CHAPTER 14

Between Thomism and Scotism

Francisco Suárez on the Analogy of Being

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1 Introduction

At the beginning of his Church Dogmatics, Karl Barth (in)famously identifies the analogia entis as the ‘invention of the anti-Christ’ and the principal reason for his inability to become Catholic. While most Catholic theologians would no doubt dismiss Barth’s characterization of analogy as little more than hyperbolic diatribe, Barth’s recognition of the centrality of analogy in the Catholic intellectual tradition is more than a little perspicacious. Most likely directing his claim at Erich Przywara and, to a lesser extent, Hans Urs von Balthasar—both Catholic interlocutors of the Protestant theologian—Barth’s criticism of analogy reaches well beyond his twentieth-century contemporaries to challenge the philosophico-theological schemas of thinkers stretching back to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Indicative of the role that analogy would play during those periods, centuries prior to the Dogmatics, Tommaso de Vio Gaetanus (1469–1534), more commonly known as Cajetan, wrote that without a knowledge of analogy “no one would be able to learn metaphysics, and many errors in other sciences proceed from ignorance of it.” Operating in a much different environment than Barth, medieval and Baroque discussions of analogy had their own set of interlocutors, in particular Thomists and Scotists, the latter following their master, John Duns Scotus, who had issued a direct challenge to the semantic possibility of analogy.

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1 Cf. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God (Edinburgh, 1995), vol. 1.1, p. xiii: “I regard the analogia entis as the invention of Antichrist, and I believe that because of it it is impossible ever to become a Roman Catholic, all other reasons for not doing so being to my mind short-sighted and trivial.”
2 Erich Przywara’s most important work devoted to the subject of analogy is simply known as Analogia Entis: Metaphysik (Munich, 1932).
3 Von Balthasar pursued a constructive dialogue with Barth over the issue of analogy in his own The Theology of Karl Barth (New York, 1971).
5 Joshua Hochshild, The Semantics of Analogy: Rereading Cajetan’s De nominum analogia (Notre Dame, IN, 2010), p. 79. Briefly, the Scotist challenge stems from the understanding of
In this vein, Francisco Suárez was also keenly aware of the challenge that Duns Scotus and his disciples had posed to any metaphysical and theological thinking that purported to proceed upon non-univocal lines, and it was a challenge to which the Jesuit metaphysician would have to respond if he were to succeed in lifting his own metaphysical project, which is heavily dependent upon analogy, off the ground. Much like the Scotists, Suárez’s concern for the unity of the concept of being is clear in the opening disputations of his *Disputationes metaphysicae*. In framing his metaphysical project, Suárez first identifies being insofar as it is real being (*ens inquantum ens reale*)\(^6\) as the adequate object of metaphysics, and subsequently investigates being as it is known by means of the objective common concept of being, a concept, he insists, that is most simple (*simplicissimus*) and absolutely unified.\(^7\) At the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, the Jesuit metaphysician denies that this absolutely unified concept is univocal and, moving closer to the Thomist position, insists that it is analogical.\(^8\) The juxtaposition of unity and diversity-difference within analogy poses a serious challenge for Suárez and creates tensions in the very core of his metaphysical system, tensions of which he himself is aware:\(^9\)

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\(^6\) *DM* 1.1.26 (ed. Vivès, vol. 25, p. 11): “Dicendum est ergo, ens in quantum ens reale esse objectum adaequatum hujus scientiae.” All references to the *Disputationes metaphysicae* (*DM*) will be taken from the Parisian Vivès edition, with volume and page number cited parenthetically.


\(^8\) The *loqui classici* for Suárez’s discussions on analogy are *DM* 28.3 and 32.2.