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<395, col. a>²

I pass over a general discussion of the material cause as abstracted from the cause of substance or the cause of accident, since the strongest *ratio* of this cause is discerned in prime matter. And once it has been explained in that case, it will be easy to understand the remaining cases proportionately. Nor should there be any fear of censure from those who think that a treatise on prime matter in no way belongs to metaphysics but only to physics. For it was already shown in earlier disputations, especially in the introductory one, that many aspects of this work are relevant to metaphysics. For, although physics deals with matter under its proper and special character, insofar as it is a principle of natural generation and is a cause <col. b> or part of natural being, metaphysics, nevertheless, in considering the general *ratio* of material cause, which is proper to it, necessarily deals with the first cause of that genus, which is prime matter.³ Also, when dealing with the essence of substance, one necessarily discusses matter, insofar as it is a part of the essence, as we will see below when talking about material substance. Therefore, in this place we treat matter under this consideration. And since the *ratio* of causing cannot be understood without first understanding material entity, we will first investigate whether there is matter, then what sort of being it is and what its essence is, then what its properties are, and then finally its causality.

SECTION I.

Whether it is evident to natural reason that there is given in beings a material cause of substances, which we name prime matter.

¹Translation is based on the 1597 edition.

²Numbers in angle brackets indicate page numbers in the Vivés edition for ease of reference, given that it is the most widely used edition.

³For the sake of readability, I have translated the Latin '*primus*' with both 'prime' and 'first', but note that a connection that is evident in the Latin text is lost this way. In this sentence, for example, the Latin expressions translated as 'first cause' and 'prime matter' are '*prima causa*' and '*materia prima*'.

1. Because prime matter includes two aspects, it is necessary before doing anything else to explain the signification of this expression with respect to both parts. Matter, then, is usually divided into the matter from which (*ex qua*), the matter in which (*in qua*),⁴ and the matter concerning which (*circa quam*). This division can be explained in different ways. In the first way it is not a division of things or of matters but rather of the respects or the functions of the same matter. For the same matter is called that from which either with respect to the composite that is constituted from it or with respect to the form that is educed from it. Hence, in the former respect the body of a human being is the matter from which, but not in the latter respect, since the form of a human being is not educed from the potency of the matter. Hence, with respect to such a form it is called the matter in which the form is introduced in such a way that that ‘in which’ is said with respect to union rather than with respect to education. That ‘in which’ can also be taken abstractly so that it includes a disposition (*habitudo*) to the form as inhering in the matter. But with respect to the agent the same matter is called that concerning which the agent operates. According to this interpretation of the terms, therefore, no member [of the division] can be excluded from the present consideration. For we are dealing with matter according to itself or as it includes all those dispositions (*habitudines*) in its adequate concept. But whether they pertain to different causalities and are distinct *ex natura rei* we will see later.

In another way, matter concerning which is customarily taken as distinguished from matter from which and in which according to real union and inherence. In this way it properly expresses a respect to the agent by an immanent action and it is nothing other than the object concerning which such an agent turns. This signification of matter is metaphorical <396> and of no relevance at present, since that as such does not exercise material causality or either efficient or final causality, as we mentioned above. This discussion, therefore, is not about objective matter but about subjective matter.

⁴It is sometimes suggested that ‘*materia in qua*’ should be translated with ‘matter of which’ rather than ‘matter in which’ (e.g., by Gyula Klima in his translation of Thomas Aquinas’s *On the Principles of Nature*). The thought is that the difference between *materia ex qua* and *materia in qua* is between transient and enduring matter. In the case of Suárez, at least, the distinction between transient and enduring matter is seen as one to be made within *materia ex qua*. See n. 2.

A taxonomy of the different kinds of matter.

2. In turn, matter from which is customarily divided into transient and enduring matter. Wood, for example, is in the former way called the matter from which fire comes to be. In that signification that expression ‘from which’ designates not only the disposition (*habitudo*) of a material cause but also includes the disposition (*habitudo*) of a *terminus a quo*. From this part that signification in no way pertains to the present disputation. Enduring matter, however, is a proper and internal material cause, which endures in the composite or in the terminus of generation, joining together in its way for the constitution of that composite.

