

FIRST PART, QUESTION 66

On the Order of Creation Towards Distinction (In Four Articles)

We must next consider the work of distinction; first, the ordering of creation towards distinction; secondly, the distinction itself. Under the first head there are four points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether formlessness of created matter preceded in time its formation?
- (2) Whether the matter of all corporeal things is the same?
- (3) Whether the empyrean heaven was created contemporaneously with formless matter?
- (4) Whether time was created simultaneously with it?

Whether formlessness of created matter preceded in time its formation?

Ia q. 66 a. 1

Objection 1. It would seem that formlessness of matter preceded in time its formation. For it is said (Gn. 1:2): “The earth was void and empty,” or “invisible and shapeless,” according to another version^{*}; by which is understood the formlessness of matter, as Augustine says (Confess. xii, 12). Therefore matter was formless until it received its form.

Objection 2. Further, nature in its working imitates the working of God, as a secondary cause imitates a first cause. But in the working of nature formlessness precedes form in time. It does so, therefore, in the Divine working.

Objection 3. Further, matter is higher than accident, for matter is part of substance. But God can effect that accident exist without substance, as in the Sacrament of the Altar. He could, therefore, cause matter to exist without form.

On the contrary, An imperfect effect proves imperfection in the agent. But God is an agent absolutely perfect; wherefore it is said of Him (Dt. 32:4): “The works of God are perfect.” Therefore the work of His creation was at no time formless. Further, the formation of corporeal creatures was effected by the work of distinction. But confusion is opposed to distinction, as formlessness to form. It, therefore, formlessness preceded in time the formation of matter, it follows that at the beginning confusion, called by the ancients chaos, existed in the corporeal creation.

I answer that, On this point holy men differ in opinion. Augustine for instance (Gen. ad lit. i, 15), believes that the formlessness of matter was not prior in time to its formation, but only in origin or the order of nature, whereas others, as Basil (Hom. ii In Hexaem.), Ambrose (In Hexaem. i), and Chrysostom (Hom. ii In Gen.), hold that formlessness of matter preceded in time its formation. And although these opinions seem mutually contradictory, in reality they differ but little; for Augustine takes the formlessness of matter in a different sense from the others. In his sense it means the absence of all form, and if we thus understand it we cannot say that the formlessness of matter was prior in time either to its formation or to its distinction. As to formation, the argument is clear. For it formless matter preceded in duration, it already existed; for this is implied by duration, since the end of creation is being in act: and act itself is a form. To say, then, that matter preceded, but without form, is to say that being existed actually, yet without act, which is a contradiction in

terms. Nor can it be said that it possessed some common form, on which afterwards supervened the different forms that distinguish it. For this would be to hold the opinion of the ancient natural philosophers, who maintained that primary matter was some corporeal thing in act, as fire, air, water, or some intermediate substance. Hence, it followed that to be made means merely to be changed; for since that preceding form bestowed actual substantial being, and made some particular thing to be, it would result that the supervening form would not simply make an actual being, but ‘this’ actual being; which is the proper effect of an accidental form. Thus the consequent forms would be merely accidents, implying not generation, but alteration. Hence we must assert that primary matter was not created altogether formless, nor under any one common form, but under distinct forms. And so, if the formlessness of matter be taken as referring to the condition of primary matter, which in itself is formless, this formlessness did not precede in time its formation or distinction, but only in origin and nature, as Augustine says; in the same way as potentiality is prior to act, and the part to the whole. But the other holy writers understand by formlessness, not the exclusion of all form, but the absence of that beauty and comeliness which are now apparent in the corporeal creation. Accordingly they say that the formlessness of corporeal matter preceded its form in duration. And so, when this is considered, it appears that Augustine agrees with them in some respects, and in others disagrees, as will be shown later (q. 69, a. 1; q. 74, a. 2).

As far as may be gathered from the text of Genesis a threefold beauty was wanting to corporeal creatures, for which reason they are said to be without form. For the beauty of light was wanting to all that transparent body which we call the heavens, whence it is said that “darkness was upon the face of the deep.” And the earth lacked beauty in two ways: first, that beauty which it acquired when its watery veil was withdrawn, and so we read that “the earth was void,” or “invisible,” inasmuch as the waters covered and concealed it from view; secondly, that which it derives from being adorned by herbs and plants, for which reason it is called “empty,” or, according to another reading[†], “shapeless”—that is, unadorned. Thus after mention of two created natures, the heaven and the earth, the formlessness of

^{*} Septuagint. [†] Septuagint.

the heaven is indicated by the words, "darkness was upon the face of the deep," since the air is included under heaven; and the formlessness of the earth, by the words, "the earth was void and empty."

