

QUESTION 66

The Order of Creation with respect to Division

The next thing to consider is the work of division (*opus distinctionis*). We have to consider, first, the order of creation with respect to division (question 66) and, second, the divisions in themselves (questions 67-69).

On the first topic there are four questions: (1) Did created matter's being unformed temporally precede its division? (2) Is there a single matter for all corporeal things? (3) Was the empyrean heaven co-created along with unformed matter? (4) Was time co-created along with unformed matter?

Article 1

Was matter unformed temporally prior to its being formed?

It seems that matter's being unformed temporally preceded its being formed:

Objection 1: Genesis 1:2 says that the earth was “void (*inanis*) and empty (*vacua*)”—or “invisible (*invisibilis*) and nondescript (*incomposita*),” according to another version—and this designates matter’s being unformed, as Augustine says. Therefore, matter was unformed at some time before it was formed.

Objection 2: In its operation nature imitates God’s operation, in the way that a secondary cause imitates a first cause. But in nature’s operation *being unformed* temporally precedes *being formed*. Therefore, the same holds for God’s operation.

Objection 3: Matter is more important than an accident, since matter is a part of the substance. But as is clear in the Sacrament of the Altar, God can make it the case that an accident exists without a subject. Therefore, He could have made it the case that matter exists without form.

But contrary to this:

1. The imperfection of an effect attests to the imperfection of its agent. But God is the most perfect agent; thus, Deuteronomy 32:4 says of Him, “The works of God are perfect.” Therefore, it is not the case that any work created by Him was ever unformed.

2. The formation of corporeal creatures was accomplished through the work of division. But *confusion* is opposed to *division*, in the way that *being unformed* is opposed to *being formed*. Therefore, if matter’s being unformed temporally preceded its being formed, then it follows that at the beginning there was confusion among corporeal creatures of the sort the ancients called ‘chaos’.

I respond: The saints have had differing opinions about this question. For instance, Augustine claims that corporeal matter’s being unformed did not temporally precede its being formed, but preceded it only in origin or in the order of nature. On the other hand, others such as Basil, Ambrose, and Chrysostom claimed that matter’s being unformed temporally preceded its being formed.

Even though these opinions seem to be contraries, they nonetheless differ very little from one another, since Augustine has a different understanding from the others of what it is for matter to be unformed. For Augustine takes matter’s being unformed to mean that it lacks all form. And in this sense it is impossible to claim that matter’s being unformed temporally preceded either its being formed (*formatio*) or its being divided (*distinctio*).

This is obvious in the case of its being formed. For if unformed matter was prior in duration, then it was already actual or in actuality (*in actu*); for its duration implies this, and the terminus of creation is an actual entity (*ens actu*). But the very thing that is actuality is form (*ipsum quod est actus est forma*). Therefore, to claim that matter preceded without form is to claim that an actual being (*ens actu*) preceded without actuality (*sine actu*)—which implies a contradiction.

Nor, again, can one claim that matter had some common form, and that afterwards the diverse

forms by which the matter was divided came over and beyond this (*supervenit ei*). For this would be same as the opinion of the ancient natural philosophers, who held that primary matter was some actual body, e.g., fire or air or water or something in between. From this it followed that *being altered* would be the only kind of *being made*. For since the antecedent [common] form would give *esse* in actuality in the genus *substance* and would make the thing a *this-something* (*hoc aliquid*), it followed that the added form (*superveniens forma*) would not make the thing an actual entity, absolutely speaking, but would instead make it an entity that is actually *such-and-such* (*hoc*)—which is proper to an accidental form. And so the subsequent forms would be accidents and, accordingly, there would be an *alteration* and not a *generation*.

Hence, one must claim that primary matter was neither created without any form at all nor created under some common form. Rather, it was created under distinct forms. And so if ‘matter’s being unformed’ refers to the condition of primary matter, which in its own right (*secundum se*) does not have any form, then matter’s being unformed did not *temporally* precede its being formed or being divided; rather, as Augustine says, it preceded it only *in origin* or *in nature*, in the sense in which potentiality is prior to actuality and in which a part is prior to its whole.

