



UNIVERSALITAS & PERVASIVITAS

IL COSTITUIRSI E DIFFONDERSI DELLA S.J. E SUOI ECHI (1540 - 1773)

di A. Pisani

Schede di approfondimento di argomenti generali

MOLINISMO

Molinism

The name used to denote one of the systems which purpose to reconcile grace and free will. This system was first developed by **Luis de Molina**, and was adopted in its essential points by the Society of Jesus. It is opposed by the Thomistic doctrine of grace — the term Thomism has a somewhat wider meaning — whose chief exponent is the Dominican **Bañez**. Along lines totally different from those of Molina, this subtle theologian endeavours to harmonize grace and free will on principles derived from St. Thomas. Whereas Molinism tries to clear up the mysterious relation between grace and free will by starting from the rather clear concept of freedom, the Thomists, in their attempt to explain the attitude of the will towards grace, begin with the obscure idea of efficacious grace. The question which both schools set themselves to answer is this: Whence does efficacious grace (*gratia efficax*), which includes in its very concept the actual free consent of the will, derive its infallible effect; and how



is it that, in spite of the infallible efficacy of grace, the freedom of the will is not impaired? It is evident that, in every attempt to solve this difficult problem, Catholic theologians must safeguard two principles: first, the supremacy and causality of grace (against Pelagianism and Semipelagianism), and second, the unimpaired freedom of consent in the will (against early Protestantism and Jansenism). For both these principles are dogmas of the Church, clearly and emphatically defined by the Council of Trent. Now, whilst Thomism lays chief stress on the infallible efficacy of grace, without denying the existence and necessity of the free cooperation of the will, Molinism emphasizes the unrestrained freedom of the will, without detracting in any way from the efficacy, priority, and dignity of grace. As in the tunnelling of a mountain, galleries started by skilful engineers from opposite sides meet to form but one tunnel, thus it might have been expected that, in spite of different and opposite starting-points, the two schools would finally meet and reach one and the same scientific solution of the important problem. If we find, however, that this is not the case, and that they passed each other along parallel lines, we are inclined to attribute this failure to the intricate nature of the subject in question, rather than to the inefficiency of the scholars. The problem seems to lie so far beyond the horizon of the human mind, that man will never be able fully to penetrate its mystery. In the following we shall first consider Molinism as it came from its author's hands, and then briefly review the phases of its later historical development.

Molinism in its original form

Molinism combats the heresy of the Reformers, according to which both sinners and just have lost freedom of will. It maintains and strenuously defends the Tridentine dogma which teaches:



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1. that freedom of will has not been destroyed by original sin, and
2. that this freedom remains unimpaired under the influence of Divine grace (Cf. Sess. VI, can iv-v in Denzinger, "Enchiridion", ed. Bannwart, Freiburg, 1908, nn. 814-15).

Freedom is the power of the will to act or not to act, to act this or that way; whereas it is the characteristic of necessary causes, as animals and inanimate beings, to produce their effects by an intrinsic necessity. Freedom of the will is a consequence of intelligence, and as such the most precious gift of man, an endowment which he can never lose without annihilating his own nature. Man must of necessity be free in every state of life, actual or possible, whether that state be the purely natural (*status puræ naturæ*), or the state of original justice in paradise (*status justitiæ originalis*), or the state of fallen nature (*status naturæ lapsæ*), or the state of regeneration (*status naturæ reparatæ*). Were man to be deprived of freedom of will, he would necessarily degenerate in his nature and sink to the level of the animal. Since the purely natural state, devoid of supernatural grace and lacking a supernatural justice, never existed, and since the state of original justice has not been re-established by Christ's Redemption, man's present state alone is to be taken into consideration in solving the problem of the relation between grace and free will. In spite of original sin and concupiscence man is still free, not only with reference to ethical good and evil in his natural actions, but also in his supernatural salutary works in which Divine grace co-operates with his will. Molinism escaped every suspicion of Pelagianism by laying down at the outset that the soul with its faculties (the intellect and will) must be first constituted by prevenient grace a supernatural principle of operation in *actu primo*, before it can, in conjunction with the help of the supernatural concursus of God, elicit a salutary act in *actu secundo*. Thus, the salutary act is itself an act of grace rather than of the will; it is the common work of God and man, because and in so far as the supernatural element of the act is due to God and its vitality and freedom to man. It must not be imagined, however, that the will has such an influence on grace that its consent conditions or strengthens the power of grace; the fact is rather that the supernatural power of grace is first transformed into the vital energy of the will, and then, as a supernatural concursus, excites and accompanies the free and salutary act. In other words, as a helping or co-operating grace (*gratia adiuvens seu cooperans*), it produces the act conjointly with the will. According to this explanation, not only does Divine grace make a supernatural act possible, but the act itself, though free, is wholly dependent on grace, because it is grace which makes the salutary act possible and which stimulates and assists in producing it. Thus the act is produced entirely by God as First Cause (*Causa prima*), and also entirely by the will as second cause (*causa secunda*). The unprejudiced mind must acknowledge that this exposition is far from incurring the suspicion of Pelagianism or Semipelagianism .