Reply to Objection 1. The word earth is taken differently in this passage by Augustine, and by other writers. Augustine holds that by the words "earth" and "water," in this passage, primary matter itself is signified on account of its being impossible for Moses to make the idea of such matter intelligible to an ignorant people, except under the similitude of well-known objects. Hence he uses a variety of figures in speaking of it, calling it not water only, nor earth only, lest they should think it to be in very truth water or earth. At the same time it has so far a likeness to earth, in that it is susceptible of form, and to water in its adaptability to a variety of forms. In this respect, then, the earth is said to be "void and empty," or "invisible and shapeless," that matter is known by means of form. Hence, considered in itself, it is called "invisible" or "void," and its potentiality is completed by form; thus Plato says that matter is "place". But other holy writers understand by earth the element of earth, and we have said (a. 1) how, in this sense, the earth was, according to them, without form.

Reply to Objection 2. Nature produces effect in act from being in potentiality; and consequently in the operations of nature potentiality must precede act in time, and formlessness precede form. But God produces being in act out of nothing, and can, therefore, produce a perfect thing in an instant, according to the greatness of His power.

Reply to Objection 3. Accident, inasmuch as it is a form, is a kind of act; whereas matter, as such, is essentially being in potentiality. Hence it is more repugnant that matter should be in act without form, than for accident to be without subject.

In reply to the first argument in the contrary sense, we say that if, according to some holy writers, formlessness was prior in time to the informing of matter, this arose, not from

want of power on God's part, but from His wisdom, and from the design of preserving due order in the disposition of creatures by developing perfection from imperfection.

In reply to the second argument, we say that certain of the ancient natural philosophers maintained confusion devoid of all distinction; except Anaxagoras, who taught that the intellect alone was distinct and without admixture. But previous to the work of distinction Holy Scripture enumerates several kinds of differentiation, the first being that of the heaven from the earth, in which even a material distinction is expressed, as will be shown later (a. 3; q. 68, a. 1). This is signified by the words, "In the beginning God created heaven and earth." The second distinction mentioned is that of the elements according to their forms, since both earth and water are named. That air and fire are not mentioned by name is due to the fact that the corporeal nature of these would not be so evident as that of earth and water, to the ignorant people to whom Moses spoke. Plato (Timaeus xxvi), nevertheless, understood air to be signified by the words, "Spirit of God," since spirit is another name for air, and considered that by the word heaven is meant fire, for he held heaven to be composed of fire, as Augustine relates (De Civ. Dei viii, 11). But Rabbi Moses (Perplex. ii), though otherwise agreeing with Plato, says that fire is signified by the word darkness, since, said he, fire does not shine in its own sphere. However, it seems more reasonable to hold to what we stated above; because by the words "Spirit of God" Scripture usually means the Holy Ghost, Who is said to "move over the waters," not, indeed, in bodily shape, but as the craftsman's will may be said to move over the material to which he intends to give a form. The third distinction is that of place; since the earth is said to be under the waters that rendered it invisible, whilst the air, the subject of darkness, is described as being above the waters, in the words: "Darkness was upon the face of the deep." The remaining distinctions will appear from what follows (q. 71).

Whether the formless matter of all corporeal things is the same?

Ia q. 66 a. 2

Objection 1. It would seem that the formless matter of all corporeal things is the same. For Augustine says (Confess. xii, 12): "I find two things Thou hast made, one formed, the other formless," and he says that the latter was the earth invisible and shapeless, whereby, he says, the matter of all corporeal things is designated. Therefore the matter of all corporeal things is the same.

Objection 2. Further, the Philosopher says (Metaph. v, text. 10): "Things that are one in genus are one in matter." But all corporeal things are in the same genus of body. Therefore the matter of all bodies is the same.

Objection 3. Further, different acts befit different potentialities, and the same act befits the same potentiality. But all bodies have the same form, corporeity. Therefore all bodies have the same matter.

Objection 4. Further, matter, considered in itself, is only in potentiality. But distinction is due to form. Therefore

matter considered in itself is the same in all corporeal things.

On the contrary, Things of which the matter is the same are mutually interchangeable and mutually active or passive, as is said (De Gener. i, text. 50). But heavenly and earthly bodies do not act upon each other mutually. Therefore their matter is not the same.

