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**Impure Ontology. The Nature  
of Metaphysics and Its Object  
in Francisco Suárez's Texts\***

I. Foreword: the question of the nature of Suárez's metaphysics

A significant amount of the criticism of Francisco Suárez's *Disputationes metaphysicæ* in twentieth-century philosophical debate was structured around the use of terms such as "ontology" and "ontotheology". It should, however, be pointed out that different authors attributed different meanings to these terms.

As far as the term "ontology" is concerned, two main uses can be determined<sup>1</sup>. In the first sense, ontology is the study of being, taken to mean a *ratio* as having no ties with existence and reduced to a mere object of thought. This use of the term can be found, for example, in the works of Etienne Gilson. When speaking of Suárez, the French philosopher upholds a theory which is articulated in three points: being is considered by the Spaniard as a *ratio* that does not express any tie with existence; consequently, such a *ratio* is reduced ultimately to a mere object of thought; thus metaphysics becomes the development of deductions starting out from such a *ratio* and is translated into a body of propositions conceived as being analytically justifiable. In this way, Gilson writes, natural theology, the science of Being qua Being, becomes detached from a first philosophy which is now centred on the abstract notion of being qua being, with the consequent effect «de libérer une Ontologie pure de toute compromission avec l'être actuellement existant». In this process Suárez's role is limited yet decisive<sup>2</sup>. Taken in this sense, ontology, even that of Suárez, is seen as onto-logic,

\* Due to editorial reasons, it was impossible to include exhaustive quotations from the authors that are here discussed. Those readers who wish to check my arguments against the original texts, may consult the following Italian edition of this study: M. FORLIVESI, *Ontologia impura. La natura della metafisica secondo Francisco Suárez* [<http://web.tiscali.it/marcoforlivesi/mf2004oi.pdf>], 2004. A grateful thought for Carmel Ace and John P. Doyle.

<sup>1</sup> Present-day uses are here meant. About 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century uses, cf. J. FERRATER MORA, *On the Early History of 'Ontology'*, «Philosophical and Phenomenological Research», 24 (1963), 36-47.

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. for example E. GILSON, *L'être et l'essence*, Vrin, Paris 1962<sup>2</sup>, in particular 144-155.

and any eventual discourse about God that it develops is interpreted as onto-theo-logic<sup>3</sup>.

According to the other use of the term, ontology is the study of being considered as a transcendental *ratio* and of any other *ratio* in so far as transcendental being can be found in it. An example of this view can be found in the works by Ludger Honnefelder and by Jorge J.E. Gracia. Honnefelder takes ontology to be the science of transcendentals (*scientia transcendens*) and distinguishes it from ontotheology, taking the latter to mean the science of the transcendent<sup>4</sup>. As for Suárez in particular, on the one hand, he admits that the Spanish Jesuit attempts to keep the study of being in general united to the study of first being; on the other, he adds that the fact that it is the task of metaphysics to deal fully with immaterial being is, seen from the Spaniard's point of view, nothing but «die offensichtliche Konsequenz des Umstandes, daß der Metaphysik die Erkenntnis des immateriellen Seienden nicht anders als im Horizont *zuvor* erkannter transzendentaler Attribute erschlossen ist»<sup>5</sup>. The outcome is, Honnefelder further writes, that, despite appearances, Suárez's work is not divided into a first part treating transcendental properties and a second part treating categorical determinations; on the contrary, it is wholly and uniquely a science of transcendentals. The German historian concludes from this that the *Disputationes metaphysicæ* unequivocally move towards the separation of a general metaphysics from a particular metaphysics<sup>6</sup>. As far as Gracia's thought is concerned, it is to

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. for example J.-F. COURTINE, *Suárez et le système de la métaphysique*, P.U.F., Paris 1990, 267-271, or 208.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. for example L. HONNEFELDER, "Scientia transcendens". *Die formale Bestimmung der Seiendheit und Realität in der Metaphysik des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit (Duns Scotus – Suárez – Wolff – Kant – Peirce)*, Meiner, Hamburg 1990, 403 and Id., *La métaphysique comme science transcendantale*, P.U.F., Paris 2002, 29.

<sup>5</sup> HONNEFELDER, "Scientia transcendens" cit., 212. His italics.

<sup>6</sup> Note that this thesis cannot *sic et simpliciter* be superimposed on that which interprets ontology as onto-logic. According to Honnefelder, the fact that the study of God may be made possible only within the study of transcendentals is something else, as is the fact that such a study may be reduced to the study of mere objects of thought. For example, he rejects the notion that Scotus' metaphysics is essentialist, that is to say an onto-logic: this is because, in his opinion, the Scottish scholar conceives being as something given as such prior to the work of the mind. However, he also rejects any equivalence between the thoughts of Scotus and Suárez, as he maintains that the Suarezian theory of being is derived from Ockham. He equally rejects that the thought of the two authors concerning the nature and the foundation of the possibility of possibles can be superimposed. Cfr. HONNEFELDER, *La métaphysique* cit., 81-83 and Id., "Scientia transcendens" cit., 438. In fact, along the lines of these specifications, C. ESPOSITO in *Introduzione* to F. SUÁREZ, *Disputazioni metafisiche. 1-3*, a cura di C. Esposito, Rusconi, Milano 1996, 9-10 is able to write that Suarezian ontology is a *scientia transcendens* for the very reason that it is the study of an object «sciolto da ogni altra referenza che non sia immanente alla sua natura e alla sua pensabilità. Motivo per cui l'ontologia di Suárez può ben essere chiamata una *scientia transcendens*, considerando proprio le *Disputazioni* come uno dei punti più chiari di passaggio – continuità e cesura al tempo stesso – dal senso classico a quello moderno del "trascendentale"».

be said that he does not use the terms “ontology” and “ontotheology”. Nevertheless, he also thinks that Suárez's metaphysics is a science of transcendentals. Metaphysics, as developed by the Jesuit from Granada, deals with the properties of being and with its principles. However, in Suárez's perspective, on the one hand these properties and principles are coextensive to being itself; on the other hand, the *Disputationes metaphysicæ* are dedicated to nothing but these properties and principles and to their relationships with the categories into which being is subdivided. Therefore, Suárez's metaphysics is a science of what is coextensive to being<sup>7</sup>.

As far as the meanings of “ontotheology” are concerned, we can bear in mind first of all Heidegger's notion: the extrinsic and improper combination of the study of universal being and the study of first being. For the German philosopher, Thomas Aquinas and Suárez concur on one point: that of having unified in metaphysics a conception of it as ontology, that is to say as the study of being qua being, namely being in general, and a conception of it as rational theology, as the study of that being which is God, namely a particular being. These conceptions, he maintains, are irreconcilable and their unification has given rise to a notion of this science extraneous to the question that poses it. The fact is, Heidegger argues, that the notion of supreme being is of religious derivation; it is thus a sign of an interference between philosophical discourse and religious discourse. The roots of medieval ontology lie, therefore, in an improper unification of philosophy and religion. However, he does add that there is a subtle yet substantial difference between Aquinas and Suárez: for the former, metaphysics is such mainly because it deals with being qua being; for the latter, metaphysics is such above all because it deals with divine being. This, Heidegger concludes,

<sup>7</sup> J.J.E. GRACIA, *Suárez's Conception of Metaphysics: A Step in the Direction of Mentalism?*, «American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly», 65 (1991), 287-309, particularly 292-293. I should like to add that this scholar also takes part actively in the debate about the onto-logical versus onto-theo-logical nature of Suárez's metaphysics, using however a different terminology. He contrasts a realistic conception of metaphysics to a mentalistic conception of it: realistic metaphysics is that which is concerned with extramental things, while mentalistic metaphysics deals with the concepts of things. To his mind, Suárez's metaphysics is realistic. With reference to this theme, see the criticism of Gracia made by N.J. WELLS, “*Esse cognitum*” and *Suárez Revisited*, «American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly», 67 (1993), 339-348, and the reply to it by J.J.E. GRACIA, *Suárez and Metaphysical Mentalism: The Last Visit*, «American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly», 67 (1993), 349-354. In actual fact, I think that the debate between Gracia and Wells (along with those of Gilson, Courtine etc., based on the Suarezian use of the distinction between formal concept and objective concept) arises from an equivocation about the meaning of the Spanish Jesuit's thesis concerning the relationship among mental states, conceptual contents and extramental objects and seeks to see his position within an alternative in which he takes no part. For some notes on this theme, I take the liberty of referring readers to M. FORLIVESI, *La distinzione tra concetto formale e concetto oggettivo nel pensiero di Bartolomeo Mastri* [<http://web.tiscali.it/marcoforlivesi/mf2002d.pdf>], 2002 (earlier edition printed in French: ID., *La distinction entre concept formel et concept objectif: Suárez, Pasqualigo, Mastri*, «Les études philosophiques», 1 [2002], 3-30, in particular 12-15 and 29-30).

reveals precisely the subjection of medieval thought, and scholasticism in general, to religious categories and aims<sup>8</sup>.

