

# **“They tend into Nothing by their Own Nature”: Rufus and an Anonymous *De Generatione* Commentary on the Principles of Corruptibility<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Introduction**

“Now Atreyu saw what they were staring at in fascinated horror. On the far side of the field lay the Nothing.” What fascinates the heroes and readers of Michael Ende’s fairytale,<sup>2</sup> also fascinated Richard Rufus of Cornwall (fl. 1231–56) and his contemporaries. Why is it that some things cease to exist, while others do not? Those things that do cease to exist, do they recede into pure nothing? What are the most basic principles of generation and corruption?

Rufus was among the first to lecture on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* at the University of Paris just after it had come out of ban.<sup>3</sup> He wrote two commentaries on the work: a shorter one (*Memoriale quaestionum in Metaphysicam Aristotelis*), which is the first known Western commentary on it, and a longer one (*Scriptum super Metaphysicam*), where Rufus treats some central issues in much more detail. It is part of this latter that provides the textual basis of the present paper.

I will focus on Rufus’s account of generability and corruptibility, or as he puts it, the principles of corruptible and incorruptible things, which he addresses in book 4 (*Gamma*), lectio 1, question 2 of the *Scriptum*. We need not recapitulate the historical debates that concern the exact date and place of composition of this work;<sup>4</sup> its authenticity is

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<sup>1</sup> The quote is from Rufus’s *Lectura Oxoniensis* (hereafter *SOx*) II.17D: “ex sui natura tendunt in nihil” (Oxford, Balliol College, 62, fol. 145<sup>va</sup>). I am grateful to Rega Wood for providing me with a transcription of this text.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Ende, *The Neverending Story*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Puffin Books, 2018), 139.

<sup>3</sup> For an introduction on the life and works of Rufus, see Rega Wood, “Richard Rufus of Cornwall,” in *A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jorge J E Gracia and Timothy B Noone (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 579–87.

<sup>4</sup> In short, while the authenticity of the *Scriptum* is uncontested, it has been questioned whether Rufus wrote it while in Paris (which would put the date of authorship earlier) or while in Oxford as a Franciscan. For the former claim, see Rega Wood, “The Earliest Known Surviving Western Medieval Metaphysics Commentary,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*

uncontested, and while I will also occasionally rely on some for which this is not the case,<sup>5</sup> establishing authorship will not be my aim in this paper.

The other textual basis of the paper is an anonymous commentary on Aristotle's *On generation and corruption*, found in Oxford, Corpus Christi ms. 119.<sup>6</sup> Oxford, Corpus Christi 119 is a composite manuscript, written around 1250. The first 10 folios (1<sup>ra</sup>–10<sup>vb</sup>) contain the anonymous commentary on Aristotle's *On generation and corruption*; the next quires contain Kilwardby's Commentary on the Priscianus minor (fols. 11–124).<sup>7</sup> It also contains a commentary on the *De interpretatione*<sup>8</sup> written by Kilwardby.

As will be seen below, the anonymous author's treatment of the question of corruptibility very closely resembles Rufus's as found in the *Scriptum*. The account in CC119 contains every major claim that Rufus makes, and the arguments for these claims are also parallel to those given in Rufus's text. Sometimes CC119 elaborates more on an argument than Rufus does, and overall one may regard CC119's treatment as somewhat clearer than Rufus's. This may suggest a later writer, although I will not aim to establish that conclusion here.

The problem I will be concerned with in this paper is just one aspect of Rufus's thought: his account of generation and corruption, or more precisely, generability and corruptibility. This is a fundamental metaphysical question in the Aristotelian framework. Given that

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7 (1998): 39–49. For the latter, see Timothy B Noone, "Richard Rufus on Cornwall and the Authorship of the 'Scriptum Super Metaphysicam'," *Franciscan Studies* 49 (1989): 55–91. and Timothy B Noone, "Roger Bacon and Richard Rufus on Aristotle's Metaphysics: A Search for the Grounds of Disagreement," *Vivarium* 35 (1997): 251–65.

<sup>5</sup> For the commentary on the *Physics*, see Rega Wood, "Richard Rufus of Cornwall and Aristotle's *Physics*," *Franciscan Studies* 52 (1992): 247–81. See also Silvia Donati, "The Anonymous Commentary on the *Physics* in Erfurt, Cod. Amplon. Q. 312 and Richard Rufus of Cornwall," *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiévales* 72 (2005): 232–362. and Rega Wood, "The Works of Richard Rufus of Cornwall: The State of the Question in 2009," *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiévales* 76 (2009): 1–73. for further discussion.

<sup>6</sup> For a description and brief analysis of the contents of the ms., see Jennifer R Ottman, "Anonymous Corpus Christi, in *Aristotelis de Generatione et Corruptione*, Oxford, Corpus Christi Cod. 119," n.d., <http://rrp.stanford.edu/OttmanCorpusChristi119DGen.shtml>.

<sup>7</sup> See Paul Thom and Henrik Lagerlund, eds., *A Companion to the Philosophy of Robert Kilwardby* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 74; see also Mary Sirridge, "Robert Kilwardby: Figurative Constructions and the Limits of Grammar," in *De Ortu Grammaticae: Studies in Medieval Grammar and Linguistic Theory in Memory of Jan Pinborg*, ed. G L Bursill-Hall, Sten Ebbesen, and Konrad Koerner (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1990), 321–38, n. 4.

<sup>8</sup> See Sten Ebbesen, *Greek-Latin Philosophical Interaction: Collected Essays of Sten Ebbesen, Volume 1* (London: Routledge, 2017), section 2, n. 49.

there are things that are corruptible (such as trees and cats and the human body), and things that are incorruptible (such as the celestial bodies and angels), what is it that makes one one, and the other the other? In other words, what is the ultimate explanation (in Rufus's terminology, the principle or principles) of corruptibility and incorruptibility? Do corruptible and incorruptible things have the same principles – the same fundamental metaphysical constitution – or are their principles different?

One may be tempted to think that these questions are relatively straight-forward – for instance, that it is obviously matter, or being composite of matter and form that makes something corruptible. There are a few boundary constraints, however, that Rufus keeps in mind when answering them, which make the answers more complicated. Some of these constraints stem from philosophical, others from theological considerations to which Rufus was committed. As we will see, staying within these constraints is one of Rufus's primary aims when formulating his theory, so it will be useful to spell them out here as desiderata that the theory must satisfy.

(1) First, perhaps trivially, the account must not lead to metaphysical absurdities, and it must be consistent with our other convictions and with what we already know about the world. This is a *prima facie* obvious desideratum of any metaphysical theory, although as we will see, it is not always so easy to meet. At any rate, this first desideratum means that for instance, if an account of corruptibility resulted in the claim that an object is both corruptible and incorruptible, that would be strong evidence against the account. Again, if an account implied that the heavenly bodies are corruptible, contradicting thereby a universally held assumption of medieval cosmology; or if it implied that Sophie the cat is incorruptible, contradicting thereby our observations – again, that would be strong evidence that the account is not correct.

(2) Second, perhaps less obviously for the modern reader, the account must be able to explain, or at least be compatible with, the impassibility of the resurrected bodies of the blessed. Since this is a less familiar desideratum than the previous one, it will be worth taking a closer look at it.