Answer that, On this question the opinions of philosophers have differed. Plato and all who preceded Aristotle held that all bodies are of the nature of the four elements. Hence because the four elements have one common matter, as their mutual generation and corruption prove, it followed that the matter of all bodies is the same. But the fact of the incorruptibility of some bodies was ascribed by Plato, not to the condition of matter, but to the will of the artificer, God, Whom he represents as saying to the heavenly bodies: "By your own nature you are subject to dissolution, but by My will you are indissoluble, for My will is more pow-

* Timaeus, quoted by Aristotle, Phys. iv, text. 15.

erful than the link that binds you together.” But this theory Aristotle (*De Caelo* i, text. 5) disproves by the natural movements of bodies. For since, he says, the heavenly bodies have a natural movement, different from that of the elements, it follows that they have a different nature from them. For movement in a circle, which is proper to the heavenly bodies, is not by contraries, whereas the movements of the elements are mutually opposite, one tending upwards, another downwards: so, therefore, the heavenly body is without contrariety, whereas the elemental bodies have contrariety in their nature. And as generation and corruption are from contraries, it follows that, whereas the elements are corruptible, the heavenly bodies are incorruptible. But in spite of this difference of natural corruption and incorruption, Avicenna taught unity of matter in all bodies, arguing from their unity of form. And, indeed, if corporeity were one form in itself, on which the other forms that distinguish bodies from each other supervene, this argument would necessarily be true; for this form of corporeity would inhere in matter immutably and so far all bodies would be incorruptible. But corruption would then be merely accidental through the disappearance of successive forms—that is to say, it would be corruption, not pure and simple, but partial, since a being in act would subsist under the transient form. Thus the ancient natural philosophers taught that the substratum of bodies was some actual being, such as air or fire. But supposing that no form exists in corruptible bodies which remains subsisting beneath generation and corruption, it follows necessarily that the matter of corruptible and incorruptible bodies is not the same. For matter, as it is in itself, is in potentiality to form.

Considered in itself, then, it is in potentiality in respect to all those forms to which it is common, and in receiving any one form it is in act only as regards that form. Hence it remains in potentiality to all other forms. And this is the case even where some forms are more perfect than others, and contain these others virtually in themselves. For potentiality in itself is indifferent with respect to perfection and imperfection, so that under an imperfect form it is in potentiality to a perfect form, and “vice versa.” Matter, therefore, whilst existing under the form of an incorruptible body, would be in potentiality to the form of a corruptible body; and as it does not actually possess the latter, it has both form and the privation of form; for want of a form in that which is in potentiality thereto is privation. But this condition implies

corruptibility. It is therefore impossible that bodies by nature corruptible, and those by nature incorruptible, should possess the same matter.

Neither can we say, as Averroes* imagines, that a heavenly body itself is the matter of the heaven—beings in potentiality with regard to place, though not to being, and that its form is a separate substance united to it as its motive force. For it is impossible to suppose any being in act, unless in its totality it be act and form, or be something which has act or form. Setting aside, then, in thought, the separate substance stated to be endowed with motive power, if the heavenly body is not something having form—that is, something composed of a form and the subject of that form—it follows that in its totality it is form and act. But every such thing is something actually understood, which the heavenly bodies are not, being sensible. It follows, then, that the matter of the heavenly bodies, considered in itself, is in potentiality to that form alone which it actually possesses. Nor does it concern the point at issue to inquire whether this is a soul or any other thing. Hence this form perfects this matter in such a way that there remains in it no potentiality with respect to being, but only to place, as Aristotle† says. So, then, the matter of the heavenly bodies and of the elements is not the same, except by analogy, in so far as they agree in the character of potentiality.

Reply to Objection 1. Augustine follows in this the opinion of Plato, who does not admit a fifth essence. Or we may say that formless matter is one with the unity of order, as all bodies are one in the order of corporeal creatures.

Reply to Objection 2. If genus is taken in a physical sense, corruptible and incorruptible things are not in the same genus, on account of their different modes of potentiality, as is said in *Metaph.* x, text. 26. Logically considered, however, there is but one genus of all bodies, since they are all included in the one notion of corporeity.

Reply to Objection 3. The form of corporeity is not one and the same in all bodies, being no other than the various forms by which bodies are distinguished, as stated above.

Reply to Objection 4. As potentiality is directed towards act, potential beings are differentiated by their different acts, as sight is by color, hearing by sound. Therefore for this reason the matter of the celestial bodies is different from that of the elemental, because the matter of the celestial is not in potentiality to an elemental form.