Finally, matter is customarily divided into metaphysical and physical matter. Metaphysical matter is the genus in relation to *differentia*. But that appellation is only through analogy and proportion to physical matter, which is matter properly and strictly speaking and which is what we are discussing here. With respect to metaphysical matter, beyond the things which we already said above when talking about universal unity,⁵ we add some things in the last section of Disputation 15 when discussing metaphysical form.⁶

3. But matter can be called prime both by negation of prior [matter] and by relation to secondary [matter]. Since, therefore, matter expresses the *ratio* of a subject, that is called prime which presupposes no prior subject. In this way Aristotle in *Physics* I.9 defined matter to be ‘the first subject from which something comes to be’. But that is called secondary matter which presupposes a prior subject. And thus many call a substantial composite secondary matter with respect to its accidents, since it is a subject of accidents in such a way that it stands on a former subject. For a similar reason those who admit multiple substantial forms in the same supposit, call the composite of matter and corporeal form, for example, the secondary matter of the soul. Matter that has been disposed or affected by accidental dispositions is often also called secondary matter, not because the composite itself of the matter and accidents is the subject in which the form is received but only because the reception of such dispositions precedes in the order of nature and establishes the matter as proximately fit for such a form. For this reason such matter is properly called proximate matter. But Aristotle in *Metaphysics* VIII, text. 11, calls proper or proximate matter transient matter

⁵*DM* 6.

⁶*DM* 15.11.

that is suitable for the generation of the thing, as wine is the matter of vinegar. Concerning this matter, the Commentator says in *Physics* II, <col. b> comm. 31, that it is the matter of alteration, not of composition. Thus every secondary matter presupposes prime matter and adds some form or disposition.

The resolution of the question.

4. And from this it is clear that if we are speaking in general and, as it were, formally about prime matter—that is, about the first subject of changes or of forms—by abstracting from the question what kind of this such a subject is or what kind of form is received in it, then it is just as evident that there is prime matter as it is evident that in things there are changes to different forms. For every change presupposes some subject, as was shown above and as is clear from experience. Therefore, either that subject presupposes another or it does not. If it does not presuppose another, then it is prime matter, and the intended result is had. But if it presupposes another subject, then I will ask [the same question] about it. But it is evident that this cannot proceed to infinity. Therefore, one must necessarily stop in some first subject or prime matter.

Prime matter is inferred from the necessity of a first subject in any change.

The minor proposition last assumed is demonstrated by Aristotle concerning all the causes in Book II, yet it is in a certain way more evident in the case of the material cause, since it is an intrinsic foundation of the whole composite. Nor can a composite standing in itself be perceived by the intellect, where one part of the composite depends on another part and another part on another part, unless it is finally stopped in something that stands underneath all the other parts. Since, therefore, every natural composite is through itself in such a way that with respect to itself the whole does not depend in the genus of material cause on another subject that is extrinsic to it, it is necessary that it has within itself some subject that is prime with respect to all other entities out of which it is constituted and that are in the subject. In this way, then, it is evident that prime matter or a first subject is given in natural things.

5. Second, it is proven directly: for it is evident that generable and corruptible things are thus transformed that some are generated from others in turn and mutually, at least mediately. Therefore, it is necessary that they agree in some common subject that endures in all of them, by reason of which they are suitable

Matter is inferred from the continuous change of things.

for those mutual transformations. Therefore, that subject is first and for that reason is the prime material cause of all things of that sort. The antecedent is evident from experience. For elements act on each other and one is converted into another, either mediately <397> or immediately, and mixtures are also generated from them and consequently also resolved into them. And so it is the case that all sublunary things, insofar as the force of their nature and composition is concerned, are mutually transformable. I say 'insofar as the force of their nature is concerned' because it can happen that some parts of the elements are never transformed in virtue of the fact that they are in secluded and most remote places to which the actions of contrary agents never come.

6. The first consequence is proven, first: for there can be no natural transformation unless by a common subject enduring under each terminus. First, because otherwise the thing that is corrupted would entirely pass away according to itself as a whole, and the other thing that begins to be would come to be according to itself as a whole. And so one would pass over to nothing, another would come to be *ex nihilo*, and no common thing would endure under both. Therefore, one would be annihilated and another created, which is naturally impossible. Also, because otherwise the whole action of a natural agent would be either impossible or irrelevant to the generation of things.

