

Cecilia Trifogli

The Creation of Matter in the *Summa Halensis*

Abstract: The *Summa* contains an extensive discussion of the creation of matter, which addresses two main questions: a general question of whether matter is something created or rather an eternal independent principle of creation, and a more specific question about the mode of creation of matter, that is, whether matter is first created without any forms or whether it is created together with a form so that a composite of matter and form is properly-speaking created. This paper provides a detailed analysis of the two *quaestiones* of the *Summa* devoted to these two issues. The principal aim of the investigation is to explain and assess the views of the Summists on these two issues and the arguments in support of them, and to point out those aspects of their discussions that contain important indications about the ontological status of matter and that allow a comparison with the views of John Duns Scotus.

Introduction

The most extensive discussions about matter in the *Summa Halensis* deal with the topic of its creation. Two main questions are addressed: a general question of whether matter is something created or rather an eternal independent principle of creation, and a more specific question about the mode of creation of matter, that is, whether matter is first created without any forms or whether it is created together with a form so that a composite of matter and form is properly speaking created. In my paper I will examine the two *quaestiones* of the *Summa* devoted to these two issues: ‘Whether corporeal goods have two principles’ (*Utrum boni corporalis sint duo principia*),¹ and ‘Whether corporeal things are said to be created because of matter together with form or because of formless matter’ (*Utrum res corporales dicantur creari ratione materiae cum forma aut ratione materiae informis*).² The principal aim of my investigation is to explain and assess the views of the Summists on these two issues and the arguments in support of them. I will also point out those aspects of their discussions that contain important indications about the ontological status of matter and that allow a comparison with the views of John Duns Scotus.

1 Alexander of Hales, *Doctoris irrefragabilis Alexandri de Hales Ordinis minorum Summa theologica (SH)*, 4 vols (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1924–48), II, In1, Tr1, S1, Q1, C3, Ar3 (n. 5), pp. 11–13.

2 *SH* II, In3, Tr1, Q1, C1 (n. 248), pp. 306–8.

‘Whether Corporeal Goods Have Two Principles’

The question about the creation of matter is raised in a Platonic framework, as a question about Plato’s view according to which there are two irreducible and eternal principles of corporeal things, namely the maker (*opifex*) and matter. The Platonic framework is made explicit in the expanded formulation of the question added as a clarification of its title:

(T1) The next question is whether corporeal goods have two principles, namely, the maker and matter, each of which does not derive from something else, as Plato seemed to say since he posited that the maker and matter exist from eternity and are two principles.³

The main idea in the view ascribed to Plato is that the maker is the efficient cause and matter is the material that the efficient cause uses to produce corporeal things. In particular, matter is not produced by the maker but it is something presupposed by the action of the maker.⁴

The Summists reject Plato’s view. More precisely, they follow Plato in positing that the maker and matter are both principles of corporeal things, but they deny that these two principles are independent one from the other. The maker is indeed independent from matter and from anything else, but matter is not. For matter is produced by the maker out of nothing. This is how the Summists formulate their reply to the question:

(T2) In reply to the issues just raised we must say that the maker and matter are said to be two principles of corporeal things that come to be from matter but in different ways: the maker as the principle by which (*a quo*), whereas matter as the principle out of which (*de quo*) or from which (*ex quo*). But they are not principles such that each of the two is not produced by the other; for matter is produced by the maker.⁵

³ SH II, In1, Tr1, S1, Q1, C3, Ar3 (n. 5), p. 11: ‘Consequenter quaeritur utrum boni corporalis sint duo principia, scilicet opifex et materia, quorum utrumque non sit ab aliquo, sicut videbatur Plato dicere, qui posuit opificem et materiam esse ab aeterno et esse duo principia.’ All translations of passages from the *Summa* and other Latin works are mine, unless otherwise noted.

⁴ Thomas Aquinas too mentions Plato’s view and classifies it as one of the erroneous positions about the plurality of principles. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 44, a. 1 (*Utrum sint plura prima principia*), co.: ‘Tertius error fuit eorum qui posuerunt agens et materiam, sed agens non esse principium materiae, quamvis sit unum tantum agens. Et haec est opinio Anaxagorae et Platonis, nisi quod Plato superaddit tertium principium, scilicet ideas separatas a rebus, quas exemplaria dicebat; et nullum esse causam alterius, sed per haec tria causari mundum, et res ex quibus mundus constat.’ All quotations from Aquinas’ works are from the online versions available at www.corpusthomicum.org.

⁵ SH II, In1, Tr1, S1, Q1, C3, Ar3 (n. 5), p. 12: ‘Respondendum est ad iam dicta quod opifex et materia duo dicuntur principia rerum corporalium quae fiunt ex materia, sed differenter: opifex ut a quo, materia vero ut de quo vel ex quo. Sed non sunt duo principia, quorum neutrum sit ab altero: nam ipsa materia est ab opifice.’

This reply contains two main points. The first is a specification of Plato's claim that the maker and matter are principles of material things. They are both principles of material things but of different kinds. The maker is the principle 'by which' (*a quo*), i.e. in the sense of being the efficient cause of corporeal things. Matter is the principle 'out of which' (*de quo*), i.e. something out of which a corporeal thing is made (the subject or a component of such thing) or the principle 'from which' (*ex quo*), i.e. that from which the production of a corporeal thing starts. The second main point is the statement of the Summists' view that matter is produced by the maker, against Plato's claim of the independence of matter.

Despite its role in the formulation of the question, the Platonic framework does not play any significant role in its actual discussion. In fact, this is shaped by general principles of Aristotle's physics and metaphysics about act and potency, matter, change. The dominant philosophical framework is indeed Aristotelian.⁶ A significant indication of the Aristotelian framework is the frequent use of the expression '*prima materia*' (prime matter), which is used interchangeably with the term '*materia*'. Furthermore, the only argument in favor of the Platonic view exclusively appeals to Aristotelian ideas about active and passive powers and principles.⁷

The substantial controversial issue of the question is whether (prime) matter is produced by the maker, i.e. by God, and if it is produced, whether it is produced in time.

The question presents and discusses three different views on this issue: 1. Plato's/Aristotle's view: matter (i) is eternal and (ii) is an independent principle (does not depend on the maker or anything else). 2. Augustine's view: matter is (i) eternal but (not ii) is not an independent principle: it is caused by the maker. (3) Summists' view (standard medieval Christian view): matter is (not i) not eternal and (not ii) not independent: it is created from nothing by the maker, i.e. God, and it starts to exist.

In what follows I will concentrate on major philosophical aspects in the discussions of each of these three views.

Plato's/Aristotle's View

The Summists present only one argument in support of this view.⁸ The argument appeals to standard Aristotelian ideas about agency. Matter and the maker are assumed to be the ultimate passive principle and the ultimate active principle respectively. Then the existence of these two irreducible principles is inferred from the distinction between acting and being acted upon: since there is an essential distinction between

⁶ A clear sign of this is provided by the *apparatus fontium* of the question. Almost all references are to Aristotle's works (*Physics* and *Metaphysics*). In addition to Aristotle and internal references, the only other references are to Augustine (and are very few).