Whether the empyrean heaven was created at the same time as formless matter?

Ia q. 66 a. 3

Objection 1. It would seem that the empyrean heaven was not created at the same time as formless matter. For the empyrean, if it is anything at all, must be a sensible body. But all sensible bodies are movable, and the empyrean heaven is not movable. For if it were so, its movement would be ascertained by the movement of some visible body, which is not the case. The empyrean heaven, then, was not created contemporaneously with formless matter.

Objection 2. Further, Augustine says (*De Trin.* iii, 4)

* *De Substantia Orbis* ii. † *De Coelo* i, text. 20.

that “the lower bodies are governed by the higher in a certain order.” If, therefore, the empyrean heaven is the highest of bodies, it must necessarily exercise some influence on bodies below it. But this does not seem to be the case, especially as it is presumed to be without movement; for one body cannot move another unless itself also be moved. Therefore the empyrean heaven was not created together with formless matter.

Objection 3. Further, if it is held that the empyrean

heaven is the place of contemplation, and not ordained to natural effects; on the contrary, Augustine says (*De Trin.* iv, 20): “In so far as we mentally apprehend eternal things, so far are we not of this world”; from which it is clear that contemplation lifts the mind above the things of this world. Corporeal place, therefore, cannot be the seat of contemplation.

Objection 4. Further, among the heavenly bodies exists a body, partly transparent and partly luminous, which we call the sidereal heaven. There exists also a heaven wholly transparent, called by some the aqueous or crystalline heaven. If, then, there exists a still higher heaven, it must be wholly luminous. But this cannot be, for then the air would be constantly illuminated, and there would be no night. Therefore the empyrean heaven was not created together with formless matter.

On the contrary, Strabus says that in the passage, “In the beginning God created heaven and earth,” heaven denotes not the visible firmament, but the empyrean or fiery heaven.

Answer that, The empyrean heaven rests only on the authority of Strabus and Bede, and also of Basil; all of whom agree in one respect, namely, in holding it to be the place of the blessed. Strabus and Bede say that as soon as created it was filled with angels; and Basil[†] says: “Just as the lost are driven into the lowest darkness, so the reward for worthy deeds is laid up in the light beyond this world, where the just shall obtain the abode of rest.” But they differ in the reasons on which they base their statement. Strabus and Bede teach that there is an empyrean heaven, because the firmament, which they take to mean the sidereal heaven, is said to have been made, not in the beginning, but on the second day: whereas the reason given by Basil is that otherwise God would seem to have made darkness His first work, as the Manicheans falsely assert, when they call the God of the Old Testament the God of darkness. These reasons, however, are not very cogent. For the question of the firmament, said to have been made on the second day, is solved in one way by Augustine, and in another by other holy writers. But the question of the darkness is explained according to Augustine[†], by supposing that formlessness, signified by darkness, preceded form not by duration, but by origin. According to others, however, since darkness is no creature, but a privation of light, it is a proof of Divine wisdom, that the things it created from nothing it produced first of all in an imperfect state, and afterwards brought them to perfection. But a better reason can be drawn from the state of glory itself. For in the reward to come a two-fold glory is looked for, spiritual and corporeal, not only in the human body to be glorified, but in the whole world which is to be made new. Now the spiritual glory began with the beginning of the world, in the blessedness of the angels, equality with whom is promised to the saints. It was fitting, then, that even from the beginning, there should be made some beginning of bodily glory in something corporeal, free at the very outset from the servitude of corruption and change, and wholly

luminous, even as the whole bodily creation, after the Resurrection, is expected to be. So, then, that heaven is called the empyrean, i.e. fiery, not from its heat, but from its brightness. It is to be noticed, however, that Augustine (*De Civ. Dei* x, 9,27) says that Porphyry sets the demons apart from the angels by supposing that the former inhabit the air, the latter the ether, or empyrean. But Porphyry, as a Platonist, held the heaven, known as sidereal, to be fiery, and therefore called it empyrean or ethereal, taking ethereal to denote the burning of flame, and not as Aristotle understands it, swiftness of movement (*De Coel.* i, text. 22). This much has been said to prevent anyone from supposing that Augustine maintained an empyrean heaven in the sense understood by modern writers.

Reply to Objection 1. Sensible corporeal things are movable in the present state of the world, for by the movement of corporeal creatures is secured by the multiplication of the elements. But when glory is finally consummated, the movement of bodies will cease. And such must have been from the beginning the condition of the empyrean.