When the Thomists propound the subtler question, through what agency does the will, under the influence and impulse of grace, cease to be a mere natural faculty (*actus primus*) and produce a salutary act (*actus secundus*), or (according to Aristotelean terminology) pass from potency into act, the Molinists answer without hesitation that it is no way due to the Thomistic predetermination (*prædeterminatio sive præmotio physica*) of the will of God. For such a causal predetermination coming from a will other than our own, is a denial of self-determination on the part of our own will and destroys its freedom. It is rather the will itself which by its consent, under the restrictions mentioned above, renders the prevenient grace (*gratia præveniens*) co-operative and the completely sufficient grace (*gratia vere sufficiens*) efficacious; for, to produce the salutary act, the free will need only consent to the prevenient and sufficient grace, which it has received from God. This theory reveals forthwith two characteristic features of Molinism, which stand in direct opposition to the principles of Thomism. The first consists in this, that the *actus primus* (i.e. the power to elicit a



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supernatural act) is, according to Molinism, due to a determining influx of grace previous to the salutary act (*influxus praeuius, gratia praeueniens*), but that God enters into the salutary act itself (*actus secundus*) only by means of a concomitant supernatural concursus (*concursum simultaneum, gratia cooperans*). The act, in so far as it is free, must come from the will; but the *concursum praeuius* of the Thomists, which is ultimately identical with God's predestination of the free act, makes illusory the free self-determination of the will, whether in giving or withholding its consent to the grace. The second characteristic difference between the two systems of grace lies in the radically different conception of the nature of merely sufficient grace (*gratia sufficiens*) and of efficacious grace (*gratia efficax*). Whereas Thomism derives the infallible success of efficacious grace from the very nature of this grace, and assumes consequently the grace to be efficacious intrinsically (*gratia efficax ab intrinseco*), Molinism ascribes the efficacy of grace to the free co-operation of the will and consequently admits a grace which is merely extrinsically efficacious (*gratia efficax ab extrinseco*). It is the free will that by the extrinsic circumstance of its consent makes efficacious the grace offered by God. If the will gives its consent, the grace which in itself is sufficient becomes efficacious; if it withholds its consent, the grace remains inefficacious (*gratia inefficax*), and it is due — not to God, but — solely to the will that the grace is reduced to one which is merely sufficient (*gratia mere sufficiens*).

