Suárez's Non-Reductive Theory of Efficient Causation[*]

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In the last twenty-five years or so, scholars have increasingly come to
recognize the importance of the late Scholastic philosopher Francisco
Suárez (1548–1617), both for the intrinsic interest of his philosophy,
and for his influence on subsequent early modern thinkers.[1] How-

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[*]In preparing this paper, I have consulted reprints of volumes 25 and 26 of
the Vivès edition of Suárez's *Opera omnia*. See Francisco Suárez, *Disputationes
metaphysicae*, 2 vols. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965).
References to this work are indicated by 'DM', followed by disputation number,
chapter number, and paragraph number. For example, 'DM 17.1.2' indicates
Disputation 17, Chapter 1, paragraph 2. All translations are my own. How-
ever, I have consulted existing English translations where available, and have
in some cases adopted their wording without significant changes. See especially
Francisco Suárez, *On Efficient Causality: Metaphysical Disputations 17, 18, and
19*, trans. Alfred Freddoso (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994); and
Francisco Suárez, *Creation, Conservation, and Concurrence: Metaphysical Dis-
putations 20–22*, trans. Alfred Freddoso (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press,
2002). For Suárez's other works, I have consulted the Vivès edition itself. See
Francisco Suárez, *Opera omnia*, 28 vols., ed. Charles Berton (Paris: Vivès, 1856–
61).

[1]Two recent collections of essays on Suárez's philosophy are Benjamin Hill
and Henrik Lagerlund, eds., *The Philosophy of Francisco Suárez* (New York:
Oxford University Press, 2012); and Daniel Schwartz, ed., *Interpreting Suárez*
(New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Both volumes include intro-
ductions with details about Suárez's life and work, as well as about the current
state of Suárez scholarship. The first of these volumes also includes two in-
valuable bibliographies: one of Suárez's own published works in their various
editions (including translations), and another of the existing secondary litera-
ture on Suárez. Notably, many of the existing English-language translations
have been completed within the last twenty-five years. For further discussion of
Suárez's life and the significance of his work, see the preface of Sydney Penner,
'Francisco Suárez on Acting for the Sake of an Ultimate End' (Ph.D. Diss., Cor-
nell University, 2011), xii–xxxix; John P. Doyle, 'Suárez, Francisco', in E. Craig

ever, in spite of this recognition, Suárez's views on a wide variety of topics remain poorly understood. One such topic is efficient causation. Although his treatment of this topic is often cited in the literature on figures such as Descartes and Malebranche, relatively little attention has been paid to Suárez's theory of efficient causation in its own right.[2] My aim in this paper is to fill part of this gap in the scholarship. I do this by examining an important but neglected issue in Suárez's account of efficient causation—namely, the precise nature of the relationship between an efficient cause and its effect.

The central component of Suárez's account of this relationship is his claim that efficient causation is to be identified with action (*actio*), one of Aristotle's ten highest genera (*summa genera*) or categories (*praedicamenta*).[3] Thus, according to Suárez, an efficient cause brings about its effect in virtue of performing an action. Or,

(ed.) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998) URL: http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/C040; and Jorge J.E. Gracia, 'Francisco Suárez: The Man in History', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (1991): 259–66. Doyle's assessment of Suárez's significance and influence is particularly glowing; for a more sober assessment, see Robert Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes: 1274–1671* (New York: Clarendon Press, 2011), 253. For references to Suárez in the secondary literature on early modern philosophy, see subsequent notes.

[2] For three excellent discussions of Suárez's influence on Descartes's theory of causation, see Tad Schmaltz, *Descartes on Causation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 24–48; and Helen Hattab, 'Conflicting Causalities: The Jesuits, their Opponents, and Descartes on the Causality of the Efficient Cause', in D. Garber and S. Nadler (eds.) *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 1–22. For a wide-ranging treatment of Scholastic influences on Descartes's philosophy of nature, see Dennis Des Chenes, *Physiologia: Natural Philosophy in Late Aristotelian and Cartesian Thought* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998). For an illuminating discussion of Scholastic views of natural necessity, focusing on Suárez, see Walter Ott, *Causation and Laws of Nature in Early Modern Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Ch. 3. For a book-length treatment of Suárez's theory of efficient causation, with a strong emphasis on theological contexts, see Alfred J. Freddoso, 'Introduction', in *Creation, Conservation, and Concurrence.* For a more general treatment of Suárez's theory of efficient causation, see Jacob Tuttle, 'Suárez's Metaphysics of Efficient Causation' (Ph.D. Diss., Purdue University, 2013). For a discussion of issues connected with the 'propinquity', or nearness, of efficient causes to their effects, see Dennis Des Chenes, 'Suárez on Propinquity and the Efficient Cause', in *The Philosophy of Francisco Suárez*, 89–100.

[3] See DM 18.10.5.

to put the point in another idiom, he thinks that action plays the role of a connection (*connexio*) or link (*vinculum*) between an efficient cause and its effect.[4] This aspect of Suárez's theory of efficient causation has been noted several times in the literature.[5] However, its significance has not been fully appreciated. In what follows, I show how Suárez's identification of efficient causation with action helps to shed light on his views about the precise nature of efficient causation, and its role in his ontology. More specifically, I show that Suárez understands efficient causation to be a distinctive or *sui generis* type of entity, and that he thinks we must adopt this view in order to account for the facts of efficient causation.

A few remarks about my strategy are in order. Because, I shall argue, Suárez's views about action constitute the core of his theory of efficient causation, the bulk of this paper is devoted to explaining and motivating his account of the category of action. In keeping with this focus, the paper is divided into two parts. In the first part (§§1–2), I sketch the theoretical background against which Suárez presents his theory of efficient causation. In §1, I introduce Suárez's concept of efficient causation, with special attention to his understanding of the relationship between efficient causation and action. The most important conclusion of this section, which guides the remainder of the paper, is that Suárez identifies efficient causation with action. Next, in §2, I identify some of the most important philosophical and theological commitments that inform Suárez's account of the nature of efficient causation or action.

In the second, longer part of the paper (§§3–6), I argue for a detailed interpretation of Suárez's views about the category of action. As it turns out, he develops the bulk of his account in the context of a Scholastic dispute about whether action is reducible to any of the other Aristotelian categories. For this reason, my interpretation emphasizes Suárez's own position in this dispute. In §3, I offer a precise characterization of what Suárez regards as the two main

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[4]DM 18.10.8.

[5]For discussion, see Schmaltz, *Descartes on Causation*, 30–33; Hattab, 'Conflicting Causalities', 1–6; and Freddoso, 'Introduction', xliii–l. An older and less helpful treatment is Patout Burns, 'Action in Suarez', *The New Scholasticism* 38, no. 4 (1964): 453–472.

dialectical options in this controversy—what I call 'reductive' and 'non-reductive realism about action'—and I show that he endorses the latter of these options. In §4, I present and explain Suárez's arguments for his own non-reductive theory of action. In §5, I present two objections to Suárez's non-reductive theory, and I show how his responses to these objections shed light on his further characterization of efficient causation or action. Finally, in §6 I make some concluding remarks about the philosophical significance of Suárez's theory of efficient causation.

Although Suárez discusses efficient causation in several places in his *corpus*, his most thorough and systematic treatment is found in the *Metaphysical Disputations*.[6] Accordingly, in this paper I focus primarily on material from this work. I draw most heavily on DM 12, *On the Causes of Being in General*; DM 18, *On the Proximate Efficient Cause, and its Causality, and Everything that it Requires in order to Cause*; DM 20, *On the First Efficient Cause, and his First Action, which is Creation*; and DM 48, *On Action*.[7]

1   Efficient Causation and Action

Suárez presents his theory of efficient causation within the context of a much broader account of causation and causal explanation. Accordingly, in order to understand his views about efficient causation, it will be helpful to have a rough outline of this broader account in mind. Like other Aristotelians, Suárez acknowledges four different types of causes—namely, formal causes, material causes, efficient

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[6]Suárez provides a brief overview of the topics covered in the *Metaphysical Disputations*, as well as his rationale for writing this work, in a brief note to the reader, 'Ratio et discursus totius operis: ad lectorem'. This note precedes the 'Index locupletissimus in Metaphysicam Aristotelis', which begins on p. i of the Vivès edition. These items have been included together in translation by John Doyle. See Francisco Suárez, *A Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics: Index locupletissimus in Metaphysicam Aristotelis*, trans. John Doyle (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2004).

[7]DM 18, *De causa proxima efficiente, ejusque causalitate, et omnibus quae ad causandum requirit*; DM 20, *De prima causa efficiente, primaque ejus actione, quae est creatio*; DM 48, *De actione*.

causes, and final causes.[8] Against some unnamed opponents, he argues that the four Aristotelian causes do in fact share a common notion (*conceptus*) or account (*ratio*), and he spends the bulk of DM 12 attempting to clarify exactly what this account is.[9] This discussion culminates in his definition of a cause as a principle (*principium*) or source 'instilling (*influens*) being in another'.[10] Accordingly, Suárez's view is that each of the Aristotelian causes somehow 'instills' (*influit*) being in its effect.