The consequence is shown by the fact that we can speak either: [i] about accidental alteration, which we experience and which obviously does not happen except in a subject and from a common subject that remains under each terminus, since it is clear from experience that this action does not come to be unless a subject is presupposed. For the accident that comes to be through it cannot naturally be except in a subject that sustains both the action and its formal terminus. From this subject the form or opposing privation is expelled. Therefore, a common subject is given in an action of this kind. Or [ii] we speak about that action or substantial transformation that comes to be in the terminus of an alteration in which the thing that passes away loses without qualification the being that it had before and another thing begins without qualification, as when fire comes to be from flax. And here, too, it is necessary for a common subject to endure. Otherwise, the entire preceding alteration or heating of the flax would be irrelevant to the procreation of the fire. For the heating in no way brings anything to the procreation of the fire, if it and its whole subject perishes entirely. At most it

would serve to empty the place or space in which the thing to be procreated can be introduced. But the destruction of a thing is irrelevant for this. Local expulsion would suffice, and that can come about through the introduction of another thing in that space, as happens in local motion.

7. Also impossible would be such destruction of a thing through alteration, since an accident cannot, speaking *per se*, destroy its subject <col. b> since it is sustained by it and takes up being from it. That subject, then, is either simple or composite. If it is simple, it can in no way be destroyed through an action or through an accident that comes to be in it, since that being is necessary so that such an action or such an accident can be. But if that subject is a composite of a prior subject and another form, it will indeed be able to be destroyed by reason of an alteration and an accident introduced into it. But not *per se* but *per accidens* by reason of another action and form having followed the prior alteration. But this following cannot be understood unless the subsequent form is introduced into the same subject in which the former form was. For otherwise there would be no reason why the union between the former subject and its form is dissolved. Therefore, this whole natural transformation must necessarily be grounded in some common subject that endures under each terminus.

8. This can also be shown by an induction made over some transformations. When an animal, for example, is nourished by food, either something of the food remains in the end of nutrition and is conjoined to the living substance or the food and the whole that is in it is entirely destroyed through the action of the living being. If nothing of the food remains, the entire action of the living thing is superfluous and nothing can be aided by the food so that from it something grows or becomes stronger. For nothing becomes stronger or grows from that which perishes in the food. But if something in the food endures, that cannot be unless it is a common matter or subject.

From some special changes.

The same argument can be taken from the visible and improper nutrition of fire. For it does not increase except wood or something similar is presupposed nor is it conserved except it is nourished by oil or some similar matter. Therefore, this matter cannot be transient according to itself as a whole; otherwise, it would be useless and no reason could be given why it was necessary for such effects. Nor could it be shown what it contributed to those [effects]. That matter, therefore, in some way endures

under the form of the thing that arises or is nourished. Therefore, it endures according to some common subject.

9. It is confirmed, finally, by the fact that otherwise the transformation of things would not be corruption and generation but a kind of transubstantiation, since the whole substance of one thing would perish and another whole substance would begin. In fact, it would be more than transubstantiation. For not only would there be that succession in whole substances but also in all their accidents, since if no common subject endures much less can the same accidents (which <398> depend on the subject for their being and their being conserved) naturally endure. But this kind of transformation is alien to every philosophy and every natural action. And beyond the nature of annihilation and creation, which it includes, as I said above, no reason can be thought of why those two things are connected in the nature of things in such a way that the destruction of one is necessary for the production of the other and conversely. Therefore, there is no natural transformation through complete destruction and inception, but only through transformation from some common subject. And this is what Aristotle's demonstration generally tends to, that this transformation is always from contrary to contrary (opposite privations being included under contraries), having a common subject. Therefore, it is evident that a common subject or material cause is given.

Physics I.6 and
Metaphysics VIII.1.

