

QUALCOSA DI DIO:  
THE METAPHYSICS OF DESIRE  
AND PARADOX OF THE REAL

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“If true metaphysics must be bound to the reality of being, true theology must be bound to the *potentia ordinata* according to which God has ordered his creation well and to the most fitting end.”



The world . . . is not to be justified as the best of all possible worlds. . . . It is the best of all impossible worlds.

—G.K. Chesterton

Sed nihil est homini tam necessarium quam id per quod finem ultimum consequitur.

—Thomas Aquinas

*Spirito e libertà*<sup>1</sup> was published in 1980 by the Milanese publisher

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1. Henri de Lubac, *Spirito e libertà* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1980). Prepared in French in the late 1970s, the original manuscript of de Lubac’s *Esprit et liberté* was not published before the French original was lost. Its Italian translation remained de Lubac’s sole work available in Italian only until volume 14 of his *Œuvres complètes* appeared in 2013: *Esprit et liberté dans la tradition théologique suivi de Petit catéchèse sur nature et grâce* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2013). This

Jaca Book. A revised text of two of the most controversial sections of *Surnaturel*,<sup>2</sup> the book was Henri de Lubac's third reflection on his masterwork to be taken alongside *les deux jumeaux* of 1965: *Augustinisme et théologie moderne*<sup>3</sup> and *Le mystère du surnaturel*.<sup>4</sup> The 1980 volume, as an act of self-reflection, is luminous for the audacity of what de Lubac lets stand. Without so much as a hint of self-conscious second-guessing or anxious dialing-down of his 1946 thesis, de Lubac repeats: the desire of the human heart is already "something of God."<sup>5</sup>

The appearance of a French text of *Spirito e libertà* affords an opportunity to reconsider afresh the debate concerning *Surnaturel* and redress a gap in de Lubac studies. As such, this essay aims to (re)affirm the radical theologico-metaphysical *novum* John Milbank detects in de Lubac's thesis, rooted in the claim of *Surnaturel* according to which the natural desire of man for the supernatural is already "something of God," even while "it is not yet grace."<sup>6</sup> According to Milbank, the implication of de Lubac's thesis implicitly proposes "a new sort of ontology—in a sense a 'non-ontology'—articulated *between* the discourses of philosophy and theology, fracturing their respective autonomies, but tying them loosely and yet firmly together."<sup>7</sup> *Surnaturel*, therefore, concerns something deeper than a

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volume, a reconstructed French edition of *Spirito e libertà* uses the 1946 text of *Surnaturel* as its basis, integrating the modifications published in the 1980 edition of *Spirito e libertà*.

2. Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel. Études historiques* (Paris: Aubier, 1946).

3. Henri de Lubac, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 13: *Augustinisme et théologie moderne* (1965; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2000). This work is a revision of the first part of *Surnaturel*.

4. Henri de Lubac, *Le mystère du surnaturel* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2000), a booklength expansion of "Le mystère du surnaturel," *Recherches de science religieuse* 36 (1949): 80–121.

5. De Lubac, *Spirito e libertà*, 261 [*Esprit et liberté*, 187; *Surnaturel*, 487].

6. John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 41. See his argument in note 4 that for de Lubac this constitutive human desire is an anticipation of the supernatural in the natural, citing *Surnaturel*, 487: "Quoi qu'il y ait de bonnes raisons de l'appeler 'naturel' (puisque'il est essentiellement dans la nature et qu'il en exprime du fond) on doit ajouter qu'il est déjà en un sens, quelque chose de Dieu."

7. Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 5.

merely “dogmatic” question: it concerns the meaning and necessity of the Christian judgment on reality as such. For this reason, according to Milbank, more than a mere “recovery of sources,” *Surnaturel* proposes a *ressoucement* of the patristic method by which the Christian “account of grace and the supernatural is *ontologically revisionary*.”<sup>8</sup> As such, *Surnaturel* entails as much a revolution in metaphysical thinking as a revolution in theological anthropology.<sup>9</sup>

If, positively, this essay takes up the metaphysical boldness of de Lubac’s proposal, it also offers another (if largely indirect) response to scholarship that aims to undermine the legacy of *Surnaturel*, both as an interpretation of Thomas Aquinas and as an authentically Christian vision of the real.<sup>10</sup> In its most acute form,

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8. *Ibid.*, 35.

9. While this essay intends to take up the trajectory set by Milbank, it seeks to do so with three minor caveats. Milbank contrasts the generative fecundity of *Surnaturel*’s “non-ontology” with a “formal capitulation to papal authority” putatively evidenced in de Lubac’s later work on the subject. Emerging from the publication of *Humani generis*, de Lubac is understood by Milbank to have been chastened as a “traumatized theologian, resolved to articulate himself in somewhat oblique fragments” (*The Suspended Middle*, 8). I qualify this judgment on three counts. First, the 1980 publication of *Spirito e libertà* shows that de Lubac did not suppress the “non-ontology” of *Surnaturel*, nor did he relegate the radicalism of his 1946 thesis to “oblique fragments,” but rather maintained it. This point will become clear in the body of the essay. Second, I contend that the divergence between *Humani generis* and *Surnaturel* should not be overdrawn, that *Humani generis* is truly (as de Lubac held) a “boomerang” insofar as it entails a limit against the metaphysical possibilism and theological abstractionism that is the basis of the “system of pure nature.” Third, notwithstanding the concrete question of *Surnaturel*, for de Lubac the spiritual authenticity of the theological vocation is bound to service rendered to the Church and so to the submission the theologian freely makes to the Magisterium and to ecclesial authority. For de Lubac this docility of theology could never diminish theology’s genuine creative fecundity, but rather ensures its flourishing. Theology does not save the Church; the Church saves theology. This is how de Lubac lived the imposed silence he suffered after *Humani generis* (imposed by his Jesuit superiors and not by any directive from the Holy See), which Milbank perfectly terms “the tension of the suspended middle . . . of his ecclesial vocation.” I contend that de Lubac’s years of silence ought to be read less as a “formal capitulation” and more as a spiritual waiting in the “suspended middle” of ecclesial fidelity, which is the generative basis of the theological vocation.

10. See Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters*, 2nd ed. (2001; Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2010); Ralph McInerny, *Praeambula fidei: Thomism and the God of the Philosophers* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006);

some recent scholarship against *Surnaturel* has even laid blame for the postconciliar crisis on de Lubac's work.<sup>11</sup> It is beyond the scope of this essay to respond in full to these charges, but the lineaments of a response will attempt to show that de Lubac was not proposing a more secular vision of the real—exactly the opposite is true. De Lubac's aim, I hope to show, was to recover a genuinely orthodox method of theology: not an idea in search of a reality but the real understood in light of the event of the divine mystery made flesh.

This essay is divided into four parts: (1) "The *desiderium naturale* of St. Thomas" outlines the basic contours of two interpreters of Thomas, Lawrence Feingold and Henri de Lubac; (2) "After *Surnaturel*: personalism and metaphysical realism" proposes that the question of the supernatural "call" does not concern primarily abstract "nature" but the concrete "I"; (3) "Between *Surnaturel* and *Humani generis*" shows the dogmatic harmony between de Lubac's and Pius XII's texts, arguing that in fact both deconstruct the metaphysical possibilism on which the Suarezian "system of pure nature" is based; and (4) "The 'Scotist' influence" parses Scotus's doctrine of *indisponditus* in order to counter Feingold's assertion that de Lubac's thesis is essentially a Scotist interpretation of Thomas.

## 1. THE *DESIDERIUM NATURALE* OF ST. THOMAS

### 1.1. *The perplexity of Thomistic desire: rival inheritors*

The status and meaning of Thomas Aquinas's doctrine of "*desiderium naturale visionis Dei*" is one of the most vexed questions of modern Catholic anthropology (philosophical and theological).

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Steven A. Long, *Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature* (New York: Fordham, 2010); Bernard Mulcahy, OP, *Aquinas's Notion of Pure Nature and the Christian Integralism of Henri de Lubac: Not Everything Is Grace* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011). Cf. Denys Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Romanus Cessario, OP, "Cardinal Cajetan and his Critics," *Nova et Vetera* 3 (2005): 109–18; and *A Short History of Thomism* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005); Reinhard Hütter, *Dust Bound for Heaven: Explorations in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); and Thomas Joseph White, OP, *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomist Study in Christology* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015).

11. Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God*, 441–43.

That Thomas affirms a natural desire of the human creature to see God is clear.<sup>12</sup> But what precisely the nature of this “natural desire” *is* is more difficult to establish. Is it ontologically constitutive of the human being? Or is it a sign of received grace? Does it entail that the end to which it aims is a *debitum* of nature? Or is it a desire for gift as gift?

Feingold has argued that interpreters of Thomas’s “*desiderium naturale visionis Dei*” divide in two camps. The first sees this desire as naturally elicited by some knowledge of God’s existence, but it does not have *visio* as its necessary object.<sup>13</sup> On this view, the natural desire of the spiritual creature for God is augmented in direct relation to his knowledge of God’s existence, such that it only becomes a concrete desire for *visio* (as its formal object) when it is provoked by the light of revelation; therefore, it is rooted not fundamentally in a power of nature but in the awakening of received grace. The second interpretation holds that this desire for the vision of God is “innate”: human nature was created in the image of God and is ordered from within to eternal blessedness with God.<sup>14</sup> In this case, without the revelation and gift of grace, this desire remains naturally frustrated and cannot be satisfied.

The difficulty of answering this question concerns the fact that nowhere does Thomas himself distinguish clearly between

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12. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (hereafter *ST*) I, q. 12, a. 1; I-II, q. 3, a. 8; *Summa contra Gentiles* (hereafter *SG*) III.25, 48–54; *Compendium theologiae* I.104. All quotations from Thomas Aquinas are from *Corpus Thomisticum S. Thomas de Aquino Opera Omnia* (Navarra, Spain: Universitas Studiorum Navarrensis, 2009).

13. Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God*, xxiii.

14. Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God*, xxiii. For representatives of this position, see Nicholas J. Healy Jr., “Henri de Lubac on Nature and Grace: A Note on Some Recent Contributions to the Debate,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 35, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 535–64; William L. Portier, “Thomist Resurgence,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 494–504; John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Renewed Split in Modern Catholic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014); Angelo Scola, *Questioni di antropologia teologica. Seconda edizione ampliata* (Rome: Pontificia Università Lateranense, 1997), 74; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac: An Overview*, trans. Joseph Fessio, SJ, Michael Waldstein, and Susan Clements (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991).