So, how are we to understand what it means for one thing to instill being in another? The Latin verb '*influere*' is most literally translated as 'to flow in' or 'to pour in'.[11] However, it is important to emphasize that in his definition of a cause, Suárez is using the term in a figurative or metaphorical sense. In fact, elsewhere in the *Metaphysical Disputations*, he explicitly denies that causes literally transfer anything to their effects.[12] Moreover, his subsequent treatment of each of the four causes provides further confirmation that he intends '*influere*' to be taken figuratively. This is perhaps easiest to appreciate for the final and efficient causes, which Suárez calls 'ex-

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[8]DM 12.3.

[9]See especially DM 12.2.

[10]DM 12.2.4.

[11]None of the options for translating Suárez's use of '*influere*' is completely satisfying. 'To flow being' is an ungrammatical expression in contemporary English, given that 'to flow' is an intransitive verb. Moreover, as I shall explain below, both 'to flow' and 'to pour' involve a misleading transference metaphor. Two alternatives would be 'to influence' and 'to have influence', which are Freddoso's standard translations. But these translations suggest that the being in question is pre-existent and is somehow changed by the cause, and so is also misleading. In adopting 'to instill', I am following Gracia. See Jorge Gracia, 'Glossary,' in *Suárez on Individuation: Metaphysical Disputation V: Individual Unity and its Principle*, Mediaeval Philosophical Texts in Translation, no. 23, au. Francisco Suárez, tr. Jorge Gracia (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press 1982), 186. For Fredosso's use of 'to influence', see Suárez, *On Efficient Causality*, and Suárez, *On Creation, Conservation, and Concurrence*. For the literal translation given above, see *Cassell's Latin Dictionary*, ed. D. P. Simpson (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1968), 305. For a treatment of the various senses of '*influxus*' in late medieval and early modern philosophy, see Eileen O'Neill, 'Influxus Physicus', in *Causation in Early Modern Philosophy: Cartesianism, Occasionalism, and Preestablished Harmony*, ed. Stephen Nadler, (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 27–56.

[12]For one very clear denial, see DM 12.2.7.

trinsic causes' (*causae extrinsicae*) because they do not enter into the composition of their effects. Characterizing these causes, he writes:

> [An extrinsic cause] does not communicate to its effect its own proper and (as it were) individual being; rather, [it communicates] another [being], really flowing forth (*profluens*) and emanating from such a cause [...].[13]

In contrast, Suárez understands the so-called 'instrinsic causes' (*causae intrinsicae*)—namely, formal and material causes—as constituents of hylomorphic compounds. For example, a material substance is composed of both a formal and a material cause. Accordingly, to the extent that such causes do enter into the composition of their effects, he claims that they contribute their own being to those effects. Nevertheless, Suárez plainly does not think that in making this contribution, formal and material causes lose any of their own being, as a literal reading of '*influere*' would suggest. It is not as if being is a liquid that can be moved around from one vessel to another.

But if this is right, then what *does* Suárez mean when he says that causes instill being in their effects? He presents his clearest answer to this question in DM 12, several paragraphs after his generic definition of a cause. There, he argues that what is common to each of the four causes can also be captured by appealing to the notion of existential dependence. On this view, to say that a cause instills being in its effect 'means the very same thing' as to say that an effect depends for its being on its cause.[14] This equivalence helps to explain why Suárez also routinely characterizes causes in terms of the existential dependence of their effects. And in fact, although he says that for expository reasons he prefers to define a cause in terms of its instilling being in another, he also acknowledges what he takes to be a coextensive definition, according to which a cause is anything on which another depends for its being.[15] Although this definition is perhaps not completely transparent, it does have the advantage

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[13]DM 17.1.6.
[14]DM 12.2.7.
[15]DM 12.2.4.

of avoiding the misleading transference metaphor that appears in Suárez's preferred definition. For this reason, in the remainder of this paper I shall generally frame Suárez's talk of causes in terms of existential dependence, rather than instilling being.

Before turning to the details of Suárez's views about efficient causes, it is worth pausing to make one final observation about causes in general. So far I have been emphasizing that Suárez thinks the generic account of a cause can be captured by appealing to the notion of existential dependence: C is a cause of E if and only if E depends on C for its being. However, it bears emphasizing that according to Suárez, it is precisely in virtue of this relationship of existential dependence that C qualifies as an actual cause of E. He sometimes expresses this point by noting that existential dependence is to be identified with causation or 'causality' (*causalitas*) itself. For example, he writes:

> [T]he causality of each cause is that by virtue of which
> [...] it achieves its effect, and conversely that by virtue of
> which the effect depends on such a cause.[16]

Now, as it turns out, Suárez thinks that each of the four Aristotelian causes involves its own distinctive type of causality or existential dependence. In fact, the existence of four different kinds of causality is one of the chief reasons he offers for thinking that there must be four different kinds of causes. Accordingly, Suárez's characterization of efficient causes emphasizes how their causality differs from that of formal, material, and final causes. He writes:

> [M]atter and form [...] do not cause by means of action,
> but through formal and intrinsic union. And an end [i.e.,
> a final cause] causes only through metaphorical motion,
> insofar as it is an end. On the other hand, an efficient
> [cause] causes through a proper action flowing from it.[17]

As this passage makes clear, Suárez thinks that, unlike these other causes, an efficient cause brings about its effect by performing an action. We have seen already that Suárez classifies formal

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[16]DM 18.10.6.
[17]DM 17.1.6.

and material causes as intrinsic causes, because he takes them to be constituents of hylomorphic compounds. For this reason, it should not be surprising that he understands the causality of formal and material causes to be their union with one another, which he elsewhere describes as the 'inherence' (*inhaerentia*) of the formal cause in the material cause. Moreover, although final and efficient causes are both extrinsic causes, Suárez insists that final causes do not perform actions. Instead, they are the ends for the sake of which efficient causes act, and so 'move' efficient causes only metaphorically. Of the four causes, then, only efficient causes bring about their effects via action. Accordingly, action is the causality of an efficient cause.[18] That is to say, action is the peculiar sort of existential dependence that an effect has on an efficient cause. Or, to put the point in a more modern idiom, efficient causation *just is* action.

In order to appreciate the significance of this result, it will be helpful to consider one of Suárez's favorite examples of efficient causation, in which a fire heats some water. Imagine that a pot of cold water is placed over a fire, where it remains until the water is boiling. In this case, Suárez will say that the agent or efficient cause is the fire, and its effect is an accidental form—namely, a quality of heat—that comes to exist in the water. And, most importantly for our purposes here, the causal connection between the fire and the quality of heat just is the fire's action of heating. That is to say, it is precisely in virtue of heating the water that the fire causes or instills being in the quality of heat. Or, described alternatively, it is precisely in virtue of the fire's heating the water that the quality of heat depends on the fire for its existence.

With this example in mind, I want to address two potential sources of misunderstanding about how Suárez conceives situations involving efficient causation. The first of these concerns the extension of the term 'action'. Philosophers nowadays generally reserve 'action' for the purposive or intentional behavior of conscious agents. A paradigmatic example of an action in this sense would be a person moving her hand with the aim or intention of grasping an object. However, it turns out that Suárez understands action in a much

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[18]Suárez makes this claim routinely, but he defends it most explicitly in DM 18.10.

broader sense. To be sure, he acknowledges that conscious, intentional behavior qualifies as action. Nevertheless, as his example of fire heating water makes clear, he thinks that action extends well beyond what is done by conscious agents.

Suárez's reasons for holding this view can be best appreciated by observing that he understands action in terms of making or producing something. In fact, he often points out that performing an action is nothing over and above making or producing an effect. For example, he writes:

> [A]ction, as action, if it is true and proper, is nothing besides production (*productio*) or making (*effectio*) [...].[19]

> [W]hat is it to make (*efficere*) except to act (*agere*)?[20]

Accordingly, to the extent that an unconscious agent (such as fire) is able to produce an effect (such as heat), Suárez regards it as being capable of acting.

Another potential source of misunderstanding concerns the nature of causes and effects. In the contemporary philosophical literature, causes and effects are routinely taken to be events. This can be illustrated by a common example of causation, made famous by David Hume, in which the event of one billiard ball striking another causes the event of the second billiard ball rolling.[21] However, in Suárez's example of efficient causation outlined above, the efficient cause is a substance (a fire), and its effect is an accidental form (a quality of heat). And as it turns out, he thinks that this case is representative of efficient causation in the natural world. In such instances, the agent or efficient cause is always a substance, and its effect is always a form (either an accidental or a substantial form). This view fits well with Suárez's understanding of action as the making or production of an effect. For while it makes good sense to say that substantial and accidental forms are produced by their causes,

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[19]DM 48.2.16.

