of grace becomes a subject of speculation that serves to illuminate something about created nature itself.

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Victor M. Salas

§1. Introduction

THE UNIVERSITY OF SALAMANCA is an historical phenomenon that helped shape centuries of thought and formed scores of legendary philosophers and theologians. Together with a number of other important Iberian universities (especially Coimbra), Salamanca stood at the center of dynamic cultural, political, and religious shifts that altered Baroque Christendom thenceforth. The discovery of the New World spurred on various theories of international law and just war theories; disputes about grace and freedom begat the infamous *De auxiliis* controversy; and the growing threat of the Protestant Reformation ushered in the Catholic Counter Reformation. Salamanca stood at the center of each of these historical developments and the contentious debates surrounding them. One particular topic that fueled the speculative efforts of many thinkers at Salamanca—and which would help shape Catholic theology well into the twentieth century—was the theory of pure nature.

Today the notion of ‘pure nature’ conjures the name of Henri de Lubac and partisans of the *nouvelle théologie*, which movement caused great consternation for so many neo-scholastics such as Garrigou-Lagrange.¹ The debates surrounding pure nature—to de Lubac’s mind—centered upon rebuking improper interpretations of Thomas Aquinas’s thinking regarding the ultimate end of human beings. On de Lubac’s read, Thomas’s late scholastic commentators, in particular Suárez, were guilty of perpetrating interpretive and theological violence upon their master, for they maintained that the great Dominican taught that human beings have a twofold end rather than a singular supernatural end.² De Lubac levels his aim squarely at the position taken by the theologians associated with Salamanca: Domingo de Soto, Domingo Báñez, Bartolomé de Medina, and especially Francisco Suárez. Of these theologians, Suárez stands out for offering perhaps the most systematic, comprehensive, and synthetic account of pure nature.

In what follows I present Suárez’s theory of pure nature and argue that not only does it grapple with a theological dispute, it also has the consequence of illuminating philosophical aspects of human nature that remained obscure with the preceding Aristotelian tradition. As grace builds upon and perfects nature, a proper account of nature considered according to the

¹ Henri De Lubac’s 1946 *Surnaturel* provoked the debate in the twentieth century. See his *Surnaturel: Études historique* (Paris: Aubier, 1946). For Garrigou-Lagrange’s discussion on the desire for the beatific vision, see his “L’appétit naturel et la puissance obédientielle,” *Revue thomiste* 11 (1928): 474–78 and *De revelatione per Ecclesiam catholicam proposita* (Rome: Ferrari, 1945), 1: 359–71.

² See De Lubac, “Duplex hominis beatitudo,” *Recherches de science religieuse* 35 (1948): 291, 297–98.

exigencies of its own logic is indispensable for a proper understanding of the nature of grace. What is more, such discussions were of paramount importance in light of the theological controversies then-dividing Christendom. Accordingly, for Catholic theologians such as Suárez, pure nature not only served as a *via media* meant to avoid the tempting extremes of heterodoxy, but also as a heuristic device whereby the utter gratuity of grace could be placed into proper relief. My present concern, then, is not to enter into controversy with de Lubac and his disciples regarding what is or is not a proper interpretation of Thomas Aquinas's teaching on the *finis hominis*. Rather, my interest pertains to exploring the rationale behind Suárez's development of the notion of a pure nature and what role that thesis played in his larger philosophico-theological project. To the extent that discussions of Thomas Aquinas's thinking on the subject and the interpretations he received at the hands of his scholastic commentators are unavoidable, I cannot help but refer to the Angelic Doctor's perspective. Nevertheless, my principle concern remains with Suárez who, oftentimes, moves well beyond the ken of Thomas.

§2. A Twofold End according to Some Salamancans

The debate about pure nature frequently arose in the context of attempting to determine whether human beings have a natural desire for the beatific vision or, what is the same, for a supernatural end. With some important exceptions, many Dominican and Jesuit theologians argued that our *natural* desire is for a *natural* end, and thus our supernatural end is due to the beneficence of God and the gift of His grace. To appreciate the relationship between the supernatural and the natural, theologians marked distinctions among the various states of human nature. Domingo de Soto, for example, enumerates four such states of human nature: the states of (1) pure nature, (2) original justice, (3) guilt, and (4) grace after the redemption of the human race.³ With respect to pure nature, Soto insists that it is only a mental construct (*mente excogitatum*), as it were, and that no person has ever been created in a state of pure nature. Soto muddles the clarity of this abstraction, however, when he suggests, contrary to the majority of other Dominicans but in league with the Scotistic position, that there is a natural human desire or a *pondus naturae* (i.e., a propensity or weight of nature, as it were) for the (supernatural) beatific vision.⁴ “For the natural end of each and everything is that to which its natural appetite is favorably inclined: our natural appetite, however, is inclined and carried off towards inestimable felicity, since it cannot rest without it: therefore it is our natural end.”⁵ Since “inestimable felicity” is just the beatific vision, Soto holds that we do in

³ Domingo de Soto, *De natura et gratia*, lib. 1, c. 2 (Paris, 1549: fol. 2r–v): “Sane ut hominem in puris naturalibus mente excogitatum, in originali iustitia revera conditum, in culpam inde collapsum, ac denique in gratiam postea restitutum depingerem.”

