QUESTIONS
ON THE METAPHYSICS
OF ARISTOTLE
BY JOHN DUNS SCOTUS

II

BOOKS SIX-NINE

Translated by
Girard J. Etzkorn and Allan B. Wolter, O.F.M.
QUESTION FIVE

Text of Aristotle: “I say that matter, which in itself is nothing in particular, is neither quantity nor any of the other categories by which being is determined. For it is something of which each of these is predicated, whose being is different from that of each of the categorical predicates.” (Metaphysics VII, ch. 3, 1029a 19-22).

Is matter a being?

[Arguments Pro and Con]

1 [1] For the negative there is the text cited that it is neither something, etc.

2 Reply:¹ it is not such actually but it is such in potency.—To the contrary: either it is potentially matter or form or the composite.

3 Also, what is generated, does not exist according to Physics V.² This is understood of the subject of generation, because what is moved, exists. It is understood to be ‘in potency’, because what comes to it is actual existence; therefore, matter is not in potency.

4 Also, either it is pure act or a composite of act and potency, but it is neither of these. First because “it is scientifically knowable only by analogy;"³ secondly, because then something less than it [matter] would be possible; nor is it the first [i.e., pure act], because “it is not differentiated as the basis of nature,"⁴ and thus it is not form; neither is it the second [i.e. a composite] because it is a principle.

5 Likewise, in this way: the first act is without any potency; therefore there is also a first potency without any act. Likewise, act is in proportion to potency and thus would be unlimited just as potency is indefinite [infinite].

¹Thomas Aquinas, Quodl. III q. 1, a. 1, ed. Parma IX, 485h; Godfrey of Fontaines, Quodl. I q. 4, resp. (PhB II, 8-9).
²Aristotle, Physics V, ch. 1, 225a 26-27.
6 [2] To the contrary: it [matter] is a \textit{per se} principle, according to \textit{Physics} I,\textsuperscript{5} and a \textit{per se} cause, from II.\textsuperscript{6}

[I.—BODY OF THE QUESTION]

7 Reply: “it is change that makes matter known”,\textsuperscript{7} for all natural agents have something passive corresponding to them on which they act; therefore just as in accidental change, the agent of change changes something that remains from one term to the other (for whiteness does not become blackness, but what was at first white becomes black), so also in [substantial] generation, the generator changes something from one form to another form, and what is changed is called matter. This is Aristotle’s argument in \textit{Physics} I, Bk. I \textit{About generation},\textsuperscript{8} and Bk. II and XII of the \textit{Metaphysics},\textsuperscript{9} and often elsewhere.

8 To this it is objected: that on which the agent acts must perish, but in the last instance the whole is changed into the whole, according to Bk. I \textit{On generation}.\textsuperscript{10}

9 On the contrary: the first is not naturally corrupted before the thing generated comes to be; hence, if nothing of what perishes remains in that ‘now’ in which the generator generates, then it generates from nothing, neither does it act on something.

10 Reply: it is not from anything subjectively, but from something initially, as from a terminus \textit{a quo}, God [however creates] from nothing in both senses.

11 To the contrary: an agent having in its causative power the whole effect, no less produces it, although another [agent] is not posited, which would debilitating the power of the agent than fortify it. But, according to you, the generator has in its effective power the whole of the effect, because it presupposes nothing of it [i.e. what was there before]. But through the action in a contrary that has to perish its active power is weakened, not strengthened.

12 This reason is confirmed, because a natural agent potent in regard to some complete effect, of necessity will cause it to be if not impeded, from Bk. IX, ch. 4.\textsuperscript{11} Fire however is not prevented from generating fire, in which as a whole it has power, from what has been granted, because that water is not present; however, it would be impeded more if it were present.

13 Also, other congruences are proposed: that there is one primary potential, because in material causes there is an essential order, just as there is in efficient [causes], from Bk. II of this work.\textsuperscript{12} The first potential seems to be in relation to first act.

14 Also, no passive generation will be natural, because no appetite preceded as regards the generated term, for the form that perishes does not desire it, as is evident, because then it would desire its own corruption; indeed there would be no generation, because there is no privation, which could be the terminus \textit{a quo}.” For privation only exists in something suited by nature to have it; among disparate forms, however, there is no \textit{per se} generation, because it proceeds from a nonsubject to a subject.\textsuperscript{13}

15 Also, everything, intrinsically speaking, would be equally incorruptible. For this form of air strives to save itself, neither it seems, is it in any natural aptitude of itself to be nonexistent, just like the form of the heavens; but air is of itself only a form.