This explanation gave the Molinists an advantage over the Thomists, not only in that they safeguarded thereby the freedom of the will under the influence of grace, but especially because they offered a clearer account of the important truth that the grace, which is merely sufficient and therefore remains inefficacious, is nevertheless always really sufficient (*gratia vere sufficiens*), so that it would undoubtedly produce the salutary act for which it was given, if only the will would give its consent. Thomism, on the other hand, is confronted by the following dilemma: Either the grace which is merely sufficient (*gratia mere sufficiens*) is able by its own nature and without the help of an entirely different and new grace to produce the salutary act for which it was given, or it is not: if it is not able, then this sufficient grace is in reality insufficient (*gratia insufficientis*), since it must be supplemented by another; if it is able to produce the act by itself, then sufficient and efficacious grace do not differ in nature, but by reason of something extrinsic, namely in that the will gives its consent in one case and withholds it in the other. If then, when possessed of absolutely the same grace, one sinner is converted and another can remain obdurate, the inefficacy of the grace in the case of the obdurate sinner is due, not to the nature of the grace given, but to the sinful resistance of his free will, which refuses to avail itself of God's assistance. But for Thomism, which assumes an intrinsic and essential difference between sufficient and efficacious grace, so that sufficient grace to become efficacious must be supplemented by a new grace, the explanation is by no means so easy and simple. It cannot free itself from the difficulty, as is possible for Molinism, by saying that, but for the refractory attitude of the will, God would have bestowed this supplementary grace. For, since the sinful resistance of the will, viewed as an act, is to be referred to a physical pre-motion on the part of God, as well as the free co-operation with grace, the will, which is predetermined ad unum, is placed in a hopeless predicament. On the one hand the physical pre-motion in the form of an efficacious grace which is necessary to produce the salutary act, is lacking to the will, and, on the other, the entity of the sinful act of resistance is irrevocably predetermined by God as the Prime Mover (*Motor primus*). Whence then is the will to derive the impulse to accept or to reject the one pre-motion rather than the other? Therefore, the Molinists conclude that the Thomists cannot lay down the sinful resistance of the will as the cause of the inefficacy of the grace, which is merely sufficient.



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At this stage of the controversy the Thomists urge with great emphasis the grave accusation that the Molinists, by their undue exaltation of man's freedom of will, seriously circumscribe and diminish the supremacy of the Creator over His creatures, so that they destroy the efficacy and predominance of grace and make impossible in the hands of God the infallible result of efficacious grace. For, they argue, if the decision ultimately depends on the free will, whether a given grace shall be efficacious or not, the result of the salutary act must be attributed to man and not to God. But this is contrary to the warning of St. Paul, that we must not glory in the work of our salvation as though it were our own (1 Corinthians 4:7), and to his teaching that it is Divine grace which does not only give us the power to act, but "worketh" also in us "to will and to accomplish" (Philippians 2:13); it is contrary also to the constant doctrine of St. Augustine, according to whom our free salutary acts are not our own work, but the work of grace.

The consideration of these serious difficulties leads us to the very heart of Molina's system, and reveals the real Gordian knot of the whole controversy. For Molinism attempts to meet the objections just mentioned by the doctrine of the Divine scientia media. Even Molinism must and does admit that the very idea of efficacious grace includes the free consent of the will, and also that the decree of God to bestow an efficacious grace upon a man involves with metaphysical certainty the free co-operation of the will. From this it follows that God must possess some infallible source of knowledge by means of which he knows from all eternity, with metaphysical certainty, whether in the future the will is going to co-operate with a given grace or to resist it. When the question has assumed this form, it is easy to see that the whole controversy resolves itself into a discussion on the foreknowledge which God has of the free future acts; and thus the two opposing systems on grace are ultimately founded upon the general doctrine on God and His attributes. Both systems are confronted with the wider and deeper question: What is the medium of knowledge (*medium in quo*) in which God foresees the (absolute or conditioned) free operations of His rational creatures? That there must be such a medium of Divine foreknowledge is evident. The Thomists answer: God foresees the (absolute and conditioned) free acts of man in the eternal decrees of His own will, which with absolute certainty produce *præmovendo* as definite *prædeterminationes ad unum*, all (absolute and conditional) free operations. With the same absolute certainty with which He knows His own will, He also foresees clearly and distinctly in the decrees of His will all future acts of man. However, the Molinists maintain that, since, as we remarked above, the predetermining decrees of the Divine Will must logically and necessarily destroy freedom and lead to Determinism, they cannot possibly be the medium in which God infallibly foresees future free acts. Rather these decrees must presuppose a special knowledge (*scientia media*), in the light of which God infallibly foresees from all eternity what attitude man's will would in any conceivable combination of circumstances assume if this or that particular grace were offered it. And it is only when guided by His infallible foreknowledge that God determines the kind of grace He shall give to man. If, for example, He foresees by means of the scientia media that St. Peter, after his denial of Christ, shall freely co-operate with a certain grace, He decrees to give him this particular grace and none other; the grace thus conferred becomes efficacious in bringing about his repentance. In the case of Judas, on the other hand, God, foreseeing the future resistance of this Apostle to a certain grace of conversion, decreed to allow it, and consequently bestowed upon him a grace which in itself was really sufficient, but remained inefficacious solely on account of the refractory disposition of the Apostle's will. Guided by this scientia media God is left entirely free in the disposition and distribution of grace. On His good pleasure alone it depends to whom He will give the supreme grace of final perseverance, to whom He will refuse it; whom He will receive into Heaven, whom



