

## Francisco Suárez on Eternal Truths, Eternal Essences, and Extrinsic Being

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Brian Embry

University of Groningen

b.a.embry@rug.nl

According to philosophical lore, it is necessarily true that water is H<sub>2</sub>O. But it is a contingent fact that there is any water at all, and according to current science there was a time at which there was no water. Because water is contingent and temporal, it is ill-suited to ground the necessary, eternal truth that water is H<sub>2</sub>O, and it is *prima facie* unclear what could ground that truth. More generally, it is unclear what could ground necessary, eternal truths about contingent, temporal existents. Following medieval and early modern tradition, I will call this ‘the problem of eternal truths’.<sup>1</sup>

Francisco Suárez’s discussion of the eternal truths has received much attention from scholars because it appears to be the target of some of Descartes’s critical remarks,<sup>2</sup> and Suárez’s view is also philosophically interesting in its own

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All translations from Latin are my own. In the translations I have taken liberties with the original punctuation where doing so renders the text more perspicuous. Many of the relevant texts by Suárez are available in English translations, which I have consulted. The relevant translations are listed under References.

<sup>1</sup> For a contemporary resurrection of this medieval problem, see McDaniel (forthcoming: Section 9.3–4).

<sup>2</sup> Compare Descartes, To Mersenne, May 6, 1630 (AT I: 149–150; CSMK III: 24) with Suárez, DM 31.12.40 and 12.45. Descartes claims that (i) eternal truths are true because God knows them, and (ii) we “must not say” that they would be true even if God did not exist. Suárez explicitly denies (i) and seems to deny (ii). (He does not in fact deny (ii).)

Suárez actually recognizes two distinct problems regarding the eternal truths. One concerns the grounds of eternal truths, and the other concerns the failure of supposition (or reference) of the subject terms of eternal truths (DM 31.12.38, 44; *De scientia Dei*, II, c. 5, n. 12 [Vivès, XI: 359]). These two problems are often conflated in the literature (see, e.g., Karofsky 2001), perhaps because Suárez has one solution for both problems. For the sake of space I will focus exclusively on the grounding problem.

right. In spite of all the attention, however, Suárez's view has remained elusive. Scholars have alleged that Suárez grounds the eternal truths in "connections between properties" (Karofsky 2001: 41), essential properties (Cantens 2000: 135), "objects themselves" (Cantens 2000: 135), the "law of identity" (Cantens 2000: 135, 142), the "actual existence which ... essences would have, were they to be created" (Wells 1981a: 81), the "essence of creatures" (Doyle 1967: 33), the characteristics of properties (Karofsky 2001: 44), facts (Karofsky 2001: 44), and the "necessity and reality of the divine essence itself" (Karofsky 2001: 44). Clearly scholars do not know what to make of Suárez's view of the eternal truths. Moreover, in my view scholars have missed the main point at stake in Suárez's discussion of the eternal truths. On my reading, Suárez's solution to the problem of eternal truths hinges on his distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic being. Suárez uses this distinction throughout his works, but it has not received much attention in the literature. As will become clear, the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic being is crucial to understanding Suárez's view of non-existent essences; the distinction is also philosophically interesting in its own right and likely to be of interest in connection with contemporary theories of ontological pluralism and grounding.

## 2. Henrician Essentialism

Suárez introduces the problem of eternal truths in the thirty-first disputation of the *Metaphysical Disputations* (DM 31.2 and 31.12), where his primary target is a view I call 'Essentialism'. According to Essentialism, water is contingent and began to exist in time, but water has an *essence* that is necessary and eternal. Because it is necessary and eternal, the essence of water is sufficient to ground the truth of 'Water is H<sub>2</sub>O'.

Many readers will recognize Essentialism from Gassendi's *Fifth Objections* to Descartes's *Meditations*, where Gassendi accuses Descartes of being an Essentialist of the scholastic sort (AT VII, 319; CSMK II, 222). In the scholastic

tradition Essentialism is often attributed to Henry of Ghent (1217–1293),<sup>3</sup> although, as Suárez notes, many Thomists endorse a position that is hard to distinguish from Essentialism.<sup>4</sup> In 1623 Martin Meruisse, no fan of Essentialism, reported that Essentialism was revived by philosophers at the University of Paris who were “otherwise learned and smart”.<sup>5</sup> But the most notorious defender of Essentialism in the seventeenth-century was an Italian, Francesco Albertini (1552–1619), who published a thorough defense of Essentialism in 1616,<sup>6</sup> apparently responding to Suárez’s 1597 critique of Essentialism in the *Metaphysical Disputations*.

The title of the question in which Albertini advocates Essentialism is, “Whether the essence of a creature from eternity and before existence is, according to essential being, some positive, real, actual thing” (*Corollaria, tomus secundus, princ. 1, d. 1, q. 1, pp. 1ff*). Albertini answers this question in the affirmative:

The essences of creatures are not altogether nothing before existence, nor do they have merely potential being in a cause, but from eternity they have intrinsic, actual, absolute, quidditative being or essential being [*esse essentiae*]. (*Corollaria, tomus secundus, princ. 1, d. 1, q. 1, n. 12, p. 4*)

As this quotation indicates, the characteristic feature of Essentialism is the distinction between two kinds of being: existence and what is called “essential being [*esse essentiae*]”. The essence of water exists exactly when water exists, but it has essential being even when water does not exist. Essentialists therefore

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<sup>3</sup> However, it is controversial whether Henry endorsed Realist Essentialism. For opposing interpretations see Wippel (1981) and Cross (2010).

<sup>4</sup> Including especially John Capreolus. Capreolus both rejects Henry’s view and endorses something very close to it (*In II Sent. d. 1, q. 2, a. 3, ad 4, pp. 73–76*). For Suárez’s commentary, see DM 31.2.2.