Theologians thought, from early Christianity, that at some point, our bodies will be resurrected. There was a motley collection of metaphysical puzzles connected to bodily resurrection – if the resurrected bodies will be numerically identical with the current ones, will they be made out of the same matter? what about those eaten by cannibals? and so on – but however those may be, it was taken as a theological given that the resurrected body will be a material body, consisting of roughly the same kind of matter as it consists of right now; that it will be somehow numerically identical to our present body, and will be joined to our soul.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Belief in bodily resurrection is already stated in the Apostolic Creed, and the claim was repeated throughout early Christianity. That the bodies that will rise will be the same that we bear now, is also a recurring theme, found in numerous early fragments of professions of Faith. See, e.g., Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum / Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and*

Apart from figuring out some of the metaphysical details of this theological outline, there is an immediately arising question: what will this body be like? Assuming that it will be *our* body – what characteristics will it have? Medieval theologians usually turned to Paul’s letter to the Corinthians for a first approximation of an answer. As Paul briefly notes there, “[w]hat is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.”<sup>10</sup>

Although Paul’s description is rather vague, it was generally taken to imply that after the resurrection, although our bodies will be the same kind, they will also be quite different from what they are now. More specifically, it was believed that the bodies will be given what are called the “four dowries”: agility, subtlety, the inability to die, and the inability to suffer.

One of these characteristics, the inability to suffer (usually called *impassibility*) gave rise to a quite interesting debate in the later thirteenth- and fourteenth-century discussion, having to do with the questions of how causal powers bring about their effects, and what happens when this bringing about apparently fails.<sup>11</sup> While unfortunately, Rufus never seems to have written a commentary on the final part of the *Sentences* where this question is usually

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*Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, ed. Peter Hünemann, Robert Fastiggi, and Anne Englund Nash, Forty-Third Edition (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), §23, 72, 76, 540, 574, 797. As the Eleventh Synod of Toledo (675) formulates: “we confess that there is a true resurrection of the flesh for all the dead. And we do not believe that we shall rise in ethereal or any other flesh, as some foolishly imagine, but *in this very flesh in which we live and are and move*” (, Denzinger, §540, emphasis added). Or, as the Fourth Lateran Council puts it later (1215), “All of them will rise again with their own bodies which they now bear....” The same formulation is repeated in Lyon (1274). See Denzinger, §801, and §854. Cf. also the Synod of Constantinople (543), against what may seem as a logical view of a perfect body: “If anyone says or holds that in resurrection the bodies of men are raised up from sleep spherical and does not agree that we are raised up from sleep upright, let him be anathema” (, Denzinger, §407).

<sup>10</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:42–44; translation is from the ESV. For a thorough discussion of various aspects of these characteristics, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), especially ch. 6.

<sup>11</sup> An analysis of some of these views can be found in Thomas Jeschke, “Per virtutem divinam assistentem: Scotus and Durandus on the Impassibility of the Glorified Bodies — Aristotelian Philosophy Revisited?” *Philosophia* 1 (2012): 139–65. See also Zita V Toth, “Perfect Subjects, Shields, and Retractions: Three Models of Impassibility,” *Vivarium*, forthcoming.

discussed,<sup>12</sup> as will be seen below, both he and the anonymous author of CC119 consider impassibility as a test case when discussing the principles of corruptibility and incorruptibility. This will mean that for Rufus, if a theory cannot account for how the glorified bodies are impassible, or would lead to the consequence that the glorified bodies are corruptible – that would be another piece of evidence that the theory is not viable.

(3) Third, another theologically-driven boundary, the account of corruptibility must be able to accommodate the assumption that contrary to the glorified bodies of the blessed, the bodies of those in hell will suffer eternally. In other words, while the bodies of the blessed and the bodies of the damned will share the eternity of their state (and hence they will both be incorruptible), the bodies of the damned will be capable of suffering, whereas those of the blessed will not.<sup>13</sup> This means that, for instance, if a theory of corruptibility implied that incorruptibility necessarily leads to impassibility and that only corruptible things can be acted on – that would be yet another piece of evidence against the theory.

(4) Finally, fourth, another meta-theoretical desideratum: the theory of corruptibility, when accounting for desiderata (2) and (3) above, should not be *ad hoc*. While *adheccity* seems to come in degrees and consequently this desideratum will be a less clear-cut guideline than the ones above, Rufus and the anonymous author is at least trying to avoid theories that could only account for the impassibility of the blessed and the passibility of the damned by, for instance, introducing some special divine action for every single case. They will also object to theories that can only respond to desiderata (2) and (3) by introducing some entirely new feature in the theory.

As we will see, Rufus and the anonymous author take these desiderata seriously. They consider multiple proposed theories of corruptibility, and reject most of them because they think that they fail to satisfy at least one of these desiderata. I will turn to their discussion of corruptibility shortly, but since Rufus's account is embedded in his broader metaphysical views, it will be useful to revisit some of these views first.

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<sup>12</sup> His *Oxford lectures* end with book III, whereas his *Paris lectures* end with distinction 22 of book IV. The resurrection and its metaphysical problems are usually considered in book IV, distinctions 43–44.

<sup>13</sup> How the bodies of the damned will suffer raised a host of other issues, including whether, or how, a spiritual body can be affected by a physical fire. (Not to mention the difficulties arising from the further assumption that even the separated souls suffer in the fire of hell, before the Final Judgement.) For some of these difficulties, see Pasquale Porro, "Fisica Aristotelica E Escatologia Cristiana: Il Dolore Dell'anima Nel Dibattito Scolastico Del Xiii Secolo," in *Henosis Kai Philia; Unione E Amicizia: Omaggio a Francesco Romano*, ed. Maria Di Pasquale Barbanti, Giovanna R Giardina, and Paolo Manganaro (Catania: CUECM, 2002), 617–42; and Jeschke, "Per Virtutem Divinam Assistentem."

## Some Metaphysical Background

We can only examine Rufus's general metaphysical background here rather briefly and superficially.<sup>14</sup> There are two elements of it that will play a role in Rufus's account of corruptibility: his view of substantial form, and his view of matter, especially prime matter.

### Substantial Form

Although the debate of the unicity of substantial forms is perhaps most famous for its later thirteenth- and fourteenth-century culmination,<sup>15</sup> it originates at least as early as the early thirteenth century.<sup>16</sup> While Callus claims that "the real meaning of substantial form is misunderstood"<sup>17</sup> by Rufus, the case is rather that Rufus's understanding of substantial forms is somewhat unusual.

While most of the later discussion centered on the question of whether a single substance can have more than one substantial form – e.g., whether, beside the (rational) soul, the human body also possesses a substantial form of corporeity – Rufus thinks that there is not one or two, but a whole Porphyrian tree of substantial forms present in every individual, starting from the form of most general genus (the form of 'substance'), down to the most proper, individual form of the particular thing. Nevertheless, Rufus also thinks that all this multiplicity of substantial forms does not exist in the individual in full actuality.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> An analysis of some of these views, especially as related to substantial forms, is given in Elizabeth Karger, "Richard Rufus's Account of Substantial Transmutation," *Medioevo* 27 (2002): 165–89.

<sup>15</sup> For an overview of the later debates, as well as for further bibliography, see Robert Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes, 1274-1671* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), chapter 24.

<sup>16</sup> For some background of the early part of this debate, see Daniel A Callus, "Two Early Oxford Masters on the Problem of Plurality of Forms: Adam of Buckfield – Richard Rufus of Cornwall," *Revue Néo-Scholastique de Philosophie* 12 (1939): 411–45, who, however, thinks that Rufus's "philosophical contribution is not very valuable" (432).