⁷ On this argument, see below, pp. 17–18.

⁸ *SH* II, In1, Tr1, S1, Q1, C3, Ar3 (n. 5), p. 11.

acting and being acted upon, then also the principles from which acting and being acted upon ultimately derive must both exist and be essentially distinct and independent. The Summists' reply to this argument appeals to the main claim of their view that, although matter is the ultimate passive principle, it is produced by the ultimate active principle (the maker or God) from nothing.⁹

The discussion of Plato's/Aristotle's view, however, is not limited to this standard argument.¹⁰ We shall see that some of the objections against the Summists' view are in fact forceful arguments in support of Plato's/Aristotle's view.¹¹

Augustine's View

The Summists do not present any argument in support of the view that matter is eternal but (eternally) dependent on God. They simply illustrate it with the famous example of *De civitate Dei* of the foot and the footprint:

(T3) Just as the footprint imprinted in the dust is produced by the foot, and if the foot were always placed in the dust, the footprint would always be there, so matter is produced by the maker in such a way that, if the maker always exists, matter too always exists.¹²

The example is supposed to illustrate the difficult idea that something can be eternal (the footprint) and still caused by something else (the foot).

The Summists do not find the combination of being eternal and being dependent incoherent. They mention the trinitarian case of the Son as dependent on the Father as a case in which this combination is found. They deny, however, that this combination holds for matter. They argue that in the case of matter, dependence on the maker entails that matter is not eternal, but it starts to exist. Their argument for this conclusion is the following:

(T4) If matter is produced by the maker, it does not however belong to the substance of the maker; for if this were the case, then the maker would belong to the substance of the things that are from matter. Therefore, if matter is caused by or derives from the maker as from a principle, this happens with a diversity in substance. There is also a distinction between what is prior in causality and what is prior in duration, just as we say that eternity is prior to time. Now, given this distinction, it is necessary that the thing by which another thing is produced with a diversity in substance has both kinds of priority together. For the thing produced by it is either out of the First or out of nothing; but it cannot be out of the First, because it is different

⁹ SH II, In1, Tr1, S1, Q1, C3, Ar3 (n. 5), p. 13.

¹⁰ A version of this argument against the creation of matter is also in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 44, a. 2, arg. 2.

¹¹ See below, pp. 22–27.

¹² SH II, In1, Tr1, S1, Q1, C3, Ar3 (n. 5), p. 11: 'Sicut vestigium pedis in pulvere est a pede, et si semper esset pes in pulvere, semper esset vestigium, ita materia sit ab opifice, et semper existente opifice semper sit materia.'

in substance; therefore, it is out of nothing. Therefore, it is not eternal, but just as eternity is prior to the instant of time, so the essence of the maker will be prior to matter. Therefore, matter will not be produced by the maker and existing from eternity.¹³

This argument is compressed and obscure. Let us try to make sense of it. An essential ingredient of it is the distinction between two kinds of priority: (i) priority in causality: the priority of a cause qua cause with respect to its effect; and (ii) priority in duration: the priority of something that exists before something else. In the example of the foot and the footprint, there is priority in causality of the foot over the footprint but there is no priority in duration. According to the Summists, however, the case of the maker and matter is not like the case of the foot and the footprint: if the maker (also called ‘the First’ in this argument) is prior in causality to matter, then it is also prior in duration, so that it cannot be the case that matter is caused by the maker and eternal like the maker. Thus, in the case of the maker and matter, priority in causality entails priority in duration. The bulk of the argument then consists in proving that this inference is valid.

The crucial premise in support of this inference appeals to the different natures of matter and the maker: diversity in substance (*diversitas substantiae*) in the text. This premise is formulated at the very beginning of the argument and supported with an appeal to the difference between the transcendence of the maker and the immanence of matter: matter is an essential component of corporeal things whereas the (nature of the) maker is not. The diversity in nature of matter from the maker or the First is expressed by the condensed claim that matter is not out of the First (*de Primo*). The distinction at work here is that between being out of the First and being by the First (*a Primo*), that is, produced by the first. Matter, according to this view, is by the First but not out of the First.

The next crucial step in the argument is the following inference: if matter is not out of the First, then it is out of nothing (*de nihilo*). The inference is based on the assumption that the alternatives ‘out of the First’ and ‘out of nothing’ are exhaustive. Although it is difficult to give a rigorous account of these alternatives, the main idea is the following. It is clear that the claim that matter is out of nothing should not be understood in the sense that ‘nothing’ indicates somehow a component of matter or something from which the production of matter starts. Rather the sense is that ‘nothing’ indicates the lack of a component or of a starting point, so that the claim should be understood in the sense that there is nothing out of which matter is produced. So

13 SH II, In1, Tr1, S1, Q1, C3, Ar3 (n. 5), p. 11: ‘Materia, si est ab opifice, non est de substantia opificis: nam si hoc esset, opifex esset de substantia eorum quae sunt ex materia; ergo si causatur sive principiatur, est in diversitate substantiae. Sed est prius, scilicet in causalitate, et est prius duratione, sicut dicitur aeternitas praecedere tempus. Sed si hoc, necesse est quod haec duo simul sint in eo a quo est alterum in diversitate substantiae secundum iam dicta. Nam aut est de Primo aut de nihilo. De Primo non potest esse, cum diversum sit in substantia; ergo de nihilo. Ergo non est aeternum, sed sicut aeternitas praecedat nunc temporis, ita essentia opificis praecedet materiam. Non ergo erit materia ab opifice et aeternaliter ens.’

the alternatives can be reformulated as: either matter is out of the First or there is nothing out of which matter is. Thus, it is only the First that could be the thing out of which matter is produced. But because of their different natures, this cannot be the case.

The final inference in the argument is that being out of nothing entails not being eternal: since matter is out of nothing, then it is not eternal. This inference is obviously of great importance to establish the conclusion that matter cannot be both produced by the First and eternal, but it is simply taken for granted in this argument.

Some explanation of this final inference is found in the question devoted specifically to the notion of creation as coming to be out of nothing ('The next question asks what is meant by 'nothing' when we say that creation is coming to be from nothing').¹⁴ The Summists' reply is the following:

(T5) To this question it must be replied that coming to be from nothing or out of nothing is said in many ways. For the particle 'out of' or 'from' can express an order and not a cause, and an order such that it is saved in only one of the two extremes. And it is in this way that to be created is said to be coming to be from nothing or out of nothing, that is, because a creature proceeds into being after its absolute non-being (...). If instead it [i.e. 'from' or 'out of'] expresses a cause, in this way it is not the case that to be created is coming to be from nothing.¹⁵

This reply is based on a distinction between a cause and an ordering associated to the particle 'from'. In the expression 'from nothing', the particle 'from' does not express a cause: for what is nothing cannot be a cause, whereas creation does have a cause. The particle rather expresses an order. The extremes between which this relation of order obtains, however, are such that only one of them is something positive; for the order is that between non-being and being, where non-being precedes being or equivalently being is after non-being.