“elicited” and “innate” desire; his “terminology is variable.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the status and meaning of Thomas’s doctrine has been bequeathed—not as a question of exegesis but as a question of elucidation, textual interpretation, and hermeneutics.<sup>16</sup>

Both understandings of this desire—“innate” or “elicited”—introduce different philosophical and theological problems. Metaphysically, it is alleged that proponents of “innate” desire compromise the natural knowability of human nature, the *telos* of human life, and so threaten to undermine metaphysics’s autonomy from theology, thereby diminishing the power of reason unaided by faith to know the natural law and the dignity of human nature. Theologically, it is argued that an “innate” natural desire for the vision of God compromises the gratuity of grace, because if this desire for *visio* is “innate” then nature *must* be given “grace” to become naturally perfect on its own grounds; grace, therefore, is reduced to a *debitum*. On the other hand, proponents of “innate” desire for the vision of God argue that those who subscribe to a merely “elicited” desire create a realm of “pure philosophical” discourse in which questions of human dignity and the natural law are posed in a way that constitutively excludes the witness of faith, thus reducing the field of apologetic and evangelical dialogue. Metaphysically, it is argued that this separation of nature from the supernatural, entailed by the denial of “innate” desire, undermines the mysterious concrete and universal experience of the human being in his encounter with reality, an experience to which the whole Hellenic tradition of philosophy in fact bears witness. While theologically, it is argued, the position now contradicts the Second Vatican Council’s declaration

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15. Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God*, 397.

16. Likewise commenting on the distinction between “grace” and “nature” in Aquinas, Steven Long writes, “It is without doubt true that there is a problem in the very texts of Aquinas, and a problem which seemingly does not allow much room for maneuver with respect to its solution: because the doctrinal points which constitute the elements of the problem—one is almost tempted to say ‘constitute the contradiction’—are starkly and clearly stated in St. Thomas’s text” (*Natura Pura*, 13). Or again (but more generally), see John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2001), 20–21: “[With Aquinas] exegesis is easy; it is interpretation that is difficult. And Aquinas, more than most thinkers, requires interpretation. . . . He does not at all offer us a decently confined ‘Anglo-Saxon lucidity.’ . . . At the heart of Aquinas’s thought, commentators discover . . . a certain obscurity which resists easy interpretation or analysis.”

that Jesus “fully reveals man to man himself,” and that “all men are called to one and the same goal, namely God Himself.”<sup>17</sup>

The acrimony of the debate since the publication of *Sur-naturel* in 1946 has given rise to intermittent outbreaks of “*rabies theologica*.”<sup>18</sup> Both sides tend to charge the other with misconstruing authentic “Thomism” as well as the tradition Thomas dependably inherited from the Church Fathers. What is more, they tend to charge the other’s putative misconstrual as at least partially guilty of engendering or facilitating “secularism” and the “silent apostasy” of the late twentieth century. De Lubac, for example, argued that construing *visio* as a purely supernatural “end” dissociable from the most elemental desire of human nature made the Christian claim an “artificial and arbitrary superstructure,” thus clearing the field for secularism.<sup>19</sup> While Feingold, from the other side, charges de Lubac’s understanding of the “innate” desire for *visio* with naturalizing the supernatural, which leads in turn to extinguishing the sense of the sacred in Catholicism.<sup>20</sup> In this way Feingold repeats the charge of Cardinal Giuseppe Siri, who in 1980 had already singled out de Lubac’s understanding of the relation between grace and nature as the fundamental error of the postconciliar pastoral and theoretical crisis.<sup>21</sup>

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17. *Gaudium et spes*, 22, 24 (hereafter cited as GS).

18. Fergus Kerr, OP, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 72.

19. Henri de Lubac, “Nature and Grace,” in T. Patrick Burke, ed., *The Word in History: The St. Xavier Symposium* (London: Collins, 1968), 32.

20. In the conclusion of *The Natural Desire to See God*, in a section titled “Religious Value of the Interpretation of the Natural Desire to See God as an Elicited Desire” (441–43), Feingold offers what I understand to be the wider program of his book. Rejecting de Lubac’s charge of the pastoral deficiencies of neo-scholasticism, Feingold offers five cultural/pastoral advantages of his recovery of commentarial Thomism: (1) by rejecting the innate appetite for the vision of God, it more clearly manifests the *gratuitousness* of grace and the *visio Dei*; (2) interpreted as an “elicited desire,” the natural desire to see God better manifests the disproportionate *transcendence* of God; (3) the fact that human beings are not naturally ordered to God but only so ordered by grace emphasizes the *humility* of the creature; (4) exclusion of de Lubac’s thesis better emphasizes the “need for the sacraments and the supernatural virtue of charity”; and (5) the scheme of commentarial Thomism helps us not to take “heaven” for granted.

21. Cardinal Giuseppe Siri, *Getsemani: Riflessioni sul movimento teologico contemporaneo* (Rome: Fraternità della Santissima Vergine Maria, 1980), 56.

The legitimate theological provocation of the polemic on both sides notwithstanding, the complexity of reality does not countenance the reduction of either side to a univocal falsification of Thomas. The debate concerning the *desiderium naturale visionis Dei*, rather, goes back to the letter of the Angelic Doctor himself, and played itself out after Thomas's death in terms of rival Thomistic traditions.<sup>22</sup>

### 1.2. *Desire according to de Lubac*

The basic thesis of *Surnaturel* is straightforward: the theological anthropology of Thomas Aquinas confirms (and does not contradict) the view of the Fathers. The human being is created with an innate desire for *visio Dei*, a *finis* the human being can only receive as a supernatural gift, a grace that surpasses every human power to achieve it.<sup>23</sup> As Thomas himself put it,

In one way, beatific vision or knowledge is beyond the nature of the rational soul in the sense that the soul cannot reach it by its own power; but in another way it is in accordance with its nature, in the sense that by its very nature the soul has a capacity for it, being made in God's image.<sup>24</sup>

De Lubac's argument was made against the reigning versions of Thomism dominant in Rome at the time, the Jesuit tradition of Suarezian Thomism and the Dominican tradition of Cajetanian Thomism.

For both the Suarezian and Cajetanian versions of Thomism, the doctrine of *natura pura*—the doctrine that human nature qua nature has an exclusively “natural end” apart from the “supernatural end” of *visio Dei*—was central to their metaphysical vision and their theology of grace. De Lubac argued that this

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22. See Jacob Wood, *To Stir a Restless Heart: Thomas Aquinas and Henri de Lubac, Grace and the Desire for God* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019); and “Henri de Lubac, *Humani Generis*, and the Natural Desire for a Supernatural End,” *Nova et Vetera* 15 (2017): 1209–41.

23. Fergus Kerr, OP, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 134.

24. *ST* III, q. 9, a. 3.



doctrine is foreign to the Greek and Latin Fathers as well as to Thomas, for whom the Fathers of the Church were *his* Fathers, the great masters through whom Christ's wisdom was handed down.

Tracing the meaning and genesis of the doctrine of *natura pura* on the one hand, and the terms “ὑπέρ φύσιν” and “*supernaturalis*” on the other, de Lubac argued that “following pagan antiquity, [these terms] had first of all simply denoted the realm of the divine above that of known *physis*.”<sup>25</sup> In antique Christian usage, therefore, the supernatural did not so much signify another *ordo* as much as the radical *novum* of the divine dispensation, with its attendant understanding that *visio Dei* is the one end of historical humanity as such. In this way, de Lubac argued that the authentic Latin understanding of the operation of grace, including in Thomas, was essentially convertible with that of the Greek Fathers, and thus the doctrine of *natura pura* as the basis of a “system of pure nature” is a modern innovation. What is more, by rejecting the “system of pure nature” as he did, de Lubac implied that the reigning “orthodoxy” of the Roman schools of Thomism (Dominican and Jesuit) were themselves based on a modern misreading of Thomas as well as the tradition they sought to inhabit faithfully.

The first intervention de Lubac made into the debate on the question of the supernatural occurred in 1931, in an article on Baius and Jansen.<sup>26</sup> This article forms the basis of the first part of *Surnaturel*.<sup>27</sup>

For de Lubac, while Baius's vision bears a certain resemblance to Augustine's, which he sought to recover, the resemblance on closer inspection is more superficial than substantial. While both formally reject the idea of a purely natural end for the human creature, insisting that the destiny of the human being is the glory of divine grace, they do so in irreconcilable ways. The human creature, on the Augustinian vision, is a fragile being who must learn to stand unassumingly before the gratuity of God; he can only humbly receive the grace that is beyond his

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25. Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 16.

26. Henri de Lubac, “Deux Augustiniens fourvoyés: Baius et Jansénien,” *Recherches de science religieuse* 2 (1931): 422–33, 513–40.

27. For what follows, see Wood, *To Stir a Restless Heart*, 404–31.

nature as a gift received with patient and ready waiting. The Augustinian creature cannot demand anything from God without destroying himself. For Baius, by contrast, the human being's need for grace is construed as a *debitum naturae*, such that the man who perfectly observes and obeys the natural law is owed the glory of vision as a matter of justice—something merited and therefore not a gift (in the strict sense).<sup>28</sup> In this way, according to de Lubac, Baius generated an anthropology not so much Augustinian in character as Pelagian, since the power of human nature is—in principle (without the stain of sin)—capable of meriting the supernatural destiny of man as a right due. This latter inclination, de Lubac says, lives on among Catholic thinkers (philosophers and theologians) who posit a purely natural end of human nature, a principle according to which human nature can be perfectible within the limits of mere nature, that is, without recourse to the gift of God's grace.

Moreover, according to de Lubac, Baius's error was propositivistic, since it was based in a logical rigorism and not in the experience of spirit Augustine sought to awaken. In other words, whereas Baius naturalizes the supernatural, reducing the gift to debt and the mystery of revelation to logic, Augustine supernaturalizes the natural, radicalizing the first gift of nature into the unequalable gift of grace, opening the paradoxes of being to the deeper mystery of the supernatural.<sup>29</sup> What is important to see here is that for de Lubac logical and ontological reductionisms both foreclose the disposition of receptivity to the mystery and surprise of the divine gift, thus resulting in an economy of debts and a system of synthetic schemes. By contrast, an adequate disposition of reason and the self before the gift of being leads to a true mysticism.

In his subsequent treatment of Jansen, de Lubac argues that, while he did not commit the same error as Baius (i.e., making the supernatural something owed to nature's merits), he fell nevertheless into a convertible mistake, since he made grace a necessity to achieve the supernatural end in the form

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28. De Lubac, *Surnaturel*, 16–18.