By contrast, the other saints understand the lack of form not as excluding all form, but as excluding the beauty (*formositas*) and elegance (*decor*) which is now apparent in corporeal creatures. And it is in this sense that they claim that corporeal matter’s lack of form temporally preceded its having form. Accordingly, as we shall see below (q. 69, a. 1 and q. 74, a. 2), Augustine agrees with them in some respects and disagrees with them in other respects.

And as far as can be gathered from the text of Genesis 1, there were three kinds of missing beauty (*formositas*) in virtue of which corporeal creatures were called unformed.

For the beauty of light (*pulchritudo lucis*) was missing from the whole diaphanous body that is called ‘the heavens’, and it is in virtue of this that the text says, “Darkness was upon the face of the deep.” Two kinds of beauty were missing from the earth. The first is the beauty that it has from the fact that it is not covered by the waters, and in this regard the text says, “The earth was empty (or: invisible),” since its corporeal aspect could not be seen because of the waters covering it everywhere. The other kind of beauty is that which it has from the fact that it is adorned with herbs and plants, and in this regard the text says, “It was empty” (or “nondescript,” i.e., not adorned, according to the other version). And so since the text had previously mentioned the two created natures, viz., heaven and earth, it expressed heaven’s lack of form by saying, “Darkness was upon the face of the deep” (insofar as the air is also included under ‘heaven’), whereas it expressed earth’s lack of form by saying, “The earth was void and empty.”

Reply to objection 1: The name ‘earth’ in this text is understood differently by Augustine and by the other saints.

Augustine claims that in this text the names ‘earth’ and ‘waters’ signify primary matter itself. For Moses was unable to make primary matter clear to an uneducated people except by means of likenesses to things known to them. Hence, he made primary matter clear with multiple likenesses, not calling it just ‘water’ or just ‘earth’, lest it seem that primary matter is in fact either earth or water. Yet it does have a similarity to earth, insofar as it sits under forms; and it does have a similarity to water, since it is apt to be shaped by diverse forms. Therefore, the sense in which the earth is said to be “void and empty” (or “invisible and nondescript”) is that matter is known through form (and so, considered in itself, is “invisible” or “empty”), and its potentiality is fulfilled by form (and thus Plato says that matter is place (*locus*)).

By contrast, the other saints understood ‘earth’ as itself an element. We have already explained the sense in which it was unformed according to them.

Reply to objection 2: Nature produces an actual effect (*effectum in actu*) from a being that is in

potentiality (*de ente in potentia*), and so in its operation the potentiality must temporally precede the actuality, and the *being unformed* must precede the *being formed*.

God, on the other hand, produces an actual being *ex nihilo*, and so He can directly produce a complete entity (*rem perfectam*), given the magnitude of His power.

Reply to objection 3: Since an accident is a form, it is a certain actuality (*quidam actus*), whereas matter, given its character (*secundum id quod est*), is a being in potentiality (*ens in potentia*). It is a greater anomaly (*magis repugnat*) for matter to exist in actuality without form than for an accident to exist without a subject.

Reply to argument 1 for the contrary: If, according to the other saints, matter's being unformed temporally preceded its being formed, this did not stem from a lack of power on God's part. Rather, it stemmed from His wisdom, so that order might be preserved in the condition of things as they were led from being incomplete to being complete.

Reply to argument 2 for the contrary: Certain of the ancient natural philosophers posited a confusion that excluded every type of division—apart from the fact that Anaxagoras posited Mind as the only distinct and unmixed reality. But Sacred Scripture posits several distinctions before the work of division.

The first is the distinction between heaven and earth (in which, as will be explained below (a. 3), we also see a division with respect to matter), when it says, “In the beginning God created heaven and earth.”

The second is the distinction among the elements with respect to their forms, which is made by naming earth and water. It does not name air and fire, since it is not as obvious to the uneducated people Moses was addressing as it is in the case of earth and fire that things of this sort are bodies—though, as Augustine points out in *De Civitate Dei* 8, Plato understood (a) air to be signified by “the spirit of the Lord” (since air is also called a spirit) and (b) fire to be signified by ‘heaven’ (which he claimed to be of a fiery nature). However, Rabbi Moses, who agrees with Plato in other matters, claims that fire is signified by “darkness,” since, as he puts it, fire does not give light in its own proper sphere. Still, what was said above seems to more plausible, since “spirit of the Lord” is not normally used in Scripture except for the Holy Spirit, who is said here to “move over the waters,” not corporeally, but in the way that a craftsman’s will “moves over” the matter that he wants to give shape to.