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He will exclude from His sight for ever. This doctrine is in perfect harmony with the dogmas of the gratuity of grace, the unequal distribution of efficacious grace, the wise and inscrutable operations of Divine Providence, the absolute impossibility to merit final perseverance, and lastly the immutable predestination to glory or rejection; nay more, it brings these very dogmas into harmony, not only with the infallible foreknowledge of God, but also with the freedom of the created will. The *scientia media* is thus in reality the cardinal point of Molinism; with it Molinism stands or falls. This doctrine of the *scientia media* is the battlefield of the two theological schools; the Jesuits were striving to maintain and fortify it, while the Dominicans are ever putting forth their best efforts to capture or turn the position. The theologians who have come after them, unhampered by the traditions of either order, have followed some the doctrine of the Jesuits, some the Dominican system.

The chief objection directed against Molinism at its rise was, that its shibboleth, the *scientia media*, was a sheer invention of Molina and therefore a suspicious innovation. The Molinists on the other hand did not hesitate to hurl back at the Thomists this same objection with regard to their *præmotio physica*. In reality both accusations were equally unfounded. As long as there is an historical development of dogma, it is natural that, in the course of time and under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Ghost, new ideas and new terms should gain currency. The deposit of faith, which is unchangeable in substance but admits of development, contains these ideas from the beginning, and they are brought to their full development by the tireless labours of the theological schools. The idea of the *scientia media* Molina had borrowed from his celebrated professor, **Pedro da Fonseca**, S.J. ("Commentar. in Metaphys. Aristotelis", Cologne, 1615, III), who called it *scientia mixta*. The justification for this name Molina found in the consideration that, in addition to the Divine knowledge of the purely possible (*scientia simplicis intelligentiæ*) and the knowledge of the actually existing (*scientia visionis*), there must be a third kind of "intermediate knowledge", which embraces all objects that are found neither in the region of pure possibility nor strictly in that of actuality, but partake equally of both extremes and in some sort belong to both kinds of knowledge. In this class are numbered especially those free actions, which, though never destined to be realized in historical fact, would come into existence if certain conditions were fulfilled. A hypothetical occurrence of this kind the theologians call a conditional future occurrence (*actus liber conditionate futurus seu futuribilis*). In virtue of this particular kind of Divine knowledge, Christ, for example, was able to declare with certainty to His obstinate hearers that the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon would have done penance in sackcloth and ashes, if they had witnessed the signs and miracles which were wrought in Corozain and Bethsaida (cf. Matthew 11:21 sq.). We know, however, that such signs and miracles were not wrought and that the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon were not converted. Yet God had infallibly foreseen from all eternity that this conversion would have taken place if the condition (which never was realized) of Christ's mission to these cities had been fulfilled. Who will doubt that God in His omniscience foresees distinctly what any inhabitant of New York would do throughout the day if he were now in London or Paris instead of America? It is true that a number of Thomists, for example **Ledesma** (["De div. gratia auxil.", Salamanca, 1611, pp. 574 sqq.], denied, if not the existence, at least the infallibility of God's knowledge concerning the conditioned free future, and attributed to it only great probability. But, from the time that such eminent theologians as **Alvarez**, **Gonet**, **Gotti**, and **Billuart** succeeded in harmonizing the infallibility of this Divine knowledge with the fundamental tenets of Thomism by the subtle theory of hypothetical Divine decrees, there has been no Thomist who does not uphold the omniscience of God also with regard to conditioned events. But have they not then become supporters of the *scientia media*? By no means. For it is precisely the Molinists who most sternly repudiate these Divine predetermining



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decrees, be they absolute or conditioned, as the deathknell of man's freedom. For the very purpose of securing the freedom of the will and in no way to do violence to it by a physical premotion of any sort, the Molinists insisted all along that the knowledge of God precedes the decrees of His will. They thus kept this knowledge free and uninfluenced by any antecedent absolute or conditioned decree of God's will. Molinism is pledged to the following principle: The knowledge of God precedes as a guiding light the decree of His will, and His will is in no way the source of His knowledge. It was because by their *scientia media* they understood a knowledge independent of any decrees, that they were most sharply assailed by the Thomists.