A second meaning of ontotheology has already been briefly hinted at in presenting Honnefelder's stance: the unified treatment of common being and first being based on the enquiry into the latter. It should, however, be added that different authors attribute different connotations to this acceptance of the term. In Honnefelder's work it seems to be a position outdone by Scotus' more refined one. On the contrary, Costantino Esposito mentions, at least indirectly, a positive notion of ontotheology: while it is, indeed, that knowledge which has as an object both common being and first being, it is such because, in thematizing the dependence of created being on first being, it goes on to study created being in the doorway to supreme being, that is the being itself. In these terms, Thomas Aquinas' thought would be an example of ontotheological metaphysics<sup>9</sup>.

A third meaning of ontotheology inverts the contents of the second one: ontotheological is that type of metaphysics that deals with first being on the basis of universal being. In some passages by Olivier Boulnois "onto-theology", taken in this sense, is consequently opposed to "theo-ontology", that is the metaphysics in which divine science determines the science of being. The latter, Boulnois writes, is "katholou-protologia": a universal science because it is the science of what the origin of being is. The former is, on the other hand, "katholou-tinologia": the universal science of being reduced to *aliquid*, that is to say to the content of a representation disregarding existence<sup>10</sup>.

As we have seen, Suarezian metaphysics has been indicated as ontology or as ontotheology in all the senses hitherto mentioned, albeit combined and modified in various ways<sup>11</sup>, with one single exception: that of the second meaning of "ontotheology", both as used by Honnefelder, and as hinted at by Esposito<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> M. HEIDEGGER, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik. Welt – Endlichkeit – Einsamkeit* (Freiburger Vorlesung Wintersemester 1929-30), nn. 12-14, in Id., *Gesamtausgabe*, 29-30, hrsg. v. F.-W. von Herrmann, V. Klostermann, Frankfurt a. M. 1983, 63-81. Text taken from n. 13, 74.

<sup>9</sup> C. ESPOSITO, *Heidegger, Suárez e la storia dell'ontologia*, «Quaestio», 1 (2001), 407-430, in particular 416.

<sup>10</sup> O. BOULNOIS, *Etre et représentation. Une généalogie de la métaphysique moderne à l'époque de Duns Scot (XIII<sup>e</sup>-XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, P.U.F., Paris 1999, 459-462 and 514. Cfr. also Id., *Le besoin de métaphysique. Théologie et structures des métaphysiques médiévales*, in J.-L. SOLÈRE / Z. KALUZA (éd.), *La servante et la consolatrice. La philosophie dans ses rapports avec la théologie au Moyen Âge*, Vrin, Paris 2002, 45-94, in particular 80.

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. for example J. USCATESCU BARRÓN, *El concepto de metafísica en Suárez: su objeto y dominio*, «Pensamiento», 51 (1995), 215-236, in particular 232.

<sup>12</sup> For a list of authors who develop their interpretation by means of these notions, see C. ESPOSITO, *Ritorno a Suárez. Le "Disputationes metaphysicæ" nella critica contemporanea*, in A. LAMACCHIA (a cura di), *La filosofia nel Siglo de Oro. Studi sul tardo rinascimento spagnolo*, Levante, Bari 1995, 465-573. To the works considered by Esposito, the reader can subjoin the essays by Jean-Paul Coujou, in whom the neo-

Nevertheless, the interpretations that make use of these categories do not fully exhaust all the interpretations of the Spanish author. There are authors that deny that Suárez may have inspired pure ontology<sup>13</sup> and others who develop historiographical enquiries into his thought without taking into consideration such coordinates or the theses of the history of philosophy on which they rely<sup>14</sup>. It would be necessary to carry out a careful study of his whole thought in order to verify the plausibility of the single and diverse interpretations of Suárez. In particular, as has opportunely been pointed out even by interpreters influenced by neo-Thomist theories, it would be necessary at least to examine his doctrines concerning the nature of the distinction between formal concept and objective concept, the nature of the reality of real being and the nature of the last basis of the possibility of possibles<sup>15</sup>. This is not the place for such an enterprise. It may, however, be of some interest to examine what he writes about the nature of the metaphysics he proposes to his readers and about the object of this science.

## II. Preliminary remarks

### II. a. The *ratio* of real being presupposes the existence of spiritual beings

In the first place it must be stressed that for Suárez real being, even when taken as formally distinct from any other *ratio*, consists in neither a *ratio* detached from

Heideggerian-Thomist current, by way of Aubenque and Courtine, reaches its fullest and most perfect expression: J.-P. COUJOU, *Suárez et la renaissance de la métaphysique*, in FR. SUÁREZ, *Disputes métaphysiques. I, II, III*, éd. par J.-P. Coujou, Vrin, Paris 1998, 7-45; J.-P. COUJOU, *Introduction to Id., Suárez et le refondation de la métaphysique comme ontologie. Étude et traduction de l'“Index détaillé de la Métaphysique d'Aristote” de F. Suárez*, Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, Louvain-la-Neuve / Peeters, Leuven 1990, \*1-67. I note that Coujou makes use of a further variation in the terminology here in question: he gives an alternative between an *ontologie de l'existence*, whose major exponent was Aquinas, and an *ontologie de l'essence*, of which Suárez was one of the most significant representatives (cfr. COUJOU, *Introduction cit.*, \*33).

<sup>13</sup> Cfr. for example M. GRABMANN, *Die Disputationes Metaphysicae des Franz Suarez in ihrer methodischen Eigenart und Fortwirkung*, in Id., *Mittelalterliches Geistesleben. Abhandlungen zur Geschichte der Scholastik und Mystik*, Hueber, I, München 1926, 525-560, in particular 545-548, and F. COPLESTON, *A History of Philosophy*, III, Search, London 1972 (reprint of the 1953 edition), 355-356.

<sup>14</sup> For a brief *status questionis* of the debate on the nature of Suárez's thought, dated but not restricted to the presentation of Heideggerian and neo-Thomist scholars, cfr. A. GNEMMI, *Il fondamento metafisico. Analisi di struttura sulle “Disputationes metaphysicae” di F. Suarez*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1969, 11-21.

<sup>15</sup> With reference to the first theme, I again take the liberty of referring to FORLIVESI, *La distinzione* cit. As for the second and third themes, the pages Rolf Darge dedicates to the demolition of the neo-Thomist interpretation with its derivatives seem particularly effective to me: cfr. R. DARGE, *Suárez' transzendente Seinsauslegung und die Metaphysiktradition*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2004, 37-48.

the occurrence of separate substances, nor in a notion given fully from the outset of metaphysical research; on the contrary, its nature and the knowledge of it are decided by the existence (or, at least, by the possible existence) of spiritual beings and by the knowledge we have of the latter.

This aspect of Suárez's doctrine is so obvious that it should not need discussing<sup>16</sup>. However, what seems obvious at times goes unnoticed. For this reason, the reader is here given some passages from *Disputationes metaphysicæ* in which this thesis is clearly apparent<sup>17</sup>.

In the first section of the first of the *Disputationes* Suárez denies that God is the adequate object of metaphysics. One of the objections to his position has recourse to a widely quoted statement by Aristotle. In the first chapter of Book Six of *Metaphysica* it is stated that were there no substances other than the natural ones, physics would be the first science. If, on the other hand, there is an immobile substance, the science of such a substance will take precedence over other sciences and be the first philosophy. As the first science, Aristotle concludes, this science will be universal and its task will be to study being qua being, that is to say what being is and which properties being qua being possesses<sup>18</sup>. This is not the place to question the meaning of Aristotle's passage, but here is what Suárez writes:

«In posteriori autem loco [Aristotelis] conditionalis illa “Si non esset alia substantia superior præter materialis, naturalis philosophia esset prima, neque esset alia scientia necessaria” verissima est, non quia substantia immaterialis sit adæquatum obiectum primæ philosophiæ, sed quia hac substantia ablata, auferretur tam proprium quam adæquatum obiectum primæ philosophiæ, quia non solum auferretur immaterialis

<sup>16</sup> I am not, by the way, the first to observe this point: cfr. J. ITURRIOZ, *Estudios sobre la metafísica de Francisco Suárez, S.J.*, Colegio Máximo S.J. de Ona, Madrid 1949, 355, and J. HELLÍN LASHERAS, *Existencialismo escolástico suareciano*, «Pensamiento», 12 (1956), 157-178 and 13 (1957), 21-38, in particular 30.

<sup>17</sup> For reasons of space, I do not tackle this question from the point of view of the collocation of Suárez in the succession of authors who in the course of two centuries precede and follow him. Let it suffice here to recall that GRABMANN, *Die Disputationes* cit., 545-548, observes that in none of the seventeenth-century *cursum philosophicum* influenced by Suárez's *Disputationes* is the separation between science of God and science of being claimed, and that E. VOLLRATH, *Die Gliderung der Metaphysik in eine Metaphysica generalis und Metaphysica specialis*, «Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung», 16/II (1962), 258-284, correctly indicates in Perera, not in Suárez, the model for this *Gliderung* in the seventeenth-century *Schulphilosophie*. Furthermore, in order to see the abyss that separates the Spanish scholar and the propounders of metaphysics as ontology it is enough to observe the radical nature of the criticisms that Jacobus Revius, in his *Suarez repurgatus* published in Leiden in 1644 (intelligently quoted by A. GOUDRIAAN, *Philosophische Gotteserkenntnis bei Suárez und Descartes im Zusammenhang mit der niederländischen reformierten Theologie und Philosophie des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Brill, Leiden-Boston-Köln 1999, 16-17, footnotes 13, 14, 19 and 22), formulates against the Suarezian conceptions of real being and of the object of metaphysics.

