Suárez on the Will as a Two-Way Power

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Abstract

In his theory of action, Suárez defends a voluntarist position. He claims that we are free agents because our will is a two-way power: it can always accept or reject the action-guiding judgement that is presented by the intellect. But why is the will not obliged to accept this judgement? The paper discusses this question by relating Suárez's theory of the will to his theory of causation. It first examines his arguments against intellectual determinism, paying particular attention to his claim that the intellect is not an efficient cause: it cannot act upon the will and force it to accept a judgement. The paper then analyses Suárez's account of the relevant cause by focusing on the goal of an action. The goal acts as a final cause, and if the goal is not perfectly good, it does not fully attract the will; consequently, the will can reject it. The paper spells out the functioning of the final cause as a form of normative attraction and argues that the issue of normativity is at the centre of Suárez's theory of the will: we are free because our will can resist normative attraction.

1. Introduction: A Mysterious Will?

Suppose you are approached by a beggar who is asking you for money. You pause for a moment, think about what you should do, and realise that you can easily spare a few bucks. This leads you to the conclusion that you should give him some money. Will you then give him money? Or will you at least be determined to do so? It seems so, for you cannot escape your own conclusion, at least not as long as you behave as a rational agent: you must do what your action-guiding judgement tells you to do. Acting against your own judgement would amount to acting irrationally.

This verdict is clearly an expression of intellectual determinism, for it takes rational agents to be fully determined by their own intellectual judgements. But does intellectual determinism do justice to all the forms of action we see in daily life? A number of scholastic philosophers had serious doubts. They were puzzled not only by

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cases in which strong passions make us act against our own judgements (usually discussed as cases of *incontinentia*) (see Saarinen, 1994; Müller, 2009), but also by more fundamental cases in which we don't act in accordance with our own judgements without being distracted or misguided by any passions. In these cases, they claimed, our will simply rejects the judgement that is made by the intellect. On their view, this is possible because the will is a free power that cannot be determined in its activity, not even by the best possible judgement that is presented and endorsed by the intellect.

The late scholastic philosopher Francisco Suárez, who shaped the debate on free will far into the modern period, is a clear proponent of this view.[1] He unmistakably holds:

> [T]he judgement of the intellect moves the will only by means of the object which it proposes. But the proposed object does not always impose a necessity on the will or determine it to one activity; this is not required for the will to be able to tend toward the object. Therefore, no such determination is necessary on the part of the judgement – this is not even possible. (*DM* 19.6.7)[2]

The crucial point is that the intellect proposes an object by making a judgement about it, yet it does not force the will to follow that judgement. Thus, when encountering the beggar, your intellect makes a certain proposal, namely that you should give him money, but it does not impose any necessity on your will. As a free power, your will can refuse the judgement. This is possible without a new judgement that replaces the initial one or a strong passion that overcomes you so that you are no longer aware of your action-guiding judgement. In fact, your will can refuse the judgement while you are fully aware of it. This is possible, Suárez contends, because the will is not determined by any other power, not even by the intellect that presents a clear judgement as the result of a process of deliberation. In making this claim, he rejects intellectual determinism, defending

[1] He is of course not the first to defend this view. It can be traced back to Duns Scotus and other thirteenth-century authors; see Schierbaum & Müller (2024).

[2] References to Suárez's works apply to his *Disputationes Metaphysicae* (= *DM*) and his *De anima* (= *DA*). The first number indicates the disputation, the second the section (or question in *DA*), the third the paragraph. All translations from Latin are mine.

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instead a *voluntarist* position.[3] Quite obviously, he rejects not only external determinism by holding that the will is not determined by external factors (*e.g.*, material things, other agents, or God), but also internal determinism.[4] Inside the agent, there is no power – not even the intellect as a rational power – that can determine the will in its activity.

At first sight, this position looks promising because it makes it possible to locate the root of freedom: it is the will as a two-way power – a power that can always follow or not follow an action-guiding judgement – that makes free actions possible.[5] Consequently, the will can strive or not strive for the goal that is presented in the judgement. It is therefore with good reason that we praise or blame human beings for their actions. Since they have a will, they are not mere rational automata that inevitably do what their judgements tell them to do. They always have the option to refuse the judgement that is actually present and can therefore be held responsible if they follow it. This means, of course, that they clearly differ from non-rational animals which have nothing but one-way powers.

However, Suárez's voluntarism gives rise to a fundamental question: on what ground is it possible for the will to reject the action-guiding judgement? Suppose you have carefully evaluated the situation in which the beggar is asking you for money. And suppose you have the best possible reasons for judging that you should give him money; nothing speaks against it. On what ground can your will then refuse this judgement? Doesn't it act without any reason and hence without any rational ground if it does not follow it? Given this problem, it is not surprising that modern interpreters are puzzled about Suárez's position. Thus, Sydney Penner (2013, p. 30) remarks that

[3] For a concise discussion of this label, see Hoffmann (2014). Because of his rejection of determinism, Suárez is also called a libertarian; see Penner (2013, p. 2).

[4] He deals with external determinism, which will not be examined here, in *DM* 19.11-12. Note that not even divine providence determines human beings because it concerns their dispositions to act, not their actions (*DM* 19.12.11).

[5] In principle, the will can also stay neutral and neither accept nor reject the judgement. Suárez concedes this possibility but points out that a neutral reaction usually involves a negative act: the will cannot be neutral unless it actively stays away from the judgement. Technically speaking, the neutral reaction of not willing (*non velle*) involves a negative volition (*nolitio*); see *DM* 19.4.8.

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Suárez and other scholastic voluntarists 'leave something mysterious about free actions'. This remark is quite understandable because it is unclear why and how the will can act against the action-guiding judgement. A groundlessly acting will looks indeed like a mysterious will.