The third distinction is signified with respect to position. For the earth was under the waters and rendered invisible by them, whereas the air, which is the subject of darkness, is signified as having been above the waters when it says, “Darkness was upon the face of the deep.”

Now what remained to be divided will become clear in what follows (q. 71).

Article 2

Is there a single type of unformed matter for all corporeal things?

It seems that there is a single type of unformed matter for all corporeal things (*una sit materia informis omnium corporalium*):

Objection 1: In *Confessiones* 12 Augustine says, “I find two things that you have made, one that was formed and the other that was unformed.” He says that the latter is “the invisible and nondescript earth,” a phrase which, he says, signifies the matter of corporeal things. Therefore, there is a single type of matter for all corporeal things.

Objection 2: In *Metaphysics* 5 the Philosopher says that things which are one in genus are one in

matter. But all corporeal things agree in the genus *body*. Therefore, there is a single type of matter for all corporeal things.

Objection 3: Diverse actualities come to be in diverse potentialities, and a single actuality comes to be in a single potentiality. But there is a single form for all bodies, viz., corporeality. Therefore, there is a single type of matter for all corporeal things.

Objection 4: Matter, considered in itself, exists only in potentiality. But division comes about through forms. Therefore, if matter is considered in itself, there is just a single type of matter for all corporeal things.

But contrary to this: As *De Generatione et Corruptione* 1 says, if things agree in their matter, then they are transmutable into one another, and they act on and are acted upon by one another. But the celestial bodies and the lower bodies are not related in this way to one another. Therefore, they do not share the same type of matter (*eorum materia non est una*).

I respond: The philosophers have had differing opinions on this topic.

Plato and all the philosophers before Aristotle claimed that all bodies are of the nature of the four elements. Hence, since the four elements share a single type of matter, as mutual generation and corruption among them make clear, it followed as a result that there is a single type of matter for all bodies. And Plato ascribed the fact that some bodies are incorruptible not to the status of their matter, but rather to the will of their maker, viz., God, whom he represents as saying to the celestial bodies, “By your nature you are subject to dissolution, but by my will you are not subject to dissolution, since my will is stronger than your bond.”

However, Aristotle refutes this position by appeal to the natural motions of bodies. For since a celestial body has a natural motion that is different from the natural motion of the elements, it follows that its nature is different from the nature of the four elements. And just as circular motion, which is proper to a celestial body, lacks contrariety, whereas the motions of the elements are contrary to one another in the way that an upward motion is contrary to a downward motion, so too a celestial body exists without contrariety, whereas elemental bodies exist with contrariety. Moreover, since corruption and generation stem from contraries, it follows that it is by their nature that the celestial bodies are incorruptible and that the elements are corruptible.

However, despite this difference in natural corruptibility and incorruptibility, Avicenna, focusing on the unity of the form of corporeality (*attendens ad unitatem formae corporalis*), claimed that there is a single type of matter for all bodies.

To be sure, if the form of corporeality were of itself a single form such that the other forms by which bodies are divided supervened on it, then this claim would be necessary. For the form in question would immutably inhere in matter, and each body would be incorruptible with respect to it. Corruption would occur through the removal of the subsequent forms, but this would be corruption only in a qualified sense and not absolutely speaking, since some actual entity would be the subject of the privation—just as with the ancient natural philosophers, who posited as the subject of bodies some actual entity such as fire or air or something of this sort.

