

MATTER AND FORM (*Metaphysics VII*, qq. 5, 6, 12)

The basic issues

q. 5: Matter exists, and is a being with actuality of its own.

q. 6: Form is a being with existence of its own.

p. 12: Given this, how does generation and corruption avoid the *creation* of new forms?

Lectura II, d. 12, q. un., n. 10: 'there are three things to show: first, that matter is; secondly, what kind of existence (*esse*) it has and what sort of being it is, and thirdly that it is really diverse from form.'

Two assumptions

Aristotelian: Natural change requires a substrate.

Scotist: There is no change without the production/destruction of a thing.

Matter: q. 5: is it a being (ens) – the kind of thing to which existence is non-repugnant?

Structure of the question

nn. 1-5: objections to show that it's not

n. 6: sed contra: 'it's a principle'

nn. 7-19: body of the question

n. 7: it's a principle, because generation and corruption exist (and these require a substrate) – so it is 'what is changed'

nn. 8-12: attempts to show that if there were no matter all generation would be creation/transubstantiation (and n. 11: if can transubstantiate, then can create)

nn. 13-16: more arguments in favor of its existence

nn. 17-19: it's a being in potency – clarification of senses of 'potency'

nn. 20-28: replies to the original objections

Senses of 'being in potency'

n. 17: 'something said to be in potency in two ways'

(1) As the end term of a power (e.g. 'the whiteness that is to be generated') = objective potency

(2) As a subject in potency to a form (i.e. as a substrate) = subjective potency

n. 18: Aquinas's view: matter is pure potency – i.e. it's in potency in the first way, not the second. (Its identity is parasitic on the identity of the composite it constitutes; so it can't function as substrate persisting across change)

n. 19: so it's in potency in the second way; it has the actuality that is the correlate of objective potency.

The text of Aristotle quoted at the top (p. 119) pushes in two directions: 'it's nothing in particular', and its 'being is different from that of each of the categorical predicates'.

So: the answer to the question is 'yes', and it is an actual being with subjective potency. It has an essence. (This is the answer to the first two questions from the *Lectura*.)

How do we know it?

n. 28: By analogy with form.

Difficult part

nn. 21-2: Essential predication predicates an essential property of a subject; denominative predication predicates an accidental feature of a subject, or 'something that resembles an accident'.

Here: matter is the relevant part, and it's true neither that a human being is matter nor that matter is a human being. (Cases of essential predication, not true of parts and their wholes)

But: 'matter is human', something that resembles denominative predication, but is not denominative predication.

Not allowed: 'matter is white' – a genuine denominative prediction – 'because denominative predications are not convertible' (i.e. 'a white thing is matter' is false, because matter is a part of the white thing)

Form: q. 6: is form prior to matter and the composite?

Structure of the question

nn. 1-4: objections to show that it's not prior to the composite

Possible senses of 'prior': n. 1: non-accidental; n. 2: more perfect; n. 3: more like a substrate; n. 4: separable

n. 5: sed contra: form is prior to both the composite and to matter – appeals to Aristotle

nn. 6-9: Another sense of 'prior': more actual. Form is of itself actuality; composite per se actual (since includes something actual); matter is denominatively actual (since united to something actual): this must be another sense of actual from those outlined in q. 5)

nn. 9-11: body of the question:

form prior because it actuates matter, so temporally posterior but 'prior in perfection'.

nn. 12-18: replies to objections

nn. 12-13 (to nn. 1-2): for reasons given the form needs being prior to the composite; but there is another being that is proper to the composite and relative to that there's a sense in which the form is parasitic on the composite (that there is a composite is necessary for there being a form of the composite). Form has 'proper *esse*, both quidditative and [*esse*] *existentiae*'.

nn. 14-17 (to n. 3): form is what makes matter the substrate

n. 18 (to n. 4): in non-causal priority, the posterior can exist without the prior.

The answer to the third issue in the *Lectura*: matter is separable from any (and every) substantial form; q. 6 here seems ambivalent

Form and matter in generation: q. 12: are there *rationes seminales*

Structure of the question

nn. 1-2: two arguments in favor of *rationes seminales*

nn. 3-10: 3 or 4 arguments in support of the second of these

n. 11: sed contra: form is simple

nn. 12-19: four ways of interpreting the view that there are *rationes seminales*

nn. 20-22: deviant versions of the theory – shows why they're not plausible versions of the theory

nn. 23-31: arguments against the theory in its four plausible versions

nn. 32-43: some cases (natural generation) in which there are *rationes seminales*; the theory described

nn. 45-6: replies to the first argument in favor (n. 1)

nn. 47-53: replies to the second argument in favor (n. 2)

nn. 54-64: replies to the supporting arguments (nn. 3-10)

The problematic

If form has its own *esse existentiae*, then (n. 1) how can we say that it doesn't get created in generation and corruption? and (2) we need an intrinsic active principle in matter if generation is to be a natural process (n. 2). Call such a thing a 'ratio seminalis'. We find them posited by Augustine.

Implausible theories

The *ratio seminalis* is matter's passive capacity; the *ratio seminalis* is just the generating agent. These are theoretically redundant, and they're not what Augustine meant.

Rationes seminales: four plausible (but rejected) theories

The idea is that a form or forms somehow preexist in matter as a partial *active* cause in generation. They are temporally simultaneous/coextensive with matter.

n. 13: 1. it's one general form

n. 16: 2. There are as many such forms 'as [matter] is capable of receiving from a natural agent'.

n. 17: a. the forms are partial or imperfect

n. 18: b. the forms are whole

i. they preexist separately and are united with matter in generation

n. 19 ii. the form is whole but in an incomplete state of existence

n. 23: against 1: either the form includes all others or not. If not, doesn't solve the problem. If it does, that seems contradictory.

nn. 24-5: against 2a: how does the perfected form become one form with the less perfect? Act and potency?

n. 26: against 2bi: posits separate accidents, separate material forms, etc.

n. 27: against 2bii: same thing generates itself.

n. 28: So none of these ways avoids the creation problem.

n. 29: And they don't show how generation is a natural process.

Biological reproduction

nn. 32-4: biological entities produce seeds which get an 'active intrinsic power' which operates to produce offspring similar to the original entities. These are *rationes seminales*.

nn. 41-3: we don't need them in any other cases.

The solution to the original problem

n. 44: don't need them (Ockham's razor)

nn. 45-6: something 'altogether new' is produced by a creature – i.e. the form. It's not creation because there is a substrate.

nn. 47-8: what makes motion natural is the presence of a substrate.

n. 49: in some cases, there's an internal active principle (in the patient – cases of self-motion); but not in generation.

Bibliography: Cross, *The Physics of Duns Scotus*, chs. 2 and 3.