It is precisely this mystery that I want to solve by examining Suárez's account of the will as a non-determinable two-way power. To understand his account, it is important to distinguish two problems. The first could be called *the grounding problem*: is there any ground for the will to act against the judgement presented by the intellect, or does it act groundlessly?[6] The second problem could be called *the rationality problem*: if there is a ground, is it rational or not? These two problems need to be distinguished because it might be that there is a ground for the activity of the will, but not (or not always) a rational ground. In fact, it might be that the will is so radically free that it can act even on an irrational basis.

When dealing with these two problems, one should pay attention to the connection Suárez establishes between will and final causation – a connection that has been neglected by most commentators.[7] I will therefore proceed in three steps. First, I will sketch Suárez's main theses about the relationship between intellect and will and explain why he rejects internal determinism (Section 2). I will then examine his account of the will by analysing the different types of causation – in particular final causation – he takes to be necessary for an activity of the will (Section 3). Finally, I will discuss some objections to this account and argue that there are still some open questions; the mystery does not fully disappear (Section 4).

2. The Interplay between Intellect and Will

To understand why Suárez conceives of the will as a non-determinable power, it is important to see how he defines its function and its relation to the intellect. On his view, at least two conditions must be fulfilled for an activity of the will.

[6] To avoid misunderstandings, it should be pointed out that this problem differs from the grounding problem as it is discussed in contemporary metaphysics. The main problem here is not how the grounding relation differs from other kinds of dependency relations, but if there is a grounding relation at all.

[7] The only exceptions I am aware of are Schmid (2011, pp. 121–136), and Pink (2018). On final causation in general, see Penner (2015).

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First of all, the will cannot become active and strive for something unless some object is cognized as the goal of its activity. One could therefore speak about a *Cognition Condition*, which can be formulated as follows:

> *Cognition:* The will cannot strive for *x* unless *x* is cognized as its goal.

This is a fairly traditional condition that was taken for granted by most scholastic authors. Suárez presents it by saying that 'the will is, as it were, blind' (*DM* 19.5.25), and that it therefore depends on a power that provides a cognition of the goal. He hastens to add that there always needs to be an *intellectual* cognition, that is, a judgement about the goal to be pursued. Consequently, the will is always dependent on the intellect.

But why should there always be an intellectual cognition? Why shouldn't it suffice to have a sensory cognition that is provided by a sensory power? Suppose you see a piece of chocolate and thus have a sensory cognition of something delicious. Why shouldn't that be sufficient for your will to go for the chocolate? Suárez would answer this question by distinguishing two forms of striving.[8] There is first a *sensory* striving that immediately follows a sensory cognition. It is a basic desire that arises without any choice or decision. Thus, when you see the chocolate, you are immediately drawn to it and perhaps immediately try to get hold of it, without thinking whether or not you should really eat it. But if you behave like that, you do not really act.[9] You then merely exhibit bodily behaviour because every action in the strict sense presupposes a decision, and a decision is a judgement that results from a process of deliberation. What follows this judgement is a *rational* striving. An activity of the will is precisely this higher form of striving, the form that can be found in rational beings only. Thus, you may be drawn to the chocolate like other animals that are spontaneously drawn to the food they see. But as a rational being, you can think about what to do and decide that you should indeed eat the chocolate. If you then go for it, you have a rational desire that goes beyond a sensory one because it is

[8] He discusses them in detail in *De anima*, first analysing the sensory striving (*DA* 11) and then the rational one (*DA* 12).

[9] Technically speaking, you then perform an activity of a human being (*actio hominis*), but not a human action (*actio humana*). On this subtle distinction, which can be traced back to Thomas Aquinas, see his *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 1, art. 1.

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based on an intellectual cognition. In fact, it is based on an action-guiding judgement and therefore makes real action (as opposed to mere bodily behaviour) possible.

However, a descriptive judgement about the goal to be pursued is not sufficient for an activity of the will. The goal also needs to be present as something good and hence worth being pursued; only then can the will strive for it. This means that a second condition, the *Evaluation Condition*, needs to be fulfilled:

> *Evaluation:* The will cannot strive for *x* unless *x* is evaluated as something good.

This is also a fairly traditional condition that was accepted by many scholastic authors.[10] Suárez endorses it by saying that 'the object of the will is the good' (*DM* 19.5.16). On his view, the will cannot go for something bad. Or to be more precise, it cannot go for an object that is evaluated as something bad. To be sure, this does not mean that the object is in fact good; false or misleading evaluations are always possible. But it is necessary that the object be conceived as something good. Using modern terminology, one could say that the object has to be present under the guise of the good.

But why is the guise of the good necessary? Suárez seems to rule out the possibility of a will so depraved that it goes for something bad precisely because it is bad. But why? His rejection of this possibility is mostly motivated by his understanding of goodness. He takes it to be a real feature of an object – a feature that is given by its specific nature.[11] Every object, he assumes, is by its nature fitting or unfitting for other objects, including human beings. In fact, its goodness is nothing but its fittingness. Technically speaking, being good amounts to having the 'aspect of agreeability' (*ratio convenientiae*) with respect to some other thing (*DM* 10.1.12). It is only under this aspect that a thing can become the object of the will, because the will can strive only for what is in fact agreeable or at least conceived as agreeable. Hence, it is impossible for the will to strive for something

[10] It was, however, not unanimously accepted. Following Anselm of Canterbury, some authors claimed that the will has two dispositions, since it can strive either for what is advantageous or for what is just (see Brower, 2004, pp. 243–245). For Suárez, there is just one disposition. He takes the advantageous as well as the just to be forms of goodness.

[11] Strictly speaking, it is a transcendental feature, *i.e.*, a feature that transcends the categorical distinctions. It can be found in every category and hence in every type of entity. See *DM* 10.3.3-10 and a detailed discussion in Darge (2004, pp. 313–385).