29. *Ibid.*, 32.

of a *sequela creationis*.<sup>30</sup> De Lubac contrasts Jansen in this regard with Augustine, arguing that the latter begins from the urgency of concrete human experience, from reason encountering reality, while the former begins from an a priori and abstract idea of nature and grace, attempting to achieve a synthesis from a logical point of view.<sup>31</sup> This leads to a critical discussion of methodology, both metaphysical and theological. The synthetic method of logical abstraction and postulates (such as the doctrine of *natura pura*) can be useful but not sufficient. An authentic metaphysical and theological methodology must be determined by and serve an adherence to the concrete experience of reason's meeting with reality as it is, that is, with the experience of sin and the unequalable surprise of the gift of grace. Only this ensures the integral and real relationship of the human being to the supernatural and prevents the abstractness that would reduce the mystery of the human being and the drama of human life to a logical synthesis.

The methodological tendency toward abstract reasoning, toward what we could call a systematic or syllogistic reduction of metaphysical/theological reasoning, is, for de Lubac, the basis of a definite continuity between Baius and Jansen and the "system of pure nature." If the former (Baius and Jansen) conceived of Adam as a creature who could, by his own power, merit glory as a *debitum naturae*, the proponents of the "system of pure nature" broke with this logic of *debitum* on the level of the supernatural only to transfer it to the level of a hypothetical state of "pure nature," a state free of both sin and grace.<sup>32</sup> According to Francisco Suárez, for example, what human nature is can only be established on the basis of a purely "natural" definition: "[We must] cut off [*praescindere*] whatever surpasses nature; which can be done by the intellect, as it could have actually been done by God: *what to our eyes is already almost as certain* as it is certain that all these supernatural goods are purely gratuitous."<sup>33</sup>

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30. Ibid., 43–57.

31. Ibid., 76–82.

32. Ibid., 101–02.

33. Francisco Suárez, *De ultimo fine hominis*, dis. 15, sec. 2. All citations of Suárez are taken from his *Opera omnia*, ed. D. M. André (Paris: Vivès, 1856–1878) (emphasis added).

This *epoché* of the actual historical fact of grace and the Incarnation is legitimized by appealing to the Aristotelian axiom of proportionality, according to which what a nature “is” is derived from its *telos*, its *finis ultimus*, such that it is “necessary that every natural substance have some connatural final end towards which it might strive.”<sup>34</sup> According to this scheme, the *finis* of human nature qua nature is indeed a *debitum naturae* in the way Jansen and Baius construed Adam’s supernatural end. Now, however, this *debitum naturae* applies not to any order of grace or glory but to a *finis* that corresponds proportionally to human nature. As the Suarezian theologian Victor Cathrein holds, the human being possesses a *duplex beatitudo* and thus a *duplex finis ultimus*: one merely natural, the other wholly supernatural; one a *debitum naturae*, the other a *donum gratiae*; one the *finis ultimus in statu naturae purae*, the other *visio Dei* given in Christ.<sup>35</sup>

As the chapters of *Surnaturel* on Baius and Jansen draw to a close, de Lubac cautions against the Suarezian and Dominican traditions of Thomism on the point of *natura pura*, which, ironically, is the doctrine by which they aimed to refute Baianism and Jansenism.<sup>36</sup> On the Suarezian and Dominican schemes, the *visio Dei* is secured as an absolute *novum*, a fact wholly beyond every prerogative of nature to achieve or demand—or even desire. *Visio Dei* is thereby confirmed as a *finis* of unequalable grace, while nature and reality are granted an ontological density apart from the Christian claim, such that a metaphysics informed by Christian faith is precluded. But resisting Baianism and Jansenism on these terms ends up, according to de Lubac, undermining the paradox and gift character of reality as such in three basic ways. First, it reduces the drama of reality’s mystery and other-directed givenness by delineating the ontology of human nature increasingly in terms of what is nongratuitously “owed” in the form of a *debitum naturae*. This, surely, distorts human nature and not merely the gift character of grace; the more nature qua nature is conceived in terms of what it can do on its own or is owed by right, the less the dialogical structure of the gift of being is acknowledged

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34. Suárez, *De gratia, prolegomenon* 4, c. 1, n. 10.

35. Victor Cathrein, “De naturali hominis beatitudine,” *Gregorianum* 11 (1930): 398–409, at 403. Cf. Suárez, *De statibus humanae naturae*, c. 1, n. 3.

36. De Lubac, *Surnaturel*, 141–43.

as constitutive—both on the level of the first gift of creation and the second gift of redemption. Second, and consequently, limited in scope to the study of what nature can do on its own, metaphysical and theological reasoning is reduced: it becomes less concretely “realist”; the ontology of human nature is separated from man’s real historical experience (which all agree is graced) and is thus conceived in terms of ahistorical and abstract logical principles. Finally, and internal to the foregoing, de Lubac held that the “system of pure nature” was in fact a “piece of Scotism” (*morceaux de scotisme*) wrongly absorbed by Thomism “because it was extremely convenient in the refutation of Baianism.”<sup>37</sup> By bracketing revelation *tout court* from metaphysical speculation, *ens* is necessarily understood as if it occupied its own ontic space in a univocal fashion, as if every being that exists (including God) existed in the same sense, that is, in the barest sense of existing. Moreover, this univocal and self-possessed space of *ens* can be considered by Scotus as if, *per impossibile*, God did not exist; if God’s existence is kept within view from the start, he is not contemplated as the giver of being and the source of participated existence but rather as one being among many.<sup>38</sup> In this way the analogical and participatory character of Thomas’s realist metaphysics (which could never be perfectly dissociated from theology) was understood by de Lubac to have been compromised by a possibilist modification native to a univocal understanding of being, inherited from Scotus.

### 1.3. *The parting of the ways*

The fundamental parting of the ways on the question of Thomas’s doctrine of *desiderium naturale visionis Dei* occurred in the sixteenth century through a new use of *natura pura* as an essential theological hypothesis. This occurred, according to de Lubac, through the great Dominican commentator Tommaso de Vio Cajetan,

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37. Henri de Lubac, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 33: *Mémoire sur l’occasion de mes écrits* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2006), 188. Cf. de Lubac, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 13: *Augustinisme et théologie moderne*, 260–66.

38. See Catherine Pickstock, “Duns Scotus: His Historical and Contemporary Significance,” *Modern Theology* 21 (2005): 543–74, at 553.

founder of the Dominican or Cajetanian tradition of Thomism.<sup>39</sup> In two steps Cajetan achieved the basis for the Thomist “system of pure nature.”<sup>40</sup> First, he affirmed the convertibility of spiritual substance and natural substance; second, he introduced the idea of “obediential potency” as the foundation of human nature’s receptivity to grace. According to de Lubac, Thomas had always considered the human being to be naturally *capax Dei* and had used “obediential potency” to specify not the achievement of the human destiny but miraculous change.<sup>41</sup> This had everything to do with the fact that the human soul is an incarnate spirit, a *forma* that is self-subsisting is therefore not merely a natural substance.<sup>42</sup> What Cajetan achieved by his double move was to reduce the spiritual nature of the human soul to the level of the merely natural while reconfiguring the order of grace to be convertible with the miraculous, and thus extrinsic to the internal infrastructure of created nature. Therefore, the *desiderium naturale visionis Dei* had to be understood as a desire elicited miraculously by an extrinsic act of divine grace. The upshot was to require that the purely natural desire of human nature for its *finis* must now be conceived as a desire for a naturally achievable end, and not for *visio Dei* as such. Thus Cajetan, for the first time according to de Lubac, made the hypothesis of pure nature something not merely conceivable (as it had been for many medievals) but exigent for a proper philosophical and theological anthropology.

As much as Cajetan is said to be at the origin of the doctrine of *natura pura*, however, it was the Jesuit Francisco Suárez who made the hypothesis into a “system of pure nature.”<sup>43</sup> After Suárez, the hypothesis of pure nature became the basis of a universal explanation of what God could do *de*

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39. De Lubac, *Surnaturel*, 109.

40. Wood, *To Stir a Restless Heart*, 380–90.

41. De Lubac, *Surnaturel*, 117, 136–37.

42. This is not to say that the human being is an “incarnate spirit.” The human being is a rational animal; he is a composite of body and rational soul, that is, matter and spirit. But because his soul is spirit and he is an animal, his soul is an incarnate spirit.

43. De Lubac, *Surnaturel*, 123–25, 148–49.

*potentia ordinata*.<sup>44</sup> This led, on the one hand, to the inclusion of this doctrine as the basis of scholastic tractates against Baianism and Jansenism,<sup>45</sup> and, on the other hand, to the reification of the hypothesis as the essential *epoché* by which human nature qua nature is properly defined. This secured both the ontological density of human nature and at the same time the gratuity of grace as a superaddition. In this way, the idea of *natura pura* was expanded beyond the mere hypothetical, becoming essential to a robust philosophical anthropology and to an “orthodox” theology of grace. Steven Long summarizes the twofold claim as follows,

(1) That even here and now, in the concrete order, there is impressed upon each human person a natural order to the proximate, proportionate, natural end from which the species of man is derived, an end that is in principle naturally knowable and distinct from the final and supernatural end; and (2) that the human person could *without injustice* have been created with this natural ordering alone, outside of sanctifying grace, *in puris naturalibus*, and without the further ordering of man to supernatural beatific vision (for the call to grace is an unmerited gift).<sup>46</sup>

The proportionate end “from which the species of man is derived” functions fully in terms of a strict use of the Aristotelian axiom of proportionality. In this way a *duplex finis ultimus* has to be affirmed for the human being, who by nature now possesses an “ultimate end in the state of pure nature (*finis ultimus in statu naturae purae*),” which is proper to it and wholly dissociable from the *visio Dei* to which the human being is called in Christ. This proportionate end is a true *finis ultimus* of nature, and “perfectly satisfies the natural appetite of man, . . . [and thus is] *perfect* insofar as it is proportionate with respect to human nature.”<sup>47</sup> On this basis Thomas’s “terminological variation” concerning nature’s “elicited” and “innate” desire is resolved by an axiom according

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44. Ibid., 149.