[20]DM 18.10.3.

[21]David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2 vols., eds. David Norton and Mary Norton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 111.

it is not immediately clear what it would mean to say that events are made or produced.

This completes our introduction to Suárez's concept of efficient causation. To sum up the results, Suárez understands the four Aristotelian causes in terms of four distinctive types of existential dependence or causality. Unlike the other causes, efficient causes bring about their effects by acting, and for this reason Suárez identifies action with the special sort of existential dependence or causality associated with efficient causes. For the same reason, on Suárez's view, action just is the connection between an efficient cause and its effect.

However, it is important to recognize that, by itself, this characterization of efficient causation is fairly neutral about its nature or ontological status. After all, it will be illuminating only to the extent that we already have a clear account of what action is in itself. Indeed, Suárez emphasizes this very point near the beginning of his treatment of efficient causation in DM 17, where he defines an efficient cause as a '*per se* principle from which an action first exists'.[22] Immediately after proposing this definition, he acknowledges that action's precise nature is itself 'somewhat obscure', and thus in need of further clarification. As it turns out, Suárez provides this clarification in the context of a dispute about whether the Aristotelian category of action is reducible to any of the other categories. Accordingly, the remainder of this paper focuses on clarifying and motivating Suárez's position in this dispute. But in order to follow the details of the dispute itself, it will be helpful to have in mind a few of the philosophical and theological commitments that inform his views about the nature of efficient causation or action. I turn to these now.

2   Philosophical and Theological Commitments

Suárez's views about the nature of efficient causation or action were strongly influenced by two of the main intellectual currents of the medieval era, Aristotelianism and Christianity. Fundamental to all me-

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[22]DM 17.1.5.

dieval theorizing about the nature of action was the Aristotelian doctrine that action is one of the nine categories of accidents.[23] Aristotle and his medieval followers divided real beings into accidents—which they construed as existing in a subject—and substances—which they construed as not existing in a subject. It is important to notice that nearly all medievals took this conception of accidents to rule out the possibility of a single accident spanning two or more subjects. That is to say, medievals typically understood their substance-accident ontology to preclude the existence of what we would nowadays call polyadic (or many-place) properties.[24] Even accidents such as action, which clearly play a relational role, must somehow be accommodated within a framework of monadic properties.

This conception of action naturally raises the question of which subject it exists in. Aristotle addresses this question in Book 3 of the *Physics*, where he articulates a general model for understanding situations involving action. According to this model, an action is always performed on some patient, where a patient is understood as something that undergoes a change. This can be illustrated by our earlier example of efficient causation, in which some fire (an agent) heats some water (a patient), which changes from being cold to being hot. Not surprisingly, Aristotle thinks that something qualifies as an actual agent in virtue of an action, and that something qualifies as an actual patient in virtue of a passion (being-acted-on). However, he argues that action and passion both exist in the patient, and

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[23]The Aristotelian categories are substance, quantity, quality, relation, action, passion, where, when, situation, and habit. The most important source for Aristotle's category theory is his short treatise *Categories*, 1^a1–15^b32. All references to Aristotle's works are taken from *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, 2 vols., ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

[24]See Jeffrey Brower, 'Medieval Theories of Relations', in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (Stanford University, 1997–, article published 2009), URL: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/relations-medieval/; and Mark Henninger, *Relations: Medieval Theories 1250–1325* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 4–6. For an apparent exception to this nearly unanimous medieval view, see Heine Hansen, 'Strange Finds, or Nicholas of Paris on Relations', in *Logic and Language in the Middle Ages: A Volume in Honor of Sten Ebbesen*, ed. Jakob Leth Fink, Heine Hansen, and Ana Maria Mora-Marquez (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2012), 139–154.

moreover that they are one and the same change or motion. In our example, the fire's action of heating, as well as the water's passion of being-heated, both exist in the water, and they are the same change or motion undergone by the water—namely, its becoming hot.[25]

As noted above, another important influence on Suarez's views about the nature of action was Christianity. According to the Christian theological tradition, God causally interacts with the world in a variety of ways. Perhaps most strikingly, this tradition claims that God creates the world *ex nihilo*, or from nothing. Like other medievals, Suárez understands God's creation of the world as an instance of efficient causation, and accordingly, he takes creation to be a type of action. However, he understands this type of action to depart from the Aristotelian paradigm in at least one important respect—namely, that it precludes the existence of a patient on which the agent acts. When God creates, he does not change any preexisting stuff, but rather brings into being his effect and whatever is presupposed by it, all at once. Suárez thus recognizes two fundamentally different types of action. On the one hand, there is motion, which conforms to the model proposed by Aristotle, and consequently presupposes the existence of a patient on which the agent acts. And on the other hand, there is creation, which does not conform to this model, insofar as it precludes the existence of a patient.[26]

Suárez's theological commitments have an important implication for his views about the subject in which action exists. Like others in the Aristotelian tradition, he conceives action as a kind of accidental being—that is to say, a being that exists in another. However, because he acknowledges the possibility of creation *ex nihilo*, he must

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[25]See *Physics* 3.3, 202^a15–202^b20. For a recent treatment of this passage, see Anna Marmodoro, 'The Union of Cause and Effect in Aristotle: *Physics* III 3', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 32 (2007): 205–232.

[26]For Suárez's definition of creation, see DM 20.1.1. For discussion of Suárez's views about creation and its distinction from motion, see Tuttle, 'Suárez's Metaphysics of Efficient Causation', Chapter 3; and Freddoso, 'Introduction', xxxvii–xxxviii and lxxiii–lxxxvii. For a more general treatment of issues connected with creation and efficient causation in medieval philosophy, see Taneli Kukkonen, 'Creation and Causation', in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, 2 vols., ed. Robert Pasnau and Christina Van Dyke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 232–46.

abandon the Aristotelian view that every action exists in a patient. Instead, Suárez claims that every action exists in an *effect*. Although he does not offer a sustained argument for this thesis, he seems to have been led to it by his view that action just is the peculiar sort of existential dependence that an effect has on an efficient cause. But once this dependence is construed as an accidental being, it is difficult to see what it could exist in, besides a dependent thing. Indeed, according to the standard medieval analysis of accidental property-possession, some subject qualifies as an actual F precisely in virtue of having some accidental being—an F-ness—existing in it. All this helps to explain why Suárez endorses the general principle that 'a dependence must necessarily exist in a dependent thing'.[27]

Now, in light of what we have seen so far, one might naturally assume that Suárez takes efficient causation to involve only the initial production of an effect, whether this production is an instance of motion or creation *ex nihilo*. However, according to the Christian theological tradition, God not only creates the world in the first instance, but also preserves or sustains it over time. In keeping with this tradition, Suárez refers to God's continual preservation of the world as 'divine conservation' (*conservatio divina*), and he argues that 'all entities apart from God depend on divine conservation for their being'.[28] Accordingly, he thinks that if God should ever stop efficiently causing some particular creature, that creature would simply go out of existence.[29]

Because Suárez's defense of his non-reductive theory of efficient causation presupposes two additional points about how he understands conservation, I will briefly note them here. First, although Suárez believes that creatures depend on God for their continuing existence in a special way, he is also willing to grant that in some cases creatures are conserved by other creatures. For example, he thinks that light produced by the sun depends on the sun not only for its initial coming-to-be, but also for its continued existence thereafter.[30]

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[27]DM 20.4.6.

[28]DM 21.1.4.

[29]See DM 21.1.14. For discussion of Suárez's theory of divine conservation, see Freddoso, 'Introduction', lxxxviii–xcv.

[30]DM 21.3.10.

Suárez thus understands the term 'conservation' broadly enough to include any action by which something is sustained in existence over time, whether this action is performed by God or by a creature.[31]

The second point concerns the relationship between instances of production and conservation. Imagine a case in which some light is initially produced by the sun at dawn, and is thereafter conserved by the sun for the remainder of the day. In such a case, will the sun's action of conservation be really distinct from its action of production? In answer to this question, Suárez acknowledges that there is a conceptual distinction between the sun's production of the light and its subsequent conservation of it. It is included in the concept of production that the relevant effect has not yet existed, whereas it is included in the concept of conservation that this effect has already existed. Nevertheless, Suárez thinks that in the case described above, there is only a single, continuous action performed by the sun throughout the day. Accordingly, even though production and conservation can be distinguished in thought, they are not necessarily distinct in reality. Not surprisingly, Suárez thinks this result holds equally well for God's creation and conservation of creatures.[32]

With this background in mind, let us turn now to Suárez's views

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[31] As it turns out, Suárez thinks that creatures never perform actions on their own, without God's participation or concurrence (*concursus*). This is another important way in which his account of efficient causation is influenced by the Christian theological tradition. However, because Suárez's views about divine concurrence are only tangentially related to the topic of this paper, I do not discuss them in detail here. For his lengthy treatment of the topic, see DM 22, *Concerning the First Cause and Another of Action of his, Which is Cooperation or Concurrence with Secondary Causes*. For discussion, see Freddoso, 'Introduction', xcv–cxxi; Alfred Freddoso, 'God's General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Pitfalls and Prospects', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 67 (1994): 131–56; and Alfred Freddoso, 'God's General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Why Conservation is not Enough', *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 553–85. For treatments of Descartes's theory of causation that rely on Suárez's account of concurrence, see Geoffrey Gorham, 'Cartesian Causation: Continuous, Instantaneous, Overdetermined', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 42, no. 4 (2004): 389–423; and Andrew Pessin, 'Descartes's Nomic Concurrentism: Finite Causation and Divine Concurrence', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 41, no. 1 (2003): 25–49.