However, if we assume that no form that exists in a corruptible body remains as the substratum for generation and corruption, then it follows necessarily that the matter of corruptible bodies is not the same as the matter of incorruptible bodies. For matter, given what it is, is in potentiality with respect to form. Therefore, matter, considered in itself, must be in potentiality with respect to the forms of all those things which share a common matter. Now through one form the matter comes to be actual (*in actu*) only with respect to that form. Therefore, it remains in potentiality with respect to all the other forms. Nor is this conclusion undermined if one of those forms is more perfect and virtually contains the others within itself. For potentiality, taken in itself, is related indifferently to the perfect and the imperfect; hence, just as it is in potentiality to a perfect form when it is the subject of an imperfect form, so the converse holds

as well. So, then, matter, insofar as it is the subject of the form of an incorruptible body, will still be in potentiality with respect to the form of a corruptible body. And since it does not have the latter form in actuality, it will simultaneously be the subject of the form [of an incorruptible body] and of the privation [of the form of a corruptible body], since a privation is the absence of a form in something which is in potentiality with respect to that form. But this is precisely the condition of a corruptible body. Therefore, it is impossible for there to be a single type of matter for both a body that is corruptible by its nature and a body that is incorruptible by its nature.

And yet one should not claim, as Averroes imagines, that (a) the matter of the heavens is the celestial body itself, a being in potentiality with respect to place and not with respect to *esse*, and that (b) its form is the separated substance that is united to it as its mover. For it is impossible to posit an actual being unless either (a) the whole of it *is itself* an actuality and a form or (b) it *has* an actuality, i.e., a form. Therefore, if, once the separated substance that is posited as the mover is mentally removed, the celestial body is such that it does not *have* a form—i.e., if it is not composed of a form and the subject of that form—then what follows is that it is a form and actuality as a whole. But everything like that is an intellect in actuality—something that cannot be said of a celestial body, since it is sensible. What remains, then, is that the matter of a celestial body, taken in itself, is in potentiality only with respect to the form that it in fact has. And it makes no difference to the argument what that form is, whether it is a soul or something else. Hence, as Aristotle says, the form of a celestial body so perfects the matter that no potentiality with respect to *esse* remains in it in any way; rather, it has potentiality only with respect to place.

And so the matter of a celestial body is not the same as the matter of the elements, except by way of an analogy, insofar as both agree in the notion of potentiality.

Reply to objection 1: On this point Augustine is following the opinion of Plato, who does not posit the “fifth essence” (*quintam essentiam*).

An alternative reply is that unformed matter is one by a oneness of order, in the sense that all bodies are one within the order of corporeal creatures.

Reply to objection 2: If the genus is thought of within *physics (physice)*, then, as *Metaphysics* 10 says, corruptible and incorruptible things are not in the same genus, and this because of the different types of potentiality they have.

On the other hand, from the perspective of *logic (secundum logicam considerationem)*, there is a single genus for all bodies, and this because there is a single concept of corporeality.

Reply to objection 3: The form of corporeality is not a single form in all bodies, since, as has been explained, it is not other than the forms by which bodies are distinguished from one another.

Reply to objection 4: Since potentiality is predicated in relation to actuality, *being in potentiality* is diversified by virtue of being ordered to diverse actualities, e.g., sight is ordered to color, and hearing is ordered to sound. Hence, the matter of a celestial body is other than the matter of an element by the very fact that it is not in potentiality to the form of any element.

Article 3

Was the empyrean heaven co-created with unformed matter?

It seems that the empyrean heaven was not co-created with unformed matter:

Objection 1: The empyrean heaven, if there is such a thing, must be a sensible body. But every sensible body is subject to motion (*est mobile*). However, the empyrean heaven is not subject to motion,

since its motion would be ascertained through the motion of some visible body—which does not at all appear to be the case. Therefore, it is not the case that the empyrean heaven is something co-created with unformed matter.

Objection 2: In *De Trinitate* 3 Augustine says, “The lower bodies are ruled in a certain order by the higher bodies.” Therefore, if the empyrean heaven is a highest body, it must have some influence on lower bodies. But this does not seem to be the case, especially if the empyrean heaven is posited as a body not subject to motion, since a body does not effect motion unless it is itself moved. Therefore, it is not the case that the empyrean heaven was co-created with unformed matter.

Objection 3: Someone might reply that the empyrean heaven is a place of contemplation not ordered to natural effects.

Against this: In *De Trinitate* 4 Augustine says, “Insofar as we grasp something eternal with our mind, we are not in this world.” From this it is clear that contemplation elevates the mind above corporeal things. Therefore, there is no corporeal place set aside for contemplation.