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bad, for in that case it would go for something that is conceived as disagreeable and hence contrary to what ought to be attained. Even if the will seems to go for something bad, it does in fact strive for something that is (rightly or wrongly) considered to be agreeable.

Given the Cognition Condition and the Evaluation Condition, it is obvious that the will is not an autonomous power. It clearly depends on the intellect, for it cannot become active unless the intellect provides a judgement with the form '*x* should be pursued as something good'. But how is the dependency relation to be understood? At first sight, there seems to be a simple answer: it is a relation of efficient causation, for whenever the intellect judges that *x* should be pursued, it acts upon the will and makes it strive for *x*. This is why the will's activity is completely determined by the intellect's activity.

Anyone giving this answer subscribes to a strong intellectualist position that leaves no room for freedom in the will.[12] Suárez mentions it without naming any proponents (*DM* 19.5.12), but it can be traced back to authors like Siger of Brabant or Godfrey of Fontaines. These thirteenth-century philosophers did indeed conceive of the relation between intellect and will as a relation of efficient causation.[13] That is, they claimed that in presenting an action-guiding judgement, the intellect somehow pushes the will to come up with an act of striving. Siger of Brabant even defended the view that the will then *necessarily* produces such an act: if the intellect presents *x* as the appropriate goal of an action, the will must strive for *x*.[14]

It is exactly this position that Suárez considers to be mistaken. He adduces a number of arguments to refute it. Let me focus on two of them. The first argument directly addresses the problem of freedom and has the form of a *reductio ad absurdum* (*DM* 19.6.3).[15] If the will has no freedom, Suárez argues, there must be some freedom in the intellect. But the intellect has no freedom in its activity. Consequently, there is no freedom at all – an absurd conclusion that stands in opposition to our everyday observation that human beings

[12] Note that the strong intellectualist position takes the intellect to be the *total* cause of the will's activity. A more moderate position takes it to be a mere *partial* cause and thereby leaves some room for freedom. On different types of intellectualism, see Hoffmann (2021, pp. 31–57).

[13] See Putallaz (1995) for a detailed study and Williams (2018) for a concise survey.

[14] See *Quaestiones super librum de causis*, q. 25 (Brabant, 1972, p. 101) and a discussion in Perler (2024a).

[15] I confine myself to analysing the main point of this argument. For further discussion, see Penner (2013, pp. 18–26).

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can freely choose their actions. To avoid this conclusion, one must defend the view that there is freedom in the will: the will does *not* necessarily strive for the goal that is presented by the intellect.

The crucial premise in this argument is, of course, the claim that the intellect has no freedom in its activity. Why should that be the case? Suárez justifies this claim by saying that 'the intellect is by its nature determined to assent to what is true and to dissent from what is false' (*DM* 19.5.14). This means that the intellect has no freedom to reject or withhold assent to what is true. If it forms a proposition that is clearly true, it must assent to it and thereby produce a judgement. Let me illustrate this point with the chocolate example. Suppose you see the chocolate and are told that you can take it. And suppose you are quite hungry and realise that eating the chocolate is the best thing to do. Your intellect then immediately assents to the proposition that you should eat the chocolate. In fact, your intellect has no choice: it must assent to what is obviously true. In doing that, it *necessarily* produces the action-guiding judgement. This means, of course, that it has no freedom in its activity.

One might reply that this argument is convincing as long as we look at cases in which the intellect deals with propositions that are clearly or even evidently true. In these cases, the intellect is indeed fully determined because it is a truth-oriented power that must give its assent to what is true. But what about cases in which the propositions are not clearly true? Suppose it is not so clear to you that eating the chocolate is the best thing to do. After all, you could also look for healthier food or go on a diet. In that case, your intellect can come up with different propositions (*e.g.*, that you should eat the chocolate, that you should eat something else, that you should stop eating) and it is not so clear to which one it should give its assent. Doesn't this range of options show that the intellect is free to choose a proposition and therefore also free to choose an action-guiding judgement?

Suárez would disagree. In such a case, the intellect 'does not remain, as it were, by itself suspended and undetermined because it has an inner power and a control over its activity, but because the object is not applied in a way that is sufficient for the intellect to be led to it' (*DM* 19.5.15). This means that the intellect doesn't assent to one of the propositions because it has an inner power that enables it to withhold its assent. Rather, it gives no assent because the propositions are not clear enough. As soon as one of them becomes clear, the intellect inevitably and even necessarily assents to it. Thus, as soon as it becomes clear that you should eat healthier food than chocolate, your intellect assents to this proposition and discards the other ones – not because of a free choice but because

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this proposition somehow stands out as the true one. The intellect is like a judgement-forming machine that automatically produces an assent when a proposition turns out to be true.

This argument for freedom of the will is an argument *ex negativo*, for it shows that freedom cannot be rooted in the intellect, and it concludes from this negative result that freedom must have its root somewhere else. But Suárez also presents a positive argument for freedom of the will. This second argument tackles the problem of causation, which is lurking in the background of the whole debate about the relationship between intellect and will.