<sup>18</sup> ARIST., *Metaph.*, VI, 1, 1026a27-32.

substantia, sed etiam omnes rationes entis vel substantiæ communes rebus immaterialibus et materialibus, et data illa hypotesi, sicut nulla essent entia immaterialia, ita nullæ etiam essent rationes entium abstrahentes a materia secundum esse, et ideo non esset necessaria alia scientia distincta [a naturali philosophia]»<sup>19</sup>.

Nothing could be more explicit than what Suárez writes here. However, it is possible to take matters further. Let us suppose that there are no spiritual substances (i.e. that such substances were impossible, that they were not real beings). It would then be possible to ask: what prevents the mind from abstracting from real being, which in this case would be material, a more generic notion of being that leaves materiality aside? In the second *disputatio* Suárez provides an answer to this query: the mind does have this power<sup>20</sup>. However, he adds, this operation would have its foundations exclusively in the mind: in this case, in fact, the concept of real being would be identical to that of material being.

«Hoc tamen posito, nihilominus juxta mentem Aristotelis, citato loco, naturalis philosophia esset prima scientia seu philosophia, saltem dignitate et præstantia, quoniam ageret de nobilissimo objecto, scilicet, de substantia ut sic, et de omni substantia; et consequenter etiam ageret de primis causis rerum et principiis, non quidem secundum abstractionem mentis, sed secundum rem. Unde tandem dicitur probabilius videri, in eo casu non fore necessariam scientiam metaphysicæ specialem, et a naturali philosophiam distinctam. Ratio est, quia tunc philosophia ageret de omni substantia [...] ad eandem philosophiam spectaret omnium prædicamentorum divisio et consideratio [...] omnium essentialium, omniumque causarum realium consideratio [...] eadem ageret de prædicatis communibus substantiæ, et accidentibus, nec propter illa sola oporteret specialem scientiam constituere, quia non abstraherent a materia sensibili, et conceptus entis non esset alius a conceptu entis materialis»<sup>21</sup>.

That is, the being abstracted from matter *secundum esse* would be a being of reason, a sort of pretence carried out by the mind. It is only the fact that there are spiritual substances that makes being effectively abstract from matter *secundum esse*; and only the prior knowledge of the occurrence of spiritual substances guarantees that the being abstracting from matter *secundum esse* is something real outside the mind.

To return to the first section of the first *disputatio*: here Suárez announces the thesis according to which the adequate object of metaphysics is being insofar as it is real being, defending this thesis from objections. One of these relies on the

<sup>19</sup> FRANCISCUS SUÁREZ, *Disputationes metaphysicæ* (henceforth *DM*), disp. 1, s. 1, n. 16. Cfr. also SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 1, n. 17.

<sup>20</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 2, s. 2, n. 30.

<sup>21</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 2, s. 2, nn. 30-31.

following considerations. The object of any science must have properties, principles and causes. Yet being qua being has none of these<sup>22</sup>. In order to overcome this obstacle Suárez distinguishes between complex and simple principles; the latter are distinguished into: *a*) causes really distinct from effects of which they are principles; *b*) *rationes* of something else, conceptually different from the latter. He then states that as long as something is the object of a science it is not necessary for it to possess simple principles of the first type. Notwithstanding, he does not simply reject the above objection; on the contrary, he concedes that being qua being (or at least the being common to God and creatures) has no true causes<sup>23</sup>. The question which then arises is: if the *ratio* of being were independent of the fact that God is a real being, if this *ratio* became fully known without the knowledge of God's existence, how could it be excluded that it has true causes?

To turn to the pages in the third section where Suárez argues in favour of the unity of the enquiry into transcendental being and the enquiry into spiritual being. Here he establishes the criterion of abstraction *secundum rationem et secundum esse* on the basis of what metaphysics has actually been concerned with, and states:

«Si autem distincta esset scientia quæ ageret de ente, ut ens est, ab ea quæ tractat de ente immateriali, et re ipsa a materia separato, illa prior non participaret proprie et perfecte hujusmodi abstractionem, neque ageret de primis rerum causis, neque alia haberet, quæ Aristoteles metaphysicæ tribuit»<sup>24</sup>.

Any further comment seems superfluous.

The author then maintains that the ultimate reason why metaphysics is a unitary science – and why the *ratio formalis sub qua* of its subject is a sole, unitary one – consists in what follows: the *rationes* included in beings separated from matter and the *rationes* of *transcendentes* conceptual contents constitute an inextricable complex, in particular from the point of view of acquiring them by knowledge (*propter necessariam connexionem talium rerum et prædicatorum inter se, præsertim in ordine ad cognitionem*)<sup>25</sup>. Let us now look at this consideration in detail. At first, Suárez elaborates an argument that may be thus expounded: the natural intellect can attain the knowledge of God and separate intelligences only thanks to the knowledge of transcendental *rationes*; therefore,

<sup>22</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 1, n. 27.

<sup>23</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 1, n. 29.

<sup>24</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 3, nn. 9-10.

<sup>25</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 3, n. 11.



the science that takes into consideration separate substances must also deal with transcendental *rationes*<sup>26</sup>. He, however, adds:

«Unde etiam confirmatur, nam perfecta scientia de Deo et aliis substantiis separatis tradit cognitionem omnium prædicatorum quæ in eis insunt; ergo etiam prædicatorum communium et transcendentium. Neque est eadem ratio de inferioribus scientiis, verbi gratia, philosophia, quæ, licet consideret de materiali substantia, non tamen propterea contemplatur prædicata communia et transcendentia quæ illi etiam insunt, quia cum illa sit inferior scientia, non potest ascendere ad abstractiora et difficiliora prædicata cognoscenda, sed per altiolem scientiam cognita supponit. At vero scientia de Deo et intelligentiis est suprema omnium naturalium; et ideo nihil supponit cognitum per altiolem scientiam, sed in se includit quidquid necessarium est ad sui objecti cognitionem perfectam, quantum per naturale lumen haberi potest; eadem ergo scientia, quæ de his specialibus objectis tractat, simul considerat omnia prædicata, quæ illis sunt cum aliis rebus communia, et hæc est tota metaphysica doctrina»<sup>27</sup>.

Here the *ratio* of being is presented not only as more abstract, but also as more difficult to know compared to the substances physics is concerned with; hence there cannot be any immediate knowledge of this *ratio*. If anyone should object that the *predicata abstractiora* and the *predicata difficiliora* mentioned in the text are different, a reply to this is that it cannot be the case, since Suárez's argument is valid only if the former are also "more difficult" to know. The conclusion is that, if in this text we may find an allusion to the fact that metaphysics acquires knowledge of God on the basis of dealing with transcendentals, we can also see an allusion to the fact that metaphysics acquires knowledge of transcendentals on the basis of dealing with separate substances.

In conclusion, real being, taken to mean something abstracted from matter *secundum esse* and also really present (at least as far as its foundations are concerned) in material beings, presupposes the existence (or at least the possible existence) of spiritual beings. Now, that such types of beings do exist is demonstrated only in the second part of the *Disputationes*. The outcome is that the *ratio* of real being does not constitute an absolute starting point of philosophizing, almost as if it were *sic et simpliciter* the first (in order of time) of the notions our intellect conceives and in which every other one is resolved. This means that the knowledge of separate substances is not acquired on the basis of a previous, complete knowledge of the being conceived distinguishing it from every other *ratio*; on the contrary, the very knowledge of real being is accomplished, as far as this is possible for the natural capabilities of human reason, at the very mo-

<sup>26</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 3, n. 10.

<sup>27</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 3, n. 10.

ment when the latter acquires knowledge of separate substances. The interconnection between *prædicata communia*<sup>28</sup> and immaterial substances is therefore reciprocal; and this is precisely the sense of, and the reason for, Suárez's statement according to which they «sunt inter se connexa, ut non possint commode diversis scientiis attribui». The fact remains that in the first *disputatio* this connection is stated, not exhibited. Suárez actually answers the need to justify it in the whole of his *Disputationes metaphysicæ*.

## II. b. Being taken as the object of metaphysics includes the inferiors in a limited and asymmetric way

Another key aspect in our author's doctrine consists in the relationship he establishes between being taken as the object of metaphysics and the other *rationes* with which metaphysics is concerned. To this end Suárez states two theses. First: metaphysics is not restricted to the study of the sole *ratio* of being and of those that can be converted with it; on the contrary, it is also concerned with some *inferiora* according to their own *rationes*<sup>29</sup>. Second: metaphysics does not study in detail all the *rationes* of all beings, but only some of them<sup>30</sup>. The second thesis is composed of two elements and is thus elucidated. *a)* First of all, it is the task of metaphysics to concern itself with some general *rationes*, even non-transcendental ones: substance, accident<sup>31</sup>, created or uncreated being, finite or infinite substance, absolute or relative accident, quality, action, operation or dependence<sup>32</sup>, cause, single types of causes. Furthermore, with the causes of the whole universe<sup>33</sup>. Relative to such *rationes*, metaphysics is concerned on the same level, i.e. symmetrically, with both spiritual substances and material ones<sup>34</sup>. *b)* It must, however, be added that it is also concerned, in detail, with all *rationes* proper to spiritual substances, although knowable purely through natural reason. On the other hand, it is not concerned, at least directly, with the *rationes* proper to material beings<sup>35</sup>. There is, therefore, a difference, an asymmetry, be-

<sup>28</sup> Incidentally, note that this reflection is also valid, *mutatis mutandis*, for every other *ratio* common (even non-transcendental) to separate substances and material substances: cause, effect, efficient cause, final cause, etc.: cfr. SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 2, n. 17.