⁴ On this point see Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2010), 197.

⁵ Soto, *De natura et gratia*, lib. 1, c. 4 (fol. 12r): “Finis naturalis cuiusque rei est, in quem appetitus naturalis propensus tendit: appetitus autem naturalis noster inclinatur & fertur in illam inestimabilem felicitatem, quia illucque quiescere non potest: ergo est finis noster naturalis.”

fact have a natural desire for the supernatural vision of God. Whereas other Dominicans, such as Cajetan and Báñez, held that the desire for the beatific vision is only an elicited one—that is, a desire that results from some conditional cognition of God—Soto holds that it is a disposition of our nature. The desire for the beatific vision cannot be elicited because, prior to the light of faith, human persons cannot know the essence of God as He is *secundum se*. What is more, a person cannot desire what he does not know.⁶ Accordingly, if a human being is to move to attain the beatific vision, it can only be through a sort of innate appetite and “natural attraction.” Soto is clear: if human beings are to move towards and attain the beatific vision, they must have a natural desire for the supernatural. But therein consists the problem: how can one, by nature, have a desire that moves one to transcend and leave behind that same nature? Put another way: if Soto is correct, would it not be the case that supernatural beatitude is owed to humanity as a function of its nature? Certainly, no Catholic theologian would be willing to maintain that last claim.

Another Dominican operating out of Salamanca, Bartolomé de Medina, was not one to confuse the natural with the supernatural. He takes note of Soto’s argument regarding the natural desire for the supernatural but challenges his Dominican confrere (and Scotists for that matter),⁷ for, as Medina sees it, “the vision and enjoyment of God, is by no account the natural end of man, but it is a gratuitous gift of God.”⁸ Medina turns to scripture, sacred teaching, and reason itself to establish his thesis. First, scripture is filled with numerous passages suggesting that the beatific vision exceeds human nature. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians (2:9) is one such instance: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” According to Medina, this passage directly contradicts the claim that there is a natural desire for the beatific vision.⁹ Citing further scriptural support, Medina refers us to John 17:3 “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent,” as well as 1 John 5, Isaiah 9, and Psalm 83.¹⁰

In denying that we have a natural desire for the beatific vision, Medina is not thereby rejecting the claim that we are in fact supernaturally ordered to the beatific vision. Rather, his claim is that our being is ordered to a supernatural end by means of grace, through which our nature is elevated, and not by means of nature. Indeed, it is for the purpose of emphasizing the distinction between grace and nature as well as manifesting the nature of grace as a *gratis data*, that theologians such as Medina, Báñez, and Suárez maintain that human beings do not have the beatific vision as a natural end. There can be no mistaking such a position for any

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Medina, *Expositio in primam secundae Angelici Doctoris* (Venice, 1602), q. 3, a. 8 (fol. 44A).

⁸ Ibid. (fol. 45A): “... visio Dei, & eius fruitio, nulla ratione est finis naturalis hominis, sed est gratuitum Dei donum....”

⁹ Ibid. (fol. 45A).

¹⁰ Ibid.

variety of Pelagianism; supernatural beatitude is not earned through one's own efforts, according to Medina.

Be that as it may, in addition to citing scriptural support for his position, Medina appeals to reason. Both an end and the means to that same end should be of the same order or have a proportion to one another. For example, legs are a proportionate means for walking and wings are the proportionate means for the sake of flying. Nature itself would be utterly vain and absurd if a creature were ordered to walking or to flying but left without the natural means to do so. The means necessary for the vision of God, however, such as faith, charity, and the light of glory, are such that they are entirely outside the reach of nature and are, instead, supernatural.¹¹

Reciprocally, if the beatific vision were our natural end, then we should naturally have the means to attain that end according to a "*debitum naturae*." Here, by *debitum naturae* Medina, like many other theologians, understands simply that which is owed to nature such that a creature may realize itself and attain its end. For his part, Suárez gives as an example of the *debitum naturae* the nature of a form. "For just as he who gives a form [i.e., a particular nature], [thereby] gives what follows from the form; thus he who gives an end, necessarily gives the means conducive to that end."¹² The necessity pertaining to the *debitum naturae* may be described as a kind of *hypothetical* necessity as opposed to an absolute necessity. The reason for this should be obvious: there is no necessity that compels God to create in the first place. If it is the case that God chooses to create that thing, then in order to be consistent with Himself and as matter of justice God must create something with the (natural) powers necessary for it to reach its own proper end. God could not, for example, create a human being (i.e., a rational animal) without reason and then expect him to reach a rational end. Accordingly, if it were the case that, by nature, we are ordained to the beatific vision, we would necessarily have the coordinate powers (i.e., means) to attain that end. But, as Medina points out, we do not have such powers. Therefore, the beatific vision cannot be our natural end.¹³

In short, Medina maintains, "That thesis which affirms that to see God is our end is entirely supernatural, is more true, and more in conformity with sacred scriptures, doctrine, and more apt for preaching..."¹⁴ If we do not have a natural potential for the beatific vision, it remains that we only have the "obediential potency" to be elevated above the reach of our nature so as to be able to have the vision and enjoyment of God.¹⁵ Here, Medina follows

¹¹ Ibid. (fol. 45B).