<sup>17</sup> Callus, 432.

<sup>18</sup> For the claim that an individual possesses, in some sense, the form of the species, that of the genus, and so on up to the form of the most general genus, see his *Lectura Parisiensis* (hereafter *SPar*) II.3, and also *SOx* II.17. For the claim that there are more and less complete forms, see *In Aristotelis Physicam* (hereafter *In Phys*) VII, as quoted below (, Richard Rufus of Cornwall, *In Pysicam Aristotelis*, ed. Rega Wood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).). Although it is difficult to establish direct influence, according to James A Weisheipl ("Albertus Magnus and Universal Hylomorphism: Avicbron," *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 10(3) (1979): 239–260), these doctrines became known to the thirteenth-century thinkers via Avicbron's *Fons vitae* through Gundissalinus's *De anima*.

As this already suggests, Rufus recognizes both complete and incomplete substantial forms, where the different degrees of completeness generate a whole spectrum, and on this spectrum the incomplete forms are in potency to the more complete ones.<sup>19</sup> On one end of the spectrum, we find the substantial form of the individual substance, which is the most complete form: it is not in potency to anything else. On the other end of the spectrum, we find the form of the most general genus, which is the most incomplete form, and in potency to all its completions, that is, all the other forms under it on the Porphyrian tree. For instance, the form of substance is in potency to the form of corporeal substance *and* of incorporeal substance, and in turn, the form of corporeal substance is in potency to the form of animate things and that of inanimate things. The form of animate things, in turn, is in potency to the form of mammals, and so on, all the way down, let us say, to the form of Sophie, an individual cat.

When an incomplete form evolves into a more complete form, it becomes identical with it – even though this identity is only partial. In the above example, the form of substance *becomes* the form of corporeal substance and, in turn, the form of mammal, and so on. But, as Rufus points out, positing full identity in this case would lead to transitivity problems: if the form of substance is identical with the form of Sophie the cat, *and* it is also identical, for the same reason, with the form of Fido the dog, then – since identity is transitive – the form of Sophie would also be identical with the form of Fido, which is of course not the case. Therefore, Rufus thinks that the identity between more and less complete forms is only partial, which can avoid the transitivity-problem.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *In Phys VII.2.3*: “Dicendum ut mihi videtur sic: ‘Aliquid’ dicit completum, et propterea ‘aliquid’ in genere essentiae dicit completam essentiam. Et dicendum quod genus non est aliquid – id est, non est una essentia completa – sed genus est in se una essentia incompleta. Sed eo modo quo est essentia completa, et hoc est secundum potentiam, est multae essentiae. Et hoc est quod dicitur, genus est idem per essentiam unam omnia diversa – id est, omnes species differentes secundum essentiam. Ita ergo possumus videre quod licet genus non sit aliquid unum, non tamen est aequivocatum penitus, nec tamen ita univocum sicut species specialissima, quae est essentia completa et non est in potentia essentiae diversae nisi numero tantum” (Wood ed., 214–215).

<sup>20</sup> *In Phys VII.2.4*: “Dicendum quod non sequitur si A et B sint idem ipsi C quod est idem – si fuerit, dico, incompletum et illa completa – quod sint idem inter se. Ita enim est in incompletis quae sunt in potentia activa quod unum incompletum est duo completa in potentia. Dico potentiam activam quando hoc est in potentia respectu illius quod hoc fiat hoc vel cedat in hoc. Exemplum de hoc possumus habere de puncto in medio lineae super quem, si dividatur linea, ille qui prius fuit unus numero fit duo numero. Et utrumque illorum duorum est idem numero cum puncto praecedente, diversa tamen inter se numero, et hoc est quia ille punctus praecedens ante divisionem non fuit completus sed fuit in potentia, ita quod fuit in potentia duo puncta. Ita est ex hac parte quod aliqua duo diversa secundum essentiam sunt eadem secundum essentiam cum aliquo uno incompleto, inter se tamen diversa. Hoc non est mirum, supposita hac propositione, quod essentia incompleta – quod est genus – cedit in diversas essentias, sicut punctus cedit in diversa puncta. Et quod

One consequence of this view is Rufus's general account of generation and corruption, which, as Elizabeth Karger has argued, is able to accommodate both Aristotle's most fundamental metaphysical commitments as well as Augustine's notion of *rationes seminales*. Rufus thinks that when a substantial change happens, there is an instantaneous ascent and descent into and then from the more general substantial form (*how* general of a substantial form this stopping point is, is not clearly expressed by Rufus, and may depend on the generation and corruption in question). For instance, when Sophie dies, and we see a cat "turning into" a corpse, what happens, on the metaphysical level, is that Sophie's form of felinity "ascends" into the form of mammals, which further ascends into the form of animate things, until it reaches a point where it stops and descends, in this case, to the form of a corpse.

This also means that on Rufus's view, neither the individual thing's matter, nor its substantial form is completely destroyed when the thing ceases to exist; just as there is no natural generation *from* nothing, there is also no natural return *into* nothing. The matter as substrate of the change will be the same as it was before, and the substantial form at least partly survives as well, since the "old" and the "new" individual (such as Sophie and the corpse) share a general form, which is partially identical to both of the individuals' proper form.<sup>21</sup>

## Prime matter

Rufus's doctrine of prime matter complements his view of substantial forms. A few elements of this doctrine will also play a role in his explanation of generability and corruptibility.

First, Rufus thinks that while prime matter has no actuality on its own, it is *something* – a substance, at least in the loose sense of the term. Ontologically speaking, it is between the form of the most general genus (such as 'substance') and pure nothing. It is not pure nothing, since in that case it would not be intelligible and also would not be able to serve as a receptacle for the substantial forms; moreover, denying *all* actuality of prime matter would also lead to the absurd consequence that God could not have an idea of it, and hence would not be able to create it either. Thus, Rufus often uses the expression *substantia materiae* for prime matter, even though he also notes that prime matter cannot be fully actual either, since the first actuality is given by the substantial form of the most general genus, and prime matter, considered on its own, is devoid of that form.<sup>22</sup>

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genus cedat in diversas essentias, hoc oportet dicere si dicamus quod fiat species per receptionem non alterius essentiae" (Wood ed., 215).

<sup>21</sup> For Rufus's argument for and elaboration on this ascent and descent, see *SOx* II.17 D.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *In Phys* II.8.2.



Rufus also thinks that prime matter is shared among all created things – a view handed down from Averroes, and at least partly endorsed later by Aquinas.<sup>23</sup> Rufus, however, unlike Aquinas, views this as a universal claim, true of all created beings; in other words, he thinks that the same prime matter that material creatures have is also shared by immaterial ones.<sup>24</sup> Although this is a surprising view, since it means that Sophie the cat has the same prime matter as Gabriel the archangel, it follows from Rufus’s conviction that *every* specification of and distinction between things already presupposes some substantial form, which prime matter on its own does not have.

