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Book Review of *On the Formal Cause of Substance: Metaphysical Disputation XV*, by Francisco Suárez, John Kronen, and Jeremiah Reddy

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# On the Formal Cause of Substance: Metaphysical Disputation XV

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## Abstract

"On the Formal Cause of Substance: Metaphysical Disputation XV" by Francisco Suarez and translated by John Kronen and Jeremiah Reedy is reviewed.

Suarez, Francisco. *On the Formal Cause of Substance: Metaphysical Disputation XV*. Translated by John Kronen and Jeremiah Reedy. *Medieval Philosophical Texts in Translation*, vol. 36. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2000. 217 pp. Paper, \$25.00-This latest volume in the long-running Marquette University series *Medieval Philosophical Texts in Translation* provides students of late medieval, renaissance, and early modern philosophy with an important new resource. While Suarez's significance in the history of philosophy is

well known, his writings have been rather inaccessible to students ignorant of Latin. Of the 54 disputations that constitute his most famous work, the *Metaphysical Disputations*, only 13 have been translated into English prior to the volume under review. The present volume presents Suarez's extended discussion of the issue of substantial and accidental forms. In addition to the translation itself, the translators provide a brief introduction, indices (both name and subject), a brief bibliography restricted to works in English as well as basic notes. Most of these notes identify sources (although some sources are left unidentified) and provide basic explication of difficult arguments and technical terms.

In the Disputation itself, Suarez follows his typical procedure of canvassing a wide array of previous opinions on the topic under consideration. This methodology in itself makes Suarez well worth reading as he provides an encyclopedic compendium of prior thought on the subject of substantial forms. Starting with a consideration of the need to posit substantial forms, Suarez concludes that the rational soul provides the best evidence for such forms. Nonetheless, he also admits that the rational soul is peculiar in that it is the only substantial form that arises from nothing by a proper creation. All other substantial forms result from the potency of pre-existing matter and are not the result of creation as such, but can be considered created only insofar as the composite is created. Thus matter is always logically presupposed in any production of form other than the rational soul. Turning to the nature of substantial forms, Suarez takes a position at odds with that of Thomas Aquinas. For Suarez, the substantial form is not that which gives being to the composite, but simply is the act that constitutes the essence of a composite. Interestingly, he sees his thought as consistent with the Aristotelian teaching (*Physics*, 11.3) that form is the nature of the essence. It would be an interesting project to juxtapose recent interpretations of Aristotle's theory of form with the nuanced view that Suarez provides.

After discussing the existence and nature of substantial form, Suarez turns to a discussion of form's causality. First he distinguishes between the causality of the form in relation to an entity's first act and its second act: the former concerns the principle by which the form acts, while the latter refers to the action of the form itself. Consequently, he argues that in relation to an entity's first act form is

a principle of actuality through itself simply by being present to its matter or the composite. In relation to an entity's second act, the emphasis resides in the union of form and matter in a composite. Again, a crucial consideration on behalf of his position is found by considering the human soul. Because the human soul can exist apart from the body, the act of the form must be really distinct from the form itself. As a result, the union resulting from form is its proper act. Finally, he discusses the unicity of substantial form, following Thomas Aquinas in rejecting a plurality of substantial forms in one substance. Here he uses Ockham's razor to point out that just because there is an essential predicate picking out a function, there is no reason to posit a separate substantial form for each such predicate. Since the summary I have provided gives little indication of the richness and depth of Suarez's treatment of the issue of substantial form, the translators have done a great service in making this disputation available to students of scholastic philosophy.

The translation itself is clear, accurate, and readable, rendering Suarez's limpid Latin prose into useful English. There are a number of typographical errors, but none mars the meaning of the text. The bibliography, although restricted to works in English, has several notable omissions: for example, Dennis Des Chene's *Physiologic: Natural Philosophy in Late Aristotelian and Cartesian Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996) is directly relevant to the subject of Suarez and substantial form.