[32] See DM 21.2.2–7 and DM 49.2.11. For a brief discussion, see Freddoso, 'Introduction', xci–xcii.

about the nature of efficient causation or action.

3   The Dialectical Options: Reductive and Non-Reductive Realism

Throughout the *Metaphysical Disputations*, Suárez takes for granted what I shall call *realism about action*—namely, the view that action exists in extramental reality. One statement of this view can be found in the Prologue to DM 48, where he notes that action is 'something in the nature of things (*in rerum natura*)' and is 'contained within the latitude of being (*entis*)'. He does not dwell on this thesis, and as far as I can tell, he does not explicitly argue for it anywhere. However, his contemporaries probably would have regarded it as uncontroversial. One reason for thinking that this is correct has to do with medieval accounts of the categories more generally. According to the dominant medieval view, Aristotle's categories constitute a scheme for classifying extramental reality, so that the categories include only extramental beings.[33] Suárez follows the tradition on this point, noting approvingly that it is 'for all of the philosophers the common way of conceiving and speaking' of the categories.[34] Thus, his realism about action is just part and parcel of a more thoroughgoing realist program for the categories as a whole.

Consequently, Suárez's discussion of the nature of action focuses on specifying what sort of extramental being action is. As we shall see below, much of this discussion aims to clarify action's precise relationship to the other categories. However, before proceeding to the details of this discussion, it will be helpful to make a few additional remarks about how he understands the categories themselves. Because he thinks that the categories include only extramental beings, it is perhaps natural to assume that Suárez also takes them to classify such beings *exhaustively* and *exclusively*, so that each is included in at least one category, and none is included in more than one. After all, philosophers normally think of a realistic category theory as one

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[33]See Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes*, 229–230; and Brower, 'Medieval Theories of Relations'.

[34]DM 32.2.18.

that attempts to 'carve up reality at the joints', and two desiderata of such a theory are that it should neither omit any part of reality, nor count any part of reality twice.

Nevertheless, Suárez denies that the categories are exclusive. That is to say, he thinks that at least some of the categories can overlap, in the sense that the same extramental beings may fall under more than one category. He expresses this most clearly in the context of his discussion of the so-called 'sufficiency' (*sufficientia*) of the categories, where he rejects the view that entities falling under different categories must be distinct 'according to being' (*sub ente*), or in extramental reality. He writes:

> But this opinion cannot be defended in general. For in the first place, concerning all categorical relations, it [seems] most likely to me that they are not actually distinguished on the side of reality (*a parte rei*) from their foundations [...], but only according to reason or the connotation of the other extreme. Moreover, concerning action and passion it is very nearly the common opinion that they are not actually distinguished in extramental reality (*ex natura rei*), yet nevertheless that they constitute diverse categories.[35]

In this passage, Suárez's main point merely echoes what is, if not

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[35]The quotation is taken from DM 39.2.21. For Suárez's characterization of the view he is attacking, see DM 39.2.19–20. In most contexts, Suárez understands a distinction *ex natura rei* as a specific type of real or extramental distinction—namely, the distinction between a thing (*res*) and its mode (*modus*). Suárez is emphatic that such a distinction obtains in extramental reality. He makes this point most explicitly in DM 7.1.16, where he notes that a distinction *ex natura rei* 'can be called "real" in the general sense, because it is truly on the side of reality (*ex parte rei*), and is not through an extrinsic denomination from the intellect'. However, he sometimes also appears to use '*ex natura rei*' to signify *any* extramental distinction—even a distinction between thing and thing—and it is not always clear which sense he intends. I introduce Suárez's notion of a mode later in this section. For Suárez's theory of distinctions, see DM 7, *De variis distinctionum generibus*. For an English translation, see Francisco Suárez, *On the Various Kinds of Distinctions*, trans. Cyril Vollert (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1947). For discussion, see Sydney Penner, 'Suárez on the Reduction of Categorical Relations', *Philosophers' Imprint* 13, no. 2 (2013), §2.2.

the unanimous opinion of medievals, at any rate the opinion of the overwhelming majority. Although medievals construed the categories as a system for classifying extramental beings, most nevertheless understood this system to classify such beings via our ways of conceiving or speaking of them.[36] However, because it is not obvious that our ways of conceiving or speaking are exactly isomorphic with reality, this way of understanding the categories leaves open the possibility that a single entity might fall under more than one category. And as it turns out, nearly all medievals think that at least some of the categories overlap in this way. Suárez's example of the category of relation is a controversial one. However, as he notes, most medievals think that the categories of action and passion include the same entities. This is at least partly because of Aristotle's opinion in the *Physics* that action and passion are the same motion.

Although the precise relationship between action and passion is an important topic in Suárez's treatment of the nature of efficient causation, here it will suffice to make a few brief remarks. As the quoted passage makes clear, Suárez endorses the standard medieval opinion about the categories of action and passion—namely, that they are constituted by the same reality, or as he notes elsewhere, by 'the same dependence' of an effect on an efficient cause.[37] As a result, we can think of the categories of action and passion as together performing a distinctive, efficiently-causal role in Suárez's ontology. Because it should be clear from the context that I am focused exclusively on efficient causation, I shall sometimes refer to the categories of action and passion simply as the *causal categories*, and the remaining categories as the *non-causal categories*.

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that for Suárez and other Aristotelians, action and passion have different notions or accounts (*rationes*). One way of understanding this difference is by recalling the metaphysical or functional roles of action and passion, as articulated in the first two sections of this paper. As we have

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[36]See Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes*, 229–230. This view of the categories can be traced back to *Categories* commentaries from late antiquity. See Giorgio Pini, *Categories and Logic in Duns Scotus: An Interpretation of Aristotle's* Categories *in the Late Thirteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), 9–10.

[37]DM 49.1.8.

seen, Suárez thinks something qualifies as an agent or efficient cause in virtue of an action, whereas something qualifies as a patient in virtue of a passion. Making the same point, he sometimes characterizes action and passion as the actuality of an agent and a patient, respectively.[38] Suárez also emphasizes that these distinctive metaphysical or functional roles are associated with the distinctive relations in which a given instance of existential dependence stands. On his view, the same instance of existential dependence both proceeds from the agent or efficient cause, and exists in the patient in which the effect is produced. Thus, when we think of this dependence as proceeding from an agent or efficient cause, we are conceiving of it as an action. On the other hand, when we think of it as existing in a patient, we are conceiving of it as a passion. This difference helps to explain why Suárez treats the categories of action and passion separately (in DM 48 and 49, respectively), as well as why he raises questions about action that he does not about passion, and *vice versa*. Following Suárez, in the remainder of this paper I shall focus on questions that are relevant to his characterization of action as such.[39]

For the purposes of this paper, the most important of these questions concerns the relationship between action and the noncausal categories. Exploiting the conception of the categories outlined above, some medievals endorse a kind of reductionism about action. According to this view, which I shall call *reductive realism about action* (or simply 'reductive realism', where the context is clear), action is to be identified with the effect that serves as its endpoint (*terminus*). As noted already, Suárez insists that, whatever action is in itself, it must be something that exists *in* an effect. The idea behind reductive realism is that actions may in a certain sense exist 'in' effects without being extramentally distinct from them. For

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[38]DM 49.1.8.

[39]Suárez's most detailed treatment of the differences between action and passion is found in DM 49.1. Valuable insights are also found throughout DM 48, especially in §4, where he examines whether action as such includes a subject of inherence. For discussion of the relationship between action and passion in Aquinas, as well as relevant citations from Aquinas's work, see Michael Rota, 'Causation in Contemporary Metaphysics and in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas' (PhD Diss., St. Louis University, 2006), 126–137.

example, on this view, when a fire heats an object, the action of heating is not anything over and above the heat produced in the object. Of course, we might be able to *conceive* this action of heating as if it were a distinct property existing in the heat produced. Nevertheless, on this reductive view, in extramental reality the action of heating *just is* the heat produced. Consequently, the action of heating also falls under the category of the heat produced. More generally, things in the category of action also fall under the categories of the effects that serve as their end-points. If the effect in question is a substance, then the action falls under the category of substance; if the effect is a quality, then the action falls under the category of quality, and so on.