In the context of generation and corruption, a perhaps surprising element of Rufus’s view of prime matter is that – contrary to what many Aristotelians seem to think – he does not regard it as the ultimate substrate of natural substantial change. As Rufus elaborates, the underlying substrate in an instance of change is *more* than just prime matter: it is prime matter, together with what he calls the “potencies of matter” (*potentiae materiae*).<sup>25</sup> The main reason for this view seems to be that Rufus regards the alternative as absurd: if prime matter were the substrate of natural change, then a natural agent would be able to induce a new form in prime matter; it would be a *dator formarum*, a giver of forms, which title, Rufus thinks, is reserved for God alone.<sup>26</sup>

Oxford, Corpus Christi 119 seems to agree with most of Rufus’s metaphysical commitments about substantial form and prime matter, and its close resemblance to some of Rufus’s formulations seems to indicate that the author was at least familiar with Rufus’s text. Although, being a commentary on the first book of Aristotle’s *On Generation and Corruption*,

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<sup>23</sup> I am not proposing here any particular interpretation of Aquinas’s view. For some of surrounding controversy, see Marilyn McCord Adams, *William Ockham* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), ch. 16, esp. pp. 672–676; John F Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas, From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, DC, 2000), ch. 9; and Richard Cross, *The Physics of Duns Scotus: The Scientific Context of a Theological Vision* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), esp. pp. 17–26.

<sup>24</sup> *Scriptum in Metaphysicam Aristotelis* (hereafter *SMet*) 2.2; *Memoriale quaestionum in Metaphysicam Aristotelis* (hereafter *MMet*) 11.4 (<http://rrp.stanford.edu/MMet.shtml>); *In Aristotelis De generatione* (hereafter *In De Gen*) I.5.6. (, Richard Rufus of Cornwall, *In Aristotelis de Generatione et Corruptione*, ed. Nel Lewis and Rega Wood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).). Perhaps Scotus at some point held a similar view, although see *Quodlibet* IX, a. 2, where he argues that angels do not have, nor can they inform even in principle, matter. For an analysis, see Thomas M Ward, *Duns Scotus on Parts, Wholes, and Hylomorphism* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 112–113.

<sup>25</sup> While I translate *potentia* as ‘potency’ here, it is a notoriously ambiguous term. Rega Wood tends to translate it as ‘potential’, but it could also be simply translated as ‘power’ (the same term is used both for active and passive powers (*potentiae activae et passivae*) in the later discussion).

<sup>26</sup> See *In De Gen* I.2 (Wood ed., 113); and *SOx* II.17 D.

it does not deal with the notion of substantial forms in great detail, it alludes to the hierarchy of forms, and often mentions the form of the most general genus.<sup>27</sup> It also argues that prime matter is common (numerically identical) in all created things; that it is ungenerated; and that the potency of prime matter (*potentia materiae*) belongs neither to the substance nor to the accidents of matter.<sup>28</sup>

## The principles of corruptibility and incorruptibility

Given the outlined desiderata as well as some general metaphysical background, the main concern of Rufus and the anonymous author of CC119 is to determine the principles of corruptibility and incorruptibility, or the most basic metaphysical explanation of why some things are corruptible while others are incorruptible.

To make the question more precise, Rufus and the anonymous author make a distinction. As they explain, the term ‘incorruptible’ can be taken in two ways. First, commonly speaking (*communiter*); something is incorruptible in this sense if, even in principle, it cannot be destroyed, that is, cannot return to nothing. Since God is the only being that was not created *ex nihilo*, God is also the only being that cannot return *ad nihilum* and so is incorruptible in this sense of the term.

For our present context, however, the more relevant meaning of ‘incorruptible’ is the second one; in this sense, some created things are also incorruptible. Although the heavens, the angels, or the bodies of the resurrected were all created from nothing and consequently have at least in principle a possibility to return there, they do not have this possibility in the same way as, for instance, a cat or a fruit fly does.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> See, especially, CC119, fol. 5<sup>rb</sup>, where the author asks whether the form in generation is prior or posterior to the most general form. E.g.: “omnis forma sequens formam generalissimi in ordine est forma generalis, specialis, vel individualis....”

<sup>28</sup> CC119: “Ex his colligamus materiam primam esse unam numero et hoc eodem modo ab omnibus causatis participatam” (fol. 4<sup>va</sup>)...“Ad hoc quod quaeritur de potentiis materiae puto quod potentia materiae nec est eius substantia nec eius accidens, quia nomen potentiae nec est nomen substantiae nec accidentis; omne enim potens est potens per suam potentiam, sicut omne agens est agens per suam virtutem. Unde nomen ‘potentiae’ est nomen virtutis et non substantiae neque accidentis” (fol. 5<sup>ra</sup>).

<sup>29</sup> CC119: “Forte posset aliquis dicere quod dupliciter posset fieri quaestio quae quaerit de causa corruptionis. Communiter, ita scilicet quod dicamus esse corruptibile omne quod de sui natura posset non esse, et secundum philosophos et maxime Platonem nihil est incorruptibile praeter primam causam.... Aut potest ferri sermo in propriissima eius acceptione secundum quod dicimus quod eorum quae causata sunt quaedam sunt corruptibilia, quaedam incorruptibilia. Verbi gratia, animalia et plantas esse corruptibilia,

Thus, the question Rufus and the anonymous author are investigating is this: what is it that makes it the case that Sophie the cat be corruptible and Gabriel the archangel be incorruptible?<sup>30</sup> Their treatment is divided into two parts. First, in an attempt to characterize the principles, they examine a dilemma, which will ultimately lead to a dead end, but makes clearer what they are looking for from the theory. Second, having found no obviously satisfactory escape from the dilemma, they embark on a new start, investigating *what* exactly makes something corruptible.

## The Dilemma of Identity

The dilemma Rufus and the anonymous author investigate concerns the question of how the principles of corruptible and incorruptible things are related. As it will turn out, whether one thinks that these principles are identical or that they are different, the result will fail in giving us an account with all the desiderata outlined at the beginning.

(1) The first horn of the dilemma is constituted by the first proposed theory (call it the *Identity theory*), according to which corruptible and incorruptible things have the same basic principles. Rufus thinks, however, that this is impossible. If corruptible and incorruptible things had the same principles, that would mean that those principles would sometimes produce corruptible things and sometimes incorruptible things, which, as Rufus points out, is absurd. While he does not elaborate on the kind of absurdity invoked here, such a case would indeed violate the basic Aristotelian principle of the uniformity of nature, that is, that similar things in similar circumstances produce similar effects. The anonymous author indeed notes,

The same thing, insofar as the same, is apt to cause always the same; therefore, if the principles of corruptible and incorruptible things were the same, then corruptible and incorruptible would be the same.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, Rufus and the anonymous author think that the Identity theory, in this form, would violate our first, most basic desideratum – that the account should not imply any metaphysical absurdity, which is precisely what would ensue if we posited that different things have the same principles.

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corpora autem supracaelestia et intelligentias separatas incorruptibilia” (fol. 5<sup>vb</sup>). Cf. Rufus, *SMet* IV, 1.Q3.

<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that sometimes Rufus and the anonymous author talk about the principles of corruptibility or corruption (*principia corruptionis*), while other times they talk about the principles of corruptible things (*principia corruptibilium*). This, however, does not result in much unclarity, since the main question is the same: we are inquiring after what it is that makes a thing corruptible or incorruptible.

<sup>31</sup> CC119: “Idem in quantum idem semper natum est idem facere; ergo si corruptibilium et incorruptibilium essent eadem principia, idem esset corruptibile et incorruptibile” (fol. 5<sup>va</sup>); cf. Rufus, *SMet* IV, 1.Q2.