45. Ibid., 144–45.

46. Long, *Natura Pura*, 8.

47. Cathrein, “De naturali hominis beatitudine,” 403. Cf. Suárez, *De statibus humanae naturae*, c. 1, n. 3.

to which, as Suárez expressed it, “a natural inclination cannot be founded in anything but natural power.”<sup>48</sup>

Against this bifurcated anthropology, fractured between a discrete theological anthropology of grace, on one side, and a philosophical anthropology of nature, on the other, de Lubac champions the Augustinian roots of St. Thomas. He insists that the Suarezian and Cajetanian schemes tend, on the one hand, to reduce the philosophical mystery of the human being, relaxing the tension of the question of man’s nature and his sense of being a paradox to himself, while on the other hand construing the gift character of the supernatural end in terms extrinsic to the mystery of man’s metaphysical infrastructure.

## 2. AFTER *SURNATUREL*: PERSONALISM AND METAPHYSICAL REALISM

### 2.1. *The person and the mystery of the supernatural*

In the immediate years following the publication of *Surnaturel*, de Lubac published two important articles on the subject in *Recherches de science religieuse*. The first, published in 1948, is titled “*Duplex Hominis Beatitudo* (Saint Thomas, I<sup>a</sup> 2<sup>ae</sup>, q. 62, a. 1);”<sup>49</sup> the second, published in 1949, is “Le mystère du surnaturel.”<sup>50</sup> These articles crucially specify the doctrine of *Surnaturel* beyond the aporia outlined above.

The 1948 article is a refutation of the essentially Suarezian doctrine according to which

the beatitudo proportionate to human nature (*beatitudo proportionata humanae naturae*) of which St. Thomas speaks [ST I-II, q. 62] is . . . a natural beatitudo that man would have been able to attain had he been created without being

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48. Suárez, *De gratia, prolegomenon* 4, c. 1, n. 8.

49. Henri de Lubac, “*Duplex Hominis Beatitudo* (Saint Thomas, I<sup>a</sup> 2<sup>ae</sup>, q. 62, a. 1),” *Recherches de science religieuse* 35 (1948): 290–99. English translation: “*Duplex Hominis Beatitudo*,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 35, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 599–612. Hereafter the English translation will be cited.

50. De Lubac, “Le mystère du surnaturel,” 80–121.



ordered to a supernatural end (*sine ordinatione ad finem supernaturalem*).<sup>51</sup>

According to de Lubac, this natural beatitude is “not a transcendent beatitude, a final or definitive end of the created spirit in a hypothetical world of ‘pure nature’”; rather it is a *beatitudo imperfecta*, “terrestrial and temporal, immanent to the world itself.”<sup>52</sup> The *duplex beatitudo* of which Thomas writes implies a *beatitudo per participationem*, on the one hand, which is imperfect, and *visio Dei*, which alone is *beatitudo vera et perfecta*. De Lubac offers a significant clutch of texts in support of this reading,<sup>53</sup> but the crucial text he offers is taken from *Summa contra Gentiles*, where Thomas contrasts the perfect happiness of the *visio divina* with the imperfect happiness the “philosophers”<sup>54</sup> wrote about and achieved. From this text de Lubac argues that there is for Thomas a “formal equivalence” between *beatitudo imperfecta* and that happiness the philosophers sought and attained *in hac vita*. Thus, for Thomas, *duplex beatitudo* articulates “the difference in nature between ‘contemplation of divine things’ . . . and the vision of God himself, obtained through the ‘light of glory.’”<sup>55</sup>

While “*Duplex Hominis Beatitudo*” may not yet solve the aporia in which *Surnaturel* ends, it shows the concrete key in which *Surnaturel* must be read. *Surnaturel*, and the understanding de Lubac sought to unfold therein, is wholly uninterested in abstract speculations about other possible worlds—logical deductions of God’s *potentia absoluta*. As valid as it may be to affirm the divine *potentia absoluta*, such speculation tells us little about the real world and history, and even less about God.

To know someone’s goodness is to know what they have done in the given circumstances, that is, in creation; it does not mean to know what they could have done in other circumstances

51. De Lubac, “*Duplex Hominis Beatitudo*,” 600.

52. *Ibid.*, 603.

53. See *ST I-II*, q. 3, a. 5, and q. 62, a. 1; *SG I.5*, III.48; *De virtutibus in communi* q. 1, a. 9 ad 6; *Scriptum Super Sententias II*, d. 41, q. 1, a. 1; III, d. 27, q. 2, a. 2; IV, d. 49, q. 1, a. 1; *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 2 and a. 10; q. 27, a. 2.

54. *SG III.63*, as cited in de Lubac, “*Duplex Hominis Beatitudo*,” 608n20.

55. De Lubac, “*Duplex Hominis Beatitudo*,” 609.

(in a world modally and actually different from creation). If true metaphysics must be bound to the reality of being, true theology must be bound to the *potentia ordinata* according to which God has ordered his creation well and to the most fitting end. Indeed, *potentia ordinata* must be metaphysically prior, and primary, while *potentia absoluta* can only be derivative and therefore secondary: God's character precedes and constitutes the absolute power of his divinity, and not otherwise. If this were not the case, we could rightly judge a crucified God to be a failed God, deficient in *potentia ordinata*, which seems to have been the logic of Judas Iscariot. Metaphysical and theological reason, thus, if they are to say anything true, must be determined by a concrete and realist insistence. Everything serves to understand concrete human experience, and by extension the one who became flesh and was crucified. To understand fully this anthropological realism and how it specifies *Surnaturel*, an account of the 1949 article is critical.

In "Le mystère du surnaturel," de Lubac clarifies the metaphysical basis for his anthropology.<sup>56</sup> The human being's "nature" is fundamentally different from the natures of the other creatures that inhabit the visible world. These natures, various as they are, all possess a stable *finis ultimus*—a perfective end—that corresponds to their nature and the power of their nature to achieve. Normatively, then, the Aristotelian axiom of proportionality, so critical to the Suarezian understanding of nature, does indeed apply to "nature": nature's *finis ultimus* is connatural to that particular nature. Hence, natural appetite "does not extend to anything other than things possible to its nature."<sup>57</sup> But the human being is unlike any other being. The human being possesses a nature unlike any other nature: he is a mystery, a paradox who moves through life with a *mystérieuse claudication*, a limp more primeval than the injury of original sin.<sup>58</sup> He is *capax Dei*, which means—before he is called to any concrete *finis*—that human nature is constitutively open to the infinite. Therefore, the human being bears the burden of an

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56. The following argument is indebted to Wood, "Henri de Lubac, *Humani Generis*, and the Natural Desire for a Supernatural End," 1221–29.

57. Suárez, *De ultimo fine hominis*, dis. 4, cap. 2, n. 5.

58. De Lubac, "Le mystère du surnaturel," 107.

irreducible vertigo, of an “unstable ontological constitution” (*constitution ontologique instable*).<sup>59</sup> Whereas other natures are stabilized by a connatural end, human nature by definition lacks a naturally determined end.<sup>60</sup> There is no natural *finis* of human nature; he is a spiritual creature and this means his nature does not determine a *finis ultimus*. Rather, by nature he *is* radical openness before the totality of the real.

The creation of the spiritual creature thus requires, according to de Lubac, a twofold act of God. First, God must decree a *finis* for this nature,<sup>61</sup> since *this* nature is, by nature, open to the infinite (*anima quodammodo est omnia*).<sup>62</sup> Second, God must will the existence of *this particular* spiritual nature, who shares in this universal nature and desires the *finis* decreed for it by God.<sup>63</sup> This follows from the doctrine reiterated at the Fifth Lateran Council, according to which the spiritual soul of the human being—that “something” of human existence which is convertible with the *nomen dignitatis* of personhood—is in each human being directly willed and created, multiplied and infused by God according to the multitude of human bodies.<sup>64</sup> Or as *Gaudium et spes* would later put it, the human being is “the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake.”<sup>65</sup> The consequence is a painful existential tension: human nature *qua* nature lacks its own *finis* and so is a mystery; the particular person who possesses this nature possesses a determinate *finis*, not insofar as it is given him by nature, but insofar as it is received within his concrete

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59. *Ibid.*, 149.

60. *Ibid.*, 106.

61. *Ibid.*, 101.

62. *ST I*, q. 14, a. 1.

63. De Lubac, “Le mystère du surnaturel,” 103.

64. Fifth Lateran Council (AD 1512–17), *Apostolic regiminis*, Session VIII, 19 December 1513 (DS 1440): “Damnamus et reprobamus omnes asserentes, animam intellectivam mortalem esse, aut unicam in cunctis hominibus, et haec in dubium vertentes, cum illa non solum vere per se et essentialiter humani corporis forma existat . . . et pro corporum quibus infunditur multitudine singulariter multiplicabilis, et multiplicata, et multiplicanda sit.”

65. *Gaudium et spes*, 24. Cf. *Humani generis*, 36.

history.<sup>66</sup> Thus, according to de Lubac, to consider human nature strictly “in its species,” apart from the supernatural, is to consider it “statically,” in abstraction from history and the providential order in which a concrete being is situated as a subject before his Creator, and thus to contemplate it with no determined *finis* whatever, whether natural or supernatural.<sup>67</sup> Critically, for de Lubac, the meaning of the *imago Dei* is more than the mere fact of an intellectual faculty: the meaning of being created *ad imaginem Dei* is rooted in concrete values that are generated from the creation of an intellectual being within a history and communal complex of intellectual beings, who have concrete experiences of reason, free will, and the primal mystery of their being, their “unstable ontological constitution.”<sup>68</sup> For the individual, all this is rooted in the experience of history, of the wider community, and in the *ordo* of the contingencies of being in time with others. This means that the *imago Dei*, and the *finis ultimus* given thereby, is not something that can be contemplated *in abstracto*. Of course, the *imago* and the *finis* are no less ontologically constitutive than a natural faculty, but they have the *forma* of being given in a concrete history, and are therefore experienced like the mark of a covenant, like the call of Abraham or Israel’s passage through the Red Sea. That being said, the temporal and the eternal cannot, like grace and nature, be set over and against each other: history is metaphysics, while without history there is no metaphysics. From this point of view, a hypothetical state of pure nature in which the human being is neither called nor ordered to *visio Dei* is fully admissible, only now it is practically useless to understand both the metaphysics of the experience of concrete human beings

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66. De Lubac, “Le mystère du surnaturel,” 113, 92. Cf. Wood, “Henri de Lubac, *Humani Generis*, and the Natural Desire for a Supernatural End,” 1226–27.