¹² Suárez, *De ultimo fine hominis*, disp. 4, sec. 3, n. 3 (vol. 4, 44): "... nam sicut qui dat formam, dat consequentia ad formam; ita qui dat finem, necesse est ut conferat media conducentia ad illum finem...."

¹³ Medina, *Expositio in primam secundae Angelici Doctoris* (Venice, 1602), q. 3, a. 8 (fol. 45B).

¹⁴ Ibid. (fol. 46B): "Illa sententia quae asserit, quod videre Deum est finis noster omnino supernaturalis, verior est, & sanctis scripturis magis conformis, & ad docendum, & ad praedicandum aptior, nam eius rationes sunt efficaciores & literis sanctis magis consentanae."

¹⁵ Ibid. (fol. 47A).

Cajetan's thinking with respect to obediential potency. Unlike natural potencies, which are coordinate to nature (e.g., the potential for a human being to learn a different language or develop a skill), obediential potency pertains to a creature's receptivity to the absolute power of God, which is itself limited only by contradiction. Cajetan explains, "Obediential potency, however, is called the aptitude of a thing to become whatever God has ordained it to become."¹⁶ It is only in this sense of 'potency,' thinks Cajetan, that we have a potential for the supernatural end that God has promised us. But, again, such a potency is not coordinate with or a function of our own nature.

Domingo Báñez—famous for his role in the *De auxiliis* controversy—shares many of the same conclusions as Medina, for Báñez thinks that the vision of God is not the natural end of man.¹⁷ Siding with Medina against Soto, Báñez also holds that neither human beings nor angels have a *pondus naturae* or natural inclination to the vision of God.¹⁸ Finally, he agrees that, though human beings have no natural potential for the beatific vision, they do have an obediential potency.¹⁹ What is more, the arguments he advances for these positions are largely parallel to Medina's. "That is a natural end, to which things are naturally able to attain."²⁰ He emphasizes, however, the *elicited* character of our desire for the beatific vision. This desire does not arise necessarily as a function of nature itself according to an innate inclination, but comes about only when one attains knowledge of God on the basis of God's effects. Here Báñez capitalizes upon Aristotle's claim that all human beings, by nature, desire to know.²¹ Even one of Báñez's chief targets, Duns Scotus, holds that "if all human beings by nature desire to know, they will therefore desire to know that which is most knowable."²² But God is most knowable since He is just being itself. Therefore, all human beings by nature will naturally desire to know God. Furthermore, in this life we can know that God exists as the cause of creation, as being pure act, preeminent, et cetera. Knowing that God is (*an est*), in turn, elicits the desire to know what God is (*quid est*), which is simply the desire for the beatific vision in which God is seen in His essence face to face. Yet, as Báñez points out, the fact that this desire is only elicited and not an innate appetite can be seen from the fact that not all people have the desire to know the essence of God because not all know that God

¹⁶ Cajetan, *In Summam theologiam* I, q. 1, a. 1, n. 9 (ed. Leonine, vol. 4: 8): "Vocatur autem *potentia obedientialis*, aptitudo rei ad hoc ut in ea fiat quidquid faciendum ordinaverit Deus. Et secundum talem potentiam, anima nostra dicitur in potentia ad beatitudinem pollicitum et finem suernaturalem, et alia huiusmodi."

¹⁷ Báñez, *Scholastica commentaria in primam partem Angelici Doctoris* (Douay, 1614), q. 12, a. 1 (p. 157).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.: "Finis naturalis est ille, ad quem res naturaliter potest pertingere..."

²¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1.1.980a22.

²² Duns Scotus, *Quaestiones super libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1997), liber 1, prologus, n. 16 (p. 7–8): "... si omnes homines natura scire desiderant, ergo maxima scientiam maxime desiderabunt."

exists. For this reason, the elicited desire is only conditional upon the cognition of God's existence.

Suárez, like his preceding Dominican counterparts, also holds that human beings do not have a natural desire for the beatific vision. The Jesuit thinks that it is fairly uncontroversial that all human beings have an innate appetite for natural beatitude. Indeed, it takes no special divine revelation to appreciate that fact, as even Aristotle himself develops his *Nicomachean Ethics* in terms of human happiness as the *telos* of all human action but without the benefit of revelation. As Suárez sees it, each power naturally inclines to an action that is connatural with that power. "For everything perfectible desires its perfection: but beatitude, as is often said, is maximally perfect, and if it is natural, is also proportionate [to nature]."²³ The more controverted question, as Suárez well knows, is whether human beings have an innate appetite for supernatural beatitude, which is just the vision of God. Suárez notes that Thomas Aquinas himself is none too clear on the matter.²⁴ For the Jesuit, however, "there is no innate natural appetite in human beings for the clear vision of God, both just as He is in Himself, and consequently nor is there [an inclination] to supernatural beatitude."²⁵