<sup>5</sup> Meruisse, *Rerum metaphysicarum libri tres*, lib. 1, q. 15, p. 173. According to Jacob Schmutz (1998: 95), this is a jab at Charles François Abra de Raconis (1580–1646).

<sup>6</sup> Albertini, *Corollaria, tomus secundus, princ. 1, d. 1, q. 1, pp. 1–10*. Coombs (2003: 219) briefly discusses Albertini’s view. Other Henricians include Abra de Raconis and Giuseppe Polizzi (*Philosophicarum tomus tertius, d. 49, s. 2, p. 623*).

endorse *ontological pluralism*, the idea that there is more than one kind of being.<sup>7</sup> In the above quotation, Albertini claims that essences have essential being from eternity. In order to ground necessary truths, essences must also have essential being necessarily, and in other passages Albertini explicitly states that essences not only eternally but also necessarily have essential being (*Corollaria, tomus secundus, princ. 1, d. 1, q. 1, nn. 36, 39, pp. 8, 9*). Because Albertini's brand of Essentialism is traditionally attributed to Henry of Ghent, I will call it 'Henrician Essentialism', and I will understand Henrician Essentialism as follows:

**Henrician Essentialism:** Eternal truths are grounded in essences. Essences do not necessarily exist, but they necessarily have essential being from eternity.

The need to provide grounds for eternal truths was an important motivation for Henrician Essentialism. Albertini, for example, writes,

'Man is a rational animal' is a proposition of eternal truth because the essence of man has actual, intrinsic, quidditative, absolute being from eternity. (*Corollaria, tomus secundus, princ. 1, d. 1, q. 1, n. 27, p. 7*)

Here Albertini alleges that eternal essences can explain why it is eternally true that a human is a rational animal. This sort of argument is prevalent in seventeenth-century discussions of Essentialism, and many authors state the argument explicitly in terms of grounding [*fundamentum* or *fundare*] and truthmaking [*verificare*].<sup>8</sup>

Suárez persistently attacks Henrician Essentialism throughout DM 31. The main conclusion of DM 31.2, for example, is,

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<sup>7</sup> For a contemporary explication of ontological pluralism, see McDaniel (2009).

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Albertini, *Corollaria, tomus secundus, princ. 1, d. 1, q. 1, n. 25, p. 6*; Mastri, *Tomus quintus, d. 8, q. 1, a. 4, n. 58, p. 31*; Suárez DM 31.2.6, 31.12.46. Polizzi, *Philosophicarum tomus tertius, d. 49, s. 3, n. 16, p. 629*.

Therefore, it must necessarily be confessed that when you take away the entity of existence, which is communicated to a creature by some efficient causation, the entity of essence is altogether nothing. (DM 31.2.5)

Nearby Suárez writes,

The essences of creatures, although they are known by God from eternity, are nothing; and they have no true real being before they receive it through God's free production [*efficientiam*]. (DM 31.2.1)

Before God creates concrete particular objects like water, human beings, and roses, the essences of those objects are "altogether nothing" and have no "true real being", contrary to Essentialism.

Suárez's primary reason for rejecting Essentialism is that it conflicts with the doctrine of creation, according to which everything other than God was freely (i.e., contingently) created in time. In order to ground necessary, eternal truths, Essentialists must say that essences are both necessary and eternal. But the doctrine of creation implies that everything other than God is contingent and temporal. So Essentialism conflicts with the doctrine of creation (DM 31.2.3-4; 31.3.3).

## **2. Suárezian Essentialism**

Because Suárez rejects Essentialism, he owes us a story about the eternal truths, as he is well aware. Surprisingly, Suárez ends up endorsing his own version of Essentialism. I argue for this claim in three steps. First, I argue that for Suárez the eternal truths are not grounded in anything that (necessarily) exists. (On Suárez's view, the grounds of eternal truths might exist but they do not need to exist to ground the eternal truths. For the sake of exposition I'll elide this complication going forward by saying that the grounds of eternal truths do not exist.) Second, I argue that Suárez grounds the eternal truths in non-existent, potential beings. Third, I argue that the relevant potential beings are essences. Accordingly, Suárez grounds the eternal truths in non-existent essences that necessarily have

potential being from eternity. This situation is surprising given Suárez's attacks on Henrician Essentialism. So in the subsequent section I will explain how Suárez views his Essentialism as distinct from (and superior to) Henrician Essentialism.

The first step of Suárez's solution to the problem of eternal truths is to distinguish between two ways of understanding the copula 'is':

This whole controversy, it seems to me, consists in the variable signification of the copula 'is', by which the terms in these sentences are conjoined. For 'is' can be taken in two ways. First, as signifying an actual and real conjunction of terms, existing in reality .... (DM 13.12.44)

On the first way of understanding the copula, 'is' signifies an existing conjunction of terms. It is important to note that the terms in question here are not utterances, concepts, or otherwise linguistic items. Rather, they are the worldly correlates of linguistic items. Thus, on the first reading the proposition that Peter is running signifies an existing conjunction of Peter and running. I will call the first reading of the copula the 'existential reading'. Suárez admits that on the existential reading propositions of the form '*a* is *F*' require the existence of their terms for their truth; accordingly, propositions like 'a human is an animal' are neither eternally nor necessarily true on the existential reading for the same reason that 'Peter is running' is neither eternally nor necessarily true—because its terms are neither necessary nor eternal.