When talking about causation, the proponents of strong intellectualism take it for granted that there is a relation of efficient causation between the two rational powers. The intellect, they assume, somehow acts upon the will and makes it strive for the object that is presented in an action-guiding judgement. Suárez thinks that this way of conceiving of the relationship between the two rational powers relies upon a false metaphysical picture of the relationship among the powers of the soul in general. On his view, these powers are indeed inner causes, but they don't act upon each other as efficient causes. Rather, they form a network of causes and are coordinated in such a way that their effects go along with each other, without there being an interaction. Suárez holds that there is a connection (*connexio*), conjunction (*coniunctio*), or even harmony (*consonantia*) among all the powers of the soul, such that an activity that arises in one power naturally goes along with a corresponding activity in another power.[16] If, for instance, the perceptual power produces an act of seeing an object, there will be a corresponding act of thinking about that object (at least under normal circumstances) because the sensory and the intellectual powers are well coordinated. However, this does not mean that the sensory power acts upon the intellectual power and elicits in it an act of thinking; there is no relation of efficient causation between the two powers. Each power is an efficient cause only with respect to its own acts, and these acts can at best be occasional causes for the production of corresponding acts in another power. Thus, if the sensory power efficiently causes an act of seeing, this act will at best serve as an occasion for the intellect to produce a corresponding act of thinking. It will therefore be just an occasional cause, not an efficient cause, with respect to the intellect.[17]

[16] See *DM* 18.5.3 and *DA* 2.5.5 and further references in Tropia (2014).
[17] See *DA* 9.2.12 and an analysis in Perler (2020).

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Now, this general model of causation also applies to the relationship between intellect and will. These two powers are efficient causes only with respect to their own acts, not with respect to each other. Suárez makes this point by emphasising that 'efficient causation would be against the freedom of the will, as was said, because such a way of moving is foreign to the function of the intellect, which is to illuminate, direct, and regulate the activities of the will' (*DM* 19.6.7). The crucial point is that the only function of the intellect is to produce acts of thinking, in particular acts of judging, which will then direct the will in its activity. Technically speaking, its only function is to efficiently cause judgements which will then serve as occasional causes for the will. But the intellect does *not* act upon the will and thereby efficiently cause volitions; the will alone efficiently causes them. Thus, when your intellect comes up with the judgement that you should eat chocolate, it does not act upon the will and somehow push it to go for chocolate. It only produces the judgement, which then serves as an occasion for the will to strive for chocolate. The will can make use of this occasion because intellect and will are well coordinated as two powers that belong to the same soul. Their collaboration 'arises only from the agreement (*ex consensione*) between these powers, which are rooted in the same soul and naturally connected to each other' (*DA* 10.1.8). So, what makes your will strive for chocolate is simply the fact that your intellect as well as your will are present in the same soul, which coordinates them. This is why they harmoniously collaborate, but they don't interact.

This account of the relationship between intellect and will presupposes some far-reaching metaphysical theses. Suárez assumes that the powers of the soul are inner causes that are really distinct both from each other and from the underlying soul, and he further assumes that the soul is some kind of coordinator that makes a collaboration of all its powers – in particular the rational ones – possible. What matters here are less these background assumptions than the consequences they have for an assessment of strong intellectualism.[18] As it stands, this position cannot be correct for *metaphysical* reasons. Since the intellect is not an efficient cause with respect to the will, it cannot determine the will in its activity; that is, it cannot act upon the will and force it to produce a volition. All it can do is provide an occasion by forming a judgement so that the will becomes active. But it is up to the will to make use of the judgement or not.

[18] For detailed discussion of the metaphysical assumptions, see Perler (2015) and Heider (2021, pp. 51–65).

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Metaphorically speaking, the will is the master who decides what to do with the proposal presented by his servant, the intellect.

3. The Will and Final Causation

It has become clear so far that the root of freedom is in the will, not in the intellect. But how far does its freedom go? Suárez gives a radical answer: the will is almost absolutely free because it can reject almost *any* judgement.[19] This is true not just for cases in which the judgement is not very persuasive or counter-balanced by another judgement. The will can reject even a judgement that is fully convincing and uncontested. Suárez presents this radical thesis by saying that 'even if the intellect thinks about a single object, and even if it judges it to be convenient and worthy of being desired …, the will is still able in its freedom not to love it' (*DM* 19.6.14). So, your will is able not to go for the chocolate even if your intellect judges that it is the perfect object to be sought right now. Suárez then adds that 'the will does not need another judgement in order not to exercise an act' (*ibid.*). This means that you don't need an alternative judgement, say, one about fruit or other healthy food, not to go for the chocolate. Your will can just say no to the only judgement that is present.

This is quite a surprising thesis that doesn't immediately follow from the rejection of intellectual determinism. It even seems to be in tension with Suárez's metaphysical theory about the connection of the rational powers. After all, intellect and will are harmoniously related to each other. It therefore seems that the will should come up with an activity that is in accordance with the activity of the intellect. But this is precisely what Suárez denies. He claims that intellect and will can come apart: the intellect's judgement *need not* be accepted by the will. Why not?

To find an answer to this question, we need to examine the object of the will more closely. As has been explained in the previous section, Suárez takes it to be something good, or more precisely, something that is evaluated as being good. Now this object has a special force: when it is presented in a judgement, it can attract the will. However, no natural object is completely or unrestrictedly good,

[19] The only exception is a judgement about God in the afterlife (*DM* 19.6.9), as will become clear in what follows. The will can reject *every* judgement about created things.

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since it always has some deficiencies. Consequently, it never fully attracts the will. Suárez makes this point as follows:

> Although an object doesn't determine the will in this way [*sc.* as a completely good object], it can be sufficient to excite and attract the will to such an extent that the will is by its own freedom determined or led to it, for if there is an aspect of goodness represented in the object, this aspect is of itself sufficient to move the will. (*DM* 19.6.9)

The basic idea expressed here can be illustrated with the chocolate example. Since chocolate is sweet and tasty, it has an aspect of goodness. Unfortunately, it has too much sugar and therefore also displays an aspect of badness. But its aspect of goodness is strong enough to attract the will. Consequently, the will can go for it. Yet the will is not forced to go for it. It can also stay away from the chocolate because of its aspect of badness. As a two-way power, it can strive or not strive for what is only partially good.