I am calling this view 'reductive' because (at least if we take for granted Suárez's view that action just is efficient causation) it tries to account for efficient causation not by appealing to a distinctive or *sui generis* sort of causal entity, but rather by appealing to ordinary non-causal entities. Thus it is reductive in much the same way as theories that account for modality by appealing to the actual, or theories that account for the mental by appealing to the physical.

Suárez attributes reductive realism to the nominalists William Ockham and Gregory of Rimini, as well as to the Thomist thinkers Hervaeus Natalis and Chrysostomus Javellus (1470–1538).[40] However, Suárez himself emphatically rejects reductive realism about action, instead endorsing what I shall call *non-reductive realism about action* (or 'non-reductive realism', for short).[41] According to him, actions are distinct in extramental reality from the effects in which they exist. More generally, efficient causation or action is not to be explained by appeal to ordinary non-causal entities. Here are three examples of what is a common refrain in Suárez's work on action:

> [A]n action is not [...] the very effect produced by an agent [...].[42]

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[40]For Suárez's attributions and his explanation of these views, see DM 18.10.2–3, DM 20.4.6, and DM 48.1.9–12.

[41]I take the terms 'reductive realism' and 'non-reductive realism' from Brower, 'Medieval Theories of Relations'.

[42]DM 18.10.8.

> For in all of these [examples] the action [...] is distinguished in extramental reality from its end-point [...].[43]

> [A]ction must be some medium between an agent and an effect, and distinct in extramental reality from both of them.[44]

Now, in light of the fact that Suárez regards efficient causation or action as a distinctive, irreducible type of entity, it is natural to wonder exactly how we are to understand this entity. That is to say, how does Suárez characterize efficient causation's *sui generis* nature? This is a question that shall occupy much of the remainder of this paper. For the moment, however, I want to focus on two specific ways in which Suárez thinks non-reductive realism might be developed. As noted already, he understands efficient causation or action as an accidental being that exists in an effect, and thereby accounts for that effect's existential dependence on its efficient cause. However, it turns out that Suárez acknowledges two very different types of accidental beings. On his view, Aristotle's nine categories of accidents can themselves be divided into what he calls 'things' (*res*) and 'modes' (*modi*). (In keeping with the convention in the secondary literature, I shall refer to the former as 'real accidents'.) Accordingly, in order to best appreciate Suárez's views about action's *sui generis* nature, it will be helpful to briefly clarify how he understands this division.[45]

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[43]DM 20.4.12.

[44]DM 48.1.10.

[45]In order to avoid unnecessary complications, my discussion here is limited to things and modes that fall in the accidental categories. But it is worth noting parenthetically that Suárez regards substances as things, and he also locates some modes in the category of substance. Suárez's most detailed treatment of modes is found in DM 7. Suárez also makes important remarks about the distinction between things and modes, as well where they fall in the Aristotelian categories, in DM 32.1 and DM 37.2. For a treatment of Suárez's theory of modes, see Stephen Menn, 'Suárez, Nominalism, and Modes', in K. White (ed.), *Hispanic Philosophy in the Age of Discovery*, Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy, vol. 29 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 226–56. For a broader discussion of Scholastic theories of modes, including Suárez, see Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes*, 244–75. For an older discussion of Suárez on modes that includes citations from throughout the *Metaphysical Disputations*,

Before turning to the details of the division, however, I need to address a complication in the way Suárez understands accidents. As we have seen already, Aristotelians construe accidents as existing in a subject, and for this reason one might naturally expect them to think that accidents cannot exist apart from a subject. Indeed, Aristotle appears to draw just this conclusion in the *Metaphysics*, where he mentions several examples of accidents and insists that none of them is 'self-subsistent or capable of being separated from substance'.[46] Thus, for example, Socrates's whiteness is *his* whiteness, and it is difficult to see how it could exist without actually inhering in Socrates.

Suárez appreciates the force of this intuition, and he is happy to grant that accidents cannot naturally exist without inhering in a subject. Nevertheless, he accepts the standard Scholastic view that certain types of accidents can be miraculously conserved apart from any subject. Suárez portrays this view as a corollary of the Catholic doctrine of transsubstantiation in the Eucharist. According to this doctrine, when a priest consecrates the host, the bread and wine are converted into the body and blood of Christ. In the course of this conversion the substance of the bread and wine is destroyed, but the sensible accidents of the bread and wine—their quantity, color, odor, and so on—continue to exist. Because he takes it to be obvious that these sensible accidents do not inhere in Christ's glorified body and blood, Suárez believes that they must instead be miraculously conserved by God apart from any subject.[47] Accordingly, he insists that some kinds of accidents can be separated from their subjects, even if only by divine power.

see Peter Nolan, 'The Suárezian Modes', *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the Jesuit Educational Association, Midwest Division* (1931): 184–200.

[46]*Metaphysics* 7.1, 1028^a20–25.

[47]This is actually a simplification of Suárez's view. Following Aquinas, Suárez thinks that in transsubstantiation, the quantity of the bread and the wine exists as a subsistent entity, without any subject, whereas the sensible qualities inhere in this quantity. See Suárez's theological work *De Sacramentis in genera, Baptismo, Confirmatione, Eucharistia, Missae Sacrificio*, Question 77, Articles 1–2. This work is a commentary on the same topics in Part 3 of Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, and includes the text of the same question and articles. For an easily accessible collection of Aquinas's works, see the Corpus Thomisticum site at http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/index.html.

This aspect of Suárez's theory of accidents forms the basis for what is, for the purposes of this paper, the most important difference between real accidents and modes. He characterizes the former as accidents for which actual inherence in a subject is not part of their essence. Instead, he argues that what is essential to real accidents is their *aptitude* to inhere.[48] As examples of real accidents, he cites quantity and some kinds of quality, such as color.[49] In contrast, Suárez characterizes modes as accidents that cannot be conserved apart from their subjects, even by divine power. Thus, in his presentation of his theory of modes in DM 7, he writes:

> [A] mode so intimately includes a union (*conjunctionem*)
> with the thing of which it is a mode, that it cannot exist
> by any power without that [union].[50]

Modes appear throughout Suárez's metaphysics, but some of his most prominent examples are the union or inherence (*inhaerentia*) of form in matter; shape (*figura*), which he takes to be a mode of quantity; and the Aristotelian categories of where (*ubi*) and position (*situs*).[51] Because this last example is perhaps the easiest for us to appreciate, I want to briefly explain it here. As an example of something in the category of position, consider Socrates's sitting (*sessio*). If Socrates's sitting were a real accident, then on Suárez's view it should be possible for God to conserve Socrates's sitting apart from Socrates himself. However, Suárez takes it as obvious that under no circumstances can there be a sitting position apart from any seated thing. Accordingly, he classifies instances of position as modes of positioned things.

As it turns out, Suárez also classifies efficient causation or action as a mode, rather than a real accident. More specifically, he takes it to be a mode of the effect that serves as its end-point. His clearest argument for this thesis focuses on action's relational character. As I have emphasized so far, Suárez posits action in order to account for

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[48]DM 37.2.9.

[49]See DM 37.2.3–4 and the passages cited earlier from *De Sacramentis*.

[50]DM 7.1.20. See also DM 37.2.10.

[51]See DM 7.1.18–19, DM 7.2.10, and DM 7.2.18.

the causal connection between efficient causes and their effects. Accordingly, he describes action variously as the causality of an efficient cause, as the existential dependence of an effect on its efficient cause, and as the production of an effect. However, each of these ways of understanding action evidently presupposes the existence of some effect that is characterized by the action. For this reason, Suárez takes it to be inconceivable that an action should exist apart from the effect that it characterizes. Thus, he writes:

> [I]t is impossible even to conceive by the mind a true production through which there is not something produced, or an actual causality without something caused. Therefore it is also impossible to understand an action without an end-point.[52]

Because an action cannot be separated from its end-point, even in the understanding, Suárez concludes that it must be a mode of that end-point.

Of course, it bears emphasizing that in this argument, Suárez is taking for granted that efficient causation or action must be *some sort* of accidental being that is extramentally distinct from its end-point. The purpose of the argument, then, is to motivate the specific version of non-reductive realism that Suárez endorses. I shall have more to say about how he develops this view in §5. However, before turning to this, I want to examine Suárez's reasons for endorsing non-reductive realism as such. These reasons are best appreciated in the context of two methodological arguments that he presents on behalf of his reductive-realist opponents. Let us begin, therefore, by considering these.