(1b) The second account that Rufus and the anonymous author consider is a modified version of the Identity theory. According to this version (call it the *Mode theory*), the principles of corruptible and incorruptible things are identical but differ in mode. More precisely, the Mode theory maintains that corruptible and incorruptible things have the same principles, but these principles are related differently to the corruptible and to the incorruptible things, and it is due to these different relations that the two effects of the same principles also differ.<sup>32</sup>

While the Mode theory seems to avoid the immediate metaphysical absurdity that the Identity theory implies, Rufus and the anonymous author do not think that it is ultimately satisfactory. The difficulty with the Mode theory arises once we try to characterize the relations or modes involved. On the one hand, if these modes add something substantial to the principles themselves, then they would, after all, make these principles different, forcing us to confront the other horn of the dilemma. On the other hand, if the modes do not make the principles different due to their merely accidental nature, then they will not be able to account for the vast and essential difference between corruptible and incorruptible things — in other words, if the modes are merely accidents, we arrive at the same absurdity as with the Identity theory.<sup>33</sup>

(2) Since the first horn of the dilemma of Identity showed no promise, Rufus and the anonymous author turn to the other one: that corruptible and incorruptible things have different principles (call it the *Distinction theory*). However, the Distinction theory presents some further difficulties, once we try to characterize the principles of corruptible things. Given that they are not identical to those of incorruptibles, are these principles themselves corruptible or incorruptible?

(2a) On the one hand, as Rufus points out, the principles of corruptible things cannot be incorruptible. First, in that way they would not be different from the principles of incorruptible things; in other words, we would be forced back again to the first horn of the dilemma of Identity.

Second, from the definition of a proper cause or principle it follows that whenever it is posited, the effect (or principled thing) is also posited. If the principles of corruptibles are incorruptible, that, by definition, means that they are always posited; in that case, however,

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<sup>32</sup> Rufus, *SMet IV*, 1.Q2: “[L]icet sint eadem, tamen alio modo se habent, hoc est diversis dispositionibus disponentur prout sunt principia rerum corruptibilium et incorruptibilium.” (XXXp.) Cf. CC119, fol. 5<sup>va</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Rufus, *SMet IV*, 1.Q2: “istae condiciones diversae aut sunt accidentales istis principiis aut essentiales. Si accidentales, igitur non erunt causae tantae diversitatis in principiatibus sicut est diversitas corruptibilitatis et incorruptibilitatis. Et item, ex hoc sequitur quod non erunt principia proxima eadem. Si essentiales, igitur proxima principia non sunt eadem.” Cf. CC119, fol. 5<sup>va</sup>.

the corruptibles themselves must always be posited as well, which is a straight-out contradiction.<sup>34</sup>

(2b) This shows the principles of corruptibles cannot be incorruptible. On the other hand, however, if they are corruptible, what is it that *makes* them corruptible? It seems that since every corruptible thing needs a principle that makes it corruptible, these corruptible principles will need some further principles of corruptibility; and since the same question can be asked about these further principles as well, this will lead to a vicious infinite regress of positing an infinite number of principles.<sup>35</sup>

As can be seen from the discussion so far, although the first desideratum of an account of corruptibility was the most fundamental one – it should entail no metaphysical absurdity – it is not easy to satisfy. The dilemma of Identity has shown that the principles of corruptibles and incorruptibles can neither be identical nor different, which suggests that no matter how one spells out these principles, one will be likely to find herself in metaphysical inconsistency. Rufus and the anonymous author will return to this dilemma after they establish what the principle of corruptibility is, and show how the inconsistency can be avoided.

## Cause of corruptibility

Having arrived, seemingly, at a dead end in discussing the original dilemma, Rufus and the anonymous author of CC119 embark on a new start. Instead of attempting to characterize the principles of corruptible and incorruptible things, they now inquire directly about *what* it is that makes something corruptible. We should still keep in mind our original desiderata, since fulfilling those will be the guiding principle of this part of the discussion as well.

## Not the contrary qualities of elements

According to the first proposal that Rufus and the anonymous author consider, bodies are corruptible because they are composed of elements with contrary or opposing qualities. As the standard view of Aristotelian natural philosophy holds, sublunar bodies are made of earth, water, air, and fire, which have qualities contrary to one another: earth is cold and dry, air is hot and moist, and so on for the others.<sup>36</sup> Thus, it may seem that it is due to these

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<sup>34</sup> Rufus, *SMet* IV, 1.Q2: “[P]ositis propriis principiis et propriis causis ponuntur ea quorum sunt propria principia et propriae causae. Igitur manente propria causa, manet causatum; sed principia rerum corruptibilium sunt incorruptibilia et semper manent; ergo res corruptibiles semper manebunt, ergo erunt incorruptibiles – quod falsum est.” XXXp. This is one of the few arguments that do not have parallels in CC119.

<sup>35</sup> CC119: “[C]um omne corruptibile vadit ad sua principia, principiorum corruptibilium erit principium. Et similis est quaestio de illis, et erit sic processus in infinitum” (fol. 5<sup>vb</sup>); cf. Rufus, *SMet* IV, 1.Q2.

<sup>36</sup> *How* exactly the mixture is composed from the elements is a rather vexed issue. For Rufus’s and some contemporaries’ view, see Rega Wood and Michael Weisberg,

contrary qualities of the elements that the mixed bodies composed of them are, so to speak, somewhat unstable: when corruption happens, the opposite qualities “win over,” and the mixture dissolves into its elements.<sup>37</sup>

While this proposal may indeed seem plausible given most medievals’ commitment to the elements and their contrary qualities, Rufus and the anonymous author reject it on the ground that it would not satisfy our second desideratum, namely, it could not account for the incorruptibility of the resurrected bodies. As Rufus notes,

These qualities will remain in their contrariety in the glorified mixt; for the flesh is numerically the same in this corruptible [body] and in the glorified [body], therefore, [it is composed of] numerically the same elements, therefore, same qualities, therefore, same contrariety – and nevertheless, there will be no corruption.<sup>38</sup>

In other words, since the resurrected body is numerically identical to the body we have now, it is also the *same kind* of body as we have now, composed of the same kind of matter, that is, of the same elements with the same contrary qualities. Thus, if corruptibility were due to the contrary qualities of the elements, then the resurrected body would also be corruptible, which, however, Rufus rejects. This means that corruptibility cannot be explained by the contrary qualities of elements.

One may think here that Rufus’s reasoning is less than convincing. After all, we may think that you do not have numerically the same flesh that you had a week ago, since due to nutrition and the various biological processes going on in a body, a lot of it has been replaced. Since this replacement seems to pose no great metaphysical risk of you, as a human being, losing your numerical identity,<sup>39</sup> someone may think that we do not need the

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“Interpreting Aristotle on Mixture: Problems About Elemental Composition from Philoponus to Cooper,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 35 (2004): 681–706. See also Lucian Petrescu, “John Duns Scotus and the Ontology of Mixture,” *Res Philosophica* 91 (2014): 315–37. for further background, and Anneliese Maier, *Zwei Grundprobleme Der Scholastischen Naturphilosophie: Das Problem Der Intensiven Gröse* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1968). for much of the basis of the discussion.

<sup>37</sup> CC119: “Forte dicet quis quod contrarietas est causa sufficiens ad distinguendum corruptibile ab incorruptibili” (fol. 5<sup>va</sup>). Cf. Rufus, *SMet* IV, 1.Q3.