<sup>29</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, *m.*, disp. 1, s. 2, n. 12.

<sup>30</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 2, n. 13.

<sup>31</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 2, n. 14.

<sup>32</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 2, n. 15.

<sup>33</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 2, n. 17.

<sup>34</sup> Cfr. SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 2, n. 28.

<sup>35</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 2, nn. 16 e 22 e SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 5, n. 30. With regards to the passage in SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 2, n. 16 one might be led to think that the *in particulari* refers to *pertinere*;

tween the way in which metaphysics considers spiritual beings and that in which it considers material beings:

«substantiam immaterialem per se et directe considerat, omnia in universum tractando, quæ de illa cognosci possunt; substantiam autem materialem non ita contemplatur, sed solum quatenus necesse est ad distinguendam illam a substantia immateriali, et ad cognoscendum de illa omnia metaphysica prædicata, quæ illi ut materialis est, conveniunt, ut, verbi gratia, esse compositam ex actu et potentia, et modum hujus compositionis, et quod est quoddam ens per se unum, et similia»<sup>36</sup>.

In short, metaphysics deals with various types of *rationes*: those common to every being, both infinite and finite, spiritual and material; those proper to infinite being and those proper to finite spiritual beings, to the extent that is possible for natural reason; those common to every finite being. It deals with them by investigating the way in which these *rationes* belong to different types of being, with one distinction: as far as spiritual beings are concerned, it is concerned with them directly; as far as material beings are concerned, it is only concerned with them to the degree in which this is required to distinguish spiritual beings from material beings and to know the metaphysical predicates of the latter qua material<sup>37</sup>.

This thesis is so important that it actually shapes Suárez's *ordo doctrinæ*, since it provides the scheme on which the very *Disputationes metaphysicæ* are set up.

«Distinguendæ videntur duæ partes huius doctrinæ: una est, quæ de ente ut ens est, eiusque principiis et proprietatibus disserit. Altera est, quæ tractat de aliquibus peculiaribus rationibus entium, præsertim de immaterialibus»<sup>38</sup>.

### III. The consistence of the object of metaphysics

We have hence arrived at two conclusions. First, it has been established that, according to Suárez, the actual nature of real being presupposes the reality of spir-

however, it seems to me more correct and significant that the expression refers to *tractare* and to translate it with “in detail”, attributing to it the same sense as it has in the sentence in SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 2, n. 13: «*hæc scientia non considerat omnes proprias rationes seu quidditates entium in particulari, seu ut talia sunt, sed solum [...]*».

<sup>36</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 2, n. 27.

<sup>37</sup> Suárez himself sums up very effectively his own position in *DM*, disp. 1, s. 5, n. 14.

<sup>38</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 5, n. 23. Note that the *ordo doctrinæ* is, in Suárez, above all the correct order of the exposition of the discipline and only secondarily the order of the acquisition of the types of knowledge that constitute it. Cfr. the foreword to SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 30, and the way in which in SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 28, s. 1, nn. 2, 5, 6 and 20 the author introduces and justifies the treatment of the division of being into finite and infinite.

itual beings. Second, that the being which is the object of metaphysics comprehends some inferiors, but not all, and furthermore asymmetrically: it includes the *rationes* common to material beings and spiritual beings and the *rationes* proper to spiritual beings, but not (or, at least, not all) the *rationes* proper to material beings. Let us now examine how these considerations influence the nature and unity of the object of metaphysics and how, viceversa, the object of metaphysics expresses the nature and unity of this discipline.

### III. a. The articulation of Suárez's doctrine

Suárez's speculative strategy is developed in three stages<sup>39</sup>. The first is set out in the first section of the first *disputatio*. Here he establishes that the object of metaphysics must include God, immaterial substances, substances in general and real accidents. After this, he observes that only being as such embraces all these things; from this he concludes that *ens ut sic* is the *obiectum adæquatum* of metaphysics<sup>40</sup>. Now, in the following paragraphs he speaks of this being in terms of a *ratio communissima*<sup>41</sup>; hence, the *ens ut sic* in question would seem to

<sup>39</sup> That Suárez's discourse presents a continuous unfolding is quite obvious; the problem is to determine the stages in this course. E. CONZE, *Der Begriff der Metaphysik bei Franciscus Suarez. Gegenstandsbereich und Primat der Metaphysik*, Meiner, Leipzig 1928, 5-22, finds in the first *disputatio* of the *Disputationes metaphysicæ* two steps: the first, developed in the first section, would consist in defining the adequate object of metaphysics as being qua being; the second, developed in the second section, would consist in defining the adequate object of metaphysics as what is abstracted from matter according to being and in re-comprehending the former definition into this latter. Such a solution, however, Conze sustains, «auf eine Äquivokation hinausläuft» (*Ibid.*, 21). H. SEIGFRIED, *Wahrheit und Metaphysik bei Suarez*, Bouvier, Bonn 1967, 85-88 and 168-169, notes 20-21, also recognises that there is a difference between the first and the second section of the *disputatio* here under discussion, yet he denies that it consists in using two different definitions of the object of metaphysics. It consists, Seigfried alleges, in the fact that in the first section Suárez determines the material object of metaphysics, while in the second he determines the formal object of such a science. I think that both Conze and Seigfried are mistaken. Conze's error lies in holding that the inclusion of the first definition in the second consists in an equivocation (if the equivocation Conze talks about is the same one as Heidegger is thinking about, which is not altogether clear); I have already spoken about this. Seigfried (together with Honnefelder) is mistaken both in denying that there are two definitions of that which founds the unity of metaphysics, and in maintaining that Suárez determines first the material object of metaphysics, then its formal object. As far as the first aspect is concerned, I shall set about showing how, in effect, the Spanish Jesuit introduces two different definitions of what founds and shows the nature and unity of metaphysics, which does pose a real difficulty (although quite different from that posed by Heideggerians and by neo-Thomists) for the comprehension of Suárez's thought. As for the second aspect, Seigfried's suggestion has to be rejected. First, there is no basis for it in the texts. On the one hand, the Spanish Jesuit makes no use of the terminology adopted by Seigfried. On the other, such terminology, as I shall show, was by no means unknown to him. Therefore, the fact that he made no use of it cannot be irrelevant. Second, Seigfried's hypothesis contrasts with the texts. The first section of this *disputatio* does not simply say that metaphysics has *omnia entia* as an object; it says that such a science has *ens in quantum ens* as an object. I do not see how one can say that this latter is the material object of metaphysics.

<sup>40</sup> Cfr. SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 1, n. 26.

<sup>41</sup> Cfr. SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 1, nn. 27-29.

be transcendental real being, that is to say being taken as distinct from any other *ratio*. In the same pages, Suárez applies to this *ratio* what Aristotle speaks of when referring to “subject genus”: being has properties and principles, and metaphysics is concerned precisely with being, these properties and these principles<sup>42</sup>. He even goes as far as to write that being is *obiectum adæquatum* of metaphysics precisely because it is its *subiectum*<sup>43</sup>. In several places in the *Disputationes metaphysicæ* the equivalence of “subject” and “object” of a science is reiterated, and the competence of metaphysics in a certain field of objects is claimed precisely on the grounds of the fact that they refer to being either as its properties or as its principles<sup>44</sup>. Once again at the beginning of the second part of the *Disputationes metaphysicæ* Suárez identifies the object of metaphysics and transcendental being<sup>45</sup>.

Nevertheless, Suárez's texts also offer something further: this is the second step in his strategy. As we have seen, he entrusts metaphysics with the task of dealing with some inferiors of being which are neither its properties nor its principles. He bears, therefore, the burden of providing the reason for such a fact. In order to do so, he proceeds in three stages. Firstly, he distinguishes the *ratio* of being taken as distinct from any other *ratio* from the *ratio* of being taken as including its inferiors<sup>46</sup>. Secondly, he explains that the being which is adequate object of metaphysics is not the being taken in the first sense; it is the being taken in the second<sup>47</sup>. Thirdly, he restricts the range of such an “amplification”. This restriction has two limits: the first is asymmetric, including both the *rationes* common to spiritual and material things, and the *rationes* proper to the former, but excluding the *rationes* proper to the latter; the second limit includes the imperfect knowledge of many of the *rationes* proper to spiritual beings but excludes the perfect knowledge of them. Suárez justifies the first limit by invoking the criterion of the degree of abstraction of the object of metaphysics. The object about which demonstrations may be given is the knowable object (*obiectum scibile*); but the knowable object is constituted as such by means of abstraction; hence the different types of object are given by the different types of formal abstraction. Now, physics, mathematics and metaphysics consider *rationes* abstracted from matter in a different way; in particular, the latter considers the whole and only

<sup>42</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 1, nn. 28-29.

<sup>43</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 1, n. 28.

<sup>44</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, [prologus]; SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 2, [prologus]; SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 3, [prologus]; SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 12, [prologus].

<sup>45</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 28, [prologus].