4   The First Round of Arguments

4.1   Two Methodological Arguments for Reductive Realism

The Argument from Parsimony. Suárez reports that some proponents of reductive realism argue for their view by appealing to

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[52]DM 48.2.16. For similar reasoning expressed in terms of existential dependence, see DM 7.1.18.

considerations of parsimony. Although he mentions this argument in several contexts, his clearest statement of it is found in DM 48, where he attributes it to Natalis and Javellus. He writes:

> [They] say that the action of heating, for example, is nothing other than the heat produced by the fire, from which the fire is denominated an agent [...]. The foundation of this opinion is that this is sufficient for the agent to be constituted an actual agent. Therefore it is also sufficient for the nature of action. Therefore whatever else is posited (*fingitur*) is superfluous and scarcely intelligible, and therefore should not be granted.[53]

Suárez's opponents are here arguing that actions, construed as extramentally distinct properties of effects, are theoretically dispensable. We are able to account for the world's causal connections without positing any *sui generis* causal entities, over and above agents and effects. For example, in order to account for the fact that some specific fire produces some specific quality of heat, it is not necessary to posit a *sui generis* action of heating. Instead, we need only posit the fire and the quality of heat.

One way of understanding this view is in terms of the contemporary distinction between 'internal' and 'external' relations. According to the standard way of drawing this distinction, an internal relation is one that obtains just in virtue of the relata and their intrinsic (or non-relational) properties. One common example is the relation of similarity. Thus, if Simmias and Socrates each have the intrinsic property of whiteness, they will evidently be similar to one another just in virtue of themselves and their respective instances of whiteness. We might say that, in this case, the similarity of Simmias and Socrates will obtain automatically, without any addition of being. In contrast, for external relations this is not the case. For example, to account for the fact that Simmias is standing to the left of Socrates, it seems that we cannot simply appeal to Simmias, Socrates, and their intrinsic properties. In this case, it appears that

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[53]DM 48.1.9.

we must posit something further in order to account for the relational fact in question.[54]

On the account that Suárez attributes to his opponents, efficient causation is something akin to an internal relation. Of course, the opponents' point is not that efficient causation belongs in the category of relation. Rather, the point is that the existence of an agent and an effect necessitates the causal connection between them, without any addition of being. But if this is right, then non-reductive realism runs afoul of the methodological principle known as 'Ockham's Razor', which admonishes us not to posit any more entities (or types of entities) than are theoretically required.[55] Considerations of parsimony thus favor reductive realism over non-reductive realism.

The Argument from Essential Dependence. Another argument alleges that non-reductive realists fail to account for the modal character of creatures' existential dependence on God. This argument focuses on the common medieval view that creatures are essentially dependent on God for their existence. That is to say, it is an essential attribute of a creature that it be conserved by God at every moment at which it exists. But if this is right, then it is difficult to make sense of the view that God's actions of conservation are extramentally distinct accidents of creatures. After all, one of the primary reasons for positing accidents would seem to be that they enable us to account for the contingent or non-essential features of their subjects. For example, part of what motivates the view that Socrates's whiteness is extramentally distinct from him is the fact that he can change from being white to being some other color (if he gets a tan, or becomes jaundiced.) Accordingly, if Socrates's existential dependence on God were an extramentally distinct accident

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[54]For a helpful explanation of the distinction between internal and external relations, see John Heil, 'Relations', in *The Routledge Companion to Metaphysics*, ed. Robin Le Poidevin (New York: Routledge, 2009). For discussion of how the contemporary notions of internal and external relations shed light on Suárez's theory of the category of relation, see Penner, 'Suárez on the Reduction of Categorical Relations', especially §5.2.

[55]For Ockham's own use of this principle in his ontology, see Marilyn McCord Adams, *William Ockham*, 2 vols. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 156–161.

like his whiteness, then in a similar way Socrates could change from depending on God to not depending on him, and his dependence on God would not be essential after all.

It thus looks as if reductive realism is not only the most parsimonious explanation of the data of efficient causation, but also the *only* explanation of some of that data—namely, the facts about creatures' essential dependence on God. Consequently, even if non-reductive realism is not rejected outright, it must at least be softened to exclude cases divine conservation. Moreover, once it is granted that agents and effects are by themselves sufficient to account for some instances of efficient causation, it is difficult to see why this should not be granted for all instances of efficient causation.[56]

4.2 Suárez's Arguments for Non-Reductive Realism

The Separability Argument. In order to see how Suárez responds to his opponents' methodological arguments, it will be helpful to begin by considering his own arguments in favor of non-reductive realism. The most prominent of these arguments, and the one that he develops in the most detail, proceeds from the insight that action and effect are separable, in the sense that an effect can exist without the action whereby it is produced. However, Suárez thinks that if action and effect are separable in this way, then action must be an extramentally distinct property of an effect. He presents this argument in its most general form in DM 18, where he writes:

> [A]n action is not [...] the very effect produced by an agent, but rather is a mode of such an effect, extramentally distinct from it. An adequate argument for this [thesis] is that an effect can persist without such a mode [...].[57]

The argument can be represented formally as follows:

Separability Argument

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[56] See DM 20.4.8.

[57] DM 18.10.8.

(1) If A can exist without B, then A and B must be extramentally distinct.

(2) But an effect can exist without the action whereby it is denominated an effect.

(3) Therefore, effects and the actions whereby they are denominated effects must be extramentally distinct.

Suárez regards premise (1), which is implicit in the quoted passage, as the best available rule (*regula*) or method (*modus*) for showing that things signified by two distinct concepts are themselves distinct in extramental reality.[58] Indeed, whenever he approaches the issue of whether entities in two given categories are extramentally distinct, one of the first questions he considers is whether either can exist without the other. This rule would appear to be a truth of reason, for, as he observes, to deny premise (1) apparently commits one to saying that the very same thing can both exist and not exist at the same time. Moreover, he notes that it is overwhelmingly endorsed by various authorities. It is not only taught by Aristotle, but is also the 'common opinion of the doctors', and is widely employed by other philosophers and theologians.[59]

In defense of premise (2), Suárez adduces two kinds of cases in which he thinks it is clear that an effect can exist apart from any particular action. The first sort of case involves what we might call 'diachronic separability', whereas the second involves what we might call 'synchronic separability'. Let us consider each type of case in turn. Characterizing the first sort of case, he writes:

> [A]n effect can now depend on this cause, and later on another; and thus in respect of one and the same effect the dependence in it can be varied (*variatur*), and so nothing else is varied besides the causality of the agent.[60]

In order to appreciate the point that Suárez is making here, it is important to recall that he, like other medievals, believes that

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[58]DM 7.2.2.
[59]DM 7.2.2–3.
[60]DM 18.10.8.

contingent beings depend on their efficient causes not only in being-made (*fieri*), or at the first moment of their existence, but also in being (*esse*), or at every subsequent moment at which they exist. To put the point somewhat differently, Suárez thinks that contingent beings require not only producing causes, but also conserving causes. Now, if this is right, then it is sensible to ask whether a contingent being must be conserved by *numerically the same agent* throughout its entire career, or whether it may instead depend on different agents at different times. And as it turns out, Suárez thinks that in a wide variety of cases, a single effect need not be conserved by the same agent at every time at which it exists.

Suárez's clearest illustrations of this point are taken from the natural world. One of his favorite examples is the production of light by a lantern. Medieval Aristotelians understood light as a quality that exists in the air. Suárez thinks it is evident that the same quality of light can be conserved in the air by different lanterns at different times. Likewise, he would say that the quality of heat in a pot of boiling water could be sustained by a different fire than the one that first brought it to a boil. As contingent beings, both of these qualities require that *some agent or other* conserve them, lest they go out of existence. Nevertheless, this plainly need not be the agent that first brought them into existence, and this is sufficient to show that these effects depend on different efficient causes at different times.

From here it is a short argument to premise (2). Suárez thinks that an effect's depending on different efficient causes at different times can only be explained by its possessing numerically distinct *dependencies* at those times. But given that these dependencies just are actions, it follows that the same effect can be conserved via numerically distinct actions at different times. Thus, if the quality of heat in some water successively depends on two different fires, this is because numerically distinct actions of heating successively exist in that quality of heat.

It is worth emphasizing that Suárez thinks premise (2) holds not only for actions performed by natural agents, but also for the actions by which God creates and conserves creatures. Responding to the Argument from Essential Dependence—which, recall, claims that a

creature's essential dependence on God can only be explained if the creature and God's action of conservation are identical—he distinguishes two propositions:

> **Essential Dependence 1**: Every creature is essentially such that it depends on God via *some action or other*.

> **Essential Dependence 2**: Every creature is essentially such that it depends on God via *this particular action*.