Reply to Objection 2. It is sufficiently probable, as some assert, that the empyrean heaven, having the state of glory for its ordained end, does not influence inferior bodies of another order—those, namely, that are directed only to natural ends. Yet it seems still more probable that it does influence bodies that are moved, though itself motionless, just as angels of the highest rank, who assist[‡], influence those of lower degree who act as messengers, though they themselves are not sent, as Dionysius teaches (*Coel. Hier.* xii). For this reason it may be said that the influence of the empyrean upon that which is called the first heaven, and is moved, produces therein not something that comes and goes as a result of movement, but something of a fixed and stable nature, as the power of conservation or causation, or something of the kind pertaining to dignity.

Reply to Objection 3. Corporeal place is assigned to contemplation, not as necessary, but as congruous, that the splendor without may correspond to that which is within. Hence Basil (*Hom.* ii in *Hexaem.*) says: “The ministering spirit could not live in darkness, but made his habitual dwelling in light and joy.”

Reply to Objection 4. As Basil says (*Hom.* ii in *Hexaem.*): “It is certain that the heaven was created spherical in shape, of dense body, and sufficiently strong to separate what is outside it from what it encloses. On this account it darkens the region external to it, the light by which itself is lit up being shut out from that region. “But since the body of the firmament, though solid, is transparent, for that it does not exclude light (as is clear from the fact that we can see the stars through the intervening heavens), we may also say that the empyrean has light, not condensed so as to emit rays, as the sun does, but of a more subtle nature. Or it may have the brightness of glory which differs from mere natural brightness.”

[†] *Hom.* ii. in *Hexaem.* [†] *Gen.* ad lit. i; vii. [‡] *Infra*, q. 112, a. 3.

Objection 1. It would seem that time was not created simultaneously with formless matter. For Augustine says (Confess. xii, 12): “I find two things that Thou didst create before time was, the primary corporeal matter, and the angelic nature. “Therefore time was not created with formless matter.

Objection 2. Further, time is divided by day and night. But in the beginning there was neither day nor night, for these began when “God divided the light from the darkness. “Therefore in the beginning time was not.

Objection 3. Further, time is the measure of the firmament’s movement; and the firmament is said to have been made on the second day. Therefore in the beginning time was not.

Objection 4. Further, movement precedes time, and therefore should be reckoned among the first things created, rather than time.

Objection 5. Further, as time is the extrinsic measure of created things, so is place. Place, then, as truly as time, must be reckoned among the things first created.

On the contrary, Augustine says (Gen. ad lit. i, 3): “Both spiritual and corporeal creatures were created at the beginning of time.”

I answer that, It is commonly said that the first things created were these four—the angelic nature, the empyrean heaven, formless corporeal matter, and time. It must be observed, however, that this is not the opinion of Augustine. For he (Confess. xii, 12) specifies only two things as first created—the angelic nature and corporeal matter—making no mention of the empyrean heaven. But these two, namely, the angelic nature and formless matter, precede the formation, by nature only, and not by duration; and therefore, as they precede formation, so do they precede movement and time. Time, therefore, cannot be included among them. But the enumeration above given is that of other holy writers, who hold that the formlessness of matter preceded by duration

its form, and this view postulates the existence of time as the measure of duration: for otherwise there would be no such measure.

Reply to Objection 1. The teaching of Augustine rests on the opinion that the angelic nature and formless matter precede time by origin or nature.

Reply to Objection 2. As in the opinion of some holy writers matter was in some measure formless before it received its full form, so time was in a manner formless before it was fully formed and distinguished into day and night.

Reply to Objection 3. If the movement of the firmament did not begin immediately from the beginning, then the time that preceded was the measure, not of the firmament’s movement, but of the first movement of whatsoever kind. For it is accidental to time to be the measure of the firmament’s movement, in so far as this is the first movement. But if the first movement was another than this, time would have been its measure, for everything is measured by the first of its kind. And it must be granted that forthwith from the beginning, there was movement of some kind, at least in the succession of concepts and affections in the angelic mind: while movement without time cannot be conceived, since time is nothing else than “the measure of priority and succession in movement.”

Reply to Objection 4. Among the first created things are to be reckoned those which have a general relationship to things. And, therefore, among these time must be included, as having the nature of a common measure; but not movement, which is related only to the movable subject.

Reply to Objection 5. Place is implied as existing in the empyrean heaven, this being the boundary of the universe. And since place has reference to things permanent, it was created at once in its totality. But time, as not being permanent, was created in its beginning: even as actually we cannot lay hold of any part of time save the “now.”