The crucial assumption here is that the order of before and after involved in the notion of creation from nothing is a temporal one, so that what is created from nothing is such that it starts to exist. It is this assumption that, according to the Summists, makes the inference of the main argument from being out of nothing to non-being eternal a valid one. This assumption, however, is controversial. Eminent later theologians, like Aquinas and Scotus, reject it. Aquinas, for example, gives a very clear explanation of what is wrong with this assumption in his discussion of the eternity of the world in his *Sentences* commentary. Aquinas, like the Summists, maintains that the world had a temporal beginning and so it is not eternal, but, un-

¹⁴ SH II, In1, Tr1, S2, Q2, M2, C2 (n. 50), pp. 58–59: 'Consequenter quaeritur de hoc quod creari est fieri ex nihilo, qualiter accipiat hoc ipsum "nihil".'

¹⁵ SH II, In1, Tr1, S2, Q2, M2, C2 (n. 50), pp. 58–59: 'Ad quod dicendum quod fieri ex nihilo sive de nihilo dicitur multipliciter. Nam "de" vel "ex" potest dicere ordinem, non causam, qui tamen ordo non salvatur nisi in altero extremorum. Et secundum hunc modum dicitur "creari" fieri ex nihilo vel de nihilo, quia post omnino non-esse procedit creatura in esse (...). Si vero dicat causam, secundum illum modum non est creari fieri ex nihilo.'

like the Summists, he does not think that the non-eternity of the world can be proved with a rational argument. It can only be accepted by faith.¹⁶ Therefore, according to Aquinas, the arguments against the eternity of the world are not conclusive. One such argument reported by Aquinas is very similar to the argument of the Summists:

(T6) Every created thing is produced from nothing; but everything that is produced from nothing is a being after that it was nothing, since it is not at the same time a being and a non-being. Therefore, it is necessary that the heavens first did not exist and afterward existed, and likewise the whole world.¹⁷

This argument is based on the crucial assumption endorsed by the Summists that being from nothing entails having being after non-being in the temporal order. But this assumption is wrong, according to Aquinas, because it fails to consider an alternative kind of order: an order of nature. It is to the distinction between order of duration and order of nature, ascribed to Avicenna, that Aquinas appeals to in his reply to the argument:

(T7) A reply to the second argument is given by Avicenna in his metaphysics. He maintains that all things are created by God and that creation is from nothing, that is, of what has being after nothing. But this can be understood in two ways: (i) either in the sense that an order of duration is designated, and if understood in this way the claim that things are created from nothing is false, according to Avicenna. (ii) Or in the sense that an order of nature is designated, and if understood in this way the claim is true.¹⁸

Like Aquinas, Scotus too draws the distinction between these two orders in his account of creation from nothing.¹⁹

In Aquinas' explanation, the order of nature involved in the creation from nothing expresses the total dependence of the being of a creature from God. A creature by its nature is a non-being, and the whole of its being comes from God; and what a creature is by its nature is by nature prior to what it is in virtue of something

16 Thomas Aquinas, *Sentences* II, d. 1, q. 1, a. 5, co.: 'Tertia positio est dicentium quod omne quod est praeter Deum incepit esse, sed tamen Deus potuit res ab aeterno produxisse, ita quod mundum incepisse non potuit demonstrari, sed per revelationem divinam esse habitum et creditum. (...) Et huic positioni consentio, quia non credo quod a nobis possit sumi ratio demonstrativa ad hoc.'

17 Thomas Aquinas, *Sentences* II, d. 1, q. 1, a. 5, con. 2: 'Praeterea, omne creatum est ex nihilo factum. Sed omne quod est ex nihilo factum est ens postquam fuit nihil, cum non sit simul ens et non ens. Ergo oportet quod caelum prius non fuerit et postmodum fuerit, et sic totus mundus.'

18 Thomas Aquinas, *Sentences* II, d. 1, q. 1, a. 5, ad con. 2: 'Ad secundum respondet Avicenna in sua metaphysica: dicit enim omnes res a Deo creatas esse, et quod creatio est ex nihilo, vel ejus quod habet esse post nihil. Sed hoc potest intelligi dupliciter: vel quod designetur ordo durationis, et sic secundum eum falsum est; aut quod designetur ordo naturae, et sic verum est.'

19 John Duns Scotus, *Lectura* II, d. 1, q. 2 (nn. 60–62), in *Ioannis Duns Scoti Opera omnia*, vol. 18 (Vatican City: Typis polyglottis Vaticanis, 1982), p. 20; *Ordinatio* II, d. 1, q. 2 (nn. 58–59), *Ioannis Duns Scoti Opera omnia*, vol. 7 (Vatican City: Typis polyglottis Vaticanis, 1973), p. 34.

else.²⁰ Unlike Avicenna, Aquinas believes that creation from nothing involves both an order of nature and an order of duration, but, unlike the Summists, he does not think that the order of duration can be demonstrated.

The Summists' View

The most interesting part of the discussion of this view are the arguments presented against it. The main ones are the following:

1 Argument from the Possibility of Matter

This argument challenges the assumption of the dependence of matter on the first principle:

(T8) (i) Having the possibility to all things is not incompatible with the property of not being from something nor with the property of being per se; therefore, both properties can belong to the same thing; (ii) but they can both belong only to prime matter; (iii) therefore, prime matter can exist and yet not derive from a principle.²¹

The argument intends to show that matter by its nature is the kind of thing that can have independent existence (iii). The crucial premise (i) for this conclusion is that the property of having possibility to all things and the property of not being dependent on something are compatible, so that they can belong to the same thing. Then the other premise (ii) says that matter is the only thing that can have these two properties (possibly because matter is the only thing that can have the property of the possibility to all things). The crucial premise (i) is left without any explanation, let alone proof. It would also be important to understand what the two conditions 'not being from something' and 'being per se' exactly mean. Anyway, the general point made in this argument seems to be that, if something can produce all things, then it can also be not produced by anything.

20 Thomas Aquinas, *Sentences* II, d. 1, q. 1, a. 5., ad con. 2: 'Unicuique enim est prius secundum naturam illud quod est ei ex se, quam id quod est ei ab alio. Quaelibet autem res praeter Deum habet esse ab alio. Ergo oportet quod secundum naturam suam esset non ens, nisi a Deo esse haberet; sicut etiam dicit Gregorius quod omnia in nihilum deciderent, nisi ea manus omnipotentis contineret: et ita non esse quod ex se habet naturaliter, est prius quam esse quod ab alio habet, etsi non duratione; et per hunc modum conceduntur a philosophis res a Deo creatae et factae.'