I hope this example makes clear how Suárez tries to combine his thesis about freedom of the will with his background theory about the connection of the soul's rational powers. The connection guarantees that a judgement presenting an object with an aspect of goodness usually goes along with a corresponding activity of the will. In fact, the will usually accepts the judgement and strives for the object it presents. But the lack of absolute goodness makes it possible for the will *not* to strive for the object. Hence, the will acts freely, not necessarily, if it strives for it.[20]

It is significant that Suárez qualifies this general thesis with respect to judgements about God in the afterlife.[21] Since God is by definition absolutely good, he fully attracts the will when he is presented in a perfect judgement; nothing limits the attraction. Consequently, the will *necessarily* strives for God, whereas it *freely* strives for all other things, which inevitably have some aspect of badness. Suárez summarises this crucial idea by saying:

[20] Suárez points out that 'morally speaking' the will never fails to strive for the object that is presented (*DM* 19.7.11). This is how the will usually acts and even must act if there is a high degree of goodness. But moral necessity is not the same as absolute necessity: it is metaphysically possible for the will not to go for an object with limited goodness.

[21] Note that judgements *in this life* are not necessarily followed by acts of striving for God, for it may well be that God is only partially or inadequately conceived as something good. Limited cognition of God leads to limited attraction.

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> [T]he aspect of goodness is not the only one. Hence an aspect of goodness can be mixed with other aspects, namely with those of badness. But in the afterlife, when human beings obtain a vision of God, their love of God is necessary, both in its specification and in its exercise, because no aspect of badness can be found in him: he always has the highest and a necessary aspect of goodness. But the will is free in all other acts, in choosing a goal as well as in pursuing a goal. (*DA* 10.2.13)

As this passage shows, Suárez draws a clear line between two types of objects. An absolutely good object leaves no room for freedom. A partially good object, by contrast, makes freedom possible because its deficiencies allow the will not to strive for it. This difference makes clear how Suárez attempts to save freedom without turning the will into an irrational power that rejects a judgement without any reason. If it rejects it, it does so because the object that is presented in the judgement is not absolutely good and does not exercise full attraction. This means, of course, that the freely acting will is not a groundlessly acting will: the ground lies in the limited attraction.

Has the mystery about the will now been solved? One might have the impression that one mystery has simply been replaced by another. For how can an object attract the will? And how can the will resist the attraction if the object is not absolutely good? Suárez's account of freedom remains obscure as long as the mysterious attraction remains unexplained. Fortunately, we can find an explanation if we turn to his theory of final causation. Like all Aristotelians, Suárez takes it to be one of the four types of causation, the type that can be found in the goal of an action and that makes the agent choose this goal.[22] The important point is that the goal is a real cause since it really does something: it moves the agent and thereby makes him or her choose the goal. Suárez calls this movement a 'metaphorical motion' exercised by the goal.[23] He hastens to add that

[22] On his adoption of the four causes and the role he assigns to the final cause, see Schmid (2011, pp. 107–161) and Fink (2015).

[23] The terminology can be traced back to Aristotle, *On Generation and Corruption* I.7 (324b13-15): 'The active power is a cause in the sense of that from which the process originates; but the end, for the sake of which it takes place, is not active. (That is why *health* is not active, except metaphorically.)' Note, however, that Suárez deviates from Aristotle in ascribing some activity to the final cause, as will become clear.

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it is metaphorical not because it is unreal and simply imagined. A metaphorical motion is a *real* motion, yet one that differs from other kinds of motion:

> But this motion is called 'metaphorical' not because it is not real, but because it does not occur through an effective influence, nor through an intentional motion of a living being. Nevertheless, nothing prevents its causality from being true and real. (*DM* 23.1.14)

Quite obviously, Suárez intends to distinguish metaphorical motion from other motions in the natural world. On the one hand, it is not a motion exercised by an efficient cause that acts upon something else and changes it. It is thus not the kind of motion we find in a carpenter who works on a piece of wood and turns it into a table. On the other hand, it is not a motion exercised by a living being that cognizes something and is thereby intentionally directed at it. It is therefore not the kind of motion we find in someone who is thinking about a table. In short, metaphorical motion is neither physical nor mental. Nevertheless, it is real. It is 'a metaphorical motion because it flows out (*manat*) from an object that lures the will and pulls it to itself' (*DM* 23.4.8). The language Suárez uses here is metaphorical, but the phenomenon he describes is real: the object exercises an influence on the will and thereby attracts it. This is possible because the object has an aspect of goodness, and it is exactly this aspect that exercises an attraction.

At least three points deserve attention in this account of metaphorical motion. First, this motion has its origin in the object, not in the agent. In fact, the activity of the agent is simply a reaction to the activity of the object, for the will cannot strive for an object if the object doesn't attract it. Second, it is not a material feature that is responsible for the attraction, but the object's goodness. The more perfect it is, the more it attracts the will. This is why attraction comes in degrees, with God exercising the highest attraction. Third, the attraction is a motion *sui generis* that cannot be reduced to or identified with physical or mental motion. It is a special motion that targets the will: only the will can be attracted by the object's goodness.

The last point is perhaps the most difficult to understand. How can the will be attracted by goodness? Let me try to answer this question by returning to my initial example of the beggar. Suppose you have realised that he is in need of help and that you can spare a few bucks. And suppose you are also aware of the moral principle

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that people in need should be helped. If you then form the judgement 'I should help this person' and thereby define the goal of your action, this goal attracts you. You see it as the goal which you must try to reach. One could even say that the goal exercises a *normative power* on you. As a person who is sensitive to moral principles and moral deliberations, you do not only understand the judgement, you also feel an obligation to follow it. That is, you don't look at it as a neutral observer but are somehow drawn to it and accept it as the morally-binding judgement.