Suárez explains the second reading of the copula as follows:

Propositions in this second sense are reduced to a hypothetical or conditional sense .... Thus, just as this conditional is perpetual, 'If it is a human, it is an animal', or 'If it runs, it is moved', so also is this perpetual, 'A human is an animal', or 'Running is motion'. (DM 31.12.45)

In Suárez's view, the so-called eternal truths are eternally true only according to the conditional reading:

But in the second sense propositions are true even if their terms do not exist; and in this sense they are necessarily and perpetually true because the copula 'is' in this sense does not signify existence, and so it does not attribute actual reality to the terms in themselves; accordingly, it does not require existence or actual reality for its truth. (DM 31.12.45)

The implicit yet crucial assumption here is that the truth of a proposition is grounded in the significate of the proposition's copula. Suárez relies on this assumption when he argues that on the existential reading the eternal truths *do* require existence for their truth, since on that reading the copula signifies "a real and actual conjunction of terms, existing in reality" (DM 31.12.44). But the eternal truths on the conditional reading do not require existence because their copulas do not signify anything that exists. Suárez states as much in the following passage:

But in order for the knowledge to be true by which God knows from eternity that man is a rational animal, it was not necessary for the essence of man to have from eternity some real being in act, since that 'is' does not signify actual and real being, but it signifies only an intrinsic connection of such terms. (DM 31.2.8)

Here Suárez claims that the proposition 'Man is a rational animal' does not require for its truth the actual essence of a human because the copula in 'Man is a rational animal' "does not signify a real being in act." This passage therefore makes it easy to see the crucial assumption in Suárez's solution to the problem of eternal truths, the assumption that a truth is grounded in what its copula signifies. This assumption also allows us to see the purpose of distinguishing between the two readings of the eternal truths. Suárez wants to maintain that some propositions of the form '*a* is *F*' are grounded in existents, while others are not. For example, the truth of 'Peter is running' is grounded in an actually running Peter; but the truth of 'Man is a rational animal' is not so grounded. Yet both propositions have the same syntactical structure. It is in order to account for the different truth conditions of syntactically similar propositions that Suárez introduces the conditional reading of the copula.

But even on the conditional reading, the grounding problem for eternal truths remains. This is because Suárez endorses the axiom, “every truth is grounded in some being.”<sup>9</sup> If the eternal truths are true on the conditional reading, in what being are they grounded? In the above passage Suárez reveals the next step in his solution to the problem of eternal truths when he says that the copula in ‘Man is an animal’ signifies an “intrinsic connection between terms.”<sup>10</sup> Given the assumption that the significate of a proposition’s copula is the ground of that proposition’s truth, it follows that the eternal truths on the conditional reading are grounded in non-existent connections between their terms.

So Suárez’s view is that eternal truths are grounded in non-existent connections between non-existent terms.<sup>11</sup> This is puzzling, for how can something non-existent ground anything? Suárez raises this worry as follows:

But two problems still remain. The first is that it has not yet been explained what is that necessary connection of non-existing terms. For since it posits nothing in reality, it is hard to understand how it can ground [*fundare*] necessary truth. (DM 31.12.46)

Suárez’s response to this objection must be quoted at length:

To this objection it seems that it must be said that this connection is nothing other than the identity of the terms that are in essential and affirmative propositions .... For the truth of every affirmative proposition is grounded in some identity or unity of terms .... Identity, however, since it is a property of being ... is found in every being or in every state of being with proportion. Hence, just as an existing man and animal are the same in reality, so a possible man ... has identity with animal proportionally taken. Therefore this identity is sufficient to ground that necessity, and it can be found in a being in potency, although it is nothing in act. (DM 31.12.46)

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<sup>9</sup> DM 31.2.6. This statement occurs as a premise in an objection to Suárez’s view, but Suárez nowhere denies that premise and everywhere tries to accommodate it.

<sup>10</sup> This passage is what leads Karofsky to claim, correctly, “Suárez grounds the truth of essential propositions in the connections between the properties expressed in the propositions” (2001: 41).

<sup>11</sup> Suárez explicitly argues for the claim that these connections are non-existent at DM 31.12.42.



Here Suárez claims that the connections that ground eternal truths are identities between terms. This move by itself does not solve the objection, for one might think that identities can exist only if their terms exist. The second part of the solution is to claim that these identities are “found in potential beings.” Suárez therefore grounds the eternal truths in potential beings. This reading is corroborated by other texts. For example, Suárez writes,

And so, in a peculiar way essential being is attributed to created things before they exist, so that it may be said that truth is grounded in a potential being apt to exist. (DM 31.2.11)<sup>12</sup>

In sum, the eternal truths on the conditional reading are grounded in “connections between terms”, which are some kind of non-existent, potential beings. But what exactly are these connections between terms? Suárez’s central discussions of the eternal truths (DM 31.2.11 and 31.12.46) do not provide a conclusive answer to this question, but Suárez does provide a conclusive answer in his discussion of universals.

Suárez denies that universality is a mind-independent feature of the world, and to that extent he is a nominalist (DM 6.1.1). But Suárez is not a thoroughgoing nominalist, he says, because the things we *call* universal—natures or essences<sup>13</sup>—are mind-independent features of the world. So Suárez’s view is that humanity is real, but universality is not: there are concrete particular instances of humanity, but there is no universality.

In light of this view, Suárez considers an objection that evokes the problem of eternal truths. If there are only concrete particular instances of humanity, then those instances are just as contingent as concrete particular humans. It follows from Suárez’s view that humanity is neither necessary nor eternal. But in that

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<sup>12</sup> DM 2.4.14 makes a similar claim: “Therefore, for the aforesaid reason, being is an essential predicate. Moreover, to be a being in this way agrees with a creature even if the creature does not exist, just as ‘Man is a rational animal’ is said to have eternal truth.”