While Suárez thinks the Catholic faith commits us to Essential Dependence 1, which is thus 'absolutely true', it does not commit us to Essential Dependence 2, which is what is needed to show that the action of divine conservation is identical to its created end-point.[61] Moreover, Suárez thinks he can show that creatures and the actions by which God actually creates and conserves them are separable, in much the way that he has shown that effects and the natural actions by which they are conserved are separable. In his discussion of the nature of creation *ex nihilo* in DM 20.4, he runs the Separability Argument again, this time specifically for God's creation and conservation of creatures. Here he also defends premise (2) by devising cases involving diachronic separability. In the simplest of these cases, Suárez imagines that God first annihilates and later re-creates the same angel. He argues that although God could certainly ensure that the angel is produced by means of the very same action in both instances, there is no reason to suppose that God *must* perform the same action. On the contrary, if we accept, as Suárez has already argued, that two created agents can successively cause the same effect via distinct actions, then we should also accept that God could do this on his own. After all, it is a Scholastic *dictum* that God can accomplish by his absolute power whatever any combination of created agents can accomplish by their finite power.

So much for cases of diachronic separability. Let us now turn to cases of what we called 'synchronic separability'. Suárez imagines such cases in DM 20.4, where he claims that, although God actually does create the world without the participation of any other agent, he nevertheless *might have* created it by using a creature such as an

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[61]DM 20.4.32.

angel as an instrument. But since actions involving instruments are specifically different from those not involving instruments, they must also be numerically distinct, and thus the action by which God actually does create the world is numerically distinct from some action by which he might have created it.[62] Finally, Suárez baldly asserts that, in his opinion, it is probable that God could simply decide, by *fiat*, to create the numerically same effect by performing an action that is specifically the same, but numerically distinct, from the one that he actually does decide to perform.[63]

It should also be clear at this point how Suárez responds to the Argument from Parsimony. Recall that according to this argument, we can account for the world's causal connections without positing any actions over and above agents and effects, and hence such actions are dispensable. Suárez denies the opponents' claim that we can account for the world's causal connections without positing actions over and above effects. On the contrary, his defense of premise (2) of the Separability Argument makes clear that he thinks it is precisely in order to account for these connections that we must suppose that action and effect are separable in the sense specified. For, if actions and the effects that are their end-points were not separable in this way, then we could not account for the fact that the same effect depends for its being on different agents at different times, nor for the fact that it could have depended on a different agent at the same time.

The Argument from Action's Relational Essence. Although Suárez's case for non-reductive realism focuses primarily on his Separability Argument, he does sketch another argument in DM 20.4. This argument appeals to the idea that efficient causation or action has a fundamentally different type of nature or essence than do items in the absolute (or non-relational) categories of substance, quantity, and quality. According to Suárez, action differs from the absolute categories to the extent that action stands in an essential relation to an agent and its active power, whereas items in these other categories do not. But if this is correct, then surely action cannot be identified with the entities in these other categories, as Suárez's

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[62]DM 20.4.13.
[63]DM 20.4.13.

opponents insist that it should be.[64]

Although Suárez does not spell out his support for this difference in detail, his remarks suggest two reasons for accepting it. First, as he emphasizes repeatedly, action cannot even be conceived apart from an agent and its active power.[65] However, the concepts of substance, quantity, and quality evidently do not include any relation to an agent or its power. This is perhaps easiest to appreciate in the case of substance, which is supposed to be unique among the Aristotelian categories because it exists *per se*, or in itself, whereas accidents exist *per aliud*, or in another. However, even if we cannot understand the categories of quantity and quality apart from any subject, we still do seem to be able to understand them apart from any agent or active power. Accordingly, Suárez's point appears to be that this difference between our *conception* of action and the absolute categories is best explained by a fundamental *ontological* difference between action and these categories.

Suárez's remarks also suggest that he thinks the difference between action and the absolute categories can be appreciated by reflecting on the metaphysical or functional role of action. As we have seen, he identifies action with the existential dependence of an effect on its efficient cause. But again, whatever this dependence is in itself, it is plainly some sort of relational entity. After all, Scholastics posited this sort of dependence precisely in order to account for the connection or link between an efficient cause and its effect. However, Suárez thinks that if we reflect on the account (*ratio*) of substance, quantity, or quality, we will see that it does not include this sort of relational aspect.[66]

Now that we have seen Suárez's case for non-reductive realism, it is worth pausing to reiterate an important aspect of the dialectical situation. In §3, I argued that Suárez and his opponents each endorse some version of realism about efficient causation, to the extent that

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[64]See DM 20.4.14. For a brief discussion of the argument, see Freddoso, *Creation, Conservation, and Concurrence*, 74–75, note 24. This sort of argument appears to have been prominent in medieval debates about the nature of categorical relations, and so probably would have been well-known to Suárez's audience. See Brower, 'Medieval Theories of Relations'.

[65]See especially DM 48.1.17.

[66]DM 20.4.14.

they each construe efficient causation as a mind-independent entity. What Suárez and his opponents disagree about is not *whether* efficient causation exists in extramental reality, but rather *what sort* of extramental being it is. (This is, after all, why I have referred to their theories 'reductive' and 'non-reductive *realism*'.) Not surpisingly, this agreement on the truth of realism about efficient causation is reflected in the arguments we have seen so far. In claiming that their respective theories best account for the facts of efficient causation, Suárez and his opponents are of course taking for granted that there are some such facts. Accordingly, none of the arguments we have seen so far is directed against anti-realism about efficient causation, where this is understood as the view that efficient causation is a fiction or a being of reason. It is not immediately clear how Suárez would respond to an opponent who rejects realism about efficient causation outright, but at any rate, this is a topic for a different paper.

5   Objections to Suárez's Non-Reductive Realism

In the previous section, I outlined what Suárez takes to be the main methodological challenges to his non-reductive theory of efficient causation, and I showed how he attempts to overcome these challenges by appealing, first, to considerations about separability, and second, to considerations about action's relational nature or essence. However, Suárez also responds to two *reductio ad absurdum* arguments on behalf of his opponents. Because his responses to these arguments yield important insights into how he understands action's *sui generis* nature, I turn to them now.

5.1   The Vicious Regress Objection

One such argument alleges that if we admit into our ontology actions, construed as extramentally distinct properties of effects, we thereby generate a vicious regress. Setting up the alleged regress in the context of creation, Suárez writes:

> [I]f creation were something in a creature distinct from
> it, and as it were intermediate between it and God, it

would be something created and produced. For it would
be distinct from God, and flowing forth (*profluens*) from
him. Therefore one would have to distinguish *in it* its
creation from itself, and so it would proceed to infinity
[...].[67]

Although Suárez reports this argument in the context of his dis-
cussion of creation, there is nothing about the argument that confines
it to this domain. Indeed, he notes that as far as this argument goes,
'the same thing can be inferred for any action'.[68] The regress requires
three assumptions to get going:

(1) Every action is extramentally distinct from its end-
point.

(2) Every action is produced or efficiently caused by the
agent that performs it.

(3) Whatever is produced or efficiently caused, is pro-
duced or efficiently caused in virtue of an action.

Now, consider a given action, A (for example, the action of heat-
ing by which a fire produces heat in some water). By (1), A must
be extramentally distinct from its end-point, the accident of heat in
the water. Moreover, by (2), A is efficiently caused by the fire that
performs it. But then, by (3), A must be efficiently caused in virtue
of an action, A'. By (1), A' must be extramentally distinct from its
end-point, A. And by (2), A' is efficiently caused by the agent that
performs it, the fire. And by (3), A' must be efficiently caused in
virtue of an action, A", and so on *in infinitum*. Because Scholas-
tics generally believed that the simultaneous existence of an actual
infinity of real beings is impossible, both Suárez and his opponents
would have regarded this regress as vicious. What the regress evi-
dently shows, then, is that any theory that includes the conjunction
of (1)–(3) is untenable.

Suárez's reductive-realist opponents will, of course, advertise the
fact that they can escape the regress by denying (1). According

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[67]DM 20.4.7.
[68]DM 20.4.31.

to them, actions are all identical to their end-points, so there is no room for the regress to get started. For Suárez, however, escape is more difficult. What makes this argument so powerful is that the regress is generated from claims that Suárez himself explicitly endorses, and in some cases emphatically so. As we have seen, he thinks the facts of efficient causation require the existence of actions that are extramentally distinct from their end-points. Thus, (1) is a non-negotiable commitment. Likewise, (3) is simply a restatement of Suárez's thesis that action *just is* efficient causation, or the existential dependence of an effect on its efficient cause. Because this thesis is one of the cornerstones of Suárez's theory of efficient causation, it too is non-negotiable.

Finally, although there might appear to be a bit more room for him to reject (2), in certain passages Suárez explicitly endorses it. For example, in DM 48, he writes:

> [An action's] efficient cause is that principle from which it flows.[69]

It is clear from the context that the 'principle' he has in mind is the agent that performs the action. Although he is not completely forthcoming about why he endorses this claim, two considerations seem relevant. First, it would seem to be part of the concept of an action that its occurrence is to be explained by reference to the agent that performs it. For example, if Polycletus is singing, it certainly looks as if this singing is to be explained by reference to Polycletus. It is precisely *because* Polycletus performs this action that it occurs. This is why Suárez frequently describes action as flowing from, arising from, or depending on, an agent. However, this explanatory connection is, at least *prima facie*, very similar to causation.