<sup>38</sup> Rufus, *SMet* IV, 1.Q3: “istae qualitates retinebunt suas contrarietates in mixto glorificato; eadem enim est caro secundum numerum in hoc corruptibili et in eodem glorificato, igitur eadem elementa secundum numerum, igitur eadem qualitates, ergo eadem contrarietas, et tamen non erit corruptio.” Cf. CC119, fol. 5<sup>vb</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> This does not mean that the question of *how* exactly the digested food becomes the body while the body remains the same was not a problem for the medievals. For the anonymous author’s treatment of the issue, cf. CC119, fol. 7<sup>rb</sup>. For an overview of the problem especially in Aristotle, Albert the Great, and Aquinas, see Philip Lyndon Reynolds, *Food and the Body: Some Peculiar Questions in High Medieval Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

same flesh and same elements in the resurrected body for the resurrected person to be the same either.

What exactly grants the numerical identity of the resurrected person is a contentious topic throughout medieval philosophy, which I cannot address here. Aquinas, at least according to some interpreters, infamously maintains that the resurrected body must be composed of the same particles as the person deceased.<sup>40</sup> However this may be, Rufus's objection here does not assume this strong account of the numerical identity of resurrected bodies. What his objection presupposes is merely that since the resurrected body will be numerically the same, it must be composed of the very same *kinds* of elements that it is composed of now. While you can have the same body with different bits of flesh due to nutrition, your body could not turn into the steel body of a robot while preserving its numerical identity.

### Not the action and passion of the elements

Second, one may modify the previous theory and propose that although the contrary qualities of elements do not necessarily lead to corruption, their action and passion do. This account would not be subject to the previous criticism, since one could maintain that even though the resurrected glorified bodies will be composed of the same elements, there will be no action and passion in them – and hence no corruption either.<sup>41</sup>

However, Rufus and the anonymous author are not satisfied with this solution. As they point out, in this case, if one wants to have a full account of corruptibility, one would need to explain the cause or principles of action and passion. *Why* is it that the elements – some elements at least – act and are acted on? The most plausible answer seems to be that they act and are acted on because of their contrary qualities. But in this case, one would either have to say that the glorified bodies – composed of the same elements – are not impassible after all (in other words, the proposed theory would be subject to the criticism of the previous one); or that although they are composed of the same elements, having the same contrary qualities, nevertheless, these contrary qualities do not lead to action and passion.

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<sup>40</sup> For some (ambiguous) textual support, see *ScG* IV, 80–81. However, see Marilyn McCord Adams, “The Resurrection of the Body According to Three Medieval Aristotelians: Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, William Ockham,” *Philosophical Topics* 20, no. 2 (1992): 1–33. and Eleonore Stump, “Resurrection, Reassembly, and Reconstitution: Aquinas on the Soul,” in *Die menschliche Seele: Brauchen wir den Dualismus?*, ed. B Niederbacher and E Runggaldier (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2006), 151–72. for alternative interpretations. According to Bynum (, 260–261), Aquinas's account is “inherently full of tension.”

<sup>41</sup> CC119: “Forte dicet ad hoc quod contrarietas cum actione et passione qualitatum activarum et passivarum est causa corruptibilitatis. Unde etsi in corpore glorificato sint qualitates contrariae, non tamen agunt nec patiuntur” (fol. 5<sup>vb</sup>); cf. Rufus, *SMet* IV, 1.Q3.

Rufus and the anonymous regard this last option absurd or at least marvelous (*mirum*); if contrary qualities explain action and passion, that means that they necessitate it.<sup>42</sup>

### Not the passibility of matter as such

Yet another proposal that Rufus and the anonymous author consider is that the cause of corruptibility is the passibility of matter (*passivitas materiae*) as such. This would seem to avoid the difficulty with the previous proposals, since one may maintain that while there will be action in the resurrected body, there will not be any passion, and consequently no corruption either. Rufus gives an analogy of how this proposal may be supposed to work:

Light multiplies its species in some matter, just as in the matter of air; but let's posit that the matter is incorruptible, even though light multiplies its species there; so this is not passion but action.<sup>43</sup>

In other words, we could imagine an incorruptible and unchangeable transparent medium, in which light would still traverse. Thus, light would multiply its species in this medium, and so in one sense act on it; however, the medium would not be strictly speaking acted on, since it would not change.<sup>44</sup> According to this proposal then, the glorified bodies are incorruptible because they receive every species in the same way as the unchangeable air receives the species of light. While fire can burn the present body because the body receives its species in a corporeal way and thereby changes (accidentally or substantially), in the world to come this reception of species will be spiritual, and hence no physical change and no corruption will ensue.

Rufus and the anonymous author, however, reject this solution on the ground that it cannot account for our third or fourth desideratum. If passibility were the cause of corruption, that would mean that anything that is passible is also corruptible. But the bodies of the damned provide a counterexample: they suffer – as Rufus notes, they “change from the most cold

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<sup>42</sup> CC119: “Sed mirum est de hoc, cum contrarietas sit causa actionis et passionis” (fol. 5<sup>vb</sup>). Rufus is not much more elaborate: “[Q]uid est causa actionis et passionis? Non est aliud nisi contrarietas; sed contrarietas manebit ibi; ergo etc.” (*SMet* IV, 1.Q3).

<sup>43</sup> Rufus, *SMet* IV, 1.Q3: “Lux multiplicat suam speciem in aliqua materia, sicut in materia aeris; ponamus autem quod ista materia sit incorruptibilis; nihilominus multiplicabit lux suam speciem ibi; hic non est passio, est tamen actio.” Cf. CC119, fol. 5<sup>vb</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> Whether or not the species of light was received by the air in a spiritual or corporeal manner was a debated issue from at least Ibn al-Haytham (Alhazen). While Alhazen and Averroes thought that the air receives the species of light in a spiritual manner, undergoing therefore no corporeal change, Bacon famously argued for the opposite. Cf. Alhazen, *De aspectibus* I.5.29; Bacon, *Perspectiva* I.6.3–4. See also Roger Bacon, *Roger Bacon and the Origins of Perspectiva in the Middle Ages: A Critical Edition and English Translation of Bacon's Perspectiva with Introduction and Notes*, ed. David C Lindberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) lxxix.



into the most hot”<sup>45</sup> – and so are passible; nevertheless, they do not perish. And if one tries to salvage the proposed theory by referring to some other special circumstance of the damned, that would lead to the kind of *adhaecceity* that the fourth desideratum warned against.

### Prime matter revisited

Having rejected these proposed theories, here is what Rufus says about the principle of corruptibility, taken in the strict sense:

The cause of such a corruptibility is the privation of matter, by which matter has a potency to opposite forms. Therefore, the principle of such a corruption is a deficient cause and not an efficient cause, and it is a principle in becoming (*principium in fieri*) and not a principle that is the term of a thing.<sup>46</sup>

The anonymous author first presents Rufus’s view as just another attempt to answer the question, but then ends up endorsing it:

And this you should understand so that form and matter according to its substance are the principles of incorruptibles per se and not per accidens, but privated matter insofar as privated is the principle of corruptibles, and this is matter insofar as privation is joined to it.<sup>47</sup>

There are a few things to note about the account suggested by these texts.