It is along these lines that we can make sense of Suárez's metaphorical motion.[24] It is not a mysterious motion that exists in some strange world apart from the natural world. Rather, it is the motion exercised by objects that have a normative power, and they have this power because of their goodness, which in turn is grounded in their nature. To be sure, there is not just moral goodness. According to Suárez, every object that is fitting has an aspect of goodness. Hence, even chocolate has an aspect of goodness for a hungry person, and it can therefore exercise a power on that person as soon as she understands this aspect. Even in this case, there is some kind of normative attraction, because the goodness is present in such a way that the person immediately feels that she must go for the chocolate. Or to be more precise, as soon as the person's intellect understands the goodness, her will is attracted by it and realises that it must go for it.

I hope this example makes clear in what sense an object can attract the will. What matters here is that there is *real* attraction, albeit not a physical one. The example should also help to see why there is such an attraction only with respect to rational beings. Only rational beings can think about something under the aspect of goodness. Hence, only rational beings can become sensitive to this aspect and react to it with an activity of the will. Non-rational animals lack this capacity. To be sure, they can strive for good things, but only because they are physically attracted by them. If, for instance, a dog is hungry and perceives a piece of food, it is attracted by its smell and shape – nothing more. A human being, by contrast, can understand the aspect of goodness and consequently be normatively attracted by it (as well as physically, of course). This is why metaphorical motion

[24] For similar attempts, see Schmid (2011, p. 135), who speaks about a 'normative-motivational way' of influencing the will, and Pink (2018, p. 10), who calls it a 'normative kind of power'. Yet, they don't draw a parallel to the moral case.

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is possible only with respect to rational beings, for it is the kind of motion that requires sensitivity to normativity.[25]

It should be clear now what the seemingly mysterious attraction of the will is supposed to be. But how exactly does it work? Suárez is aware that he needs to address this problem to make his theory convincing and therefore devotes a long discussion to the analysis of the process of attraction. One proposal to explain this process is the following: there is a temporal order among the activities of the object and the will, and 'the metaphorical motion is such that it precedes the act elicited by the will' (*DM* 23.4.4). This means that the object's goodness first attracts the will, and the will then somehow responds to it and strives for the object. However, Suárez rejects this proposal, for it is unclear where the first activity – the activity of attracting – should take place. Just in the object? This would mean that the object somehow changes itself by producing an activity inside it. Since every activity is a distinct item (technically speaking, it is a quality), it would then produce an item that is added to it. And it would get somehow thicker and thicker over time, for the more activities it would produce, the more items would be added to it.[26]

To avoid this absurd consequence, Suárez suggests another way of understanding the process of attraction. There is no succession of activities, but one single activity, the production of a volition. This means that 'one and the same activity of the will is caused by the goal and by the will itself. Insofar as it is caused by the will, there is efficient causation; insofar as it is caused by the goal, there is final causation' (*DM* 23.4.8; similarly, 23.4.9 and 23.4.13). Let me call this the *double-aspect view of causation*. This view avoids the location problem, for it is clear where the activity takes place, namely in the will, where a volition is produced. But every volition involves an act and a content. Hence, there must be a cause for each of these two aspects. With respect to the act, it is the will that is the cause. In fact, the will is the only cause because it fully produces the act. But with respect to the content, the will cannot be the only cause because it

[25] This means, of course, that no final causation is possible with respect to non-rational animals. Or to be more precise, there is final causation only insofar as God makes them go for something that has an aspect of goodness, not because they understand this aspect (*DM* 23.10.6).

[26] This is a consequence of Suárez's conception of qualities, for he takes them to be real entities (*res*) that are distinct from the power that produces them (*DM* 22.1.5). This is why a power producing activities as qualities is somehow enriched by them. For discussion, see Perler (2023).

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cannot fix the goal of an act by itself. Nor can it do that by somehow using the intellect and acting under its influence. As has become clear (see Section 2), the intellect cannot act upon the will and make it strive for something. The will can fix the goal of an act only if it is under the influence of the object's goodness that is present to it in a judgement. This is why both this goodness, which acts as a final cause, and the will, which acts as an efficient cause, must be active. Only if they cooperate can the will cause a full-fledged volition, that is, an act with a well-defined content. In short, two causes are required for the two aspects of a volition.

To avoid misunderstandings, it is important to see that the two causes are not simply responsible for two separate aspects. One should therefore not think that the will causes just the act and the goodness just the content. After all, there cannot be a 'naked' act that comes into existence without a content. Whenever the will causes a volition, it brings about an act with a content. But it cannot do that without the co-presence and co-activity of the object's goodness. The activity of this second cause is *necessary* for the activity of the will. Let me illustrate this point with a comparison. Suppose you sit down and start writing a letter. Your hand then becomes active and puts marks on a piece of paper. But these marks would not be words and sentences with a meaning if your mind were not having some thoughts that structure your writing. This is why the activity of your mind is *necessary* for your writing. Similarly, the object's goodness somehow structures the content of the volition. Its activity is therefore necessary for the activity of the will.

At this point one might object that final causation still remains a mystery. For what does it mean that a volition gets its content from the object's goodness? How is the 'getting' to be understood here? If it can be understood at all, one might say, it should be seen as the result of efficient causation. After all, Suárez himself says that the object's goodness 'lures the will and pulls it to itself' (*DM* 23.4.8) or that it 'excites and attracts it' (*DM* 19.6.9). This language suggests that the object's goodness efficiently acts upon the will, and the effect of this acting is the fixing of the content. So, final causation can be reduced to efficient causation.

Suárez rejects this kind of reduction, emphasising that both types of causation are required for an activity of the will.[27] Why is that? An efficient cause produces or changes something, and it

[27] He even claims that final causation is prior to all other forms of causation (*DM* 23, prologue). On this priority, see Penner (2015).