<sup>13</sup> Suárez insists that essences are natures and often writes ‘nature or essence [*natura seu essential*]’ (DM 31.11.32; 11.6; 13.19; 1.9).

case, truths about humanity will be neither necessary nor eternal. Suárez raises the objection and immediately responds to it as follows:

Universals are commonly thought to be eternal because, since they are the proper objects of the sciences, they must be necessary and immutable and consequently eternal .... But we suppose that universals do not exist outside particulars, and particulars do not always have being. So we conclude that universals cannot be called eternal according to the real existence they have outside their causes. Therefore, they are called perpetual according to essential or potential being [*esse essentiae seu potentiale*]. (DM 6.7.7)<sup>14</sup>

Suárez's response is that the sciences contain necessary truths because their objects necessarily have potential being. From this passage it appears that Suárez grounds the eternal truths in universals rather than in essences. But recall that for Suárez the term 'universals' refers to essences, so it is clear from the context what his view is: eternal truths are grounded in essences with potential being. From this passage we may infer that Suárez's "connections" between the terms of eternal truths are essences. Here is why. In DM 31.12 Suárez claims that the eternal truths are grounded in non-existent connections between terms. These connections are able to ground eternal truths because they have potential or essential being. In DM 6.7 we find that the eternal truths are grounded in essences with potential being. We may infer that the connections mentioned in DM 31.12 are essences with potential being.<sup>15</sup>

As we have seen, Essentialism is Suárez's primary target in the 31<sup>st</sup> Disputation. But Suárez appears to have come full circle by embracing Essentialism in the end. The foregoing therefore raises two puzzles about Suárez's brand of Essentialism. The first puzzle I'll call 'the contradiction problem':

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<sup>14</sup> Suárez assimilates the problem of eternal truths to the problem of scientific truths in DM 31.12.38.

<sup>15</sup> *Pace* Karofsky, Suárez does not want "a solution to the problem of eternal truths that ... avoids any ontological commitment to unactualized, possible essences" (Karofsky 2001: 23).

**The contradiction problem:** Suárez insists that (C1) before creation essences are “altogether nothing” and they “have no true real being.” But Suárez also claims that (C2) before creation essences have potential being. How can Suárez reconcile these seemingly contradictory claims?

Second, Suárez argues that Essentialism conflicts with the doctrine of creation. This generates what I call ‘the creation problem’:

**The creation problem:** How does Suárez’s brand of Essentialism escape Suárez’s own argument from creation against Henrician Essentialism?

It is worth noting that even if, contrary to my reading, Suárez does not ground eternal truths in uncreated essences, there is still an exegetical puzzle to be solved, for quite apart from his discussion of eternal truths, it is clear that Suárez endorses a version of Essentialism according to which uncreated, non-existent essences have potential being from eternity. This situation puzzled even Suárez’s near contemporaries and raises a third problem:<sup>16</sup>

**The preference problem:** Why is Suárezian Essentialism preferable to Henrician Essentialism?

Solving the preference problem is crucial to understanding Suárez’s doctrine of being and essence in DM 31.

### **3. Suárez’s Essentialism versus Henrician Essentialism**

A formal fix for the first two of the above problems is easy to come by. In the light of ontological pluralism, claims like (C1) are ambiguous.<sup>17</sup> The contradiction between (C1) and (C2) is generated by the assumption that

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<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., Abra de Raconis, *Summa totius philosophiae, In metaphysicam*, s. 3, q. 1, a. 1, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> This seems to be John Doyle’s (1967) approach.

“altogether nothing” means “has no sort of being whatsoever.” But as scholastic Essentialists commonly pointed out, with ontological pluralism on the table the quantifiers can be relativized or restricted to a kind of being.<sup>18</sup> To say that an essence is nothing might mean that it has no being at all, or it might mean that the essence lacks a certain sort of being—existence, for example. The second reading is strongly suggested by several passages; for example, DM 31.2, the conclusion of which is that essences are “utterly nothing” before creation, begins like this:

In the first place it must be established that the essence of a creature, or a creature *de se* and before it is made by God has no true real being in itself, and *in this precise sense of existential being*, the essence is not something but is altogether nothing. (My emphasis, DM 31.2.1)

Here Suárez explicitly states that when he says that essences are nothing before creation, he means nothing in the sense of existential being—in other words, before essences are created, they do not exist. Similar remarks can be made about the phrase ‘no true real being’. If we restrict the quantifier in (C1) to things that exist, and if for Suárez ‘true real being’ is equivalent to existence, then (C1) becomes equivalent to

(C1\*) Before creation essences do not exist.

For Suárez, existence is a specific type of being. Hence, (C1\*) disambiguates (C1) by specifying that the kind of being mentioned in (C1) is existence rather than some other kind of being. It is also helpful to note that Suárez identifies existence with actual being (DM 31.4.6–7), so (C1\*) is a terminological variant of, ‘Before creation essences do not have actual being’.<sup>19</sup> Now (C2) merely says that before

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<sup>18</sup> For contemporary discussion of this point, see McDaniel (2009). For scholastics making this point, see Footnote 21.

<sup>19</sup> I therefore disagree with Wells’s claim that “Suárez even allows that such possible essences are actual, in a sense” (Wells 1981a: 78). There is a sense in which merely possible essences have

creation essences have potential being. Clearly, the claim that (C1\*) before creation essences do not exist (i.e., they do not have actual being) is compatible with the claim that (C2) before creation essences have potential being.<sup>20</sup> Hence, restricting the quantifier in (C1) to existence resolves the apparent contradiction between (C1) and (C2).

Ontological pluralism also provides the resources to solve the creation problem. A common objection to Essentialism in the seventeenth century was that if Essentialism were true, then God would create things out of their essences, not *ex nihilo*. On this picture, God creates by actualizing essences that are in some sense already there. In order to accommodate the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, seventeenth-century Essentialists claim that God creates not *ex nihilo simpliciter* but *ex nihilo in genere existentialium*—out of nothing that exists.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Suárez could claim that the creation doctrine is limited in scope to things that exist: everything *that exists* (except God) is contingently created in time. Again, this version of the doctrine of creation is consistent with Suárez's claim that there are uncreated, non-existent essences with potential being. Because this solution hinges on the restriction of the quantifiers in (C1) and in the doctrine of creation to things that exist, I will call it 'the restriction solution'.