67. De Lubac, “Le mystère du surnaturel,” 105.

68. Wood, “Henri de Lubac, *Humani Generis*, and the Natural Desire for a Supernatural End,” 1227: “To consider human nature ‘in the image of God’ [for de Lubac] is not, as it was for Marcelli, to consider human nature with the addition of intellectual powers; it is to consider the consequences arising from creating individual members of an intellectual species who possess the powers inherent in that species: they have intellect and will, as they would in any hypothesis, but they also possess an element of mystery arising from the primal indetermination of the nature that they have received.” Cf. De Lubac, “Le mystère du surnaturel,” 118.

and unable to specify or secure the gratuity of any grace given in that experience. De Lubac writes,

When you postulate another order of things, then whether you like it or not, you postulate at the same time another humanity, another human being and, if I may so speak, another me. . . . Between this man who, according to the hypothesis, is not destined to see God and the man who I am in reality, between this futurible [human being] and this existing [human being], there is nothing more than an entirely ideal, an entirely abstract identity. Then again, perhaps I've conceded too much by saying that. For the difference between these two does not just concern individuality; it concerns nature itself.<sup>69</sup>

## 2.2. *The paradox of the "two ends"*

If Thomas's doctrine of "*duplex hominis beatitudo*" seems on the surface to lend itself to a *duplex finis ultimus*, the situation becomes more complex when the text is read in the context of Thomas's wider oeuvre. Again, we discover that Thomas's "terminology is variable." Generally, when Thomas writes about the happiness of human beings, he distinguishes between perfect and imperfect happiness: the latter denotes a happiness that exists in the world, while the former denotes the happiness of *visio Dei* exclusively. The language of *ultima beatitudo* is thus reserved for the *visio Dei*: "Final and perfect blessedness [*ultima et perfecta beatitudo*] can consist in nothing else than the vision of the divine essence."<sup>70</sup> For example, in *Super Boethium de Trinitate*, when Thomas writes about *duplex beatitudo* he distinguishes between "the imperfect happiness found in this life, . . . [which] is possible in our present life, . . . [and] the perfect happiness of heaven, where we will see God himself through his essence."<sup>71</sup> This suggests, as de Lubac argued, that the *beatitudo proportionata humanae naturae* of which Thomas writes is "not a transcendent

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69. De Lubac, "Le mystère du surnaturel," 93, as quoted in Wood, "Henri de Lubac, *Humani Generis*, and the Natural Desire for a Supernatural End," 1228.

70. *ST I-II*, q. 3, a. 8.

71. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Boethium de Trinitate* III, q. 6, a. 4 ad 3.

beatitude, a final or definitive end of the created spirit in a hypothetical world of ‘pure nature,’” but rather natural beatitude is “an imperfect ‘beatitude,’ terrestrial and temporal, immanent to the world itself.”<sup>72</sup> The first beatitude is, thus, *beatitudo per participationem*, while only the second is *beatitudo vera et perfecta*.<sup>73</sup>

This leads de Lubac to argue that Thomas’s doctrine of *duplex beatitudo* is not a doctrine of two *finis ultimi humani*—pace Suárez and commentarial Thomism—but rather a doctrine of two human experiences of happiness: *beatitudo imperfecta*, experienced *in hac vita*, and *beatitudo perfecta*, the divinizing experience of the *comprehensor* who sees God face to face through God’s own *lumen gloriae*.<sup>74</sup> As such, the doctrine of *duplex beatitudo* serves to articulate “the difference in nature between ‘contemplation of divine things’ . . . and the vision of God himself, obtained through the ‘light of glory.’”<sup>75</sup> Therefore, whenever Thomas writes of *beatitudo per participationem*, *beatitudo imperfecta*, or *felicitas*, in each case he is writing of that experience of happiness spoken of in ancient philosophy. But as much as human life here and now is open to a real experience of *felicitas*, this is always and specifically *beatitudo per participationem*—never itself the experience of *beatitudo perfecta*, which alone perfectly satisfies the mysterious desire for the infinite that constitutes the human heart.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, de Lubac holds, the human being is constituted by a paradox: he is a creature with no naturally corresponding *finis ultimus*: he is a “spiritual nature” created *ex nihilo* for God himself. As de Lubac puts it in *Spirito e libertà*,

This idea of a “spiritual nature” which alone, in the wholly unique sense, is directly related to God (cf. *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 3, co.), whom God has made according to his image and who, by the very fact of this same eminent dignity, finds himself more than any other [creature] dependent on God; [it is the] idea of a nature that is open by essence to the completely gratuitous and marvelous gift of divine

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72. De Lubac, “*Duplex Hominis Beatitudo*” 603.

73. *ST* I-II, q. 5, a. 3; q. 3, a. 5; q. 62, a. 1; *SG* I.5, III.48.

74. *SG* III.63.

75. De Lubac, “*Duplex Hominis Beatitudo*,” 609.

76. *ST* I-II, q. 3, a. 8.

charity because he is made in view of this Gift; [it is the] idea of a being for which the end [*finis ultimus*] is not like those of other beings “proportioned to their nature,” of a being who, instead of finding his natural fulfillment in the order of nature [*invece di trovare il suo completamente normale nell'ordine naturale*], he can only find it in God, in exceeding himself and the whole order of nature.<sup>77</sup>

The human being bears within himself an élan he can only experience as an originary wound. He moves through life with a *mystérieuse claudication*, a limp more primeval than the injury of “original sin.” The human being bears his *capax Dei*, the consequence of his creation *ad imaginem Dei*, like a beast of burden bears his load: a staggering “animal who is spirit, . . . a creature who mysteriously touches God.”<sup>78</sup> The *mystérieuse claudication* is the heart of being according to which the human being discovers, at the deepest level of his inmost need, that he is an objective mystery to himself, a mystery who only comes to light through his encounter with the one who is the revelation of the Father and his love (GS, 22). Such a creature cannot be understood exhaustively according to a principle of “proportionality.” He is paradox all the way down. He is made to live by and for the gift of an “other,” which he can only receive through a sincere gift of himself (GS, 24).

Constituted as if by a wound in his heart, the original human desire is not so much a drive to overcome the limitation of his nature, but a tensive readiness for an encounter, for a love that will give him to himself. He is Adam waiting for his helpmate, for one who will be at last bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh (Gn 2:23). The original experience of the weight of this paradox is Augustine’s restless heart.<sup>79</sup> The human being, when he is honest with himself in judging his own experience of being in the world, sees that the reality he encounters only corresponds to the exigency of his being to the extent that he receives it as gift and reads it as a

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77. De Lubac, *Spirito e libertà*, 255n1 [*Esprit et liberté*, 182n1]. Quoted from a note added to *Spirito e libertà*, not original to *Surnaturel*.

78. De Lubac, “Le mystère du surnaturel,” 107.

79. Underpinning de Lubac’s critique of *natura pura* was a primordial concern with the Augustinian legacy. See David Grumett, “De Lubac, Grace, and the Pure Nature Debate,” *Modern Theology* 31 (2015): 123–46.

“sign” writ by a vital but veiled “other.” The totality of life for the human being points to, and is an indication of, the means of communication with this ultimate and utterly intimate “other,” who lies too deeply within and too far above to be known directly. As such, the human being is an élan wholly disproportionate to his “nature”; he is *desiderium naturale visionis Dei*.

### 3. BETWEEN *SURNATUREL* AND *HUMANI GENERIS*

#### 3.1. *Henri de Lubac and Pope Pius XII*

“How can a conscious spirit be anything other than an absolute desire for God?”<sup>80</sup> Feingold takes the question posed by de Lubac in 1932 to Maurice Blondel as indicative of the “central tension” of *Surnaturel*. Feingold responds that “for St. Thomas the fundamental question would be the following: How can a created spirit have an absolute desire for the vision of God without grace?”<sup>81</sup> Feingold treats the question as if it had been settled magisterially in 1950 by *Humani generis*’s warning against those who “destroy the gratuity of the supernatural order, since God, they say, cannot [*non posse*] create intellectual beings without ordering and calling them to the beatific vision.”<sup>82</sup>

In his 1985 book-length interview with Angelo Scola, de Lubac insisted that, not only was he not the target of the Pisan anathema, but on this question *Humani generis* was paraphrasing his 1949 essay, “Le mystère du surnaturel”:

If God had so willed it, he need not have given us being, and this being which he has given us he need not have called to the vision of himself. . . . God cannot be compelled to give me being, not from anything within or without. Nor can he be compelled by anything to imprint upon my being a supernatural finality.<sup>83</sup>

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80. De Lubac, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 33: *Mémoire*, 188.

81. Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God*, 628.

82. *Humani generis*, 26. See Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God*, xxxii, 374, 425, 436.

83. De Lubac, “Le mystère du surnaturel,” 104.



The basic convertibility here between de Lubac's 1949 essay with *Humani generis* is notable, if the question of a direct paraphrase is debatable. What is not debatable is the fact that this specification of *Surnaturel* anticipates *Humani generis*. This notwithstanding, the encyclical has often been read as dealing a crippling dogmatic blow to the heart of *Surnaturel*. However, the facts do not support this judgment. In the first place, de Lubac's specification antedates the Pian warning. Second, there is the 1980 publication of *Spirito e libertà*, which (1) includes the boldest doctrinal claims of 1946 unaltered; (2) does not include a single qualification of the text in light of *Humani generis*; and (3) promises a revised edition (never completed) to reinforce further the original conclusions of 1946.<sup>84</sup> *Spirito e libertà* is not the work of a theologian who understands his theology has been censured by the Magisterium. Third, and finally, the idea that Pius directly targeted de Lubac is unsustainable because there is no evidence that Pius himself ever had any reservations regarding his orthodoxy—in fact, the opposite is the case. In a note to de Lubac in 1958—during the period of de Lubac's imposed “silence” by his order—Pius thanked him for his recently published *Méditation sur l'Église* with “his wholehearted blessing,” asking him to continue his work, which, according to the pope, “promised much good for the Church.”<sup>85</sup> If *Spirito e libertà* is not the work of a theologian who understands his theology has been censured by the Magisterium, neither are these words of Pius the words of a pope writing to a theologian he judges to be heterodox. None of this evidence, however, diminishes the genuine *novum* of *Surnaturel*.

### 3.2. *The theological novum of Surnaturel and the realism of Humani generis*

To clarify the theological *novum* of *Surnaturel* in relation to *Humani generis*, as well as the book's basic dogmatic harmony with the encyclical, two preliminary questions must be posed and expounded. (1) To what extent and to what end does *Surnaturel* entail that *hic et nunc* it is “impossible” to conceive of the human

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84. De Lubac, *Spirito e libertà*, 101 [*Esprit et liberté*, 18].

85. De Lubac, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 33: *Mémoire*, 90.

being as not destined to *visio Dei*? (2) To what extent and to what end did Pius magisterially underwrite a doctrine of *natura pura*? These questions are treated in turn.