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does that by bringing about a new substantial or accidental form.[28] Thus, an animal that is begetting another animal produces something by bringing about a substantial form of the same species, and fire that is heating water changes it by bringing about an accidental form of heat. The will that produces an activity also brings about an accidental form and thereby acts as an efficient cause. But the object's goodness does *not* produce or change anything in the strict sense. It is simply present and thereby exercises a normative power on the will. Since the will is sensitive to this power, it lets its act get shaped by it so that it will have a well-defined content. But content-shaping is not the same as producing or changing. Final causation can therefore not be reduced to efficient causation. It is a special type of causation – a type that is logically (though not temporally) prior to efficient causation because the will cannot produce an act unless there is some goal that gives its act a content.

4. Objections and Unsolved Problems

Is this account of the will's activity convincing? All depends on how one assesses Suárez's background theory. If one accepts his normative realism, according to which objects really have goodness as a normative feature, it is quite plausible to say that this feature can exercise a normative power. In fact, it can attract the will, and it is because of this special type of attraction that the will strives for good objects. In light of this attraction, one can deal with the two fundamental problems I mentioned at the beginning. The first was *the grounding problem*: is there any ground for the will to act against the judgement presented by the intellect? Yes, there is a ground, for the will does not become active unless it is attracted by the object's goodness that is revealed in the judgement; and if there is no full goodness, there is no full attraction; hence, the will can reject the object. The second problem was *the rationality problem*: is the ground rational or not? In the cases we have seen so far, there is a rational ground, for it is indeed rational not to strive for an object that is only partially good. When focusing on this limitation and realising that there is only partial attraction, the will has a good reason to reject the object.

[28] Suárez discusses both types at length in *DM* 18.2-5. For an analysis, see Tuttle (2020) and Perler (2024b).

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So far, so good. But Suárez's account of the will's activity poses some additional problems. One of them concerns his core thesis that the object's goodness attracts the will. This might be plausible as long as we are dealing with an object that is actually present, say, a piece of chocolate that is lying in front of us and somehow displaying its goodness. But what about an object that is *not* present? Suppose you merely think about buying chocolate. How can an absent object and hence absent goodness attract your will?

Suárez is fully aware of this objection and tries to refute it by returning to his theory of the connection of powers. He claims that 'final causation is so real that it occurs in a moral and intellectual way through the natural harmony that exists between will and intellect. Therefore, for its being real nothing else is required in the cause than what suffices for a motion between these powers in virtue of their natural agreement; and for that to be real it suffices to be represented in the intellect' (*DM* 23.5.14). The decisive point here is that there can be a cooperation between intellect and will as long as something is *represented* in the intellect. That is, if there is a representation of the object's goodness in the intellect, the will is attracted by it and can go for it. This means that, in my example, no real chocolate needs to be present. It suffices to think about chocolate as something delicious and desirable. This representation will incite (though not determine) the will to strive for chocolate. So, there can be final causation even in the case of an absent object.

No doubt, this is an elegant answer. But one could reply that it threatens the entire account of final causation. If it is just a representation that attracts the will, then it is a mental item that is doing all the work. Why, then, can final causation not be reduced to mental causation? To answer this question, it is important to bear in mind the double-aspect view that has already been mentioned in the previous section. A representation is indeed a mental item, which Suárez characterises as a judgement. But just like a volition, a judgement has two aspects. On the one hand, it is an *act* existing in the intellect. Technically speaking, it is a quality that is produced by and inheres in the intellect. On the other hand, it is a *content* that has been fixed by an object outside the mind. This object really has the feature of goodness, and the content has the same feature because it is the same form that is present both in the external object and in the internal content.[29] Given the presence of goodness, the content

[29] Lurking in the background of this assumption is the Aristotelian thesis of form assimilation: forms apprehended by the mind come to exist in

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can attract the will. So, it is not the act but the content that is relevant here. Suárez makes this point by distinguishing between the 'formal reality' and the 'objective reality' of a judgement.[30] As an act, it has nothing but formal reality because it is an accidental form that exists in the intellect. Yet as a content, it has objective reality because it makes an object present to the mind. And taken as a content it shares with this object its features, among them the normative ones, and can therefore attract the will.

This answer immediately gives rise to another objection. It may well be that an object that is present in the act's content can attract the will if it really has the feature of goodness (at least to some degree). But what about an object that has no such feature and is mistakenly judged to be good? How can it attract the will? How, for instance, can a piece of greasy and unhealthy food, which you mistakenly take to be good, attract your will? In this case, there is no real goodness that could exercise a normative power on you.

At first sight, there seems to be an easy way of dealing with this problem. When introducing the Evaluation Condition in Section 2, I pointed out that the object does not have to be good. It only needs to be *considered* good, whatever its real normative status is. So, both real goodness and putative goodness can attract the will. This means that you can be attracted by the greasy and unhealthy food simply because you take it to be good, without there being real goodness.

However, this answer aggravates the problem. If putative goodness can attract the will, a non-real feature is doing real causal work. How is that possible? Suárez sees this problem and concedes that a non-real feature that is simply projected onto an object cannot do any real causal work. Only what is in fact good can attract the will. But an object can always be represented in different ways, and if it is correctly represented in at least one way as something good, the representation targets real goodness that causes real attraction. Suárez presents a nice example to make this point. Thieves, he says, clearly want to steal something. As long as they represent the goal of their action simply as theft, they cannot be attracted by it, because what is bad and represented as bad cannot exercise any power on them.

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the mind, with all the features they have. To be sure, Suárez speaks about representation of forms, but he still subscribes to the idea that the representation and the represented thing share the same form. For details, see Perler (2020).

[30] He introduces this distinction when talking about concepts or ideas (*DM* 2.1.1 and 25.1.9) and extends it to judgements, which are composed of concepts. For detailed analysis, see Wells (1990).