16 If it is said that air has a contrary and the heaven has not, this is irrelevant to the minor, because a contrary does not cause something to have an intrinsic principle whereby it is perishable; and this seems to be the argument of Aristotle in Bk. VII, ch. 5.\textsuperscript{14} that “everything able to be generated has matter, for it is possible for it to be and not to be; but that by which something is such, namely, intrinsically, is matter.”\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{5}Aristotle, \textit{Physica} I, ch. 7, 190b 17-20.
\textsuperscript{7}Averroes, \textit{Metaphysica} VIII, com. 12 (ed. Iuntina VIII, f. 103rb).
\textsuperscript{8}Aristotle, \textit{De gener. et corrupt.} I, ch. 4, 319b 6-320a 7.
\textsuperscript{9}Aristotle, \textit{Metaphysics} II, ch. 2 and XII, ch. 2; 994a 25-b 7, 1069b 8-15.
\textsuperscript{11}Aristotle, \textit{Metaphysics} IX, ch. 5, 1048a 4-8.
\textsuperscript{12}Aristotle, \textit{Metaphysica} II, ch. 2, 994a 1-8 31; cf. supra, Bk. II, qq. 4-6, n. 3.
\textsuperscript{14}Aristotle, \textit{Metaphysics} VII, ch. 7, 1032a 20-21.
\textsuperscript{15}Here follows an annotation in two manuscripts [which purports to be an outline of the question as found in Scotus’s \textit{Lectura}, Bk. II, dist. 12]: “Second article.
17 Nevertheless, because matter is said to be in potency, understand that something is said to be in potency in two ways: One way is as a term of potency, or as that to which there is potency, such as the whiteness that is to be generated. Another way is as the subject of potency or that in which there is potency as the surface that is to be whitened.

18 Those who say that matter is a being in potency in the first way, say it is simply speaking not a being, nor does this view seem to preserve what Aristotle had in mind. First, because such a being is not a subject of change, but a term of change; matter is assumed to be the subject. Secondly, because such a potency is numbered corresponding to the number of acts, from Physica III, matter, however, is one with respect to opposite forms.

19 In the second way, therefore, matter is a being in potency, and more so than the subject of an accident, because it has less actuality in itself, and is capable of more actuality; and this potency is founded in some act, according to the Commentator in Bk. III of the De caelo et mundo, because to receive does not pertain to

what sort of being does matter have?—Answer: it is a per se cause from Bk. V of the Metaphysics and Books I and II of the Physics; it is a per se part from Books VII and V of the Metaphysics; it is the subject of [substantial] change. —Against this is Godfrey: then generation will be alteration. In no category is the potential something in act in that category. The composite is not one, from [Scotus's] Bk. II, dist. 12. It is not nothing, nor is it something actual.—To the contrary is Godfrey: in potency.—To this: potency in a qualified sense is the subject in alteration and it is towards act, in a qualified sense; however, in an unqualified sense potency is in being.—To the second: it would be true if they were composed essentially in themselves.—To the third: it would be true if in the composite it had that act which it could have supernaturally.—Against this: nothing positive is implied if something posterior did not exist in it; and so it is regarding an accident.—Another reply: then either everything one would be simple or one from two positive entities.—Third Article: it [matter] differs absolutely from the form, otherwise it would be and not be [at the same time], or else there would be nothing new by way of generation except a [new] relation.—Likewise, there would be [nothing one or new] essentially, nor would there be an essential difference or a new action.—Also, the rational soul is proportioned [to matter].—Also, the terminus of any change can be the terminus of creation, according to the opinion of the Commentator in Bk. VIII of the Metaphysics.

Answer to the principal arguments.”

10 Thomas Aquinas, Summa theol. I, q. 4, a. 1 resp. (IV 50a).
11 Aristotle, Physica III, ch. 1, 201a 34-43.
12 Cf. supra, n. 17.
13 Averroes, De caelo III, com. 54 (ed. Iuntina V, f. 100vca-vb.)