First, Rufus thinks that the corruptibility of things, strictly speaking, have only a *deficient* cause, and not an efficient one. While ordinary things, such as cats, dogs, or even being white, have efficient causes and can also be themselves efficient causes of other things, privations as privations do not have per se efficient causes (and also cannot be per se efficient causes of other things) but only deficient causes. While the sun is, in some sense, the cause of both sunlight and shadow, properly speaking, the sun is an efficient cause of light, while only a deficient cause of shadow.<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, Rufus thinks that

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<sup>45</sup> Rufus, *SMet* IV, 1.Q3: “Corpora damnatorum sunt passibilia; mutantur enim de maxime calido in maxime frigidum; et non sunt corruptibilia; igitur passibilitas non est causa corruptionis.” Cf. CC119, fol. 5<sup>vb</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> Rufus, *SMet* IV, 1.Q3: “Causa autem talis corruptibilitatis est privatio materiae per quam habet materia potentiam ad oppositas formas. Unde principium talis corruptionis est causa deficiens et non causa efficiens, et est principium in fieri et non principium quod est terminus rei.”

<sup>47</sup> CC119: “Et hoc intellige quod [forma et] materia secundum sui substantiam sunt principia [in]corruptibilium per se et non per accidens, materia vero privata secundum quod privata est principium corruptibilium, et hoc est materia secundum quod ei coniungitur privatio.” (fol. 5<sup>vb</sup>).

<sup>48</sup> For Rufus’s characterization of deficient causes, see *SMet* V, 1.Q1. This notion of deficient causality likely originates from Augustine; see, e.g., *De civitate Dei*, XII.7–8, where Augustine argues that the evil will has no efficient but only a deficient cause. See also Pietro Antonio Ferrisi, “Creazione Dal Nulla: Eseggesi Metafisica Di Agostino a Gen. 1,1–2,” *Augustinianum*

corruptibility itself is a kind of privation, and therefore, similarly to shadows, its cause is a deficient cause.

Furthermore, Rufus specifies that the deficient cause in question is prime matter. More precisely, while the remote principles of all created things, whether corruptible or incorruptible, are prime matter and the first form (in the case of substances, the form of substance), the proximate principle of corruptible things is prime matter with privation joined to it. Thus, what makes Gabriel the archangel incorruptible and Sophie the cat corruptible, on Rufus's account, is prime matter – but different prime matter. It is true that according to Rufus, as was mentioned earlier, the prime matter of Gabriel and Sophie are *ultimately* numerically the same, since prime matter is common to all created things. Nevertheless, Sophie's prime matter has an added element, privation, which Gabriel's prime matter does not have. Consequently, while Sophie's prime matter has the potency to take on opposite forms, Gabriel's prime matter does not have that potency.

Rufus, unfortunately, does not elaborate on the notion of privation invoked in this characterization, but we can see that it is something added to the substance of prime matter, so at least in *that* sense, it is an accident. In particular, it is what makes the most general difference among things – a more general one even than the one between corporeal and incorporeal entities (consider that both Gabriel and the celestial spheres are incorruptible, but only the former one is incorporeal). This is a rather unusual feature of Rufus's account, at least in light of the later discussions: prime matter *as such* is not privated, which is to say it is not subject to all forms (including opposite forms). Instead of being a universal subject from the start, prime matter *acquires* this potency for opposite forms only by the addition of privation. This privation, however, is not added to *all* prime matter in the same way, and something can also lose it while remaining numerically the same individual; in *this* sense, then, privation is an accident of prime matter.<sup>49</sup>

As we have briefly seen above, however, the anonymous author explicitly says otherwise. Privation is a potency for opposite forms, but “the potency of prime matter belongs neither to the substance nor to the accidents of matter.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, the privation of prime matter cannot, strictly speaking be an accident. Perhaps as Rufus would point out, privations as such do not fall into any specific ontological category.

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51 (2011): 123–46, for an analysis of how his theory of *creatio ex nihilo* leads Augustine to treat Nothing as a deficient cause.

<sup>49</sup> This may suggest to treat the distinction between privated and non-privated prime matter – or corruptibles and incorruptibles – as the highest, most universal division on the Porphyrian tree. Nevertheless, we must take caution of doing so, both because of the below, and also because of the fact that at least in most cases, a thing cannot jump from one branch of the Porphyrian tree to the other. If the privated/non-privated distinction produced the two most general trunks of the Porphyrian tree, then things would be “jumpy.”

<sup>50</sup> See above, footnote 28.

Rufus and the anonymous author think that their theory fares better with respect to our four desiderata than the other proposed accounts. The first major problem some of the accounts ran into was the dilemma of Identity. Are the principles of corruptibles and incorruptibles identical, or are they different? The anonymous author thinks that it depends on what principles we are looking at:

Therefore, if the question is asked whether the former or the latter have the same principles, we have to divide the investigation whether it asks about the proximate and immediate, or about the remote principles. If the remote principles, it is clear how the principles are the same, because matter and the first form, which is the form of the most general genus, are the intrinsic principles of anything that participates in existence in the genus of substance, and thus the corruptibles and incorruptibles have the same principles. But perhaps in proximate and immediate, they are not the same...but the principle of incorruptible will be the principle of corruptible by some addition.<sup>51</sup>

Rufus seems to agree:

Therefore, as was said, we must say that the principles of corruptibles and incorruptibles are not the same, since one and the principal of the principles of corruptibles is privation. But the proximate principles of incorruptibles are form and the substance of matter; but the principles of corruptibles as such are matter as privated (*materia sub privatione*) and that privation itself.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, Rufus and the anonymous author think they can escape the dilemma of Identity by maintaining that the proximate principles are distinct, endorsing thereby some version of the Distinction theory, while also maintaining that the remote principles are identical.

As was seen above, one difficulty arising from the Distinction theory is that it leads to a further dilemma: whether one thinks that the principles of corruptible things are incorruptible, or one thinks that they are corruptible, both cases lead to absurdity. Rufus, however, can answer this dilemma easily, since as we have seen, he thinks that the principle of corruptible things is a composite principle. Thus, as he remarks,

And if it is asked about these principles whether they are corruptible or incorruptible, we must say that matter is an incorruptible principle and privation is a corruptible principle. And if someone argues that privation therefore has another principle, this is true, because [it has] a deficient principle, such as pure negation, because of which matter so privated as such is corruptible, but in its substance is incorruptible. Therefore these principles are

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<sup>51</sup> CC119: "Si igitur fiat quaestio utrum illorum aut istorum sint eadem principia, est dividendum in scrutatione utrum quaerit de proximis et immediatis vel de remotis. Si de remotis, manifestum est quoniam eadem sunt principia, quoniam materia et forma prima, quae est forma generis generalissimi, sunt principia intrinseca cuiuslibet principii existientis in genere substantiae, et ita corruptibilium et incorruptibilium sunt eadem principia. Sed forte de proximis et immediatis non sunt eadem...sed principia incorruptibilis erunt principia corruptibilis per additamentum" (fol. 5<sup>vb</sup>).