<sup>46</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 2, n. 12.

<sup>47</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 2, n. 12. The argument is anticipated at the end of the first section: cfr. the difficulty expounded in SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 1, n. 27 and the answer in SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 1, n. 30.

what is abstracted from matter *secundum rationem et secundum esse*. Here it can be noted that such a degree of abstraction is based on the object itself, or the subject, of this science<sup>48</sup>. The second limit is found by Suárez in the capabilities of natural human reason<sup>49</sup>. The conclusion is, as has already been recalled, that metaphysics treats

«in particulari de rebus omnibus usque ad proprias differentias et species, quod aliquo modo verum est, non tamen æque nec eodem modo in omnibus; nam in rebus vel rationibus rerum, quæ abstrahunt a materia secundum esse, id est simpliciter verum ex parte ipsarum rerum; limitatur tamen ex imperfectione intellectus nostri. Itaque metaphysica humana (de qua tractamus) de his demonstrat et disserit, quantum humanum ingenium naturali lumine potest»<sup>50</sup>.

This is what he writes, respectively, about the enquiry into God and into created immaterial substances:

«hæc scientia non solum considerat Deum sub præciso respectu principii, sed postquam ad Deum pervenit, ipsumque sub dicta ratione principii invenit, ejus naturam et attributa absolute inquirat, quantum potest naturali lumine»<sup>51</sup>.

«hoc loco non persequemur omnia quæ ab eis [*i.e.* by theologians] dicuntur, nec prolixam disputationem instituemus, sed brevem ac concisam, ea solum attingendo, quæ ex principiis et effectibus naturalibus potest ingenium humanum, solo lumine naturæ utens, de his substantiis investigare, scilicet, an sint, quid sint, et quas proprietates vel effectus habeant»<sup>52</sup>.

Suárez hereby distinguishes metaphysics from divine, or supernatural, theology. However, it can be noticed that he obtains this result thanks to the fact that the metaphysics he refers to is the metaphysics developed by man in the present state; in the case of the metaphysics possessed by God, by the angels or by the blessed things are different<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 2, n. 13.

<sup>49</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 1, n. 11.

<sup>50</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 5, n. 14.

<sup>51</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 1, n. 19.

<sup>52</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 35 [prologus].

<sup>53</sup> For indications of the metaphysics possessed by God cfr. SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 4, n. 24; for indications of the metaphysics of which angels are capable cfr. SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 5, nn. 5 and 25. For indications of the distinction between (human) metaphysics, science possessed by God, science possessed by the blessed and supernatural theology, cfr. SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 1, n. 12 and F. SUÁREZ, *In Summam theologiæ d. Thomæ*, In primam partem, De Deo, tr. 1, Proœmium. I should like to add that Suárez admits that this science «in nobis non semper vel non quoad omnia statum vel perfectionem scientiæ assequatur»

In the above passages Suárez no longer entrusts the task of guaranteeing the unity of metaphysics to the scheme “subject – properties – principles”, but to a scheme based on the notion of “knowable object”. The latter scheme is frequently placed alongside the former. In the second *disputatio*, after having said that the first part of the *Disputationes metaphysicæ* will deal with the properties and causes of the object, or subject, of metaphysics, he adds that he will consider in the second part, to the extent possible for natural reason, all those things that in their being leave matter aside<sup>54</sup>. In the twelfth *disputatio*, before using the criterion “subject – properties – principles”, he writes that the *ratio* of cause is within the competence of the metaphysicist because it leaves matter aside<sup>55</sup>. In the twenty-eighth *disputatio* he justifies the study of non-transcendental *rationes* on the basis of formal object and abstraction proper to metaphysics<sup>56</sup>. Therefore, having posited these two schemes, these two criteria that he uses to express and establish the specificity of metaphysics, one may wonder whether he restricts himself to setting them side by side, whether he thinks that they can be superimposed and whether he gives any reason for such an eventuality.

The structure of his foreword to the twelfth *disputatio* offers a possible answer. Here the Spanish Jesuit does not restrict himself to placing the thesis according to which the *ratio* of “cause” is within the competence of metaphysics because it leaves matter aside together with the thesis according to which this *ratio* is within the competence of metaphysics since cause is a property or principle of being. On the contrary, he develops the second consideration in order to justify the first. The result is that both the subject of metaphysics and its properties and principles are comprehended within the object of this science. The question then moves, therefore, onto the level of the relationship between the subject of metaphysics and the object of such a science. As we have seen, he says in the first *disputatio* that the being that is the object of metaphysics is not being taken as a *ratio* distinct from every other; it is being as including some inferiors, i.e. all and only those that are abstracted from matter according to being and are knowable by natural human reason. On the contrary, in the second *disputatio*, which initiates the treatment of transcendental being, what is dealt with is being taken as a *ratio* distinct from every other<sup>57</sup>. Thus the object of meta-

(SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 3, n. 1) and that in a brief passage he also seems to attribute the distinction between physics, mathematics and metaphysics to the limitations of the human mind (cfr. SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 2, n. 11). Therefore, GRACIA, *Suárez's cit.*, 293, is wrong to write *simpliciter* that in Suarezian conception «Metaphysics is [...] the perfect and a priori science of being qua real being».

<sup>54</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 2 [prologus].

<sup>55</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 12 [prologus].

<sup>56</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 28 [prologus].

<sup>57</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 2, s. 2, n. 15. Cfr. also SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 2, s. 2, n. 21.

physics does not seem to be identical with transcendental being. Furthermore, in the third section of the first *disputatio* Suárez divides the object of metaphysics into being abstracted *secundum esse* by abstraction *necessaria* in the full sense of the term (this is the case of God), being abstracted by abstraction *necessaria* but such as to leave room for composition (this is the case of created spiritual beings) and being abstracted by abstraction *permissiva* (and this is the case of common *rationes*)<sup>58</sup>. Certainly he denies that such a division is sufficient to distinguish between sciences which differ by species, but he does not reject its admissibility. Now, in the foreword to the twenty-eighth *disputatio* Suárez divides transcendental being into finite being and infinite being; therefore, once again the object of metaphysics does not seem to be identical with transcendental being. Nevertheless, in the same place here recalled he writes explicitly that the being divided into finite and infinite is the being he dealt with in the first and the second *disputatio* and is the adequate object in metaphysics<sup>59</sup>. Looking at these statements, one may wonder whether the *ens ut sic* (that is to say being taken simply in its being *ens*) spoken about in the first section of the first *disputatio*, the *obiectum scibile* spoken about in the second section and the being spoken about in the second *disputatio* are or are not equivalent, or can at least be superimposed.

The solution to this problem constitutes the third step in Suárez's strategy. He uses an instrument of logic and one observation. The instrument is the notion of *ratio sub qua*. In his theological work, he explains that the formal object of a power or of a *habitus* (and thus also of a science) is distinguished into formal object *in esse rei*, or *obiectum quod*, or terminative, and formal object *in esse cognoscibilis*, or *obiectum quo*. The former, to some extent, belongs to the material object of science or *habitus*; the second is presented as a formal motive *ratio*, «quæ solet etiam vocari ratio sub qua»<sup>60</sup>. In the case of theoretical sciences and their adequate objects, the *quod* object is what is abstracted from matter to a certain degree; the *quo* object is the degree of abstraction that leads to the knowledge of a certain *ratio*, which generates such a *ratio* as a knowable object. Metaphysics attains the knowledge of a certain *ratio*, i.e. it renders this *ratio* knowable, by carrying out a complete abstraction from matter. *Ratio sub qua* and object (i.e. *quod* object) are biunivocally correlated.

This, on the one hand, justifies the fact that metaphysics studies all and only the *rationes* abstracted from matter *secundum rationem et secundum esse*<sup>61</sup>. On

<sup>58</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 3, nn. 2, 8 and 11.

<sup>59</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 28 [prologus].

<sup>60</sup> F. SUÁREZ, *In Summam theologiae d. Thomæ*, In secundam secundæ, De fide – de spe – de charitate, tr. 1, disp. 3 [prologus].



the other hand, this in turn calls for a foundation on the part of the object. What legitimates, on the part of the object, the act of considering all and only the *rationes* abstracted from matter *secundum esse*? Suárez's reply lies in the fact that transcendental being and spiritual beings are linked together in a real connection (*connexio*), which can be untied only by carrying out a distinction purely by reason (*secundum diversos conceptus rationis*)<sup>62</sup>. Spiritual beings comprehend transcendental *rationes* and, for this very reason, such *rationes* possess a certain nature; the knowledge of spiritual beings calls for the study of transcendentals and, vice versa, the full understanding of the nature of transcendentals requires the knowledge of spiritual beings. Beings abstracted from matter *secundum rationem et secundum esse*, whether they be transcendental *rationes* or spiritual beings, can be studied only within a single science. This is why the different types of abstraction *secundum esse* from matter are not enough in themselves to give rise to specifically distinct sciences; this is also why the *ratio formalis sub qua* of the object of such a science must be the abstraction from matter *secundum rationem et secundum esse*<sup>63</sup>.

So, the welding together of transcendental being, taken to mean a *ratio* distinct from every other one and as the subject of properties and principles, and the object of metaphysics, taken to mean what is abstracted from matter *secundum rationem et secundum esse*, occurs precisely thanks to the fact that real being is effectively abstracted from matter with regard to being. This fact is what permits knowledge to carry out "legitimately" such an abstraction, that is to perform an abstraction founded in the reality of things<sup>64</sup>. Hence the degree of abstraction on the basis of which metaphysics works is founded in real being; and this is why its subject, or adequate object, is real being.