The restriction solution is correct as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. On the restriction solution alone it remains unclear how Suárez's view is different from his Henrician opponents'. Henricians also claim that essences have essential being from eternity, not that they exist from eternity. So Henricians would agree that essences do not exist before they are created. While the restriction solution solves the problem of contradiction and the problem of creation, it leaves the problem of preference completely unanswered. One near contemporary of Suárez makes a similar complaint. Charles François Abra de

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being, but there is no sense in which they are actual. For Suárez, to be actual just is to exist, and merely possible essences do not exist.

<sup>20</sup> See DM 31.2.10 for Suárez's explanation of the two senses of being.

<sup>21</sup> See Capreolus, *In II Sent.*, d. I, q. 1, a. 3, ad 4, p. 73; Albertini, *Corollaria, tomus secundus*, princ. 1, d. 1, q. 1, n. 39, p. 9. Suárez explicitly rejects this solution in DM 31.2.4.

Raconis (1580–1649) reads Suárez as advancing the restriction solution, and he objects:

But this solution is entirely impertinent (*pace* Suárez, an otherwise great man and a really sharp philosopher and theologian). The question is not whether a universal essence apt to exist in many things is real when ‘real’ means actual; for then we would be asking whether an essence is real before it is real. That’s silly. (*Summa totius philosophiae, In metaphysicam, s. 3, q. 1, a. 1, p. 15*)

One of Suárez’s main claims in DM 31 is that essences are ‘altogether nothing’ before they exist. As construed by the restriction solution alone, this claim is trivial, for it is equivalent to the claim that essences do not exist before they exist. Raconis concludes that Suárez’s view is impertinent and silly, which is out of character for an otherwise “really sharp philosopher.” But other Essentialists in the seventeenth century thought there was more going on in Suárez’s discussion of uncreated essences, and I agree with them.

Giuseppe Polizzi is an avowed Essentialist of the Henrician variety. He names Suárez as his opponent, and then he characterizes the dispute as follows:

Our opponents do not deny that the essences of creatures have real being from eternity, but they think essences have such being only in virtue of the extrinsic power of the Creator .... But I think that essences ... also have actually real essential being *in themselves*. (*Philosophicarum tomus tertius, d. 49, s. 2, n. 10, p. 624*)

Polizzi tells us that the crucial difference between Suárez and his Essentialist opponents does not concern *whether* uncreated essences have being but what the source of that being is. Henricians think that uncreated essences have intrinsic being; Suárez thinks that uncreated essences have extrinsic being. Similar remarks can be found in other seventeenth-century Henricians. To reiterate a passage cited above, Albertini, the leading seventeenth-century Henrician, states,

The essences of creatures are not altogether nothing before existence, nor do they have merely potential being in a cause, but from eternity they have *intrinsic*, actual, absolute, quidditative being or essential being [*esse essentiae*]. (My emphasis, *Corollaria, princ. 1, d. 1, q. 1, n. 12, p. 4*)

Here again, essential being is explicitly said to be intrinsic. The fact that Albertini goes out of his way to state that the being essences have before existence is intrinsic suggests that the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction plays an important role in characterizing the various positions in the debate about essence. Similar passages can be found in leading seventeenth-century Scotists.<sup>22</sup>

Suárez nowhere flags the importance of the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction in DM 31, but that distinction is unmistakably present in his characterization of the respective views. Explaining a version of Essentialism traditionally attributed to Scotus, Suárez writes,

The Thomists seriously reprimand Scotus because he had asserted that creatures have a certain being from eternity—their diminished being .... But they attribute this view to Scotus unjustly, for Scotus himself clearly states that this cognized being ... is not *in them*; it is not some real being *intrinsic* to them. (My emphasis, DM 31.2.1)

Here Suárez notes that the view he opposes is a view that the Thomists ascribe to Scotus. As it turns out, Suárez thinks that Scotus did not hold this view. The reason why he thinks so is because, according to Scotus, cognized or diminished being is not an *intrinsic* sort of being. We may infer that on the view that the Thomists (wrongly) attribute to Scotus, diminished being is an intrinsic sort of being.<sup>23</sup> Suárez opposes this view not only as a reading of Scotus, but also on philosophical grounds. Hence, the view that Suárez opposes in DM 31.2 is one according to which essences have intrinsic being from eternity.

Suárez also introduces Henrician Essentialism as follows:

Scotus ... impugns Henry because in various places Henry had asserted that the essences of things from themselves have a certain essential being, which he calls real being, eternal and unproduced, coming to creatures independently of God and

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<sup>22</sup> Mastri, *Tomus quintus*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 2, n. 19, p. 23; q. 1, a. 3, n. 27, p. 25. John Punch explicitly states that the being that creatures have from eternity is not extrinsic (*Philosophiae cursus integer*, Metaphysics, d. 2, q. 5, concl. 3, n. 50, p. 903).

<sup>23</sup> It is worth noting that some seventeenth-century Scotists endorse the view that Thomists (wrongly) attribute to Scotus. See Footnote 22.

which he supposes to be *in them* [*quodque in eis supponitur*]. (My emphasis, DM 31.2.2)

According to the view described here, essences eternally have essential being, and Suárez adds a final clause specifically emphasizing that essential being is an intrinsic sort of being.

In contrast to the views traditionally ascribed to Scotus and Henry, Suárez claims repeatedly that potential being is not intrinsic:<sup>24</sup>

An essence is said to be real before it comes to be, *not by its own reality that it actually has in itself* [*quam in se actu habeat*], but because it can become real. (My emphasis, DM 31.2.2)

[God] does not require *in them* any real being in order to terminate such knowledge, but potential being is sufficient, which as such is actually only being in a cause. (My emphasis, DM 31.2.7)

So Suárez's main claim throughout DM 31 (and especially in 31.2) is not that uncreated essences have no being whatsoever; his main claim is that uncreated essences have no intrinsic being whatsoever.<sup>25</sup>

This reading generates solutions to the three problems mentioned above. To solve the contradiction problem, we may interpret (C1) as

(C1\*\*) Before creation essences have no intrinsic being.