21 *SH* II, In1, Tr1, S1, Q1, C3, Ar3 (n. 5), p. 11: '(i) Possibilitatem habere ad omnia non repugnat ei quod est "non esse ex aliquo" nec ei quod est "esse per se"; ergo possunt simul coincidere; (ii) sed non nisi in prima materia; (iii) ergo prima materia potest esse, non tamen ab aliquo principio.' The subdivisions of this and other passages are mine.

What makes this argument very interesting is the positive account of the possibility of matter, expressed by the crucial premise (i). If the possibility of matter is one compatible with an independent status from an efficient cause, this possibility does indeed express a positive ontological feature of matter. The Summists' reply is the following:

(T9) To the objection that says that matter can be a first principle, in virtue of its having possibility to all things, it must be replied that having the capacity to all things is a distinct property from having the possibility to all things. For having the possibility to all things is restricted to forms that come to be in matter, whereas having the capacity to all things also applies to the coming into being of matter, which is possible to all things. Therefore, having the possibility to all things is incompatible with not being by something, but it is not incompatible with not being out of something.²²

The reply points out that the initial argument is based on a confusion between possibility and capacity (*potestas*). Matter has the possibility to all things but does not have the capacity to all things. The reply then asserts that it is the property of having the capacity to all things that it is not incompatible with the property of not being by something (*ab aliquo*). The property of having the possibility to all things instead is incompatible with the property of not being by something, although it is compatible with the property of not being from something (*ex aliquo*). Roughly, the idea of this reply is that its having a possibility to all things makes matter independent from a subject or something that is the starting point of its production, but does not make matter independent from an efficient cause.

This reply is very obscure, with many assumptions left unexplained. For example, no explanation is given of the incompatibility between the matter as independent subject and its independence from an efficient cause. Why is it the case that matter as ultimate subject cannot be something uncaused? This crucial question is not addressed at all in this argument.²³

What I find very original in the Summists' reply is how the difference between possibility and capacity is explained. Given the standard Aristotelian characterization of matter as passive principle, one would expect an account of this difference in terms of passive and active powers: possibility as property of matter would be a passive power, whereas capacity as property of an efficient cause would be an active power. This is not, however, how the difference between possibility and capacity is

²² SH II, In1, Tr1, S1, Q1, C3, Ar3 (n. 5), p. 13: 'Ad id vero quod obicitur quod materia possit esse primum principium, eo quod habet possibilitatem ad omnia, respondendum est quod aliud est habere potestatem ad omnia et aliud est habere possibilitatem. "Habere enim possibilitatem" coarctatur ad formas quae fiunt in materia; "habere vero potestatem" extendit se etiam ad hoc quod fiat materia, quae est possibilis ad omnia. Et ideo repugnat inter se "habere possibilitatem ad omnia" et "non esse ab aliquo," sed non repugnat "non esse ex aliquo."'

²³ It is, however, addressed in the third argument that we shall examine: the argument from the eternity of matter. See below, pp. 26–27.

explicitly presented in this argument. Their difference is not given by the kinds of power that they represent but by the range of things to which they extend respectively: possibility is restricted to forms, whereas capacity extends to matter too. Thus, the power of matter is simply a more limited power (effective on fewer things) than the power of the First.

This account of the power of matter also appears in a contra-argument of the question, that is, an argument that shows that matter is not a principle:

(T10) Furthermore, matter has a determinate potency. For although it has potency to this or that form, it does not have, however, potency to everything that comes to be; therefore, since the potency of the first active principle is infinite, they [i.e. matter and the first principle] do not have an equal status as principles.²⁴

This argument too presents the difference between the potency of matter and the potency of the First as a difference not in kind but in the range of the objects to which it extends: matter only to forms, the First to everything that comes to be.

If, as these passages suggest, the considered view of the Summists is that the power of matter is somehow active, then this view is in sharp contrast not only with Aquinas' negative account of the ontological status of matter but also with Scotus' view. While Scotus gives matter a positive ontological status, according to which matter is a being in act of its own, that is, independently of any form, he also specifies that the actuality of matter is not that of an active power or an agent.²⁵

2 Infinite Regress Argument

This argument too is against the dependence of matter on the maker:

(T11) Prime matter is a being in potency* in its own genus, just as the maker is in its own genus. Therefore, if prime matter had a principle, someone would give it its being in potency*; there-

²⁴ SH II, In1, Tr1, S1, Q1, C3, Ar3 (n. 5), p. 12: 'Item, materia habet potentiam determinatam. Licet enim habeat potentiam ad hanc formam vel illam, non tamen habet potentiam ad omne esse quod fit; ergo, cum potentia primi principii activi sit infinita, non habent se ex aequo in ratione principii.'

²⁵ See John Duns Scotus, *Lectura II*, d. 12, q. 1 (n. 38), in *Ioannis Duns Scoti Opera omnia*, vol. 19 (Vatican City: Typis polyglottis Vaticanis, 1993), p. 82: 'Si autem quaeras an debeat dici actus aut non, dico quod nolo de nomine disputare. Si enim actus dicatur ab "agere", sic non est actus. Sed dico quod materia est aliqua realitas vera, quae cum realitate formae facit unum. Unde si actus et potentia accipiantur prout dividunt ens, sic actus dicitur omne illud quod habet entitatem suam extra causas suas,—et sic materia, cum sit principium et causa rei, dicitur ens in actu; si autem accipiatur potentia ut est principium distinctum contra actum informantem,—sic materia dicitur esse potentia (et sic loquitur Philosophus de actu VII et VIII *Metaphysicae*): sic enim actus distinguitur contra illud quod recipit actum,—et sic materia non est actus, quia est principium receptivum actus; tale autem oportet esse denudatum ab omni actu.'

fore, matter could be in potency** when it would not yet be in potency*; therefore, another potency** would precede that potency*, and this other potency** could only be a material potency, because a potency with respect to an act, which is not yet in act, is as such a material potency; therefore, matter would precede matter. But this is impossible; therefore, the first potency in receiving is always in its act, as the first potency in acting; therefore, there are two principles.²⁶

The idea here is that, if matter comes to be, matter would be in potency before coming into being; but this potency is the potency distinctive of matter; so that matter would exist before matter (given that the distinctive property of matter exists then). This leads to an infinite regress: the prior matter too comes to be and so we need to posit another material potency and so another matter.

I have indicated with potency* and potency** what Scotus would have regarded as two distinct kinds of potency: potency* corresponds to Scotus' subjective potency and potency** corresponds to Scotus' objective potency. Subjective potency is the potency with respect to forms, whereas objective potency is potency with respect to existence.²⁷ A Scotist reply to this argument would consist in pointing out that the argument is based on the confusion/failure to distinguish between these two kinds of potency.