To establish his position, Suárez makes two claims. First, he holds that human beings do not have any innate, natural potency (or appetite) for the beatific vision. Second, while people do have an obediencial potency for the beatific vision, as Cajetan, Medina, and Báñez have each claimed, an obediencial potency does not suffice for establishing a natural appetite.²⁶ With respect to the first claim, Suárez explains that an innate appetite is always proportionate to or founded upon a natural potency.²⁷ As Thomas Aquinas had maintained long before Suárez, every being desires its own perfection. But perfection refers simply to something insofar as it is in act.²⁸ Human beings possess myriad potencies, each corresponding to a natural power. Those powers beget natural desires that motivate us to act in order that our potencies may be actualized through various operations. Yet, as every Catholic theologian would maintain, human beings do not have the natural power to attain God for between the finite power of a creature and the infinite being of God, there is no proportion. While God is an intelligible object, He is such only to Himself, which is to say that God escapes the limited power of any creaturely—let alone human—cognition. For this reason, Thomas argues repeatedly that in this life, we can know that God is (*an est*) but we never know what He is (*quid est*).²⁹ Indeed, as Suárez will later argue, Thomas himself holds, "It is impossible for

²³ Suárez, *De fine ultimo hominis*, disp. 16, sec. 1, n. 1 (vol. 4, 149): "... omne enim perfectibile appetit suam perfectionem: beatitudo autem, ut saepe dictum est, est maxima perfectio, et si naturalis sit, est etiam proportionata."

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., n. 6 (vol. 4, 152): "... in homine non esse appetitum innatum ad videndum Deum clare, et prout in se est, et consequenter nec ad supernaturalem beatitudinem."

²⁶ Ibid., n. 7

²⁷ Ibid., n. 10.

²⁸ Thomas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 4, a. 1.

²⁹ Ibid., I, q. 3, prol.; ibid., I–II, q. 5, a. 3.

some created intellect to see the essence of God through its own natural [power].”³⁰ If it is the case, however, that (1) we do not have the natural power to attain God; and (2) if it is the case that a natural appetite stems from a natural power, then, as Suárez reasons, “An innate appetite is founded upon a natural potency; but in man there is no natural power to supernatural beatitude: therefore there is no innate appetite.”³¹ Thus, in human beings there is no natural potency to supernatural beatitude. Nevertheless, we do have a natural potency for natural beatitude, which is the kind of happiness that can be attained through one’s own powers.³² In fact, we must have our own proper and proportionate end (natural beatitude), for without an end all action would be unintelligible and absurd. Indeed, as Aristotle claims, without such an end, there would be no beginning to action.³³ Given these philosophical considerations, Suárez thinks that all humans, by nature, desire natural beatitude. What is more, if humans have an order to natural beatitude, one must have, through a *debitum naturae*, the natural powers to attain that beatitude. Since one’s powers, which are coordinate with his natural appetites, are themselves only natural, so likewise the beatitude attained through them cannot exceed the natural. Finally, insofar as it is impossible to desire two ultimate ends—for then one end would not satisfy what the other end would, which means the former is not an ultimate end—human beings do not naturally desire anything beyond natural beatitude.³⁴

Since, like Medina and Báñez, Suárez admits that there is an obediencial potency for the beatific vision, he must further establish that such a potency, on its own, is not sufficient to constitute a natural appetite whereby one could then desire the beatific vision. Considering the potencies and powers constituting human nature, we see that each of those potencies is commensurate with and does not exceed the scope of human nature. Indeed, each of them can be realized or actualized, even if at times with great effort, through one’s own natural powers. In the case of the Incarnation, however, wherein human nature is hypostatically united to the divine Word, one can inquire what is the nature of the potentiality for such a union on the part of human nature. There must be a kind of potentiality for such a union, given that it actually occurred. But, for Suárez, it would be absurd to think that such a potentiality is a natural one that is coordinate with our human nature. Indeed, if such a potency were natural to our human nature, then the implication would be that such a union is owed our nature as a *debitum naturae*. Yet that claim would be utterly absurd, for the Word’s assumption of a human nature is an utterly gratuitous event, owing entirely to the determination of divine providence. Such being the case, Suárez holds that the potency involved in the hypostatic

³⁰ Ibid., I, q. 12, a. 4 (ed. Leonine, vol. 4; 120): “... impossibile est quod aliquis intellectus creatus per sua naturalia essentiam Dei videat.”

³¹ Suárez, *De ultimo fine hominis*, disp. 16, sec. 1, n. 10 (vol. 4, 153): “Appetitus innatus fundatur in potentia naturali: sed in homine non est potentia naturalis ad supernaturalem beatitudinem: ergo neque appetitus innatus.”

³² Ibid.

³³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.2.1094a17–20.