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They need to represent the goal of their action as something good, for instance as a way of helping the poor by robbing the rich. If they take this kind of Robin Hood attitude, their representation targets real goodness, which will then really attract them. Or as Suárez puts it, 'if someone likes theft because he can then give alms, he is moved by something deemed to be good. But he is moved by true goodness and an honest attitude, namely by the honest attitude of mercy, which he takes to be present in this action' (*DM* 23.5.15). The important point is that it is *true* goodness that moves the person. This, however, is only the case if the person represents the goal of the action as something good (giving alms), not as something bad (stealing money). Similarly, the hungry person needs to represent the food as something good (tasty and satisfying), not as something bad (greasy and unhealthy). As soon as she does that, she targets real goodness, which attracts her will.

However, there is still a problem with attraction. Suárez acknowledges that natural objects are not absolutely good, as has become clear (see Section 3). Consequently, they don't fully attract the will. Now suppose two equally good objects are represented and the intellect makes a judgement about both of them. Which one does the will then strive for? There seems to be no ground for preferring one over the other because their attraction is equally strong. Suárez clearly sees that the will can go either way and therefore affirms that 'in that case the will cannot be determined by a judgement, nor will it necessarily be suspended. Its freedom will consist in the fact that it can choose one of them and dismiss the other' (*DM* 19.6.13). So, the will can freely prefer one over the other. But on what ground can it do that? Obviously, there is no ground in the degree of goodness of the preferred object because it is equal to that of the other object. If the will goes for it and dismisses the other one, it seems to have no ground for doing that; it cannot justify why it acts the way it does. Yet in what sense does the will then really choose, as Suárez says? After all, a choice should be justifiable. What the will does seems more like flipping a coin and arbitrarily taking one of the two objects.

The situation is even more puzzling if we look at the case in which there are two unequal objects. 'When the objects or means are judged to be unequal', Suárez writes, 'I believe it is more probable (though I am not certain) that the will is not necessarily determined, by the force of the judgement, to go for the one that is better' (*DM* 19.6.13). So, even if you judge the fresh and healthy fruit to be better than the chocolate, you can go for the chocolate. Why? Suárez is hesitant in his answer, but he is inclined to say that the chocolate has a certain degree of goodness and is therefore able to exercise an

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attraction. The higher attraction of the fruit does not diminish or annihilate the lower attraction of the chocolate. And as long as there is some attraction, no matter to what degree, your will can go for the chocolate.

This way of arguing makes clear that there is a ground for the will's activity. But there seems to be no *rational* ground. There is no reason in favor of taking the lesser good. On the contrary, there is good reason to take the other object. Here again, what the will does seems like arbitrarily taking one of the two objects. It somehow lets itself be attracted by the lesser good, without having any justification for that. This means that it does not really choose: it simply picks one of the two objects.[31] And the picking cannot be explained further. Should you be asked why you picked the lesser good, you could give no answer. You could only say: 'That's what I wanted.' The rational game of providing reasons for wanting something would come to an end.

But would it really come to an end? After all, you could refer to habits, passions, desires, and natural inclinations to explain your picking. Thus, you could say that you took the chocolate instead of the fruit – despite your judgement that eating fruit would be better – because you always took the chocolate in similar situations, or because you simply had a strong desire for something sweet that was overcoming you, or because you had a reduced glucose level that made you automatically reach out for sugar. But if you argue like that, you refer to a *non-rational* ground to explain the activity of your will. You then invoke bodily states, desires, and dispositions to make sense of your picking. In doing that, you concede that you acted like a non-rational being that is guided or even completely dominated by what is going on in the body.

But what about the situation in which a person is not dominated by bodily states and desires? Suppose you have judged that giving money to the beggar is clearly better than going to the next shop and buying unnecessary stuff. You are clearly aware of this comparative judgement and are not in the grip of any passions, bad habits, or natural inclinations. And suppose you nevertheless turn away from the beggar and run to the next Gucci boutique. Why does your will then go for the lesser good? Following Suárez, all we can say is: you do that because your will is attracted by some goodness, even if it is not the highest possible goodness.

Now one might think that this is a satisfactory answer. If there is *some* goodness, there is *some* reason for the will's activity. Of course,

[31] I borrow this terminological opposition from Normore (1998).

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it is not the best possible reason, but nevertheless a sufficient reason. After all, your will does not randomly go for the lesser good. It goes for it because it is sufficiently good. And as long as it passes a certain threshold of goodness, the will has all it needs for its activity. There is no need for maximal goodness. Suárez makes this point by referring to the divine will. When God, the most rational being, created the world, he did not have to go for the best world. As long as the world he chose had some goodness, he had reason enough to create it (*DM* 19.6.13). In general, the divine will 'often chooses the lesser of two options. But our will is a participation of this and has the same root'.[32] So, our will can also go for the lesser good: the second-best object is often good enough.

But is this line of arguing convincing? After all, one would like to know why God should have wanted to create the second-best world if a better one was available to him, or why we should want to choose the second-best object. Why not go for the best one if there is more normative attraction coming from it? This question leads us back to the two fundamental problems I raised at the beginning. Suárez seems to have a good answer to *the grounding problem*, because even in the case of two unequal goods the will has a ground for its activity. After all, even the second-best object has some goodness and exercises some normative attraction. However, it is difficult to see how Suárez can deal with *the rationality problem*. It seems irrational to go for the second-best object, given that the best object is clearly present and exercises more normative attraction. The will has no justification for ignoring this attraction and striving for the second-best object.

It is at his point that the limits of Suárez's explanatory strategy become visible. In referring to normative attraction he can explain why the will strives for good objects. And in pointing out that this attraction is limited he can plausibly argue that the will is not determined in its striving. It is free to strive for different things, provided they all have a certain degree of goodness. It is even free to strive for the lesser good. But if this striving cannot be fully explained, the will seems to act arbitrarily or even irrationality: it just goes for the good it wants to go for. But why? The mystery still remains.[33]

[32] *De voluntario et involuntario* 8.4 (Opera 4, 264).

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