Let us see the reply of the Summists:

(T12) To the next objection, which says that in matter there is a potency which is first in its own genus, just as in the maker there is a potency which is first in its own genus, so that if another potency preceded the potency of matter, there would be another matter before matter, and so on ad infinitum, it must be replied as follows. There is a material potency of matter to the forms that come to be in it; and if another potency of this kind preceded such potency, there would necessarily be an infinite regress. But there is also the potency of the maker in virtue of which matter could exist before it actually existed; and on the side of this potency there is no infinite regress, but one comes to a halt. Therefore, there is only one principle. Nor prime matter always exists in its own act, as the first maker instead always does in its own act.²⁸

26 SH II, In1, Tr1, S1, Q1, C3, Ar3 (n. 5), pp. 11–12: 'Prima materia est ens in potentia* secundum genus suum, sicut opifex secundum genus suum. Si ergo haberet principium, aliquis daret ei esse in potentia*; ergo posset esse in potentia**, cum nondum esset in potentia*; ergo potentiam illam* praecederet alia potentia**, et illa** non esset nisi materialis, quia potentia respectu actus, quae nondum est in actu, quoad hoc materialis est; ergo materiam praecederet materia. Sed hoc est impossibile; ergo prima potentia in recipiendo semper est in aliquo suo actu, sicut prima potentia in agendo; ergo sunt duo principia.' The asterisks are my own addition.

27 On Scotus' distinction between objective and subjective potency, see Richard Cross, *The Physics of Duns Scotus: The Scientific Context of a Theological Vision* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 17–20.

28 SH II, In1, Tr1, S1, Q1, C3, Ar3 (n. 5), p. 13: 'Ad id vero quod obicitur consequenter quod in materia est prima potentia secundum suum genus, sicut in opifice est secundum suum, eo quod si potentiam materiae praecederet alia potentia, ante materiam esset alia materia, et ita in infinitum, dicendum quod est potentia materialis ad esse formae quae fit in ea; et si talem praecederet alia potentia consimilis, in infinitum oporteret abire. Sed est potentia opificis qua materia potuit esse antequam esset; et ex hac non est abire in infinitum, sed est stare. Et ideo unum solum est principium. Nec est prima materia in suo actu, sicut est primus opifex in suo actu, semper.'

The reply points out that the infinite regress is based on the false assumption that there is only one kind of potency involved in the hypothesis of the coming into being of matter. What is true instead is that there are two kinds of potency. One of them is the material potency, i.e. the potency intrinsic to matter; and this is the potency to a form. The other is that associated with the potential being of matter, that is, the possibility of its existence before its actual existence. This is called the 'potency of the maker' in the argument, but this expression should not be understood in the sense that the maker is the subject of this potency but in the sense that the maker is somehow responsible for this potency. The distinction between two kinds of potency in the Summists' reply is indeed very similar to Scotus' distinction between the objective and subjective potency.

The last sentence in the Summists' reply that prime matter does not always exist in its own act can be interpreted as an indirect indication of the positive ontological status of matter. For it does not challenge the idea that matter has its own act; it simply adds the qualification that matter does not always have its own act.

3 Argument From the Eternity of Matter

The argument primarily attacks the claim that matter is not eternal. Then from the eternity of matter concludes that matter does not depend on anything.

(T13) (i) The material potency or matter is a principle of every change. For what is subject to change can change from one thing into another; therefore, it is already in potency. And this is why the philosophers maintained that matter is not subject to generation and corruption. If instead matter proceeded from non-being into being, there would be a change before matter, and so there would be an infinite regress. It is necessary therefore to come to a halt, so that prime matter cannot change from non-being into being. But what is in this way unchangeable is eternal. (ii) And since this happens with a diversity in substance [from the first], matter will be without a principle. This last sentence is adduced to address the case of the Son which is produced eternally by the Father but not with a diversity in substance.²⁹

The first part (i) of this argument proves that matter is eternal. It gives the standard Aristotelian argument for this conclusion.³⁰ It is based on the assumption that matter is the principle of any change because it is the subject of change: that item that persists throughout the change and that in which change occurs. The change in the

²⁹ SH II, In1, Tr1, S1, Q1, C3, Ar3 (n. 5), p. 12: '(i) Potentia materialis sive materia est principium omnis transmutationis. Quod enim transmutatur, de uno in aliud potest transmutari; ergo potentia iam est. Et propter hoc dixerunt philosophi materiam esse ingenerabilem et incorruptibilem. Si autem materia de non-esse in esse procederet, praecederet eam transmutatio, et sic abiretur in infinitum. Necesse est ergo stare, ut materia prima sit intransmutabilis de non-esse in esse. Sed quod sic est immutabile, aeternum est. (ii) Et cum sit in diversitate substantiae, sine principio erit. Hoc enim dicitur propter hoc quod Filius est a Patre aeternaliter, sed non in diversitate substantiae.'

³⁰ See, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 44, a. 2, arg. 1 and ad 1.

sense of coming into being of matter would therefore require matter and so open an infinite regress. The second part (ii) of the argument infers from the eternity of matter that matter does not depend on the maker. This part is more original. It relies on the idea that we have already seen in the argument against Augustine's view, namely, that eternal dependence on the First and identity in nature with the First go together.³¹ In the present argument this idea is used as follows: suppose that matter depends on the maker so that it is caused by the maker. But the maker and matter are different in nature so that matter could not be out of the first (*de Primo*); but given the exhaustion of the alternatives 'out of the first' and 'out of nothing' (*de nihilo*), matter would be out of nothing; but what is out of nothing is not eternal, which is against the conclusion of the first part of the argument.

The reply of the Summists is the following:

(T14) To the next objection, which says that matter is not subject to corruption and generation, and so it is unchangeable, it must be replied that matter is said to be unchangeable with respect to generation and corruption in so far as these are natural processes, that is, generation is a change from non-being to being that requires matter as its subject, and similarly corruption is a change from being to non-being. Matter, however, is changeable in so far as it proceeded into being from nothing, and as to its nature it has the possibility to non-being.³²

The reply attacks part (i) of the argument in (T13) by pointing out that it is based on the wrong assumption that the only coming into being of matter would be through the natural process of generation, which indeed requires matter as a subject. There is, instead, another way of coming into being, that is, out of nothing. The distinction between two different ways of coming into being in the Summists' reply is a standard one. However, the implicit inference contained in the original argument and left unchallenged in this reply, namely, that the coming into being by creation entails that matter is not eternal, is controversial, as we have seen in the discussion of Augustine's view.³³

³¹ See above, pp. 18–19.

³² *SH* II, In1, Tr1, S1, Q1, C3, Ar3 (n. 5), p. 13: 'Ad id vero quod obicitur consequenter quod materia est incorruptibilis, ingenerabilis, et ita intransmutabilis, dicendum est quod intransmutabilis dicitur secundum viam generationis et corruptionis, in quantum haec sunt a natura, secundum quod generatio est mutatio de non-esse in esse, subiecta existente materia, et corruptio de esse in non-esse. Nihilominus tamen transmutabilis est eo quod de nihilo processit in esse, et quantum est de se, possibilitatem habet ad non-esse.'