1. *Surnaturel* itself does not weigh in on the question of whether God could “create intellectual beings without ordering and calling them to the beatific vision.” As an abstract possibility, dissociable from concrete reality, the question is not raised on a single page of de Lubac’s book. *Surnaturel*, rather, expounds how the tradition has understood the drama of the human being’s relation to his supernatural destiny *hic et nunc*, in the concrete reality encountered by the human being. De Lubac’s 1949 article qualifies *Surnaturel* against a possible misunderstanding: the 1946 thesis does not concern what God could have done in another world. God is not compelled by any law of abstract logic or principle of nature extrinsic to the divine good pleasure by which he has called intellectual beings to the beatific vision. Yet the question of what God could have done in another world is strictly irrelevant to *Surnaturel* properly understood. *Surnaturel* is concerned not with the question of the necessity of “ordering” but of the necessary freedom of the divine “call” *hic et nunc*.<sup>86</sup> As de Lubac puts it, “If there is in our nature a desire to see God, this can only be because God wants for us this supernatural end which consists in seeing him. It is because he wills it and does not cease from willing it, so that this desire is nothing other than his call.”<sup>87</sup> In scholastic terms, this “call” God actively and ceaselessly wills concerns an evidence of divine *conveniens*. Accordingly, our rational approach to this evidence will have to proceed *ex convenientia*, as opposed to *ex necessitate*.

There is no way to argue *to* the *conveniens* of a given fact or event; it is its own sufficient reason. To say something is *conveniens* is to say that its *ratio* is not only deeper than created minds can grasp, but that its *ratio* is also beyond any law according to which it could be otherwise compelled. The most rational disposition before such a fact or event, therefore, is one that embraces its evidence in all of its factors, with a contemplative disposition that seeks not to grasp but to penetrate the light of

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86. David Braine, “The Debate Between Henri de Lubac and His Critics,” *Nova et Vetera* 6 (2008): 543–90, at 573–74.

87. De Lubac, *Spirito e libertà*, 260 [*Esprit et liberté*, 187; *Surnaturel*, 487].

its own sufficient *ratio*. Love is such an event. There is no logic by which love can be compelled or deduced, not because it is irrational but because the event of love is its own reason.<sup>88</sup> An argument *ex necessitate*, by contrast, is an argument concerning a fact that cannot be otherwise in any possible world on account of an extrinsic law: for instance, two plus two equals four in every possible world. But the love of two lovers is no less true or certain, even while its *raison d'être* cannot be deduced or argued to. It is perfectly true and certain and reasonable, and yet it is an event that cannot be translated to any other world or circumstance. It is the concreteness of a surprise that is impossibly real. In the case of the human being created *ad imaginem Dei* we are dealing with just such a fact: the mysterious and actual way God has given himself to be the *finis ultimus* of human life is its own reason.

The distinction between “ordering” and “calling” now becomes crucial for two reasons. First, the distinction works to focus speculative attention on the question of the concrete freedom of the human being within the “reality” in which he is divinely willed. Insofar as this is the concern of *Surnaturel*, de Lubac’s argument works to root the freedom of grace in *actus* and not in a contrastive *posse*. Second, the distinction between “ordering” and “calling” roots theological speculation in the *actus* of historical “reality” as it is willed by God. According to Chesterton, the goodness of our world cannot be justified as it is by “mechanical optimists,” that is, “as the best of all possible worlds.” Rather, its “merit is precisely that none of us could have conceived such a thing; that we should have rejected the bare idea of it as miracle and unreason. It is the best of all impossible worlds.”<sup>89</sup> We could rephrase Chesterton in terms of de Lubac’s argument and say that our graced world is not the best of all possible worlds because it is “graced”; it is the best of all impossibly graced worlds. As such, the transcendentalist temptation to Kantian possibilism is foreclosed, and with it the question of the possibility of God creating human beings in another world without destining them to deification. This is not the question of *Surnaturel*, but rather

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88. Fulton J. Sheen, *Life Is Worth Living. Fourth Series* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956), 88.

89. G.K. Chesterton, *Charles Dickens* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2007), 144.

precisely the kind of abstraction *Surnaturel* wants to “un-ask.” This leads us back to our question: to what extent and in what way did Pius magisterially underwrite a doctrine of *natura pura* when he ruled out the proposition that it is “impossible” (*non posse*) for God to create intellectual beings without destining them to beatitude?

2. Assailants and defenders of de Lubac alike will grant that the sense in which *Humani generis* rules out the proposition that it is “impossible” for God to create intellectual beings without destining them to beatitude is misconstrued if it forecloses Thomas’s argument (that if there was no prospect of attaining beatific vision the natural desire of the created intellect would be in vain, *frustra*). As Thomas has it, “The human being would have been created uselessly and in vain [i.e., his *desiderium naturale* would be *frustra*] if he were unable to attain beatitude, as would be the case with anything that cannot attain its ultimate end.”<sup>90</sup> Clearly, then, Pope Pius is working with a narrow sense of *non posse*, one that concerns a “pure hypothetical.”<sup>91</sup> The Pian limit, therefore, is a dogmatic limit against those who would construct necessary laws about what God *could* have done (but in fact did not do). Positively, this amounts to a declaration that God is God and can create as he pleases. He could have created an intellectual being without calling it to *visio*; he could also have saved the human race without becoming incarnate.<sup>92</sup> The Pian doctrine is far more tentative than that Suarezian conviction that “here and now, in the concrete order, there is impressed upon each human person a natural order to the proximate, proportionate, natural end from which the species of man is derived.”<sup>93</sup> The pope stops short of an actualized doctrine of *natura pura* and indeed “avoided any mention of the famous ‘*natura pura*,’ which more than a few highly influential theologians . . . desired to canonize.”<sup>94</sup> *Humani*

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90. Thomas Aquinas, *De malo*, q. 5, a. 1 ad 1.

91. Edward T. Oakes, SJ, “The *Surnaturel* Controversy: A Survey and a Response,” *Nova et Vetera* 9 (2011): 625–56, at 644.

92. *ST III*, q. 1, a. 2.

93. Long, *Natura Pura*, 8.

94. Henri de Lubac, *Entretien autour de Vatican II* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1985), 13.

*generis* offers only a negative affirmation concerning, not so much the “nature of nature,” but the necessary *reductio ad mysterium* of true realism. Neither philosophically nor theologically, neither with the aid of revelation nor without it, can the human mind impose an abstract “law” on the divine call by declaring what is necessarily appropriable to other possible worlds. God is God. God could have created the world otherwise, just as he could have graced it otherwise. As such, the anathema leaves wholly uncontested the core theological proposal of *Surnaturel*, according to which the divine gratuity is neither secured or defended by “contrast,” by *separatio* with a “pure hypothetical.” In our best impossible world, “spirit” is gift at its very heart.

On one level, and this is emphasized by Milbank, *Surnaturel*'s thesis, consistent with the Greek Fathers, insists that the actuality of spirit as we know it is unthinkable without the destination of deification. *Humani generis* says nothing that contradicts this, but neither does it state clearly the radicality of this claim or the loss that results from its domestication or diminution. In the name of recovering the brilliance of patristic anthropology, one could argue that *Surnaturel* implies intellectual beings as such must be oriented to the supernatural (which *Surnaturel* does not explicitly argue, but *Humani generis* does rule out). The concern of *Surnaturel* ultimately has to do with the actuality of spirit as it exists concretely, while the Pian limit aims at theologians who would abstract from the concrete order of grace to write a transcendentalist law *ex necessitate* concerning the ordering of spirit in all possible worlds. As such, it is not merely the case that the Pian limit does not contradict *Surnaturel*, but it cuts also and implicitly in the opposite direction: the *finis ultimus* of the spiritual being is a matter of *convenientia* and, by virtue of its unique constitution *capax Dei*, it is irreducible to *necessitate*. In this way the Pian warning implicates, at the same time, any theology that would abstract from the concrete order to devise a necessary law for another possible world in which the hypothetical “state of pure nature” were actual.

The anathema against those who “destroy the gratuity of the supernatural order,” therefore, could be rephrased against those who “destroy the gratuity of the supernatural order, since the gratuity of God’s grace, they say, is fully secured *only* by the affirmation that in another world God could have created

intellectual beings without ordering them to the beatific vision.” The encyclical, rather than underwriting the doctrine of *natura pura* unproblematically, tends to destabilize the view that “here and now, in the concrete order” a “proximate, proportionate, natural end” is impressed on nature in a way “knowable and distinct from the final and supernatural end.”<sup>95</sup> Hence de Lubac’s comment to Angelo Scola that, far from “condemning” him, *Humani generis* did the opposite: “‘Disappointment’ does not describe it strongly enough, as a good theologian put it to me at the time, [*Humani generis*] was for [the proponents of *natura pura*] a ‘boomerang.’”<sup>96</sup>

#### 4. THE “SCOTIST” INFLUENCE

##### 4.1. *Indispositus and human destiny*

One of Feingold’s charges against the plausibility of *Surnaturel* as a legitimate reading of Thomas concerns de Lubac’s putative “Scotism,” his apparent synthetic use of John Duns Scotus’s doctrine of the *indispositus* of the human being to the *visio Dei*.<sup>97</sup> He argues that de Lubac, faced with the perplexity of Thomas’s terminological variability and the *aporia* of resolving the status of the *desiderium naturale visionis Dei* (is it “elicited” or “innate”?), resolves the question by importing a Scotist solution: “that the vision of God is our *natural end*.”<sup>98</sup> On this account, de Lubac’s thesis fails to be authentically Thomist. *Ergo*, de Lubac is guilty of a Scotist interpretation.

Feingold’s charge breaks down on at least three levels. First, it fails to the extent that, whatever de Lubac’s invocation of the Subtle Doctor to substantiate his argument, de Lubac never held—as Scotus and Jansenius both did—that the supernatural vision is a “natural end” of the human being. For de Lubac, this

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95. Long, *Natura Pura*, 8.