³⁴ Suárez, *De ultimo fine hominis*, disp. 16, sec. 1, n. 10.

union can only be an obediencial potency relative to God's absolute power. To speak, then, of human nature as having a "capacity" for the hypostatic union is, as Suárez sees it, only to speak metaphorically.³⁵

Further arguing along these same lines, Suárez, in an effort to refute Scotus and Soto, offers the potencies pertaining to water as a means to establish the difference between natural and obediencial potencies. In the sacrament of baptism water has the "power" to effect grace. It would be absurd, however, to claim that, by nature, water has a "natural appetite" (i.e., inclination) for grace-conferring activity.³⁶ If water can effect grace, it is not through any natural potency but only through an obediencial potency insofar as God assumes water into a sacramental order. Accordingly, an obediencial potency pertains not so much to the intrinsic structure of a given (created) nature and its correlative (natural) aptitudes or powers, but rather to the absolute power of God, who is able to elevate nature above itself so long as there is no contradiction. To return to the case of the hypostatic union, we see that there is no contradiction involved, for, while such a union exceeds human nature's own potencies, the Incarnation does not undermine human nature or transform it into something self-contradictory. The same can be said with respect to the sacraments, which use natural signs each of which has its own coordinate natural "powers." Bread, wine, oil, and water (the matter of some sacraments) can naturally nourish and clean, for example. But God can make use of their obediencial powers to confer grace, which grace exceeds the natural powers of the sacraments' proper matter. Suárez is thus in broad agreement with the thinkers who preceded him (e.g., Cajetan) that an obediencial potency neither constitutes a natural power nor a corresponding natural appetite.

Lawrence Feingold points out that some thinkers—both medieval (Scotus) and contemporary (De Lubac)—do not accept Aristotle's claim, which is followed by Suárez, that a natural passive potency always corresponds to a natural active power. If such were the case, then there would seem to be an avenue for claiming that human beings, though they lack the coordinate active powers—here, the power to attain God—can still have a natural desire for the beatific vision. Nevertheless, as Feingold rightly argues, to reject the correlation between passive potencies and active powers leaves one in the problematic situation of having to account for how such a natural appetite for an object that exceeds nature is established in the first place.³⁷ One might be able to claim that God Himself placed such a desire for the beatific vision within our nature that, as Augustine claims at the beginning of his *Confessions*, our hearts are restless until they rest in God. But even then, the distinction between nature and grace would be blurred. Should it remain the case that grace—without which one cannot attain a supernatural end—is gratuitous, then nature would be created with an intrinsic tension, if not outright contradiction, within itself. That is, nature would be created for an end

³⁵ Ibid., n. 9.

³⁶ Ibid., n. 7.

³⁷ Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God*, 223.

that it could not, through all of its efforts and powers, ever attain, which is simply to say that nature itself becomes unintelligible.

Be that as it may, with the foregoing claims established, Suárez's conclusion is fairly straightforward. If there is no natural potency for the beatific vision, there can be no natural appetite (desire) for the beatific vision. There is, then, only a natural desire for an end that is equally as natural. Yet, in light of what has been promised us by Christian revelation regarding supernatural beatitude, Suárez's conclusion supports the thesis that human beings have a twofold end: one natural, the other supernatural. By means of one's own natural powers, one can attain a natural kind of beatitude, which is simply the actualization of one's passive potencies. Aristotle, who, needless to say, operated without any conception of the Christian notion of beatitude, had no difficulty articulating his account of εὐδαιμονία, which corresponds to the *telos* of human nature and is just θεωρεῖν (contemplation).³⁸ Grace has not destroyed nature, nor has it undermined the natural *telos* to which that nature is directed by its own appetites and powers. Rather, grace has elevated and moved nature beyond itself to a supernatural end. But this supernatural movement only occurs on account of divine beneficence and not through any *debitum naturae*. Insofar as that supernatural end exceeds the scope and reach of one's natural powers, the beatific vision, concludes Suárez, is: (1) not naturally desired by an innate appetite and (2) can only be attained through grace, which is beyond human nature and elevates our nature to be able to attain the beatific vision of God.

§3. Suárez on Pure Nature

The implication of the preceding considerations is that, while human beings are ordered to a supernatural end only through grace, by nature they have only a natural end with the attendant natural desire for that end. By faith, it is certain that we do in fact have a supernatural end, but that is a sheer gratuity that exceeds the reach of our nature. It is also certain, Suárez thinks, that the means to that end—such as the resurrection and immortal life—are supernatural. To hold that we have a supernatural end is not thereby to abrogate our natural end, for, again, grace does not destroy nature. It remains the case that, even within the economy of grace, human beings are such that their natures are structured with a proportionate natural end, which is distinct from supernatural beatitude. Accordingly, Suárez thinks that God could have, “without a miracle,” created persons without an order to a supernatural end. But if God chose to create human beings without an order to a supernatural end, He could not have created them without some order to an end, for that would be to impose absurdity upon nature. To create an utterly vain nature, moreover, would be inconsistent with God's justice. Thus “it is necessary that, besides a supernatural end, there is given some natural beatitude to human nature.”³⁹ Such a natural beatitude simply corresponds to human nature in a pure state.

³⁸ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.7 and 10.6–8.

³⁹ Suárez, *De fine ultimo hominis*, disp. 4, sec. 3, n. 3 (vol. 4, 44): “... ergo necesse est praeter supernaturalem beatitudinem dari in humana natura aliquam beatitudinem naturalem.”