Objection 4: Among the celestial bodies there is a body that is partly diaphanous and partly luminous, viz., the starry heaven (*caelum sidereum*). There is also a totally diaphanous celestial body, which some call the aqueous or crystalline heaven (*caelum aqueum vel crystallinum*). Therefore, if there is a yet higher celestial body, it must be totally luminous. But this is impossible, since if it were so, then the air would be continuously illuminated and night would never occur. Therefore, it is not the case that the empyrean heaven was co-created with unformed matter.

But contrary to this: Strabo says that the verse, “In the beginning God created heaven and earth,” is talking not about the visible firmament, but about the empyrean, i.e., fiery, heaven.

I respond: The empyrean heaven is posited only on the authority of Strabo and Bede, and again on the authority of Basil.

In positing the empyrean heaven, they all agree on one point, viz., that it is the place of the blessed in heaven (*locus beatorum*). For Strabo says, and Bede agrees, “As soon as it was made, it was filled with the angels.” Likewise, in *Hexameron* 2 Basil says, “Just as the damned are driven into the last darkness, so the reward for worthy deeds is laid up in the light which lies outside the world, where the blessed shall receive the abode of rest.”

However, they differ in their reasons for positing the empyrean heaven. For Strabo and Bede posit the empyrean heaven because the firmament, by which they mean the starry heaven, is said to have been made not in the beginning, but on the second day. By contrast, Basil posits the empyrean heaven in order that God not seem to have begun His work simply with darkness. (The Manicheans falsely make this claim, calling the God of the Old Testament the ‘God of darkness’.)

However, these reasons are not very compelling. For Augustine and the other saints have an alternative answer to the question about the firmament’s being said to have been made on the second day. And, according to Augustine, the question about the darkness is answered by the fact that matter’s not being formed (which is signified by ‘darkness’) preceded its being formed not in duration, but [only] in origin. According to others, however, since the darkness is not a creature but is instead the privation of light, it attests to God’s wisdom that the things that He produced *ex nihilo* were such that He established them in a state of imperfection and afterwards brought them to completion.

Still, a more fitting explanation can be based on the very condition of glory. For there are two sorts of glory that are looked for in our future reward, viz., (a) spiritual glory and (b) corporeal glory not only in the human bodies that will be glorified, but also in the whole world that is to be renewed. But spiritual glory commenced at the very beginning of the world in the beatitude of the angels, equality with whom is promised to the saints. Hence, it was fitting that corporeal glory should also have commenced at the beginning in a body that was likewise totally lucid from the beginning and free from the servitude of

corruption and mutability—just as all of corporeal creation is expected to be in the future after the resurrection. And so the reason why that heaven is called empyrean, i.e., fiery, is because of its splendor and not because of its heat.

Notice, though, that in *De Civitate Dei* 10 Augustine says that Porphyry “distinguished the angels from the demons in such a way that he claimed that airy places belong to the demons, whereas the ethereal or empyrean places belong to the angels.” However, Porphyry, as a Platonist, thought that the starry heaven was fiery, and so he called it ‘empyrean’ or ‘ethereal’, insofar as the name ‘ether’ is taken from inflammation and not, as Aristotle claims, from the swiftness of the motion. I point this out lest anyone think that Augustine posited an empyrean heaven in the way that it is now posited by modern authors.

Reply to objection 1: Sensible bodies are subject to motion according to the very status of the world, since the multiplication of the elect is procured through the motion of corporeal creatures. However, the motion of bodies will cease in the final consummation of glory, and the empyrean heaven had to have such a condition from the beginning.

Reply to objection 2: It is likely enough that since the empyrean heaven is, according to certain authors, ordered toward the state of glory, it does not have an influence on lower bodies, which belong to a differ order insofar as they are ordered toward the natural course of things.

Still, it seems more probable to claim that just as the highest angels, who stand before God (*assistunt*), have influence over the intermediate and lowest angels, who are sent on mission, even though, according to Dionysius, they themselves are not sent on mission, so too the empyrean heaven has an influence over the bodies that are moved, even though it itself is not moved. And in light of this one can claim that the empyrean heaven communicates (*influit*) to the first moved heaven something fixed and stable rather than something that is transient and comes with motion, e.g., the power to contain and to cause, or something of this sort that pertains to its dignity.