³³ See above, pp. 20–22.

‘Whether Corporeal Things are Said to be Created Because of Matter Together with Form or Because of Formless Matter’

This question has a complicated title but what it actually asks is relatively clear, namely, whether matter is created alone or together with a form, so that the composite of matter and form is created. Remember that creation means to be produced out of nothing in the temporal order. Therefore, if matter is created alone, then any composite of matter and form is not properly speaking created since matter would exist before its coming into being, and so the composite would not be out of nothing. In the language of the title of the question, in this case a corporeal thing would be created because of matter. If instead matter is created together with a form, then the corporeal thing itself, that is, the composite of matter and form, would be properly speaking created, given that nothing belonging to it would exist before its coming into being. In the language of the title of the question, in this case a corporeal thing would be created because of matter together with form.

Another complication is about the notion of matter at stake. What is the matter this question of the *Summa Halensis* refers to? Is it prime matter in the medieval Aristotelian sense of matter without any forms? This Aristotelian expression is never used in this question (whereas it was the one used in the first question). In this question the expression used is *materia informis*: formless matter. This terminology is not Aristotelian, but a common one in medieval theological discussions. A major theological source of it are the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard,³⁴ a possible source of the *Summa* too. The question we are interested in is whether the difference in terminology conceals a substantial difference. Is *materia informis* simply another expression for prime matter? This is not the case, as is clear from the following explicit definition of formless matter, added to the title of the question:

(T15) Whether corporeal things are said to be created with respect to matter together with form or with respect to formless matter – and I understand formless matter in two ways: either because it does not have any forms or because has forms but in a confusion, which is called chaos – And

³⁴ Peter Lombard, *Sentences* II, d. 12, c. 1, in *Libri IV Sententiarum*, 2 vols (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1916), vol. 1, p. 358: ‘Cum Deus in sapientia sua angelicos condidit spiritus, alia etiam creavit, sicut ostendit supra memorata Scriptura Genesis, quae dicit, in principio creasse Deum *caelum*, id est Angelos, et *terram*, scilicet materiam quattuor elementorum adhuc confusam et informem, quae a Graecis dicta est chaos; et hoc fuit ante omnem diem. Deinde elementa distinxit et species proprias atque distinctas singulis rebus secundum genus suum dedit, quae non simul, ut quibusdam sanctorum Patrum placuit, sed per intervalla temporum ac sex volumina dierum, ut aliis visum est formavit.’

if corporeal things are created with respect to formless matter, the question is in which of the two ways of taking formless matter this happens.³⁵

Thus, formless matter can either be understood as (i) matter without any forms or as (ii) matter with some kind of confusion/indistinction of forms. Formless matter in the first sense (i) is the Aristotelian prime matter (in the standard medieval reading). Formless matter in the second sense (ii) is not an Aristotelian item, but it is one suggested by theological sources. Peter Lombard, for example, seems to understand formless matter in the second sense only, without hinting at the Aristotelian sense.³⁶

The distinction between these two kinds of formless matter is taken into account in the discussion of the question. For example, of the six initial arguments against the alternative that formless matter (rather than the composite of matter and form) is created, three of them are against the creation of formless matter understood as matter without any forms (i.e. prime matter) and three are against the creation of formless matter understood as matter with the confusion of forms.³⁷ Similarly, of the four initial arguments in favor of the alternative that formless matter is created, two are in favor of the creation of formless matter understood as matter without any forms and two in favor the creation of formless matter understood as matter with the confusion of forms.³⁸

The Summists' reply to the question presents two contrasting views among the Saints on this issue, namely, the view that matter is created together with form and the view that formless matter is created, without explicitly taking side with one or other of these two views or without hinting at a possible reconciliation between the two.³⁹

(T16) To this question it must be replied in accordance with the different opinions of the Saints.

- (i) According to the opinion of Augustine, it seems that creation belongs to matter together with the form that gives perfection to matter, so that each single thing would be created in its proper matter and forms.
- (ii) According to the opinion of Gregory and others, it seems instead that matter is created in the substance of matter. Thus Gregory says: 'The things that have their origin from matter are produced simultaneously with matter in substance but not in their species, which is shown in the following days: sun and moon originating from the heavens, saplings and the like from the earth.' Augustine too in his book *On Symbol* seems to say this: 'By a su-

35 *SH* II, In3, Tr1, Q1, C1 (n. 248), p. 305: 'Utrum res corporales dicantur creari ratione materiae cum forma aut ratione materiae informis – dico autem informem duobus modis: vel quia non habet formam vel quia habet in confusione quae dicitur chaos – Si vero ratione materiae informis, quo illorum duorum modorum.'

36 See n. 34 above.

37 *SH* II, In3, Tr1, Q1, C1 (n. 248), p. 306.

38 *SH* II, In3, Tr1, Q1, C1 (n. 248), p. 306.

39 A further task would be to find out whether the extensive discussions about *Genesis* in this section of the *Summa* offer clear evidence in favor of one of the two conflicting views. At a first reading, no such evidence appears.

premely ordered gift of God things have been arranged in such a way that the capacity to forms comes to be first, and afterwards all the things that have a form are formed.’ Furthermore, in *Confessions* XII, Augustine explains the claim ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth’ in one way as follows: ‘In virtue of the Word coeternal with him, God produced the formless matter of a corporeal creature, where there was a confusion of heavens and earth, which we now perceive as already distinct and with a form in the extension of this world.’ This explanation is in agreement with a Gloss on the beginning of Genesis. Furthermore, about the claim from Psalm ‘God himself commanded them and they are created,’ the Gloss says: ‘formless matter out of nothing.’⁴⁰

What I am interested in are the philosophical aspects of this question, those that provide indications of the Summists’ ideas about the ontological status of matter. The view that what is created is formless matter understood as matter without any forms is the most relevant one in this connection. For this view gives matter a very strong ontological status indeed: existence independent from any forms. And it is frustrating that the Summists’ reply to the question in presenting the second view (ii) among the Saints – the view that formless matter is created – does not make explicit which of the theological authorities quoted understand formless matter as matter without any forms and which instead understand formless matter as matter with a confusion of forms.