96. De Lubac, *Entretien autour de Vatican II*, 13.

97. De Lubac, *Spirito e libertà*, 243–44 [*Esprit et liberté*, 170–71; *Surnaturel*, 312–13].

98. Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God*, 57.

is precisely *not* the case: the human being is a paradox who does not possess a “natural” *finis ultimus*, but rather a “desire for God . . . as gift.”<sup>99</sup> As such, the answer to the paradox of the human being is gift at every turn; nothing is “proper” to nature apart from the experiential vertigo of human desire, on the one hand, and the incapacity of natural human power to achieve anything corresponding to this desire on its own, on the other. In this conviction, de Lubac is following not Scotus but Thomas: “Final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence.”<sup>100</sup> But “man is not able by his own operation to reach this ultimate end, which transcends the capacity of his natural powers,”<sup>101</sup> and therefore the human being “needs divine help to obtain the ultimate end.”<sup>102</sup>

The authenticity of de Lubac’s paradox of the supernatural lies, as Milbank reminds us, in the fact that it must work in two directions simultaneously: (1) “the extra-ordinary, the supernatural, which is always manifest within Creation, is present at the heart of the ordinary: it is ‘precisely the real’”<sup>103</sup>; while nevertheless and at the same time (2) “the ordinary and the given always at its heart points beyond itself and in its spiritual nature aspires upwards to the highest.”<sup>104</sup> The original gift of “nature” (*datum optimum*), created for this impossible *finis ultimus*, points obliquely but ineludibly—in the urgency of the anterior receptivity of the human being’s natural desire—to a needful waiting on a second gift (*datum perfectum*), an encounter that would both utterly transcend nature and alone correspond to the mystery of nature’s inmost longing. The Scotist idea that “the vision of God is our *natural end*”<sup>105</sup> precisely misses the paradox, which is the essence of de Lubac’s proposal.

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99. De Lubac, *Spirito e libertà*, 261 [*Esprit et liberté*, 187; *Surnaturel*, 487].

100. *ST I-II*, q. 3, a. 8.

101. *SG III*.147.

102. *Ibid.*

103. Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 5.

104. *Ibid.*

105. Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God*, 57.

Second, Feingold's characterization of de Lubac's interpretation as Scotist concerns the clear discrepancy between Scotus's doctrine of *appetitus naturalis* and de Lubac's doctrine of *le désir naturel du surnaturel*. Even while de Lubac cites Scotus as evidence in the tradition of a constitutive desire of human nature to see God, it is nevertheless the case that, for Scotus, "in human nature there is no tendency to depend on God (to be an incarnation of God); nor is . . . [the *appetitus naturalis* an] inclination or openness *to be fulfilled*."<sup>106</sup> Hence, as Allan Wolter has pointed out, for Scotus the *appetitus naturalis* is not an act or operation but simply the "relationship between any faculty (of the soul) and that which perfects it; . . . [therefore] to speak of the natural appetite for beatitude as a 'desire' or a 'longing' . . . is to use purely metaphorical language."<sup>107</sup> This suggests that for Scotus the *appetitus naturalis* may in fact be closer to a species of "obediential potency" (and perhaps not even a "specific obediential potency") than to de Lubac's *désir naturel du surnaturel*. Unlike de Lubac's *désir naturel*, Scotus's *appetitus naturalis* cannot be described as "something of God."<sup>108</sup> In part the issue turns on the complex way Scotus prioritizes the will over reason, thus distinguishing the will's ordination to the supernatural from the intellect's ordination, which is not ordained to the supernatural.<sup>109</sup> This leads to a problematic situation in which, as Rudi te Velde has shown, in contrast to Thomas, Scotus holds that there is no inclination in human nature to self-transcend, even while there is (aporetically) an inclination of the will toward a transcendent object (supernatural "beatitude"). This makes no sense of de Lubac's intellectual yearning, which, even while it is an inclination of being, is fundamentally a yearning for illumination. Moreover, Scotus's apparent resistance against emphasizing an

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106. Nico den Bok et al., "More Than Just an Individual: Scotus's Concept of Person from the Christological Context of *Lectura* III.1," *Franciscan Studies* 66 (2008): 169–96, at 186 (emphasis original).

107. Allan B. Wolter, "Duns Scotus on the Natural Desire for the Supernatural," in *The Philosophical Theology of John Duns Scotus* (London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 125–47, at 140–41.

108. De Lubac, *Spirito e libertà*, 261 [*Esprit et liberté*, 187; *Surnaturel*, 487].

109. Wolter, "Duns Scotus on the Natural Desire," 131–39.



inclination to self-transcend within the nature of intellectual beings allows him to emphasize a God-willed “sufficiency” of finite being. Yet how can this be? How can human nature desire transcendent beatitude without that desire constituting an inclination to self-transcend, a grasping upward that demands as a right of nature what is beyond nature? As te Velde shows, for Scotus the transcendent good is naturally willed as an *immanent good*, and therefore it is not desired as a self-transcending élan.<sup>110</sup> Dissociated from the *convenientia* of the Incarnation on the one hand, and conceived in terms of a desire for an immanent good on the other, the *appetitus naturalis* of Scotus cannot be properly described as a self-transcending *desiderium naturale visionis Dei*.

#### 4.2. Per influentiam and divine-human synergy

The third, more general but perhaps more decisive, problem with Feingold’s charge against de Lubac for a Scotist corruption of Thomas is that it suppresses the extent to which de Lubac’s critique of *natura pura* contained within it an implicit critique of the Suarezian doctrine, precisely for the way it synthesized metaphysical innovations linked to Scotus.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, de Lubac himself judged the “system of pure nature” a “piece of Scotism” (*morceaux de scotisme*) wrongly absorbed by Thomists “because it was extremely convenient in the refutation of Baianism.”<sup>112</sup> Ludwig Honnefelder has cogently shown that Suárez’s *Disputationes metaphysicae* (1597), despite the numerous references to Thomas, proposes a structural concept of metaphysics that is fundamentally Scotist, not Thomistic.<sup>113</sup> Specifically as this concerns the “*nouvelle doctrine*” of *natura pura*, the Suarezian

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110. Rudy te Velde, “*Natura in seipsa recurva est*: Duns Scotus and Aquinas on the Relationship between Nature and Will,” in E. P. Bos, ed., *John Duns Scotus (1265/6–1308): Renewal of Philosophy* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 155–70.

111. De Lubac, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 13: *Augustinisme et théologie moderne*, 260 [Surnaturel, 286].

112. De Lubac, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 33: *Mémoire*, 188; cf. *Augustinisme et théologie moderne*, 260–66.

113. Honnefelder, *Métaphysique*, 81.

debt to Scotus has been expertly demonstrated by Jacob Schmutz to be rooted in the shifting conception of metaphysical causality.<sup>114</sup>

As Schmutz has shown, what de Lubac called the “conception *nouvelle de l'être*”<sup>115</sup> entailed by the Suarezian doctrine of *natura pura* rests fundamentally on an innovation in causal metaphysics traceable to Scotus. For Thomas, the relation between primary and secondary causality ensures a participatory scheme: the first cause acts immediately “within” (*in*) the secondary cause; “God works in every agent” (*Deus operatur in omni operante*).<sup>116</sup> Being communicates itself *per influentiam* beginning with the first cause, according to the axiom of *Liber de causis*.<sup>117</sup> This means that, in the order of secondary causality, neither the primary nor secondary causes are “superfluous”—not because the effect is “partly done by God and partly by the natural agent” but because the effect “is wholly done by both, according to a different mode” (*sed totus ab utroque secundum alium modum*).<sup>118</sup> Even while the first cause is “sufficient,” the secondary cause is *not* “superfluous” according to a noncompeting logic of participation. For Suárez, by contrast, to claim that neither cause is “superfluous” is to claim that neither is capable of being the sole source of the given effect, which each cause has worked “in part.”<sup>119</sup> In other words, for Suárez the action of the two causes is separate: the more one cause acts, the more the other does not. Suárez’s scheme is worked out against the backdrop of the thought of another sixteenth-century Jesuit, Luis de Molina.

To explain the collaboration of primary and secondary causes, Molina offered, with massive metaphysical consequences, that the two collaborate as “two men hauling a boat together.”<sup>120</sup>

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114. Jacob Schmutz, “La doctrine médiévale des causes et la théologie de la nature pure (XIIIe-XVIIe siècles),” *Revue thomiste* 101 (2001): 217–64.

115. De Lubac, *Spirito e libertà*, 219 [*Esprit et liberté*, 143; *Surnaturel*, 286].

116. *ST I*, q. 105, a. 5.

117. [unknown], *Liber de causis*, cap. 1, n. 1.

118. *SG III*.70.

119. Schmutz, “La doctrine médiévale,” 251.

120. Luis de Molina, *Concordia liberi arbitrii cum gratiae donis II*, disp. 26, n. 15.

The image had been previously considered and categorically rejected by Thomas, who judged it metaphysically inadequate as a description of the relation between primary and secondary causality.<sup>121</sup> The *locus classicus* of Molina's image comes, in fact, from Scotus, along with Peter Olivi.<sup>122</sup> With Molina the image is formalized in the doctrine of "general concurrence" (*concursus generalis*), according to which God (the first cause) does not flow "into" (*in*) secondary causes, but rather flows "with" (*cum*) secondary causes to their effect.<sup>123</sup> The *novum* here concerns the "negation of *in* in favor of *cum*"<sup>124</sup>—a tacit negation of a participatory understanding of the relation between primary and secondary causality, and hence the spheres of nature and the supernatural. Molina's doctrine of *concursus generalis* can be said to belong to the ascetic tendency in the Jesuits in that, on the level of theory, it parses with conceptual clarity the division of labor of a given act, while on the spiritual level it entails the rigor of moralism. By contrast, Thomas's more traditional doctrine of *per influentiam* is metaphysically congenial with a mystical approach (tending to mystical union), the synergism of divinity and humanity that is the basis of ecclesial participation in Christ, the *quasi una persona mystica*.<sup>125</sup>

Whereas Thomas offered the metaphysical basis of a synergistic construal of the relation between primary and secondary causality, Suárez, following Molina, opted for a parallelism in which the first cause works alongside (*cum*) the more or less autonomous action of a secondary cause. This makes possible a *duplex ordo causalitatis* in which the created and uncreated agents function according to a twofold scheme of self-sufficiency.<sup>126</sup> Hence the universality with which Suárez can use the Aristotelian principle of proportionality to shape the logic of *debitum naturae* and thus underwrite his doctrine of *natura pura*.

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121. Thomas Aquinas, *Contra errores Graecorum* I, cap. 23.

122. John Duns Scotus, *Quaestiones quodlibetales*, q. 25; see *Ordinatio* I, dist. 3, pt. 3, q. 2, n. 496.

123. Molina, *Concordia* II, disp. 26.

124. Schmutz, "La doctrine médiévale," 220–21.

125. *ST* III, q. 48, a. 2.