In conclusion, in my opinion Suárez theorizes the occurrence of at least three different conceptual contents of "being": being taken as *ratio* distinct from every other; being taken as *ratio* that potentially includes all its inferiors; being taken as *ratio* that includes some, but not all, of its inferiors<sup>65</sup>. None of these three is

<sup>61</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 2, n. 13.

<sup>62</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 2, n. 11.

<sup>63</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 3, n. 9. Cfr. also *Id.*, n. 10.

<sup>64</sup> In *DM*, disp. 2, s. 2, nn. 30-31 Suárez continues thus: in the case that there should be no spiritual beings, there would not be a sufficient real foundation for abstracting, from the being dealt with in physics and from the being dealt with in mathematics, a being common to the two types of being, in the same way as there is no sufficient foundation for abstracting from *rationes* of continuous quantity and discrete quantity a *ratio* of quantity in general that is such as to make it an object knowable separately from the other two.

<sup>65</sup> I write "at least three" because I have some doubt about the collocation in this scheme of what the author writes in *DM*, disp. 2, s. 2, n. 21. In this paragraph he intends to show that in the concept of being taken as distinct from the inferiors «non includi actu modos intrinsecos substantiæ, vel aliorum membro-

given as such in reality; on the contrary, all three are grasped as such thanks to the activity of the mind. However, the contribution that the mind offers to their “expression” (to their manifestation before the mind itself) seems different and increasing. Now, the Spanish Jesuit on the one hand identifies the first and the third of these conceptual contents respectively with the subject and the object of metaphysics; on the other, he identifies the subject and the object of such a science. Nevertheless, only the third type of being seems to be, strictly speaking, the adequate object of metaphysics. It manifests itself for what it is thanks to the fact that the mind expresses in the form of a knowable object the real tie it finds between the being common to material beings and spiritual beings, the other transcendental *rationes*, the *rationes* common to finite spiritual beings and to material beings, and the *rationes* proper to purely spiritual beings.

### III. b. The results of Suárez’s doctrine

Thanks to the three steps seen, Suárez fully welds together the science of common *rationes* and the science of spiritual *rationes*, doing so in perfect correspondence with the object of such a science, which shows itself to be really “adequate” to it: it is indeed a recapitulation of all and only the contents set out by this science. This is not to imply that the first *disputatio* in the *Disputationes metaphysicæ* simply sums up and describes the matter. Once the criterion of abstraction *secundum rationem et secundum esse* has been acquired and established, Suárez employs it as the foundation for his argumentations *propter quid*, those which demonstrate that notions of substance, accident, cause, and, in general, all the *rationes* common to material beings and spiritual beings as well as the *rationes* proper to the latter, fall within the object of metaphysics. It is hence true that it is not Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* that Suárez focuses on, but metaphysics itself as a discipline, and that he proceeds systematically; yet it is also true that the epistemological structure of metaphysics is traced by a circular mental route

rum quæ dividunt ens». To this end he specifies: «hic conceptus objectivus [entis] consideratur ut præcisus, et adæquatus conceptui formali entis, ut sic, et non secundum totam realitatem, quam in re habet in omnibus inferioribus suis; hoc enim modo conceptus entis nec præcisus esse potest, neque unus, cum includat actu totum id quod ad distinctionem omnium generum, et conceptuum necessarium est; nec proprie ac vere dici potest conceptus entis ut sic, sed sunt potius plures conceptus omnium entium secundum totas realitates eorum, a quibus conceptus præcisus entis re ipsa non distinguitur». I therefore wonder whether this notion of “being” is to be added to the previous ones or whether it is to be identified with the latter. I put forward the hypothesis that in Suárez’s work four *rationes* of real being can be traced: *a*) being taken as distinct from the inferiors; *b*) being taken as expressing the potential inclusion of inferiors in it; *c*) being taken as expressing the potential inclusion of some inferiors in it; *d*) being taken, improperly, as expressing the perfections of all the inferiors.

in which, on the one hand, what follows is presupposed, and, on the other, is clarified in its own ground<sup>66</sup>.

It must, however, also be said that the Spanish Jesuit combines not only science of common *rationes* and science of spiritual *rationes*. In taking his place in a tradition that goes back at least to the end of the thirteenth century, he combines three notions that in Thomas Aquinas were separate. As used by Aquinas, *subiectum*, what a science is concerned with and *obiectum* are not congruent. The *subiectum* is what «cuius causas et passiones quærimus»<sup>67</sup>. What a science is concerned with (*tractat; considerat; determinat*) also includes the principles and properties of the subject. The *obiectum* is that whose formal *ratio* is owned by everything that is considered by a certain science<sup>68</sup>. In the case of metaphysics, the subject of this science is common created being<sup>69</sup>; its object is a possible object of speculative knowledge (*speculabile*) abstracted from matter in its very being<sup>70</sup>. Later authors try to eliminate such a discrepancy, yet none of them carry out this operation without floundering. Suárez believes that he can solve the problem by seeing in real being, that common to material and spiritual beings, what is both the subject and the object of metaphysics. Nonetheless, one might wonder if his reply affords a full explanation. It is true that real being is abstracted from matter *secundum esse*; however, the extramental basis of real being appears to be different from the extramental basis of the object of metaphysics. In the case of transcendental being, this basis consists in englobing all things in being; in other words, it consists in what all things have in common, i.e. all the

<sup>66</sup> For a brief indication of a “circularity” of the type *quia – propter quid* in physics, cfr. SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 2, n. 9. GNEMMI, *Il fondamento* cit., 35, deplors the presence in this *disputatio* of notions that suppose acquisitions that are only successive. I do not discuss the theoretical theses of this author; I do, however, observe that from an historical point of view he makes a mistake in interpretation. The *disputatio De natura primæ philosophiæ* does not merely consist in a statement about what the author intends to enquire into. It consists above all in setting out the unity of that science that the following *disputationes* explain and thereby demonstrate. The first *disputatio* is hence not, as Gnemmi seems to intend it, a sort of absolute starting point for metaphysics. I also have to add that I do not see in the Suarezian *Disputationes* any absolute starting point.

<sup>67</sup> THOMAS DE AQUINO, *In Metaph.*, Prol.

<sup>68</sup> Cfr. THOMAS DE AQUINO, *S. th.*, I, q. 1, a. 3, c.

<sup>69</sup> THOMAS DE AQUINO, *In Metaph.*, Prol.; ID., *In Boeth. De Trin.*, q. 5, a. 4, c.; ID., *In De div. nom.*, cap. 5, l. 2.

<sup>70</sup> THOMAS DE AQUINO, *In Boeth. De Trin.*, q. 5, a. 1, c.; ID., *In Met.*, Prol. This object therefore includes both created being and God, because «secundum esse et rationem separari dicuntur non solum illa quæ nunquam in materia esse possunt, sicut Deus et intellectuales substantiæ, sed etiam illa quæ possunt sine materia esse, sicut ens commune. Hoc tamen non contingeret, si a materia secundum esse dependerent» (*Ib.*). It has also been written that «Dire que l’objet de la métaphysique “comprend” Dieu, fût-ce à titre d’*objectum præcipuum*, c’est [...] s’opposer diamétralement à la lettre et à l’esprit de tout l’enseignement de Thomas d’Aquin» (COURTINE, *Suárez* cit., 208). I wonder, together with Pedro Hurtado de Mendoza, *quibus oculis aliqui legant divum Thomam*.

spiritual and material, finite and infinite *rationes*<sup>71</sup>. In the case of being as the object of metaphysics, its extramental basis consists in the connection between transcendental *rationes* and spiritual beings<sup>72</sup>. What puzzles in Suárez's doctrine is hence not the unity of "ontology" and "rational theology"; it is the identity he places between transcendental being and the object of metaphysics. Therefore, the identity he places between the subject and the object of metaphysics, and the consequent interchangeability of the schemes "subject – properties – principles" and "object – *rationes* that are part of such an object", still remain problematic.

#### IV. Complementary comments

##### IV. a. Metaphysics shows that its object occurs

Three objections could be made to this presentation of Suarezian *mens*. The first argument might be: if the comprehension of being (meaning by this term both transcendental being and the *ratio* of being abstracted *secundum esse*) were to depend on the knowledge of spiritual beings, Suárez should admit that metaphysics does not postulate the existence of its own subject; yet this contradicts what Aristotle states about the relationship between a science and its "subject genus" in his *Posterior Analytics*; it is hence implausible that Suárez should uphold this dependence.

The reply to this objection is that Suárez does indeed admit that metaphysics does not merely presuppose the existence of its own subject, or that, at least, he writes that the nature of being must be the object of study. The conclusion is that such a *ratio* is not purely and simply a postulate of metaphysics.