It is no surprise that theologians such as Suárez should be particularly interested in the dynamics involved in the state of pure nature. Indeed, as the Jesuit sees it, the understanding of pure nature is necessary for the understanding of other states of nature.⁴⁰ Not surprisingly, the Jesuit marks a number of distinctions with respect to nature in order to frame properly what is at stake with pure nature. He notes that, in general, theologians mark a distinction between (N¹) human nature *in via*—that is, on the way to acquiring beatitude—and (N²) human nature *in patria* or as already having acquired beatitude.⁴¹ As Suárez points out, his present concern—at least within the *De gratia* where he is attempting to determine just what grace adds to nature—is with N¹ since N² will have its own proper discussion. Narrowing his focus to N¹, the Jesuit makes further subdivisions between (N^{1.1}) “integral” nature and (N^{1.2}) “lapsed” nature. These two subdivisions have actually existed as empirical phenomena at certain points in human history.⁴² Yet, neither N^{1.1} nor N^{1.2} is the same as pure nature (N^P) since they both ‘add’ something to nature, namely, either an order to or a departure from grace. Though both N^{1.1} and N^{1.2} have some basis in existential reality, Suárez holds that “in fact, [pure nature] has never existed,”⁴³ which he knows *de fide* according to “sound doctrine.”⁴⁴ Nevertheless, he says, such a nature can be understood to be possible and that so important is a consideration of its possibility that without it, neither N^{1.1} nor N^{1.2} can be understood. Indeed, N^P is, as it were, the “foundation of the other [states of nature].”⁴⁵

Immediately, a potential problem with Suárez’s exposition comes to the fore. How can that (N^P) which has never existed historically and which remains only a theoretical possibility serve as a “foundation” for the other states of nature (N^{1.1} and N^{1.2}) which have actually existed and thus enjoy a real, existential status? In claiming that N^P serves as the foundation of N^{1.1} and N^{1.2} is not Suárez simply making the abstract the basis of the concrete or, what is the same, the ideal the (absurd) ground of the real? I do not think Suárez is committing himself to such a naïve, idealistic perspective but this is because he operates with a different sense of ‘foundation.’ In the opening of the very first prolegomenon to the *De gratia* Suárez says: “Since the nature of freedom is the foundation of grace, and grace is the perfection and health of nature, therefore in the disputation about grace some knowledge of nature is supposed.”⁴⁶ In other words, Suárez, like Thomas Aquinas, holds that grace builds upon nature.⁴⁷ To come to some understanding of the gratuity and nature of grace, its juxtaposition with nature must

⁴⁰ Suárez, *De gratia*, prol. 4, c. 1, n. 2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, n. 2.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Cf. *ibid.* (vol. 7, 179): “... et ideo Cajetan. et moderniores theologi tertium considerarunt statum, quem pure naturalium appellarunt, qui, licet de facto non fuerit...”

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Suárez, *De gratia*, prol. 4, c. 1, n. 2 (vol. 7, 179): “... quia revera hic status est veluti aliorum fundamentum...”

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, prol. 1, c. 1, n. 1 (vol. 7, 1): “Quia libera natura gratiae fundamentum est, et gratia perfectio et sanitas est naturae, ideo disputatio de gratia cognitionem aliquam talis naturae supponit...”

⁴⁷ Thomas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2.

be clarified. We have already seen how Medina and Báñez have attempted to emphasize this gratuity by marking the distinction between our natural and supernatural ends. Here, in pointing to pure nature, Suárez is proposing a theoretical construct against which grace may be placed into proper relief. The states of nature that have actually existed (viz., $N^{1.1}$ and $N^{1.2}$), however, already exist and have existed within the economy of grace. To say, then, as Suárez does that N^P is the “foundation” of $N^{1.1}$ and $N^{1.2}$ is not to imply a sort of ontological ground, but merely a hermeneutical structure in terms of which the gratuitous functioning of grace can be properly appreciated.

Such being the case, Suárez makes further distinctions with respect to pure nature, which can be considered either positively or negatively. These are not two species of N^P but two different perspectives. The positive perspective considers N^P in terms of all the perfections and powers that are owed—in the sense of *debitum naturae*—to human nature by divine concurrence and providence. The negative perspective is such that N^P is considered without anything superadded to it beyond what is owed (*debitum*) it. In this latter sense, N^P is considered without evil or good, “as it neither has sin, or what is [sin’s] consequence, the pain of guilt, nor also the affect of some gift of grace, or some perfection of nature that is not owed it.”⁴⁸ For Suárez’s purposes, he intends to examine N^P according to this negative perspective since it withdraws every influence of grace and leaves only human nature as a mere (theoretical) brute fact.

We have already seen how Medina, Báñez, and Suárez have maintained that human nature has a twofold end: one supernatural and the other natural. We have also seen how they hold that no one has ever been created in a state of pure nature. But, for Suárez, the question is: *could* God create such a person in such a state of nature?⁴⁹ That is, while through the grace of adoption God has ordained that intellectual creatures should be united with Him in the beatific vision, it is grace, not their own natural aptitude, that allows such creatures to enjoy a supernatural end. Could God have created a human being—together with all of one’s natural powers—without bestowing the grace upon him to attain a supernatural end? While it certainly seems that this question could be hardly more than rhetorical since, as Suárez himself points out, the absolute power of God could very well create such a nature since it involves no repugnance (i.e., contradiction),⁵⁰ the question is would it be fitting and consistent with created intellectual nature itself—and thus coordinate with the *debitum naturae*—to be created outside of the economy of grace altogether?