Later development of Molinism

Thus far we have learned that the central idea of Molinism lies in the principle that the infallible success of efficacious grace is not to be ascribed to its own intrinsic nature, but to the Divine *scientia media*. The Society of Jesus has ever since clung tenaciously to this principle, but without considering itself bound to maintain all the assertions and arguments of Molina's "Concordia"; on many points of secondary importance its teachers are allowed perfect freedom of opinion.

First of all it was clear to the Jesuits from the beginning and the disputations before the *Congregatio de Auxiliis* did but strengthen the conviction, that a more perfect, more fully developed, and more accurate exposition of the Molinistic system on grace was both possible and desirable. As a modification of Molinism we are usually referred in the first place to that expansion and development, which afterwards took the name of Congruism, and which owes its final form to the joint labours of **Bellarmino**, **Francisco Suárez**, **Vasquez**, and **Lessius**. As the article on Congruism shows in detail, the system received its name from the *gratia congrua*, i.e. a grace accommodated to circumstances. By such is understood a grace which, owing to its internal relationship and adaptation to the state of the recipient (his character, disposition, education, place, time, etc.), produces its effect in the light of the *scientia media* with infallible certainty, and thus is objectively identical with efficacious grace. The expression is borrowed from St. Augustine, as when he says: "Cujus autem miseretur, sic eum vocat, quomodo scit ei congruere, ut vocantem non respuat" (Ad Simplicianum, I, Q. ii, n. 13). Consistently then with this terminology, the grace which is merely sufficient must be called *gratia incongrua*, i.e. a grace which has not a congruity with the circumstances, and is therefore inefficacious. This term also is sanctioned by St. Augustine (I. c.), for he says: "Illi enim electi, qui congruenter vocati; illi autem, qui non congruebant neque contemperabantur vocationi, non electi, quia non secuti, quamvis vocati". This doctrine seems to have advanced beyond "extreme Molinism" to this extent, that inefficacious grace and merely sufficient grace are made to differ even in *actu primo* — not indeed in their internal nature and physical entity, but in their moral worth and ethical nature — inasmuch as the bestowal of an ever so weak *gratia congrua* is an incomparably greater benefit of God than that of an ever so powerful *gratia incongrua*, the actual inefficacy of which God foresaw from all eternity. Though Molina himself had taught this doctrine ("Concordia", Paris, 1876, pp. 450, 466, 522, etc.), it seems that among his followers some extreme Molinists unduly emphasized the power of the will over grace, thus drawing upon themselves the suspicion of Semipelagianism. At least Cardinal Bellarmine attacks some who propagated such one-sided Molinistic views, and who cannot have been mere imaginary adversaries; against them he skilfully strengthened the tenets of Congruism by numerous quotations from St. Augustine.

As was natural the later Molinism underwent considerable changes, and was improved by the unwearied labours of those who sought to establish the *scientia media* — the most important factor in the whole system — on a deeper philosophical and theological basis, and to demonstrate its