«[...] hanc scientiam in hoc superare reliquas, quod ipsa non solum supponit suum obiectum esse, sed etiam, si necesse sit, illud esse ostendit, propriis principiis utens, per se loquendo; nam per accidens interdum utitur alienis et extraneis propter excellentiam sui obiecti, et defectum nostri intellectus, qui non potest illud perfecte attingere, ut in se est, sed ex inferioribus rebus. Cum autem dicitur scientiam supponere suum obiectum esse, intelligitur per se loquendo, ut notavit Cajetanus, prima parte, q. 2, art. 3; per accidens vero non inconvenit scientiam aliquam demonstrare quoad nos obiectum suum. Quod si illa scientia suprema sit, non indiget ope alterius, sed in vi sua id præstare potest, et hujusmodi est metaphysica»<sup>73</sup>.

<sup>71</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 2, s. 2, n. 14.

<sup>72</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 2, n. 22.

<sup>73</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 4, n. 14.

To state that our intellect cannot, due to its weakness, grasp the object of metaphysics *ut in se est*, so that it must grasp it *ex inferioribus rebus*, shows that the object in question is not exhausted in a conceptual content which is fully given from the outset of metaphysical research. This is exactly why, therefore, Suárez develops the *disputationes* that follow, from the second (*De ratione essentiali seu conceptu entis*) onwards.

«In præsentē ergo disputatione explicanda nobis est quæstio, quid sit ens in quantum ens; nam, quod ens sit, ita per se notum est, ut nulla declaratione indigeat. Post quæstionem autem, an est, quæstio quid res sit, est prima omnium, quam in initio cujuscunque scientiæ de subjecto ejus præsupponi, aut declarare, necesse est. Hæc autem scientia, cum sit omnium naturalium prima atque suprema, non potest ab alia sumere vel probatam vel declaratam subjecti sui rationem et quidditatem, et ideo ipsam statim in initio tradere et declarare oportet»<sup>74</sup>.

It is arduous to focus more clearly and explicitly on the existence of a progress in the comprehension of such a *ratio*, and this progress is tied, at least partly, to the comprehension of the existence of spiritual substances.

#### IV. b. The notion of being is not the effect of a simple generalization

A second objection might be based on the page where Suárez distinguishes physics, mathematics and metaphysics on the grounds of their degree of abstraction. If what distinguishes them is purely an act of formal abstraction, then the *ratio* of real being, correlated to the degree of abstraction proper to metaphysics, is generated by the mind as the result of a simple process of generalization; that *ratio* does not, therefore, presuppose the existence of spiritual beings. To use terms closer to contemporary theoretics: the notion of being is what expresses the intelligibility of intelligible things; thus any discourse concerning the existence of spiritual beings depends on a prior science of being qua being, whereas the latter in no way depends on any reflection on spiritual substances<sup>75</sup>.

The first reply to this is that, first of all, this objection presupposes that transcendental being and the object of metaphysics are identical; well, this is somewhat dubious. Nevertheless, even if such an identity were admitted, it should be pointed out that Suárez does not present the *ratio* of real being as the effect of a generalization, performed by the mind, of simply any conceptual content. In the passage referred to, he writes:

<sup>74</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 2, [prologus].

<sup>75</sup> Cfr. for example, COUJOU, *Introduction* cit., \*7.

«Metaphysica vero dicitur abstrahere a materia sensibili et intelligibili, et non solum secundum rationem, sed etiam secundum esse, quia rationes entis, quas considerat, in re ipsa inveniuntur sine materia»<sup>76</sup>.

Yet we already know that, according to Suárez, we can only state that such «rationes [...] in re ipsa inveniuntur sine materia» if the existence of immaterial substances is presupposed. Furthermore, in the place where he deals thematically with the formation of the concept of real being, he makes no reference to any operation of “generalization”. On the contrary, he appeals to the fundamental *convenientia* that the mind notices between substance and accident, and between the creator and the creature<sup>77</sup>; this requires that it is “already” known that all these single beings are real beings. In short, as has already been explained, in Suárez’s thought the enquiry into spiritual beings determines the meaning of the very notion of real being.

#### IV. c. Metaphysics is not purely a science of transcendentals

A third objection might read as follows: even if one concedes that metaphysics deals with less common *rationes* than transcendental ones, or even with *rationes* proper to only spiritual beings, what it does find about these *rationes* is always and only constituted by transcendentals. Suárez himself admits that

«rationes universales, quas metaphysica considerat, transcendentales sunt»<sup>78</sup>;

and that what metaphysics says about infinite being and immaterial finite substances is always and only constituted by notions drawn from finite beings and common to both them and to infinite being<sup>79</sup>. As has already been observed, on this basis Honnefelder deduces that the fact that metaphysics deals fully with immaterial being is, in Suárez’s mind, nothing but «die offensichtliche Konsequenz des Umstandes, daß der Metaphysik die Erkenntnis des immateriellen Seienden nicht anders als im Horizont *zuvor* erkannter transzendentaler Attribute erschlossen ist»<sup>80</sup>. Gracia came to the same conclusion<sup>81</sup>, and Olivier Boulnois comments thus on the last of the above quotations: «La théologie na-

<sup>76</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 2, n. 13.

<sup>77</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 2, s. 2, n. 14.

<sup>78</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 2, n. 27.

<sup>79</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 1, n. 11; SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 2, n. 16; SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 5, n. 15.

<sup>80</sup> HONNEFELDER, “*Scientia transcendens*” cit., 212. His italics.

<sup>81</sup> GRACIA, *Suárez’s* cit., 293.

turelle est donc incluse dans le moment transcendantal comme une partie postérieure à celui-ci»<sup>82</sup>. In other words: everything that metaphysics says about everything it deals with is constituted always and only by notions common to every being; thus, it is clear that it considers spiritual beings and material beings in the same way. The asymmetry between the study of spiritual beings and the study of material beings is hence merely apparent: it consists in the sole fact that metaphysics exhausts what natural reason may know about spiritual substances, while it does not exhaust what natural reason may know about material beings. The outcome is that this science is, as presented by Suárez, nothing but ontology.

A reply to this objection might be the following. Taken *sicut sonat*, and to the extent in which it is different from the previous objection, it is based on a presupposition: the metaphysical knowledge both of general but not transcendental *rationes* and of spiritual beings consists exclusively in finding in them transcendental *rationes*. It follows from this that such a discipline is exhausted in the study of transcendental *rationes* and in finding them in inferior *rationes*. Yet Suárez does not agree with such a presupposition<sup>83</sup>. On the one hand, as we already have seen, in his opinion the very notion of being is not a *ratio* fully grasped by the mind; therefore, one cannot say *simpliciter* that the knowledge of transcendentals is presupposed to the knowledge of every other *ratio*. On the other hand, the Spanish scholar holds that the scientific knowledge of a certain *ratio* consists in grasping that particular *ratio* and its causes and, thanks to this, grasping both what that *ratio* has in common with something else and what distinguishes that *ratio* from the latter:

«hoc est munus scientiæ, demonstrare, scilicet, proprietates de subjecto suo, quas debet per causas demonstrare, ut sit perfecta scientia, ut constat ex I Poster»<sup>84</sup>.

<sup>82</sup> BOULNOIS, *Etre cit.*, 490.

<sup>83</sup> H. PÉREZ SAN MARTÍN, *Determinación del objeto de estudio de la metafísica, sus límites y su correlato con el nombre de esta ciencia según el pensamiento del p. Francisco Suárez*, «Cuadernos salmantinos de filosofía», 26 (1999), 5-39, denies that Suarezian metaphysics is a pure ontology on the basis of this argument: «la metafísica elaborada por el Doctor Eximio, no puede quedar constreñida a ser una pura ontología, esto es limitar el campo de acción al estudio exclusivo del ente en cuanto ente, y agotar en esa temática su objeto; si no fuera así tal disciplina no consideraría las supremas o altísimas causas, y por ende, no tendría derecho a recibir el nombre de *sabiduría*» (26, his italics). I hold this consideration to be correct, but not sufficient, because it could be stated that, in the case of highly elevated causes of things, metaphysics knows no *rationes* other than transcendental ones.

<sup>84</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 1, n. 27. Strictly speaking, this statement constitutes the major premise of an objection that Suárez raises against his own doctrine; nevertheless, there is reason to believe that he shares it, since in his reply to this objection he contests only the minor premise of it. Cfr. also SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 5, nn. 38-42, where Suárez writes in greater detail about the various types of demonstration metaphysics is capable of.

Here it can be noticed that, according to Suárez, the *ratio* whose properties are demonstrated in metaphysics is not only transcendental being but anything that falls within the realm of its object; further, it is to be noticed that the properties demonstrated about something in this science are not just *rationes* coextensive with being, but also less common *rationes*, or even those specific to a certain thing. It is true that he writes that

«plures proprietates, quas demonstrat hæc scientia, immediate non conveniunt, nisi enti in quantum ens, et in eis explicandis magna ex parte versatur»<sup>85</sup>.