To clarify what he means by such an economy, Suárez points out that the gifts which are “above the order of such a [pure] nature” are able to be understood in a twofold manner. First,

⁴⁸ Suárez, *De gratia*, prol. 4, c. 1, n. 3 (vol. 7, 179–80): “... nihil habeat naturae superadditum, ei non debitum, sive malum, sive bonum, hoc est, ut nec peccatum habeat, nec quod est consequens, reatum poenae, neque etiam affecta sit aliquibus gratiae donis, aut perfectionibus naturae non debitis.”

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, n. 5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

there are those gifts that are coordinate to human nature as perfecting human beings in a manner connatural to their natural end and operations. The other gifts perfect human beings with respect to a supernatural end and supernatural operations. It is these latter gifts that are properly called graces and infused virtues (i.e., faith, hope, and love).⁵¹ Suárez is particularly interested, he says, in determining whether N^P lacking supernatural gifts is in fact possible.

Immediately Suárez confronts an objection to the possibility of God's creating a person in a pure state of nature. God cannot create a human being without ordering that person to his proper end, for then both God and the created person would act without a purpose. But the end of a human being is a supernatural end.⁵² In light of the arguments against a natural desire for the beatific vision, it may seem at first that this objection is disputing the premises of the preceding arguments or, worse, question begging. This is not actually the case, however, since the objection does not need to assert that we have a natural desire for the beatific vision in order to establish that we have a supernatural end, which is known *de fide*.⁵³ If it is in fact the case that the *finis hominis* is supernatural and if, as Catholic theologians must maintain lest they succumb to Pelagianism, that end can only be attained through grace, then no human being could ever be created without finding himself already established within the economy of grace. Such being the case, it would seem impossible for God to create a human being in a state of pure nature. As it turns out, the objection capitalizes upon the same argumentation strategies above for why we cannot have a natural desire for the beatific vision. Given that, *de fide*, we have a supernatural end and also given the fact that we can only attain that end through the proper means, which are just the "*dona gratiae*," God could not create a human being in a pure state of nature.⁵⁴

Suárez readily concedes that, in fact, no created intellect has ever existed in a state of pure nature with only an order to a connatural end.⁵⁵ We know, *de fide*, that both angelic and human creatures were created in a state of grace.⁵⁶ Such theological data notwithstanding, Suárez argues that "eternal beatitude, for which man is created and which is promised to him, as a reward of merits, is simply and absolutely supernatural."⁵⁷ Indeed, the Jesuit thinks it is necessary to posit this thesis in order to overcome the "error of the Pelagians and return to the sound teaching of several theologians regarding divine grace."⁵⁸ Like Medina, Suárez adverts

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., n. 6.

⁵³ I should point out that a subsequent proof the objection offers in its support does claim that human nature, having been created for God, must have a *pondus naturae* for the beatific vision. But that *pondus naturae* is nothing distinct from human nature itself. Thus if God creates a human being, God must create him with the grace necessary to attain that end.

⁵⁴ Suárez, *De gratia*, prol. 4, c. 1, n. 6.

⁵⁵ Ibid., n. 13.

⁵⁶ Ibid., n. 14.

⁵⁷ Ibid., n. 9 (vol. 7, 181–82): "... beatitudinem aeternam, propter quam homo creatus est, et quae illi promittitur, ut merces meritorum, simpliciter et absolute supernaturalitem esse."

⁵⁸ Ibid. (vol. 7, 182): "Hoc existimo esse necessarium fundamentum ad evertendum errorem Pelagii,

to 1 Cor. 2, Isaiah 64, and a number of other scriptural passages to support his position. Suárez's abiding concern is to show that, though we are truly ordered to a supernatural end, it is not by means of any natural appetite. Accordingly, we cannot attain the beatific vision through any *debitum naturae* but only "from the gratuitous pleasure and will of God."⁵⁹ Since there is no *pondus naturae* to the beatific vision with the coordinate means to secure that vision, if we are to attain that supernatural end, it can only be through God's conferring upon us the "grace of adoption," through which we are justified and adopted.⁶⁰

Accordingly, Suárez insists, "It must be said that God could have created man in pure state of nature with respect to [his] ultimate end, not by transforming his nature or by denying anything naturally owed to him."⁶¹ Indeed, since man has a twofold end—one natural, the other supernatural—God could have created man with an order only to a natural end and thus without any supernatural means to attain a supernatural end. In so creating a human being in a state of pure nature with an order to natural beatitude, God would not have done any violence to human nature nor deny it something owed to it,⁶² for indeed, "grace is not owed to nature."⁶³ If a human being were created without an order to a supernatural end, nothing proper to that nature would be unjustly or violently withheld.⁶⁴ Even in such a case, though, in which God would not ordain a human being to a supernatural end, God must, nevertheless, necessarily—in terms of a hypothetical necessity—create a human person with an orientation to some kind of end. As already noted, a nature without an end is an absurdity and its actions, which should aim at the attainment or realization of its end, would be completely unintelligible. But there is action, and since thought alone moves nothing, there must be a (natural) desire that motivates that activity.⁶⁵ Such being the case, there must be an ultimate end of human nature towards which one's properly human actions are aimed. Still, Suárez notes, it is not necessary that that end must be supernatural. "Although it is necessary for God to create man for an ultimate end, it can stop at a natural end."⁶⁶

et ad reddendam solidam rationem plurimum dogmatum de divine gratia."