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worth from a dogmatic point of view. The task was a very difficult one. The theory of the Thomistic decrees of the Divine will having been eliminated as the infallible source of God's knowledge of free acts belonging to the conditional future, some other theory had to be substituted. Molina's doctrine, which Bellarmine and **Becanus** had made their own, was soon abandoned as savouring of Determinism. Molina (Concordia, pp. 290, 303) transferred the medium of God's infallible knowledge to the *supercomprehensio cordis* (kardiognosia, the searching of hearts). In virtue of this supercomprehension, God knows the most secret inclinations and penetrates the most hidden recesses of man's heart, and is thus enabled to foresee with mathematical certainty the free resolves latent in man's will. This unsatisfactory explanation, however, met with the natural objection that the mathematically certain foreknowledge of an effect from its cause is nothing more or less than the knowledge of a necessary effect; consequently the will would no longer be free (cf. Kleutgen, "De Deo Uno", Rome, 1881, pp. 322 sqq.). Therefore, the opinion, gradually adopted since the time of Francisco Suárez (but repudiated in Molina's work), maintains that, by the *scientia media*, God sees the conditioned future acts in themselves, i.e. in their own (formal or objective) truth. For, since every free act must be absolutely determined in its being, even before it becomes actual or at least conditionally possible, it is from all eternity a definite truth (*determinata veritas*), and must consequently be knowable as such by the omniscient God with metaphysical certainty. **Ruiz** ("De scientia Dei", Paris, 1629), with a subtlety beyond his fellows, laid a deeper foundation for this theory, and succeeded in getting it permanently adopted by the Molinists. Further proofs for the *scientia media* may be found in Pohle's "Dogmatik", I (4th ed., 1908), pp. 206 Sq. However, when further investigations were made, so great and well-nigh insurmountable were the difficulties which arose against the establishing of the absolute independence of the *scientia media* in regard to the Divine Will, that the greater number of the modern Molinists either give up the attempt to indicate a medium of Divine knowledge (*medium in quo*), or positively declare it to be superfluous; nevertheless, there are a few (e.g. Kleutgen, Cornoldi, Régnon) who make a sharp distinction between the question of the actual existence of the *scientia media* and that of its process. While vigorously maintaining the existence of the *scientia media*, they frankly acknowledge their ignorance with regard to its process of operation. Thus, the *scientia media*, which was meant to solve all the mysteries concerning grace, seems to have become itself the greatest mystery of all. The most favourable statement that may be made in its favour is that it is a necessary postulate in any doctrine of grace in which the freedom of the will is to be safeguarded; in itself it is but a theologoumenon. If we then consider that the Thomists also, with Billuart (*De Deo* dissert., VIII, art. iv, §2 ad 6) at their head, call the reconciliation of their *præmotio physica* with the freedom of the will a "mystery", it would seem that man is not capable of solving the problem of the harmony between grace and free will.

Another phase in the development of this system is the fact that, in the course of time, some of the Molinists have made concessions to the Thomists in the question regarding predestination, without however abandoning the essentials of Molinism. The theory of the *præmotio physica* agrees admirably with the idea of an absolute predestination to glory irrespective of foreseen merits (*prædestinatio ante prævisa merita*). This is the reason why this theory appears, except in the case of a few theologians, as a characteristic feature of the Thomistic doctrine on grace. Now, absolute predestination to glory necessarily involves the rather harsh doctrine of reprobation, which, though only negative, is nevertheless equally absolute. For, if God determines to bestow efficacious graces only upon those whom He has from all eternity predestined to glory, then those not contained in his decree of predestination are a priori and necessarily damned.



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Some leading Molinists like Bellarmine and Francisco Suárez may possibly have been tempted to show the practical possibility of reconciling Molinism with the eternal and unchangeable decree of predestination by siding with the Thomists in this question of secondary consideration, without, however, sacrificing their allegiance to the *scientia media*. But the majority of Molina's followers, under the lead of Lessius and Vasquez, most consistently held to the opposite view. For they admitted only a conditioned predestination to glory which becomes absolute only consequent upon the foreseen merits of man (*prædestinatio post — et propter — prævisa merita*), and roundly condemned negative reprobation on the ground that it not only limited but even ran counter to the salvific will of God. Today there is scarcely a convinced Molinist who does not take alone this reasonable standpoint. A modification of Molinism of minor importance arose with regard to the so-called predefinition of good works (*prædefinitio bonorum operum*). By predefinition, in contradistinction to predestination to glory, theologians understand the absolute, positive, and efficacious decree of God from all eternity, that certain persons shall at some time in the future perform certain good works (cf. Franzelin, "De Deo Uno" Rome, 1883, pp. 444 sqq.). This predefinition to good works is either formal or virtual, according as God's decree governing these works and the bestowal of efficacious grace is either formal or merely virtual: Molina, Vasquez, and **Gregory de Valentia** defended virtual, while Francisco Suárez, **Tanner**, **Silvester Maurus**, and others upheld formal predefinition.

Sources

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