(C1\*\*) is not trivial, and it represents an important point of controversy between Suárez and his Henrician opponents. In order to solve the creation problem, we can understand the doctrine of creation as saying that everything with intrinsic being (except God) is contingently created in time. Again, this is a point of disagreement with Suárez's Henrician opponents. Finally, to solve the preference

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<sup>24</sup> In this I am in agreement with Wells (1981a: 78, 81). However, Wells appears to think that the extrinsic denomination of 'potential being' comes from God's intellect rather than God's power (80), and in this we disagree.

<sup>25</sup> *Pace* Doyle, who claims that uncreated essences are real "in themselves" (1967: 31-32). However, Doyle also recognizes that potential being is extrinsic (1967: 41).



problem, we say that Suárezian Essentialism is preferable to Henrician Essentialism because Suárez attributes merely extrinsic being to uncreated essences, whereas Henricians attribute intrinsic being to uncreated essences. I think this is how Suárez and his opponents (excepting Raconis) saw the situation, but in order to get a better grasp on the proposed solution, we need a better idea of what extrinsic being is supposed to be.

#### 4. Extrinsic Being

Although the notion of extrinsic being does important work in Suárez's metaphysics, Suárez nowhere explains that notion; moreover, extrinsic being has no analogue in contemporary philosophy, and it is accordingly difficult to explain. But we can begin to get a grip on the notion of extrinsic being by starting with the notion of an extrinsic denomination. Suárez says that potential being is an extrinsic denomination coming from God's power:

Before creation ... the being that they [Thomists] call essential being is only objective potential being ... or being through [*per*] an extrinsic denomination from the power of God. (DM 31.2.2)<sup>26</sup>

The scholastic notion of an extrinsic denomination does the same work as the contemporary notion of a so-called "Cambridge property" or an extrinsic property. The difference between intrinsic and extrinsic properties is notoriously difficult to analyze but easy to illustrate with intuitive examples. Examples of intuitively intrinsic properties include having mass 50 kg, being H<sub>2</sub>O, and being able to sense. Examples of intuitively extrinsic properties include being an uncle, being thought about, and being such that the Eiffel Tower is made of iron. Early modern scholastic examples of extrinsic denominations include being thought

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. DM 30.17.10, 3.3–4. Suárez explains the notion of "being in a cause" in DM 6.4.9. To be in a cause is just to be the object of a cause, which is the same as having potential being from that cause. It is worth noting that Suárez also thinks that "objective being" or being in the mind is an extrinsic sort of being, so the outlines of the following account can easily be adapted to account for Suárez's doctrine of objective being (DM 54.1.6).

about, being loved, and being married.<sup>27</sup> These examples make it clear that extrinsic denominations are what we would call extrinsic properties. Because extrinsic being is an extrinsic denomination, and the scholastic concept of an extrinsic denomination does the work of the contemporary concept of an extrinsic property, I propose to understand the notion of extrinsic being on analogy with the contemporary notion of an extrinsic property.

Although the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction is intuitive and widespread, providing an analysis of the distinction has proven difficult. I want to start with a suggestion made by a near contemporary of Suárez, Sebastián Izquierdo. Izquierdo notes that denominations can be intrinsic, extrinsic, or semi-extrinsic. He then explains the differences as follows. Denominations are

intrinsic when all the grounds [*fundamenta*] from which the denominations are taken are intrinsic to their subjects, either by identity or by inherence; they are extrinsic when all the grounds are extrinsic – that is, neither identical to nor inhering in their subjects – and they are semi-extrinsic when the grounds are partly intrinsic to their subjects and partly extrinsic in one of the ways mentioned [identity and inherence]. (Izquierdo, *Pharus scientiarum*, d. 12, q. 3, n. 42, p. 298)

Here Izquierdo proposes to understand the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction in terms of “grounds”, identity, and inherence: a denomination is intrinsic just in case its ground is identical to or inhering in its subject; a denomination is extrinsic just in case its ground is neither identical to nor inhering in its subject. This suggestion is strikingly similar to what is probably the most promising approach to the intrinsic/extrinsic property distinction in the contemporary literature.<sup>28</sup>

In 2001 David Lewis provisionally characterized the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction as follows:

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<sup>27</sup> The most helpful explanation of extrinsic denominations I have found is in Izquierdo, *Pharus scientiarum*, d. 12, q. 3, n. 42, pp. 297–298. See also Oviedo, *Tomus II philosophiae*, Metaphysics, cv. 12, pt. 5, n. 1, p. 361; for discussion of denominations in seventeenth-century scholasticism, see Embry (2015: 200–204).

<sup>28</sup> For a survey of the literature on the intrinsic/extrinsic property distinction, see Weatherson and Marshall (2014).

In general, something has an intrinsic property solely in virtue of how that thing itself is; it has a purely extrinsic property solely in virtue of how accompanying things, and its external relations to those accompanying things, are and it has a non-intrinsic but not purely extrinsic property in virtue partly of the former and partly of the latter. (If we had a clear enough understanding of 'solely in virtue of', we would need no further definition of 'intrinsic'.) (2001: 384; cf. Lewis 1983: 197)

Lewis considers and quickly rejects the idea of analyzing intrinsicity in terms of the in-virtue-of relation; he rejects this idea because we do not have a clear enough understanding of the in-virtue-of relation. But since Lewis wrote this passage in 2001 there has been an immense effort to systematize the notion of the in-virtue-of relation, and it is now widely agreed that we do in fact have a clear enough understanding of the in-virtue-of relation to take it seriously in philosophical discourse.

The in-virtue-of relation is said to be the inverse of the grounding relation. Grounding is a generic, *sui generis*, synchronic relation of non-causal, metaphysical explanation between "levels" of reality. If *a* grounds *b*, then *a* provides a metaphysical explanation for *b*. For example, it has been said that disjunctive facts are grounded in atomic facts—I am sitting or standing in virtue of the fact that I am sitting—that non-natural facts are grounded in natural facts, and that mental facts are grounded in physical facts. In each case, grounding facts are said to be explanatory of, metaphysically prior to, and more fundamental than grounded facts.