⁵⁹ Ibid., n. 11 (vol. 7, 182): "... sicut coelestis beatitudo est supernaturalis, ita ordinari hominem ad illam consequendam, non esse ex naturae debito, sed ex gratuita dilectione et voluntate Dei."

⁶⁰ Ibid., n. 12.

⁶¹ Ibid., n. 16 (vol. 7, 184): "... dicendum est potuisse Deum creare hominem in puris naturalibus respectu finis ultimi, non immutando naturam ejus vel aliquid ei naturaliter debitum negando."

⁶² Ibid., n. 17.

⁶³ Ibid., n. 18 (vol. 7, 184): "... gratia non est naturae debita...."

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.2.1039a35–1039b1.

⁶⁶ Suárez, *De gratia*, prol. 4, c. 1, n. 17 (vol. 7, 184): "... licet Deus necessario creet hominem propter ultimum finem, potest in fine naturali sistere."

§4. Conclusion

It might strike one as bizarre, if not utterly idle, to exert so much speculative effort concerning something—a state of pure nature—that has never existed and pertains entirely to the domain of what would seem to be a counterfactual reality. Yet, for Suárez and his Salamancan confreres, while ‘pure nature’ might be merely a theoretical possibility, it retains its own metaphysical structure even if already enveloped within the theological economy of grace. The claim that grace builds on nature without destroying it only highlights and calls attention to the intelligible structures upon which the *additum* of grace supervenes and, in a fallen context, redeems. Certainly the possibility of a pure state of nature would rightly capture the attention of a philosopher and aid in one’s philosophical investigation. Therein is the paradox. Divine revelation discloses something to humanity that was already present in plain sight but which nevertheless remained obscure. This perspective of theological truth directing philosophical investigation and uncovering philosophical insights is nothing new for Suárez. In his *Disputationes metaphysicae* he tells us:

For thus these principles and truths of metaphysics are so bound with theological conclusions and discourse, that if the knowledge and perfect cognition of that [metaphysical] science be taken away, so also would [theological] science necessarily be greatly undermined.⁶⁷

If pure nature has never actually existed, then nature itself has always found itself within the economy of grace. But without the perspective of pure nature, how could one discern what truly pertains to the human condition and determine what is aberrant (i.e., a departure from grace and thus from integral nature)? Aristotle, who was not reluctant to reflect upon nature in general and human nature in particular, owing to historical circumstances did not enjoy the perspective of a theologian, whether from Salamanca or elsewhere. For the Stagirite, lapsarian nature—unknown as lapsed—was just nature itself, but what an enigma it must have seemed to itself. While he could discern that human beings are directed to a rational end, most sought to live a life of pleasure.⁶⁸ Why is there a tension between what we are (rational) and what we desire (pleasure)? The Pythagoreans made no secret of their contempt for the body, the prison of the soul, because its desires and temptations weighed down the soul. Likewise, Plotinus, if we are to believe Porphyry, was even ashamed to have a body. Lapsarian nature, when considered as the norm or just as nature itself, remains opaque and inscrutable. The light of revelation, however, disclosed for Suárez not only what was above nature, but also the integrity of nature itself; both were placed into relief for our redemption.

Still, without the benefit of a higher theological perspective Aristotle could see easily what required demonstration for Suárez: namely, that human beings are ordered to happiness,

⁶⁷ Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, prooem. (vol. 25, 1): “Ita enim haec principia et veritates metaphysicae cum theologicis conclusionibus ac discursibus cohaerent, ut si illorum scientia ac perfecta cognitio auferatur, horum etiam scientiam nimium labefactari necesse sit.”

⁶⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.5.1095b20.

which is a rational end. But if the Greek knew of no supernatural beatitude, then the happiness to which we were directed must, he thought, be of a more natural order, however opaque that order must have remained. Suárez was, to his own reckoning, not just a philosopher but a theologian. And even when he conducted what appeared to be a “purely” philosophical project in his *Disputationes metaphysicae*, he did so professedly as a Christian.⁶⁹ As was the case there and is presently the case with respect to our question of pure nature, the Jesuit’s concern was to illuminate—as far as human reason is capable and aided by divine revelation—the sublime structure of *res divina*. That structure discloses itself ultimately as a mystery, and, in the relation that obtains with human creatures through grace, human beings likewise become a mystery to themselves. The state of pure nature becomes a theological fulcrum, as it were, whereby some access to that mystery can be had and the sublime gratuity of God’s love for the human race can be known.

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⁶⁹ Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, prooem.