However, in the following lines, in order to prove that metaphysics makes use of those principles thanks to which it is enabled to develop demonstrations, he uses examples relative to divine properties:

«principia incomplexa duplici modo intelligi possunt: primo, quod sint veræ causæ secundum rem aliquo modo distinctæ ab effectibus, vel proprietatibus, quæ per illas demonstrantur; et hujusmodi principia vel causæ non sunt simpliciter necessariae ad rationem objecti, quia necessariae non sunt ad veras demonstrationes conficiendas, ut constat ex 1 Posteriorum. Deum enim est objectum scibile, et de eo demonstrantur attributa non solum a posteriori, et ab effectibus, sed etiam a priori, unum ex alio colligendo, ut immortalitatem ex immaterialitate, et esse agens liberum, quia intelligens est. Alio modo dicitur principium seu causa, id quod est ratio alterius, secundum quod objective concipiuntur et distinguuntur; et hoc genus principii sufficit ut sit medium demonstrationis; nam sufficit ad reddendam veluti rationem formalem, ob quam talis proprietas rei convenit. Quamvis ergo demus, ens, in quantum ens, non habere causas proprie et in rigore sumptas priori modo, habet tamen rationem aliquam suarum proprietatum; et hoc modo etiam in Deo possunt hujusmodi rationes reperiri, nam ex Dei perfectione infinita reddimus causam, cur unus tantum sit, et sic de aliis»<sup>86</sup>.

This means, as far as general but not transcendental *rationes* are concerned, that metaphysics determines not only what they are from a very general, transcendental, point of view but also what they are in their *quidditas*. Hence metaphysics does not restrict itself to describing such non-transcendental *rationes* by making use exclusively of transcendental *rationes*; on the contrary, it determines them thematically by what is proper to them.

As far as spiritual beings are concerned, even if one were to concede that concerning God metaphysics only speaks of the *rationes* he has in common with some types of finite being, it is not true that it speaks only of the *rationes* that he has in common with every type of being: for example, it can establish that he is

<sup>85</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 1, n. 28.

<sup>86</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 1, n. 29.



spirit, or that he is endowed with intelligence and will. It is equally not true, as far as finite spiritual beings are concerned, that metaphysics only speaks about the *rationes* they have in common with every type of being: it may also grasp the *rationes* they have in common with merely material finite beings. As a matter of fact, both as far as God and as far as finite spiritual beings are concerned, metaphysics determines not only what they have in common with finite material beings but also what distinguishes them, albeit imperfectly. Metaphysics is therefore not restricted purely and simply to considering *rationes* common to every type of being or common only to finite being; on the contrary, in the case of the different spiritual beings it somehow determines thematically what is proper to them. So, as we have seen, in the case of material beings this happens only obliquely and only to the degree in which such a determination is necessary in order to understand the nature of spiritual beings. Should one also wish to credit Suárez with the doctrine of disjunctive transcendentals<sup>87</sup>, it must be borne in mind that, as for Scotus, the sense of the “other” member of the disjunction is not originally given and consists neither in its agreeing with the member known to us nor in a pure negation of the latter<sup>88</sup>. As Suárez himself says:

«licet non concipiamus Deum distincte et per propriam repræsentationem ejus, nihilominus vere concipimus ipsum conceptu directe et immediate repræsentante ipsum, vel perfectionem aliquam, ut propriam ejus. Hic tamen conceptus, si sit positivus et absolutus, est valde confusus, non prout confusum dicitur de universali seu communi, quod vocant totum potentiale, sed prout opponitur conceptui proprie et clare repræsentanti rem prout est in se. Si vero in illo conceptu includatur negatio, quamvis illa non pertineat ad quidditatem Dei, sub illa tamen intelligimus fundamentum seu radicem ejus, quæ est propria quidditas Dei, et non ratio aliqua communis, vel analogæ»<sup>89</sup>.

<sup>87</sup> Suárez believes that the division of being into finite and infinite is sufficient, that is it exhausts the field of real being. Yet he also holds that Scotus and his followers divide being first into quantifiable being and non-quantifiable being, and only successively the first member of this division into finite and infinite; but he rejects this scheme: cfr. SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 28, s. 2, nn. 4-7.

<sup>88</sup> DARGE, *Suárez' cit.*, 387-405, denies that Suárez's metaphysics can be called *scientia transcendens* on the basis of the following consideration: for Scotus, who coins the expression *scientia transcendens*, transcendental is that which is not enclosed in a genus; for Suárez transcendental is that which is intrinsically and essentially included in every being for everything the latter is; therefore, for the latter scholar metaphysics cannot be *scientia transcendens*. I believe the observation to be correct, yet it does not seem sufficient to me to maintain that Suarezian metaphysics cannot be understood as a science of transcendentals. One should also observe along with Aza Goudriaan that both for Scotus and for Suárez it belongs to the same science to study «sowohl die gemeinsamen, mit ihrem Subjekt konvertiblen Attribute, als auch die disjunktiven Attributen zu beweisen, und zwar nicht nur insofern diese mit dem Subjekt konvertibel sind, sondern auch insofern sie besonders sind». Cfr. GOUDRIAAN, *Philosophische cit.*, 20.

<sup>89</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 30, s. 12, n. 11.

To conclude, it seems that the following could be said about the four texts cited in support of the objection. As for the first, it must be pointed out that in this Suárez does not maintain that all the *rationes* considered by metaphysics are transcendentals; he maintains (or rather, admits) that there are “metaphysical predicates” that pertain to material substance also in its being material<sup>90</sup>. As for the other three, one can note that in them the Spaniard does not maintain that, for spiritual beings, metaphysics can say only what they share with finite material beings. He sustains, more subtly, that metaphysics may acquire knowledge of immaterial substances only thanks to notions common to them and to things directly known to us. In particular, he writes in these texts that the *rationes sub quibus*, or *secundum quas*, we grasp God are common to God and to creatures; yet he does not write that the *rationes quas* we grasp as far as God is concerned are common to God and to creatures. It seems to me that the above-quoted text from the thirtieth *disputatio* illustrates well the difference that exists, in Suárez’s opinion, between making use, in order to know God, only of notions taken from creatures, and knowing, as far as God is concerned, only notions taken from creatures.

## V. Conclusion: a dismissal of the notion of ontology

It would appear that Suárez’s texts express the following three theses. *a)* The *ratio* of being does not constitute the absolute starting point of Suárez’s metaphysics. On the contrary, its “meaning”, what it is, depends on the presupposition of the reality of spiritual substances. Vice versa, the reality of spiritual substances is based precisely on the fact that real being is included in them, and their knowability requires the study of transcendental being and of the other all-embracing *rationes*. The result is that Suarezian metaphysics is formed by the connection between transcendental being and first being, and that it is “metaphysics” above all because it deals with divine being. *b)* As far as common but not transcendental *rationes* and spiritual substances are concerned, human metaphysics does not restrict itself to exclusively expressing about them properties common to every type of being which have become known without the study of such *rationes* and such substances. On the contrary, it also deals with, and determines, albeit imperfectly, the properties that belong exclusively to them. Suarezian metaphysics is, therefore, not exhausted by the determination

<sup>90</sup> SUÁREZ, *DM*, disp. 1, s. 2, n. 27. Moreover, I doubt that Suárez here is using the notion of “transcendental” in a strict sense, since, as an example of what has been said, he speaks of the case of the *ratio* of substance.

of the nature of common but not transcendental *rationes*, and of the *rationes* of spiritual beings, by means of transcendental *rationes* known without considering them. c) Suárez's metaphysics does not study every inferior of being. On the contrary, it deals only with some *rationes*. Moreover, it deals asymmetrically with material beings and with spiritual beings. Hence, the being taken as object of metaphysics is not identical to transcendental being both understood as perfectly distinct from inferiors and understood as including all its inferiors.

As can be seen, none of the notions of ontology and ontotheology examined at the beginning of paper describe Suarezian metaphysics correctly. There is, however, perhaps just one: that of ontotheology as the effectively unitary treatment of universal being and of first being on the basis of the latter. There is some doubt about this because this acceptance of the term "ontotheology" has been used in the past to describe a type of metaphysics that is constituted by the connection between common created being and first being. Now, Suárez's metaphysics is not constituted by the connection between common created being and the creator; it is constituted by the connection between transcendental being and first being (or, more generally, by the connection between transcendental being and spiritual being). If we call a type of metaphysics of the first type "ontotheology", what then should we call Suárez's metaphysics? Moreover, his is not an isolated case: from Scotus on, authors mainly concentrated not on common created being but on being taken as a *ratio* comprising both creature and the creator.

At this point, two possibilities present themselves. One can attempt, with Uscatescu Barrón, to drop the massive theoretical aspects of these notions and, once one is rid of the manipulation of the actual historical development they have been used for, utilize them as historical categories. Otherwise one can take up a different line. If I had to suggest an expression with the aim of qualifying Suarezian metaphysics, I would choose that of "impure ontology", hereby attempting to express what I have observed as regards the being metaphysics deals with, being somehow distinct from transcendental being, based on the real connection between transcendental being and spiritual beings, such as to include potentially some but not all inferiors of real being, and asymmetric in its relationship to different types of beings. In fact, this is merely an hypothesis for future study. What is most important is that analyses hitherto carried out show that to present Suárez's *Disputationes* in terms of a *refondation de la métaphysique comme ontologie*<sup>91</sup> is a mistake. They show that what is "impure" is not just Suarezian on-

<sup>91</sup> I here refer to the previously mentioned title with which Coujou presents his own translation of Suárez's *Index locupletissimus in metaphysicam Aristotelis*.

tology; it is (in this case taking the term in the sense of “illicit”) the application of the very terms of “ontology” and “ontotheology” to Suárez’s metaphysics. Perhaps then, for this very reason, it is better not to rely on them if one should attempt to express the nature of it; it is better to speak simply of “metaphysics”, or to attempt new courses of research and find new wording.