With this broad understanding of grounding in the background, Gideon Rosen (2010) proposes the following analysis of intrinsicity:

**The grounding analysis of intrinsicity:**

F is an intrinsic property iff, as a matter of necessity, for all *x*:

- (i) If *x* is F in virtue of  $\phi(y)$ —where  $\phi(y)$  is a fact containing *y* as a constituent—then *y* is part of *x*; and

- (ii) If  $x$  is not- $F$  in virtue of  $\varphi(y)$ , then  $y$  is part of  $x$ .<sup>29</sup>

The fact that I am an uncle is grounded in the fact that my brother has a child. The grounding fact has my brother as a constituent, and my brother is not a part of me. Hence, *being an uncle* is not an intrinsic property. The fact that I am not lonely is grounded in the fact that my spouse exists. But my spouse is not a part of me. Hence, by the second clause of the grounding analysis, being lonely is an extrinsic property. Rosen's analysis can also handle cases that have presented difficulties for other analyses, cases like *being a lonely cube or else an accompanied sphere*, indiscriminately necessary properties like *being such that there are numbers*, and haecceitistic properties like *being Obama*.

So here is where we stand. Suárez tells us that potential being is an extrinsic denomination coming from God's power. The scholastic notion of an extrinsic denomination does the work of the contemporary notion of an extrinsic property, so I proposed understanding the notion of extrinsic being on analogy with the notion of an extrinsic property. Following Izquierdo's suggestion, we can understand the notion of an extrinsic property by way of the notion of grounding, and we can spell this idea out in greater detail by way of Rosen's grounding analysis of intrinsicity. We can now adapt Rosen's analysis of intrinsicity for the purpose of understanding Suárez's conception of extrinsic being.

Notice that Rosen's account allows for the possibility of a property that is extrinsic but had in an intrinsic fashion. For example, on Rosen's analysis, *being such that the Eiffel Tower is made of iron* will be extrinsic, but, intuitively, the Eiffel

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<sup>29</sup> Wilson (2014 and elsewhere) argues at length against the posit of a primitive grounding relation as explained here. She thinks that such a grounding relation is too coarse-grained to be informative, and the work that grounding is currently being used for can be done by a plurality of "small-g grounding" relations like token identity, type identity, set membership, functional realization, and more. According to Wilson, prior to the recent grounding craze philosophers used grounding idioms like 'in virtue of' as schematic placeholders for various small-g grounding relations. Readers attracted to Wilson's view may take Rosen's analysis of intrinsicity and my analysis of extrinsic being as schematic, to be filled in with reference to the appropriate small-g grounding relation, whatever it turns out to be.

Tower has that property intrinsically. Call such a property ‘weakly extrinsic’. Call a property ‘strongly extrinsic’ just in case, necessarily, anything that has it has it extrinsically. When Suárez says that a denomination is extrinsic, he means that it is strongly extrinsic. I propose the following analysis of strong extrinsicality (this analysis is meant to be neutral between properties and ways of being):

**The grounding analysis of strong extrinsicality:**

F is strongly extrinsic iff, necessarily, for all<sub>unrestricted</sub> x:

If x has F, then x has F in virtue of  $\phi(y)$  – where  $\phi(y)$  is a fact containing y as a constituent – and y is not part of x.<sup>30</sup>

Suárez thinks that potential being is strongly extrinsic (but henceforth I drop ‘strongly’ for ease of exposition). On this analysis, to say that potential being is extrinsic is to say that (necessarily) anything with potential being has potential being in virtue of something else. Suárez tells us that potential being is an extrinsic denomination from the power of God. Given the foregoing, we can construe this as the claim that facts of the form [x has potential being] are grounded in facts of the form [God has a power to produce x]. On this picture, God’s power is the ground of possibility.

So the picture that emerges is as follows. For Suárez, there are (at least) two kinds of being: existence and potential being.<sup>31</sup> Existence (or actuality) is intrinsic (DM 31.1.2, 6.7), which is to say that facts of the form [x exists] are not grounded in further facts about anything other than x and its parts. Potential being, on the

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<sup>30</sup> The grounding analysis of strong extrinsicality helps make sense of McDaniel’s (2009) claim that ontological pluralism might be better than ontological monism at carving nature at the joints. If we assume that there are vertical as well as horizontal joints in nature, and vertical joints are represented by grounding relations, then the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic being will track at least one joint in reality, the joint between fundamental and non-fundamental ontic facts.

<sup>31</sup> For this paper I am setting aside Suárez’s theory of objective being [*esse objectivum*], but I think that theory can be understood along the same lines as his theory of potential being, with the result that potential being is but one kind of extrinsic being.

other hand, is extrinsic, and it comes from God's power; this is to say that facts of the form [x has potential being] are grounded in facts of the form [God can produce x].<sup>32</sup>

The grounding analysis of strong extrinsicity provides a clearer picture of Suárezian Essentialism. When Suárez claims that before creation essences are altogether nothing and have no true real being, he means that they have no intrinsic being. It follows that for Suárez uncreated essences are not fundamental. Unlike the claim that before they exist essences do not exist, the claim that uncreated essences have being but are not fundamental is not trivial. And given the foregoing, Suárez must restrict the creation doctrine to things with intrinsic being. For Suárez, then, everything with intrinsic being was freely created in time. The upshot of my reading is that for Suárez, everything is either caused by God or grounded in God.<sup>33</sup>

The contrast between Suárezian and Henrician Essentialism now appears striking. According to Henrician Essentialism, essential being is an intrinsic kind of being. So facts of the form [x has essential being] are not grounded in further facts about God (or anything other than x). It follows that for Henricians essences are neither caused by nor grounded in God. And if we grant the plausible assumption that there is no infinite downward regress of grounding facts, it will follow from Henrician Essentialism that there are fundamental ontic facts about uncreated essences.<sup>34</sup> In other words, God is only one among infinitely many fundamental, uncreated, necessary beings.