Another reason for endorsing (2) has to do with medieval views about contingent beings. As noted already, medievals generally agreed that contingent beings require some conserving cause as long as they exist. Since actions are contingent beings, they too require efficient causes throughout their careers. But, granted that actions must have efficient causes, it is difficult to see what these causes could be, if not the agents that perform these actions.

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[69]DM 48.5.2.

In his response to the Regress Objection, Suárez highlights an ambiguity in assumption (2). In some passages, such as the one quoted above, he makes it sound as if he accepts without qualification that actions are efficiently caused by the agents that perform them. However, his considered opinion turns out to be more nuanced than such passages suggest. In fact, when he is being most careful, he always qualifies the claim that actions are products or effects of the agents that perform them. For example, defending himself against the Regress Argument in DM 18, he writes:

> [I]f by the term 'effect' (*effectus*) we understand not only the thing produced, but whatever flows from the power of an agent, then we concede that action is *in some way* an effect of an agent, since it is dependent [on an agent]— or better, *just is* the very dependence [of an effect on an agent].[70]

Suárez is willing to grant that an action is an effect of an agent, if the term 'effect' is taken in what he later calls the 'broad way' (*lato modo*), so that anything whatever that flows from or depends on an agent counts as its effect. However, he urges that it does not follow from this that actions flow from or depend on their agents *via other actions*. On the contrary, he thinks that an action's role as the efficient-causal connection between agent and effect requires that it *not* be related to an agent in the same way as this effect is. After noting that every type of causality is, in the broad sense, an effect of the cause it denominates, Suárez writes:

> And neither is it necessary for that reason that a causality be caused through another causality, or that an action be performed (*fiat*) through another action, because it is of the nature (*ratione*) of a causality that it have an immediate relation (*habitudinem*) to a cause, and that it be as it were a medium or link (*vinculum*) between a cause and an effect.[71]

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[70]DM 18.10.8. Italics are mine.
[71]DM 18.10.8.

Suárez's point here is that insofar as action is what connects efficient causes and their effects, it must stand in what he calls an 'immediate' relation to a cause—where what he means by an 'immediate' relation is one that a thing stands in just in virtue of itself. The consequences of denying this are, he thinks, dramatically brought home by the regress outlined above. Thus, Suárez thinks that in advancing the Regress Objection, his reductive-realist opponents are suffering from confusion about the theoretical role that a causal connection is posited to perform. That is to say, he is accusing his opponents of what we would nowadays call a 'category mistake'.

To sum up his response, Suárez thinks the regress can be avoided by rejecting the second assumption that gives rise to it. On the analysis he has given, (2) is true only if 'produces' and 'efficiently causes' are understood so broadly that entities that depend on agents immediately, without any intervening actions, count as effects of those agents. Although Suárez is himself willing to talk this way in some contexts, he also thinks that this way of understanding efficient causation can be misleading, because it obscures the fundamental ontological differences between actions and the non-causal entities that serve as their end-points. Alternatively, if an opponent insists on understanding efficient causation in this overly broad sense, then Suárez will say that assumption (3) is false. On his view, only what is produced or efficiently caused in the strict sense requires the mediation of an action.

5.2   The Vicious Circle Objection

Another argument exploits an apparent tension between Suárez's view that action is an extramentally distinct, accidental feature of its end-point, and his view that action just is efficient causation. Although his presentation of this argument is compressed, the thought appears to be that, taken together, these two claims generate a vicious circle of existential priority.[72] This can be appreciated by considering the relationships of dependence between a subject and its accident, on the one hand, and efficient causation and its end-point,

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[72]DM 20.4.4. Suárez also clarifies the argument in the course of responding to it; see DM 20.4.25–26.

on the other. As we have seen, medieval Aristotelians take the characteristic feature of accidents to be their existence in a subject. Indeed, this is precisely the feature by which accidents are supposed to be distinguished from substances. Moreover, and most importantly for our purposes here, medievals typically understand accidents to be existentially dependent on the subjects in which they exist. This is, after all, the reason why they often refer to an accident's subject as its material cause. Thus, for example, Socrates's accident of whiteness depends on Socrates for its existence, and accordingly Socrates is said to be its material cause.[73]

However, it also appears that an effect depends for its existence on the action whereby it is produced, since it is precisely in virtue of this action that the effect exists. As Suárez sometimes puts the point, an action is a path (*via*) to its end-point, and accordingly this end-point 'has no real being that has not come to it through that path'.[74] It thus looks as if, on Suárez's account, action will be existentially prior to effect (insofar as it is that by virtue of which the effect is produced), and effect will be existentially prior to action (insofar as it is the subject or material cause of the action). And this sort of circularity certainly appears vicious, for if the existence of each is a necessary condition for the existence of the other, neither could ever begin to exist.

Suárez's way out of the circle is to deny that actions are, strictly speaking, accidents of the effects that serve as their end-points. He writes:

> [N]o dependence or being made, as such, has the character of an accident in respect of the end-point at which it aims (*tendunt*) [...].[75]

He sometimes puts the same point in a different idiom, noting that action does not inhere in its end-point, or that it does not exist in its end-point 'as in a subject'. Although this response does appear to avoid the circle, it suggests a further question about exactly how

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[73]For Suárez's arguments for the thesis that accidents are existentially dependent on their subjects or material causes, see DM 14.1.

[74]DM 20.4.25.

[75]DM 32.1.17.

action is supposed to be related to its end-point. After all, as we have seen, Suárez insists that action exists *in* an effect, and that it is a certain sort of property of that effect—namely, a mode of it. But once he has denied that this relationship can be explained in terms of the inherence of an accident in a subject, it is not immediately clear how we are to understand it.

In response to this question, Suárez insists that action is related to its end-point via a distinctive or *sui generis* type of property-possession. He claims that action exists in its end-point 'not as in a subject, but in keeping with the special (*specialis*) and distinctive (*propria*) relation by which a path is related to its end-point'.[76] He elsewhere describes this relation as 'a peculiar (*peculiaris*) way of establishing the end-point in reality, [as] depending on and flowing from its principle'.[77]

In order to appreciate what Suárez thinks is distinctive about this relation, it will be helpful to briefly compare it to an accident's inherence in its subject. As it turns out, inherence plays two different roles in Suárez's property theory. As we have seen, one of these roles is to account for an accident's existential dependence on its subject. To reiterate the example used above, it is in virtue of inhering in Socrates that Socrates's whiteness depends on him for its existence. And perhaps not surprisingly, the other role of inherence is to account for an accident's intrinsic characterization of its subject. Thus, according to Suárez, it is also in virtue of inhering in Socrates that Socrates's whiteness intrinsically affects (*afficit*) or denominates him as being white.[78]

Now, it should be clear from what we have seen so far that Suárez also takes the relation between an action and its end-point to involve intrinsic characterization. After all, it is precisely in order to account for intrinsic differences in an effect's dependence on an agent that Suárez thinks we must posit a *sui generis* type of causal entity. In this way, the relation between action and end-point is similar to an accident's inherence in its subject. However, Suárez insists that,

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[76]DM 20.4.27.

[77]DM 48.4.13.

[78]For a useful overview of relations of union or inherence in Scholastic philosophy, see Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes*, Ch. 11.

unlike the relation of inherence, action's relation to its end-point does not render action existentially dependent on that end-point. He writes:

> Regarding this [relation], there is not required a priority of nature on the part of the end-point, because it does not require true [material] causality, but only termination (*terminationem*).[79]

That is to say, the relation between action and end-point is completely one-sided: it involves characterization without material causation.

Suárez's description of the relation between an action and its end-point appears to be consistent. After all, there is no obvious reason to think that a property's intrinsic characterization of a subject entails its existential dependence on that subject. Even so, the fact that Suárez's theory of efficient causation requires him to appeal to a *sui generis* type of property-possession should be regarded as a significant cost of the theory.

6   Conclusion

My primary aim in this paper has been to clarify the details of Suárez's account of the nature of efficient causation or action. As mentioned in the introduction, this project has significant historical value, to the extent that Suárez's views on this topic have not been adequately explored by scholars. However, I also hope that my interpretation has gone some way toward persuading readers of the intrinsic philosophical interest of Suárez's theory of efficient causation. Since the time of Hume, philosophers in the Anglophone world have tended to assume that any adequate theory of causation must be reductive, in the sense that it must account for facts about causation by appealing to ordinary, non-causal facts. In my view, this assumption is far from obvious. Suárez's theory of efficient causation may or may not ultimately succeed; but in any case, it is one example of a sophisticated, non-reductive account of causation, and

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[79]DM 20.4.27.

it would be a mistake to discard it in the dustbin of history without careful scrutiny.[80]