Reply to objection 3: A corporeal place is set aside for contemplation not because it is necessary, but because it is fitting that an exterior brightness should correspond to the interior brightness. Hence, Basil says, “The ministering spirit was unable to pass his time in darkness, but had his fit dwelling place in light and joy.”

Reply to objection 4: As Basil says in *Hexameron* 2, “It is certain that heaven was created spherical in shape, with a dense body and strong enough that it could separate what was outside it from what was inside. Because of this, it necessarily left in its wake a region bereft of light, shut out from the splendor that radiated above it.”

However, since the body of the firmament, though solid, is diaphanous, given that it does not impede light (as is clear from the fact that we see the light of the stars despite the intervening heavens), an alternative reply is that the empyrean heaven has a light which is more subtle and is not condensed in such a way as to emit rays like the body of the sun does.

Yet another reply is that the empyrean heaven has the brightness of glory, which differs from natural brightness.

Article 4

Was time co-created with unformed matter?

It seems that time was not co-created with unformed matter:

Objection 1: In *Confessiones* 12 Augustine, speaking to God, says, “I find two things You have

made that are bereft of time, viz., primary corporeal matter and the angelic nature.” Therefore, time was not co-created with unformed matter.

Objection 2: Time is divided into day and night. But at the beginning there was neither night nor day; they came afterwards, when God divided the light from the darkness. Therefore, time did not exist at the beginning.

Objection 3: Time is the numbering (*numerus*) of the motion of the firmament, which, we read, was created on the second day. Therefore, time did not exist at the beginning.

Objection 4: Motion is prior to time. Therefore, motion, rather than time, should be numbered among the things created first.

Objection 5: Just as time is an extrinsic measure, so too is place. Therefore, time ought not to be counted among the things created first any more than place is.

But contrary to this: In *Super Genesim ad Litteram* Augustine says, “Spiritual and corporeal creatures were created at the beginning of time.”

I respond: It is commonly claimed the four things were created first, viz., (a) angelic nature, (b) the empyrean heaven, (c) unformed corporeal matter, and (d) time.

Note, however, that this claim does not go through on Augustine’s opinion. For Augustine posits two things that were created first, viz., angelic nature and corporeal matter, and makes no mention of the empyrean heaven. But these two things, viz., angelic nature and unformed matter, precede matter’s formation not in duration, but [only] in nature; and just as they precede matter’s formation in nature, so too they precede motion and time in nature. Hence, time cannot be numbered among the things created first.

On the other hand, the aforementioned enumeration does go through on the opinion of the other saints, who posit that matter’s being unformed precedes its being formed in duration. In that case, time must be posited for that duration; otherwise, there could not be a measure of duration.

Reply to objection 1: Augustine says this on the understanding that angelic nature and unformed matter precede time in origin or nature.

Reply to objection 2: Just as, according to the other saints, matter was unformed in a certain way and later on formed, so too time was in a certain way unformed and afterwards formed and distinguished into day and night.

Reply to objection 3: If the motion of the firmament did not start immediately at the beginning, then the time that preceded it was not the numbering of the motion of the firmament, but was instead the numbering of whatever the first motion was. For it is accidental to time that it is the numbering of the motion of the firmament, and this in virtue of the fact that this motion is the first motion. But if some other motion were the first, then time would be the measure of that motion, since all things are measured by what is first in their genus.

Moreover, it is necessary to assert that there was some motion immediately at the beginning—at least in the sense of a succession of conceptions and affections in the angelic mind. But motion cannot be understood without time, since time is nothing other than the numbering of the prior and posterior in motion.

Reply to objection 4: Among the things counted as having been created first are those which have a general relation to things. And so time, which has the character of a common measure, should be counted, whereas motion, which is related only to the moveable subject, should not be counted.

Reply to objection 5: Place is understood as included with the empyrean heaven, since it encompasses all things.

And since place belongs to permanent things, all of it is simultaneously co-created. By contrast, time, which is non-permanent, is co-created in its beginning, since in like manner nothing is actual in time except the now.