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<sup>32</sup> Suárez's view is therefore a development of the view suggested by Plantinga at the end of (1980).

<sup>33</sup> It might seem to follow from the grounding analysis of strong extrinsicity that even existence is extrinsic, since facts of the form [x exist] are grounded in facts of the form [God created x]. Suárez insists that existence is intrinsic, so on the grounding analysis he must deny that things exist in virtue of the fact that God created them. One plausible way to do so is to distinguish between efficient causation and grounding. Of course things exist because God created them, but the 'because' here signifies efficient causation rather than grounding. In a slogan, God creates existents but does not ground them. For more on the distinction between grounding and efficient causation, see Bernstein (2016). Thanks to Referee A for raising this worry.

<sup>34</sup> This consequence follows on other views of fundamentality too, including, e.g., that proposed in Raven (2016). Raven proposes, very roughly, that something is fundamental just in case it

The foregoing characterization of intrinsic and extrinsic being also helps us to see why Suárez might have thought his Essentialism is theologically superior to Henrician Essentialism. In the literature on grounding one often finds the sentiment that grounded entities are somehow less ontologically costly than fundamental entities. Kit Fine (2012) suggests that we can understand the notion of reduction only by means of the notion of ground, and grounded facts are reducible to their grounds. Gideon Rosen reinforces the impression that grounded entities are reducible to their grounds with his characterization of metaphysical naturalism. Rosen suggests we understand metaphysical naturalism as the claim that every non-natural—that is, normative or intentional—fact is grounded in some natural fact. Rosen writes:

**Rosenian Naturalism:** Every fact  $p$ , we may say, is associated with a *tree* that specifies the facts in virtue of which  $p$  obtains, the facts in virtue of which those facts obtain, and so on. A path in such a tree is *naturalistic* when there is a point beyond which every fact in the path is non-normative and non-intentional. A tree is naturalistic when every path in it is naturalistic. Metaphysical naturalism is then the thesis that every fact tops some naturalistic tree. (Rosen 2010: 111–112)

This picture of naturalism is compelling to the naturalist only if the naturalist assumes that admitting non-natural facts is harmless so long as those facts are reducible to or grounded in natural facts. This suggestion is echoed by Jonathan Schaffer's (2009) insistence that Quinean existence questions are trivial; what really matters in metaphysics is the question of what grounds what. According to Schaffer's permissive methodology, it is trivial and perfectly unobjectionable to admit the existence of such items as numbers, universals, and God, so long as these items are suitably grounded.

If grounded facts are reducible to their grounds, then Suárez's Essentialism is preferable to Henrician Essentialism because for Suárez ontic facts about possible

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appears “all the way down” the possibly infinitely regressive grounding tree. For the notion of a grounding tree, see Rosenian Naturalism below.

beings are reducible to facts about God.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, Suárez explicitly argues that extrinsic denominations generally are reducible to their grounds (DM 54.2.13). Suárez's position is therefore analogous to the position of Rosen's naturalist, and we can imagine Suárez making the following speech:

**Suárezian Theism:** Every fact *p*, we may say, is associated with a tree that specifies the facts in virtue of which *p* obtains, the facts in virtue of which those facts obtain, and so on. A path in such a tree is theistic when there is a point beyond which every fact in the path contains only God and divine attributes. Classical theism is then the thesis that every fact containing an uncreated constituent tops some theistic path.

If we can make sense of Rosenian Naturalism being preferable to non-naturalism, then we can make sense of (even if we do not sympathize with) Suárezian Theism being preferable to its Henrician rival.<sup>36</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

Henrician Essentialism posits uncreated essences as grounds for the eternal truths. Suárez argues against Henrician Essentialism on the grounds that it violates the doctrine of creation, according to which everything other than God is contingently created in time. But Suárez then goes on to ground eternal truths in uncreated essences with potential being. Suárez therefore endorses his own version of Essentialism. This situation results in an exegetical puzzle: how does Suárez see his version of Essentialism as distinct from and preferable to Henrician Essentialism? I have argued that the key to understanding Suárez's Essentialism lies in his distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic being. Extrinsic being is to be understood on analogy with extrinsic properties. Adapting Rosen's grounding analysis of intrinsicity to the case of extrinsic being allows us to

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<sup>35</sup> However, I would resist the claim that merely possible essences are identical to God (Cantens 2000: 130; Karofsky 2001: 43). Unlike God, merely possible essences do not exist. Moreover, the essence of a turkey is distinct from the essence of a trout, which would be impossible if essences were identical to God. Alvin Plantinga makes a similar point in (1980: 37).

<sup>36</sup> Note that according to Suárezian Theism, it need not be the case that every path is a theistic path, since there might be fundamental facts that do not contain God as a constituent. Indeed, Suárez thinks that existence is intrinsic, so existence facts do not top theistic paths in a grounding tree.



appreciate the crucial difference between Suárezian and Henrician Essentialism: for Suárez, everything gets its being from God, either by way of efficient causation or by way of grounding. Not so for Henricians who claim that some things are neither created by nor grounded in God.

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### **Abbreviations**

AT = Descartes, René (1964–1976). *Oeuvres de Descartes* (Vols. 1–11). Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Eds.). Vrin. Cited by volume and page number.

CSMK = Descartes, René (1985–1991). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (Vols. 1–3). John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny (Eds. and Trans.). Cambridge University Press. Cited by volume and page number.

DM = Suárez, Francisco (1861). *Disputationes metaphysicae*. In Charles Berton (Ed.), *Opera omnia* (Vols. 25–26). Luis Vivès. Cited by disputation, section, and paragraph numbers.

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