126. Schmutz, "La doctrine médiévale," 219.

As Schmutz argues, “The autonomy bestowed on the secondary cause and the efficacy of the order of secondary causality is what allows us to think of a natural appetite as efficacious and self-sufficient within its own order.”<sup>127</sup> In this regard, the *duplex ordo causalitatis* involves a clear and acknowledged break with Thomas and a mystical metaphysics in favor of an ascetic and systematic scheme of causality Suárez himself attributes to Scotus.<sup>128</sup> In this light, the shift to *natura pura* is at once, and interiorly, a move away from a participatory metaphysical vision and a move toward an “instructional-ascetic” vision of the spiritual life. At its heart, according to de Lubac, the shift involves a misunderstanding of the nature of reality, because it “misconstrue[s] participating being as if it was univocal to Being.”<sup>129</sup>

CONCLUSION:  
TOWARD THE CHRISTOLOGICAL CENTER

Granted that *desiderium naturale visionis Dei* is awakened or “elicited” by knowledge of God, the question is the following: Is this awakening of desire for God by God’s self-revelation grounded in an originary “call,” an “innate” desire of the spiritual creature? Or does it arrive wholly as an experience of pure and radical disjunction? The question concerns whether there is a “constitutive call,” an “innate” élan to God. Does the natural elicited desire of the human being who has encountered God’s self-revelation “correspond to an *underlying innate appetite* for the vision of God?”<sup>130</sup>

It is worth listening again to Feingold’s warning concerning the difficulty of the question posed in terms of *either* “innate” or “elicited” desire: “St. Thomas’s texts on the natural desire to see God . . . do not directly either affirm or deny the existence of an underlying innate appetite.”<sup>131</sup> St. Thomas never

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127. Ibid.

128. Suárez, *De gratia*, cap. 35.

129. De Lubac, *Spirito e libertà*, 259 [*Esprit et liberté*, 186; *Surnaturel*, 485].

130. Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God*, xxv.

131. Ibid., 399; see 406–07.

literally denies or affirms the existence of an “innate appetite” for the vision of God, for the simple reason that the term “innate appetite” does not belong to his terminology. However, “in a very large number of texts St. Thomas effectively denies this notion.”<sup>132</sup> In many texts Thomas “effectively denies” an innate desire for vision, but never *directly*. Even so, in one text he clearly and directly affirms an innate desire of nature for vision: “Even though by his nature man is inclined [*inclinetur*] to his ultimate end [*visio Dei*], he cannot reach it by nature but only by grace, and this owing to the loftiness of that end.”<sup>133</sup> Feingold cites this text from *In Boethius de Trinitate* once in a footnote, lightly dismissing it as if Thomas were “simply affirming a natural inclination for beatitude in general.”<sup>134</sup> But if this is the case, why does he write of the impossibility of achieving this beatitude without the gift of grace? It is clear that Thomas is not at all writing of “beatitude in general” but of *visio Dei* specifically. To this objection Feingold responds, “However, there are very many texts which effectively deny the existence of an innate appetite for the vision of God.”<sup>135</sup> On the one hand, Thomas directly affirms an “inclination” of human nature to supernatural vision, while, on the other hand (as Feingold demonstrates), elsewhere he seems to deny effectively this “inclination.” There is a definite tension in the text of the master. The question now becomes, given the *aporiae* that generate this tension, how can it be met adequately?

Feingold’s approach to this tension is exemplary of the method of commentarial Thomism. His aim is to affirm the ascetic clarity of the idea of the “Thomist system,” even if this means reducing components of the textual evidence. In other words, he is prepared to sacrifice the text itself in the name of the abstract system. But from the totality of the text it does not follow that Thomas has foreclosed *tout court* the “existence of an innate appetite for the vision of God.” The classical interpretation of Feingold and the commentarial tradition is satisfying for its

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132. Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God*, 637.

133. Aquinas, *In Boethius de Trinitate*, q. 6, a. 4, ad 5. The importance of this text should not be downplayed; it is distinguished as one of the only texts of Thomas we possess in his own handwriting.

134. Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God*, 399n6.

135. *Ibid.*

elegant clarity, but it has interpreted away the concrete perplexity of the text. As an overarching system, a tidy schematization of “innate” and “elicited” desire may prove pleasing, since it resolves unsynthesizable internal tensions of the linguistic variations of the text. But as a faithful interpretation of that text, as an encounter of the mind with the reality of a written word, the system fails. A mystical interpreter will, by contrast, be readier to let the paradoxes and tensions speak: this desire is not a dumb “innate inclination,” and yet it is not “an inclination of nature.” In this light, the textual *aporia* regarding this desire of nature is a true sign of the human being’s vertigo in the face of the mystery of being (*si comprehendis non est Deus*).

In this light, it is significant that Feingold’s central criticism of de Lubac is that his “paradoxical” approach is confusing and “contradictory.”<sup>136</sup> Feingold’s strategy seeks to “avoid the paradox,” to the point of ignoring de Lubac’s insistence that “paradox” itself lies at the heart of the truth of the world, the desire of human nature, and the relation between grace and nature.

For de Lubac, the logic of paradox (of both created spirit and ecclesial doctrine) converges on the christological fact. The human being is a living paradox because “the Incarnation is the supreme Paradox: Παράδοξος παράδοξων.”<sup>137</sup> For de Lubac, as for the Fathers of the christological councils, Jesus Christ is *the* paradox: in the perfect *unio* of his person lies the *communio* of created and uncreated difference. In the Incarnate Son, as the tradition holds, the “distinction” (*inconfuse, immutabiliter*) between the divine and the human is actual within the more fundamental “oneness” (*indivise, inseparabiliter*) of his being. Distinction is perfected within the greater *communio* that establishes it, and not otherwise.<sup>138</sup> As de Lubac holds, it is union and not separation that differentiates (*l’union différencie*).<sup>139</sup>

The tension of the paradox of Christology, however, is not ultimately rooted in the doctrine of the “hypostatic union”

136. *Ibid.*, 321, 403.

137. Henri de Lubac, *Paradoxes* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1999), 8.

138. Cyril of Alexandria, *Epistulae* 45 and 46 (PG 77.228d–245d).

139. Henri de Lubac, *Catholicisme: Les aspects sociaux du dogme* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2010), 257.

abstractly conceived; rather, both are rooted in the apostolic proclamation of “Christ crucified” (1 Cor 1:23, 2:2; Acts 2:36). The Cross is the “*crux*” of the paradoxical relation between difference and unity. As the Council of Constantinople clarified the “subject” of Chalcedonian unity: “He who was crucified in the flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ, is true God, Lord of glory, and one of the Holy Trinity.”<sup>140</sup> This means that the proportion and dynamic of the christological paradox concerns concretely the *sacrum commercium* of the Cross. The *differentiating* union of human nature with God is perfected within the *maior dissimilitudo* manifested in the utter fragility of human nature. This nature, powerless to achieve divinity and wholly incompatible with divine power, is, nevertheless, “one” with the person of the Word.<sup>141</sup> In Jesus the fragility of human nature becomes its power, supremely so in his death, where the broken limit of human finitude takes on the form of the last word: man is not made to cling to himself; he is made to give himself and receive everything as God’s gift. Only because the unity between God and human nature is maintained *through* death can the crucifixion become the sign of the total supernatural preeminence of grace: *Deus semper maior*. In other words, the crucifixion is the sign of salvation precisely because it is the concrete sign of paradox (*signum contradicetur*) where the unity of the God-man is brought to the breaking point—but does not break. On the Cross, the most radical discontinuity between nature and grace nevertheless remains “one” for the sake of the sheer gratuity of redemption, the fulfillment of the *desiderium naturale visionis Dei* in the face of sin. This paradox is the very identity of Jesus Christ. As St. Paul writes, “For the love of Christ astonishes us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor 5:14–15).

If the paradox of the Cross is truly the *sacrum commercium* where difference is perfected in Christ’s unity, then it is not only “the identity of the one Lord Christ” who hangs on the Cross, but also the perfection of the human vocation hangs in the divine

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140. *Anathematismi adversus “Tria Capitula,”* anathema 10.

141. *ST III*, q. 50, a. 2.

unity that does not break on the Cross. Hence in the first century St. Ignatius of Antioch could describe his martyrdom as a birth into the perfection of humanity given in the Crucified:

It is better for me to die in Christ Jesus than to be king over the ends of the earth. I seek him who died for our sake, I desire him who rose for us.

The pains of birth are upon me. . . . Allow me to receive the pure light: when I have reached it I shall become a man [ἄνθρωπος]. Allow me to follow the example of the Passion of my God.<sup>142</sup>

What does this mean for the practice of Christian theology? For de Lubac, the christological paradox entails that the Church's doctrine will be constituted by "a comprehensive assembly of opposing aspects," which signify the full depth of the mystery of truth to the degree that "they are mutually supported like flying buttresses [*arc-boutant*], each one braced against the other in the most extreme degrees of tension."<sup>143</sup> The image of the *arc-boutant* as the soul of orthodoxy suggests the polyphony of the synthesis of theology at the service of the one objective truth. By contrast, "heresy," for de Lubac, is most often marked by forcing a "choice" between "two truths of the faith, . . . where one of the two is chosen to the exclusion of the other," an action that finally compromises the unity of truth.<sup>144</sup>

In making this proposal concerning the nature of orthodoxy, de Lubac had recourse to "a series of classical examples . . . in the great trinitarian and christological heresies."<sup>145</sup> The christological dualism of Nestorius is crucial and illustrative. Nestorius was particularly driven by a rigorous search for "logical exactitude" and "rational precision."<sup>146</sup> Concerned to protect the distinction between divinity and humanity in order to safeguard God's transcendence, Nestorius's program was driven

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142. Ignatius of Antioch, "Letter to the Romans," 6.

143. De Lubac, *Catholicisme*, 250.

144. De Lubac, "Le mystère du surnaturel," 115.

145. *Ibid.*

146. John McGuckin, *Saint Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy* (Crestwood, NY: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), 131.



by a “fear of mixing.”<sup>147</sup> Accordingly, he devised a systematic bulwark against every hint of eliding the absolute distinction in Christ. Cyril, by contrast, exhibits none of the logico-semantic rigidity of Nestorius, and yet he, more than any other, forged the grammar of christological orthodoxy, which later enshrined in the Chalcedonian teaching of unity in distinction (*inconfuse, immutabiliter, indivise, inseparabiliter*). Thus de Lubac warned, “A theology overly concerned with tangible conciliations and definitive explanations always risks compromising the balance of the synthesis by taking away something of its weight from one of the affirmations clung to.”<sup>148</sup> □

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147. Ibid.

148. De Lubac, “Le mystère du surnaturel,” 115.