10. The second consequence of the principal argument by which we inferred that this matter is the first cause in its order and in that sense is most truly to be named prime matter still needs to be proven. But this (whatever some might wish) cannot be shown in any more evident way than the one touched on above, namely, because one cannot proceed to infinity in proximate and remote subjects or in subjects and subjected (if I may speak in that way), but one must necessarily stop in some subject that is not subjected or even composed from a part that is in a subject. For every such composite can be resolved into simples in which there must be something that is wholly not in a subject.

Matter is discovered by resolution to one first subject.

Nor does this discussion presuppose that there is not a procession to infinity of substantial forms in the same composite. For even if this is also obvious, still, if one imagined that *per impossibile* there were infinite forms in the same composite, on the part of the potency for receiving them it would be necessary to stop in some simple subject that is not in a subject, since the whole collection of such forms is in some subject. Therefore, that

[subject] is simple, as we will demonstrate at once. Therefore, we call it prime matter.

Beyond this, moreover, that consequence can also be proven from the community of this subject. For since all these lower things are transformed, immediately or at least mediately, as was said, it is necessary that what is presupposed in these transformations be first in the *ratio* of subject or matter. For if it were from another prior subject or constituting matter, then either it would also be transformable—and then <col. b> it would not be a common subject for all transformations but that which endures after its resolution—or it would not be transformable—and then not every corporeal being would be transformable into any other, but we are presupposing the opposite (but more about this in §3).

11. Therefore, from everything that has been said it is generally proven that in every order of transformation there must be given some prime material cause. But it cannot be concluded from what was said that there is given true prime matter that is a material cause of some substance unless something is added. Hence taken formally the arguments that have been made equally prove that in any heavenly body there is given some first subject of the changes that happen in them. In fact, with the same proportion they also prove the same thing about any spiritual substance you please insofar as it is capable of real change, whether local, intellectual, or affective. For although that change is not corruptive but perfective, nevertheless, it necessarily presupposes some subject. And for that reason it is necessary that it be reduced to some first subject in its order, which can also be named the first material cause of that change, even though it is not called prime matter according to the common use of this expression. For it properly signifies the material principle of substantial change or of constitution.

Inferred from every premise.

From this it also happens that even though things that in some way are transformed have a material cause of their transformation proportionate to them, nevertheless, if the transformation is not of one thing to another, it cannot be concluded from the force of the transformation that there is given some first material cause common to things of this sort. For example, although angels have a first subject of their changes and corporeal bodies similarly, nevertheless, since the latter cannot be transformed into angels nor conversely, it cannot be concluded from transformation that there is some first subject common to all things. And the same argument applies in the case of celestial bodies

and sublunary bodies, since the latter cannot transform into the former nor conversely. In fact, the same thing is true about the heavens in relation to each other, since they are not mutually transformable, but each in itself can only be changed accidentally. This is *a fortiori* true in the case of created spiritual substances. In all these cases, therefore, it can only be concluded that one common subject of accidents is given, between which change happens.

But in these lower substances and bodies, since they are mutually transformable, <399> it is rightly concluded that there is some subject both common and first. But in order to conclude that this subject is the material cause of the substances themselves of such things, it is necessary to add that mutual transformation of things with each other according to their substance and not only according to accidents. For if they are transformed only with respect to accidents, it will be enough that there be given a first subject for such accidents, whether that substance be simple or composite or whether it be of one nature in all things or different.

12. Therefore, in order to conclude that prime matter of the sort that Aristotle posits is given, it remains to prove that the transformation of these lower bodies that we experience is not only accidental but also substantial. But beyond experience—it seems sufficiently evident in itself not only in the case of elements and inanimate mixtures, but much more in living things, animals, and in us human beings since we are generated and we die—beyond this experience, I say, it should be proven by reason from the necessity of substantial forms distinct from accidents. For if such forms are given, it is necessary that prime matter be given, since it is their subject and with them composes one integral substance, which is what it is to be the material cause of a substance. But substantial forms are given, as remains to be proven below in Disputation 15 and for that reason is now presupposed. Insofar as it has been demonstrated from that hypothesis, a true and proper prime matter is given in these things that are generated and corrupted. The consequence is evident and free of any difficulty. But the antecedent will be proven in the stated place.

Transformation in things not only in an accidental way but also substantial.