BOOK VII QUESTION FIVE

20 [4] To the arguments. The Philosopher is speaking of what divides being per se,20 hence it follows [in the text]: “Neither is it any of these, by which being is determined”, so also form is not any quiddity, etc.

21 If one argues,21 as it seems [one could] from the text,22 that all things are predicated of matter denominatively; then to nothing will it be the same essentially.

22 I reply: neither is a part predicates of the whole, nor conversely it is predicates properly, but in some way denominatively, although not in the way accidents are, because it is not by extrinsic denomination of another kind; in this way, then, matter is not man, but human, just as the soul is not man but human. But the argument about [predicating] denominatively is in no way valid for them, as is evident from Bk. IX, ch. 6,23 where [Aristotle] wants to say that matter is predicat denominatively of the composite, and in this it resembles an accident. Therefore, he does not understand this in the sense that it is a subject of denominative predication in a proper sense as regards all the other [categories], because denominative predications are not convertible. These parts about the whole, however, are converted, because the whole is predicat denominatively of the part.

23 To this whole text, however, there is another answer, because he is speaking in opposition to a false position, which is seen from the epilogue that follows,24 “So that to those who consider the matter thus, matter alone must seem to be substance,” [in stating] the adversary’s position, because he immediately argued to the opposite: “If we adopt this point of view, then it follows that matter is substance.” But this is impossible.” For at times Aristotle

20 Cf. supra, n. 1.
was wont to argue pro and contra, in determining the question without any indication of a solution.

24 To the other: just as to be quantum is a condition accompanying the knower, but not necessary to knowing,—it is however necessary to whiteness,—thus actual entity is a necessary condition of the mobile, although perhaps not the proximate condition, as one gleams from Physica III, that "brass not qua brass, but qua potentially a statue is moved." Hence, from the subject of generation it is removed that actual entity is not necessary to it, and may be understood of the complete entity, which always is necessary to the mobile taken precisely qua mobile.

25 [5] To the third: it is only act.

26 To the first objection about the knowable scientifically, does not Aristotle speak there of matter in general, as being the per se principle of natural change? Why do you argue more from that statement about the subject of generation than you do of the subject of alteration? Did not Aristotle before the fifth book distinguish between these changes or between what pertained to each?

27 If you say therefore because of this statement that the subject of alteration is pure potency, because it is not knowable scientifically, therefore, I reply: absolute knowability is not complete knowability of anything qua compared. It is clear about brass and the potential statue. Yet he speaks of the matter there [i.e. in the Physica] as a principle of change; but here [viz. in Metaphysics] qua capable of a form through change. Therefore, then it is known as a principle, and not before when it is known through an analogy with form, although it may have another knowledge that is absolute or it may not have it. But what does this have to do with the minor premise?

28 Another answer: [this is the case] because of the defect of our intellect, which knows from sensibles; we are first led to knowledge of the form through sensible operations. Matter is not a principle of any sensible operation; however, from forms that succeed one another, which are principles of diverse operations, we conclude to what is analogous to these, as what receives to what is received.

29 To the other argument whereby it is argued that then there could be something below it [prime matter], I reply, if you want to have an intermediary midway between anything 'something' and 'nothing', this will be a 'something' or some minimal 'nothing' which is in a substance. As long as it is something, it is the least act and potential with respect to all other acts. If you wish to have pure potency without any act, you will have nothing, such as having a privation without a subject. More about this in BK. IX, q. 1.

30 To the other: 'act' is taken in various ways, and one ought not be contentious about the name etc.

---

25Cf. supra, n. 3.
27Cf. supra, n. 4.
28Cf. supra, n. 4.
29Cf. supra, n. 3.
30An interpolated text is inserted here by two manuscripts: "Also, another answer: The Commentator in book II of the Physica part 21 says: 'Considering matter with respect to the form is a consideration of the natural philosopher, whereas considering it as a being is a consideration of the first philosopher.'—Also, Avicenna in Bk. II of his Metaphysics ch. 4 says: 'Even though there be a relationship between matter and form, nevertheless the quiddity of each can be understood without relationship to the other.'"
31Cf. supra, n. 4.
32Cf. infra, BK. IX, qq. 1-2, nn. 35-36.
33Cf. supra, n. 5.