The Summists’ reply, however, becomes more interesting when it is compared with that of Thomas Aquinas to a parallel question from his *Summa Theologiae*.⁴¹

40 SH II, In3, Tr1, Q1, C1 (n. 248), pp. 306–7: ‘Ad quod respondendum secundum diversas sententias Sanctorum. (i) Secundum enim sententiam Augustini videtur quod creatio erat materiae cum forma perficienti eam, ita quod singulae res creatae essent in propriis materiis et formis. (ii) Secundum autem sententiam Gregorii et aliorum videtur quod creata sit in substantia materiae. Unde dicit Gregorius: “In substantia simul facta sunt quae de eis habent originem, sed non in specie, quae sequentibus diebus ostensa est: sol et luna de caelo, virgulta et huiusmodi de terra.” Augustinus etiam in libro *De Symbolo*, videtur hoc dicere: “Ordinatissimo Dei munere factum est ut primo capacitas formarum fieret, postea formarentur quaecumque formata sunt.” Item, Augustinus, in XII *Confessionum*, uno modo sic exponit “In principio creavit Deus caelum et terram:” “Deus Verbo sibi caeterno fecit informem materiam creaturae corporalis, ubi confusum erat caelum et terra, quae nunc iam distincta et formata in huius mundi mole sentimus.” Huic expositioni concordant quaedam Glossae super principium Geneseos. Item, super illud Psalmi: “Ipse mandavit et creata sunt,” Glossa dicit: “Informem materiam de nihilo.”

41 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 66, a. 1 (*Utrum informitas materiae creatae praecesserit tempore distinctionem ipsius*), co.: ‘Respondeo dicendum quod circa hoc sunt diversae opiniones sanctorum. Augustinus enim vult quod informitas materiae corporalis non praecesserit tempore formationem ipsius, sed solum origine vel ordine naturae. Alii vero, ut Basilius, Ambrosius et Chrysostomus, volunt quod informitas materiae tempore praecesserit formationem. Et quamvis hae opiniones videantur esse contrariae, tamen parum ab invicem differunt, aliter enim accipit informitatem materiae Augustinus quam alii. Augustinus enim accipit informitatem materiae pro carentia omnis formae. Et sic impossibile est dicere quod informitas materiae tempore praecesserit vel formationem ipsius, vel distinctionem. Et de formatione quidem manifestum est. Si enim materia informis praecessit duratione, haec erat iam in actu, hoc enim duratio importat, creationis enim terminus est ens actu. Ipsum autem quod est actus, est forma. Dicere igitur materiam praecedere sine forma, est dicere

Aquinas too presents two conflicting opinions among the Saints, but he shows that they can be reconciled. And Aquinas' major concern in reconciling them is clearly that of showing that none of the two views endorses the idea that matter can exist without any forms, an idea that Aquinas finds incoherent. No such concern appears in the reply of the Summists. In particular, while in presenting view (ii) that formless matter is created Aquinas immediately specifies that formless matter should not here be understood as matter without any forms but as matter with somehow a confusion of forms (or without the specific forms), the Summists do not care at all to distinguish which of the two senses of matter the second view refers to. This suggests that, unlike Aquinas, the Summists do not find anything fundamentally wrong with the idea that matter exists without any forms.

This positive attitude of the Summists towards the ontological status of prime matter also appears in their discussion of two arguments in favor of the creation of matter understood as matter without any forms:

1 Argument from the Order of Creation

(T17) Creation is a coming out from non-being into being, which is immediately followed by the coming out of the material potency into act; and this is making. But in the works of the six days there is making or founding. For it is said: *Let light be, and light is then made*, and likewise about the other things. Therefore, before making there was nothing else but creation. Therefore, matter was first created in some way from non-being into being, so that the order is the following: first from absolute non-being to potential being, and then from potential being to being in act, which is the kind of being determined by a form.⁴²

In this argument the being of matter is described as a potential being (*posse esse*) and it is contrasted both with non-being and with a being in act due to a form. The potential being of matter is a being, although of a different kind from the being in act due to a form. Indeed, creation is a passage from non-being to being, and what is created is matter and so a being. The further stage, namely, the passage from the potency of matter to the act of the form (i.e. the production of the composite), presupposes the existence of matter and so it is not creation (since it is not from

ens actu sine actu, quod implicat contradictionem. (...) Alii vero sancti accipiunt informitatem, non secundum quod excludit omnem formam, sed secundum quod excludit istam formositatem et decorum qui nunc apparet in corporea creatura. Et secundum hoc dicunt quod informitas materiae corporalis duratione praecessit formationem eiusdem. Et sic secundum hoc, quantum ad aliquid cum eis Augustinus concordat, et quantum ad aliquid discordat (...).'

42 *SH* II, In3, Tr1, Q1, C1 (n. 248), p. 307: 'Creatio est exitus de non-esse in esse, cui immediatus est exitus de potentia materiali in actum; hoc autem est "facere"; sed in operibus sex dierum est factio sive conditio. Dicitur enim: *Fiat lux, et facta est lux*, et ita de aliis. Ergo ante non fuit nisi creatio. Prius ergo creabatur de non-esse in esse aliquo modo materia, ut sit ordo de non-esse omnino in posse-esse, et deinde de posse-esse in esse actu, quod est esse per formam determinatum.'

nothing) but is called ‘factio’ (making) in theological terms, in Aristotelian terms it would be called generation.

The reply that, according to the Summists, someone supporting the opposite view would give is the following:

(T18) If one follows the first opinion, then, the objections must be replied as follows: although the coming out from absolute non-being into potential being – then followed by the coming out from potential being to the being in act in virtue of a form – can be understood, however, these two coming out take place simultaneously, so that form is created simultaneously with matter, and as joined to matter, so that the work of the Creator can be said to be perfect.⁴³

The reply denies that there are these two stages in the production of things. It is not the case that there is first the creation of matter, that is, the passage from non-being to potential being. The point relevant for us is that the reply does not challenge the coherence of the notion of matter existing without any forms. The passage from non-being to the being of matter can be understood, that is, is intelligible, the reply says.

The comparison with Aquinas is again meaningful, since Aquinas denies the coherence of the notion of matter existing without any forms. Thus, a reply to the argument along Aquinas’ lines of thought would be that the passage from non-being to the being of matter is not creation. Creation is a passage from non-being to being; but matter of itself is not a being. No hint to this kind of reply in our text. The idea there seems to be that the passage from non-being to the being of matter is not properly speaking creation, but not because matter is a not being altogether, but because it is not a complete/perfect being, as is suggested by the last sentence in the reply about the perfection of creation. Accordingly, if creation is understood as a passage from non-being to a perfect being, then it is not matter that is created but something with a form (which gives perfect being).

2 Argument from the Potency of Matter

(T19) The potency of the First extends to all things; and since this is proper to it, it cannot share this property with anything else; therefore, that thing among creatures that is most similar to the First as to the universality of potency is matter, which is capable of all forms; therefore, the first coming out effected by the divine potency seems to be the foundation of matter as capable of all forms.⁴⁴

⁴³ SH II, In3, Tr1, Q1, C1 (n. 248), p. 307: ‘Si ergo teneatur prima sententia, respondendum est ad obiecta, dicendo quod, licet intelligi posset exitus de non-esse omnino in posse-esse et post de posse-esse in esse actu per formam, tamen simul utrumque factum est, ut simul crearetur forma cum materia, et hoc ut unita, ut opus Creatoris perfectum dicatur.’

⁴⁴ SH II, In3, Tr1, Q1, C1 (n. 248), p. 306: ‘Primum habet potentiam quantum ad omne; hoc autem nulli potest communicare, cum sit eius proprium; illud ergo in creatura quod magis assimilatur ei in universalitate potentiae est materia, quae capax est omnium formarum; ergo primus exitus a potentia divina videtur esse conditio materiae ut capax omnium formarum.’

This argument relies on an idea that we have already found in the argument from the possibility of matter against the Summists' view.⁴⁵ The idea is that the potency of the First and the potency of matter are powers of the same kind; their difference simply consists in the range of things subject to the two potencies. The potency of the First extends to all things (including matter) while the potency of matter extends to all forms only. Matter because of its potency is the creature most similar to the First. From this the argument concludes that matter is created first: what is created first is what is most similar to the First.

The reply of the Summists is the following:

(T20) To the second objection it must be replied that, although matter insofar as it is capable of forms has some similarity, although a very remote one, to the divine potency, it was not necessary, however, that matter was created as formless, but it was more appropriate that it would be capable in act rather than in potency only.⁴⁶

This short reply contains two points that are relevant for us because they indicate the Summists' positive attitude towards the ontological status of matter: (i) some kind of similarity between the potency of God and the potency of matter is admitted; (ii) the creation of matter without any forms is regarded as not necessary (*non oportuit quod sic crearetur informis*), but not as incoherent.

Conclusion

The two *quaestiones* of the *Summa* that I have focussed on in this paper deal with fundamental topics of the medieval speculation about matter. In the first *quaestio* the Summists argue for the central Christian thesis that matter is created by God in time so that it is not eternal but it starts to exist. In doing so, they defend this thesis from objections arising from major authoritative sources, like Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine. Both Greek philosophers posited matter as an eternal independent principle of being. And it is Aristotle who provides the strongest argument for this view: the argument based on the assumption that matter is a principle of change or coming into being so that it cannot itself come into being.⁴⁷ The Summists' reply to this argument of the philosophers – as they describe it – is the standard one in the Christian tradition: the assumption of the philosophers about matter is only valid for the coming into being through natural changes, like generation and corruption, but not also

⁴⁵ See above, pp. 22–24.

⁴⁶ *SH* II, In3, Tr1, Q1, C1 (n. 248), p. 307: 'Ad secundum dicendum quod, licet materia, in quantum est capax formarum, quamdam habeat similitudinem, sed multum remotam, respectu divinae potentiae, non tamen oportuit quod sic crearetur informis, sed magis conveniebat quod esset capax in actu quam tantum in potentia.'

⁴⁷ See above, (T13).

for the coming into being that only God can cause, i.e. creation from nothing.⁴⁸ Moreover, the Summists maintain that matter insofar as created from nothing is non-eternal but it starts to exist, contrary to what Augustine's example of the foot and the footprint suggests.⁴⁹ Their assumption here is that the notion itself of creation from nothing has built into it the notion of a temporal beginning.⁵⁰

This assumption, however, would become controversial in the later tradition. Both Aquinas and Scotus, for example, reject it.⁵¹ More generally, while the Summists are confident that they can prove the temporal beginning of matter and of the created universe with philosophical arguments, many later Christian philosophers are led to admit that temporal beginning is a matter of faith, not of philosophy.

The second *quaestio*, about the creation of formless matter, is of a more specifically theological nature. It presents a debate about the issue of the mode of creation of formless matter among eminent theological authorities (Augustine, Gregory and other 'saints'), a debate that has its origin in the Gloss on *Genesis*.⁵² This debate is also a very important one and would indeed continue to attract attention in the later tradition, as a parallel question from Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* indicates.⁵³ While the Summists' main concern in this *quaestio* is to present the opposite parties,⁵⁴ they also give an original contribution to this debate by pointing out some major philosophical ideas that animate the different views.

One of the principal aims of my analysis of the Summists' discussion about the creation of matter has been that of finding out what it tells us about the Summists' view on the issue of the ontological status of (prime) matter. The two most representative opposite views in the later tradition are those of Aquinas and Scotus, and it is these views that I have taken as a guide of my investigation. Formulated in anachronistic terms, the question that I have asked is whether the Summists side with Aquinas or with Scotus. The Summists' discussion, however, does not provide a definite answer to this question. The main problem here is that the question itself of the ontological status of matter is not explicitly asked by the Summists. There are many remarks relevant to this issue in the Summists' discussion but they are scattered throughout their dealing with other issues.

These remarks are not substantial and systematic enough to allow for reconstructing a reply to the question that can with some degree of certainty and accuracy be ascribed to the Summists. They do contain, however, important indications that the Summists do not share the strong feelings of Aquinas against the independence of the being of matter from form. The second *quaestio* about the creation of formless

⁴⁸ See above, (T14).

⁴⁹ See above, (T3).

⁵⁰ See above, (T4) and (T5).

⁵¹ See above, (T6) and (T7).

⁵² See above, n. 34.

⁵³ See above, n. 41.

⁵⁴ See above, (T16).

matter offers an excellent occasion for expressing such feelings. And Aquinas does not miss this occasion in his discussion of a parallel question from his *Summa Theologiae*.⁵⁵ No such negative reaction on the Summists' side. They present the opinion of those theologians who posited that matter is created on its own, without any forms, as a perfectly acceptable one, just like the opposite opinion according to which matter is created together with forms.⁵⁶ There are also positive indications that the Summists' attitude to the ontological status of matter is similar to that of Scotus. For example, they point out that the potency proper to matter is not a potency to existence but a potency to forms, so that matter is an actual being, although it is in itself in potency to forms.⁵⁷ This distinction corresponds to Scotus' distinction between objective and subjective potency, which is a central theme of his account of matter. The Summists' discussion, however, offers conflicting evidence about their conception of the potency of matter with respect to forms. In some passages this potency is described as a passive power and contrasted with the active power;⁵⁸ this is the standard Aristotelian view endorsed by Scotus too. In other passages instead this potency seems to be understood as an active one, so that matter plays somehow an active role with respect to the forms that come to exist in it,⁵⁹ an idea that is rejected by Scotus but endorsed by many Aristotelians of the middle of the 13th century.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ See above, n. 41.

⁵⁶ See above, (T16). See also the Summists' replies to the arguments in favor of this opinion in the texts (T17) to (T20).

⁵⁷ See above, (T11) and (T12).

⁵⁸ See above, (T2) and n. 9.

⁵⁹ See above, texts (T8) to (T10).

⁶⁰ See my paper Cecilia Trifogli, 'Geoffrey of Aspill on Matter,' in *Materia, Nouvelles perspectives de recherche dans la pensée et la culture médiévales (XIIe–XVIe siècles)*, eds. Tiziana Suarez-Nani and Agostino Paravicini Bagliani (Florence: SISMEL-Edizioni dell Galluzzo, 2017), pp. 99–122, and the secondary literature quoted there.