<sup>52</sup> Rufus, *SMet* IV, 1.Q3: "Sicut igitur dictum est, dicendum quod non eadem sunt principia corruptibilium et incorruptibilium, quia unum principiorum corruptibilium et principalius est privatio. Incorruptibilium autem principia proxima sunt forma et substantia materiae; principia autem corruptibilium in quantum sunt huiusmodi sunt materia sub privatione et ipsa privatio."

resolved into the substance of prime matter and pure nothing. And if it is asked about these, whether they are corruptible or incorruptible, we should say about the matter that it is incorruptible, but about the other that it is neither corruptible nor incorruptible; for the pure negation into which privation is resolved is not anything.<sup>53</sup>

In other words, both Rufus and the anonymous author think that in the composite principle of corruptibles, matter itself (considered as such) is incorruptible; but privation, the other element of the composite, is corruptible. This escapes the dilemma of Identity, since positing a corruptible part of an incorruptible principle does not generate the vicious infinite regress.

The second desideratum was that the account should be able to accommodate the claim that the resurrected glorified bodies are impassible. This does not seem problematic for Rufus's account. Accounting for impassibility is only a problem if one links action and passion to being composed of matter or to the qualities of the elements; but Rufus's account has no such implication. He can maintain that while the elements currently compose a body that can undergo passions, in the world to come they will compose one that does not undergo the same kind of passions. As was mentioned above, this also means that while now our bodies are composed of prime matter that is privated, our resurrected bodies, while numerically the same, will be composed of prime matter that is not privated in the same way.

Third, the account of the principles of corruptible and incorruptible things should be able to accommodate the claim that the bodies of the damned, although incorruptible, are capable of suffering. This would rule out views on which corruptibility follows from being able to undergo passion. But Rufus's account does not imply this. As he explains,

To the other that when I say 'privation is the cause' etc., that privation is not only with respect to accidental forms but also of substantial forms. And thus in the damned there will be no such privation, because there is no transmutation from the substantial form to substantial [form].<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Rufus, *SMet* IV, 1.Q3: "Et si quaeratur de istis principiis aut sunt corruptibilia aut incorruptibilia, dicendum quod materia est principium incorruptibile et privatio principium corruptibile. Et si arguat, ergo privatio habet aliud principium, verum est, quia principium deficiens, ut puram negationem, unde materia sic privata in quantum huiusmodi est corruptibilis, in sua autem substantia est incorruptibilis. Unde ista principia resolvuntur usque ad substantiam materiae primae et pure nihil. Et si quaeratur de istis, aut sunt corruptibilia aut incorruptibilia, dicendum est de materia quod est incorruptibilis, de alio autem quod neque corruptibile neque incorruptibile; pura enim negatio in quam resolvitur privatio non est aliquid." Cf. CC119, fol. 5<sup>vb</sup>, where the anonymous author describes the principle as itself incorruptible with a corruptible part, similarly to how the totality of fire can be incorruptible even though its parts (the particular instances of fire) are corruptible.

<sup>54</sup> Rufus, *SMet* IV, 1.Q3: "Ad aliud quod cum dico 'privatio est causa' etc., non solum est illa privatio respectu formarum accidentalium sed et substantialium. Et ideo in damnatis non est ista privatio, quia non est transmutatio de forma substantiali in substantialem."

In other words, Rufus thinks that privation, or privated matter, is the cause of change, both substantial and accidental. On the one hand, matter that is privated with regard to substantial form (or matter that can take on opposite substantial forms) is the cause of substantial change and hence corruption. On the other hand, matter that is privated with regard to accidental form (or matter that can take on opposite accidental forms) is the cause of accidental change. In the bodies of the damned, however, only this second kind of privation is present. This means that these bodies will be able to undergo accidental change and consequently suffer, while they will not be able to undergo substantial change and consequently will be incorruptible.

This highlights the main advantage of Rufus's account compared to the proposals according to which there will be (for one reason or another) no passion in the resurrected bodies. While, at least in Rufus's understanding, being or not being able to undergo passion is a binary function, admitting of no degrees or further qualifications, the privation of prime matter does admit of such qualifications. Thus, Rufus's theory is able to, while the "no passions" theories cannot, account for the differences between passibility and corruptibility, and between the glorified and the damned bodies.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, the fourth desideratum of the theory was that it not be *ad hoc* when accounting for the impassibility of the blessed and the passibility but incorruptibility of the damned. Rufus's account seems to be in good standing regarding this requirement. His account is purely metaphysical in the sense that it does not invoke any divine action in accounting for impassibility, and the theory can account for both the impassibility and passibility/incorruptibility case. In the later discussions of impassibility, this criterion becomes perhaps the most difficult one to meet.

## Concluding remarks

Although there are many interesting aspects of Rufus's thought connected to the problem of corruptibility that would require further study – his notion of prime matter, the immortality of the soul, or his view of the celestial bodies and their influence – this brief overview of his account already points to some peculiar characteristics.

First, as was seen above, Rufus's account implies that he can explain the impassibility of glorified bodies merely by their metaphysical composition. While this, arguably, is not very far from how Aquinas would later deal with the same question, it remarkably differs from how early fourteenth-century thinkers would characteristically do so.<sup>56</sup> In the later discussion, the question of impassibility became a question on its own (usually discussed towards the end of the fourth book of the commentary on the *Sentences*), and strongly

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<sup>55</sup> Aquinas will later suggest that we can draw a non-arbitrary distinction between passions, based on whether or not they are contrary to a thing's nature (cf. especially *In Sent.* IV, d. 44, q. 2, a. 1, qc. 1, co). Rufus does not consider this option.

<sup>56</sup> See footnote 11 above.

intertwined with the problem of divine concurrence and the necessity of the cause-effect relation. By contrast, Rufus makes no reference to divine action at all in this context, and as was seen above, the problem of impassibility is less a problem for him in its own right than just a basis for an objection when considering various views about his more general question of corruptibility.

Another surprising feature of Rufus's account, as was also mentioned above, is the notion of prime matter that is in play. As is well known, Aquinas will later maintain that prime matter is pure potency. Scotus will maintain that prime matter has actuality on its own, even though it is in potency to any form. Rufus, however, maintains that prime matter *as such* is *not* in potency to all forms; indeed, the potency of prime matter is an added element, at least insofar as privations can be regarded as additions. What *is* prime matter then, without this addition? Is it a purely metaphysical supposit? Rufus does not say. God knows prime matter, since God created it; we only know that it is numerically one in all things. Rufus does little to illuminate this notion, but perhaps no greater illumination is possible.

It is also worth noting that in some way, Rufus takes Aristotle more literally than some of his later readers. As Aristotle describes in the *Physics*, there are three distinct principles of change: matter, form, and privation.<sup>57</sup> While the later metaphysical discussion greatly emphasized the first two of these, paying relatively little attention to the third, in Rufus it is very clear that these are indeed three principles that are equally important and irreducible to one another. Change only happens when all of them are present, and there are various ways that privation can be present or absent in matter.

I will briefly close with a worry that seems to arise concerning Rufus's account of generability and corruptibility: that ultimately, it is rather shallow if not tautological. Corruption, for Aristotle and his followers, is nothing else than matter losing one substantial form and acquiring another; this is just how we universally describe substantial change. According to Rufus, corruptible things are those that have (prime) matter joined with privation, where by 'privation' we mean the potency for opposite forms. But this amounts to nothing more than saying that corruptible things are those that have matter capable of losing and acquiring substantial forms; in other words, corruptible things are those that are able to undergo substantial change. Which may not seem as a highly informative or explanatory description.

It is difficult to know how Rufus would respond to this worry, although perhaps he could point out that the objector misunderstands how metaphysics works. When in a metaphysical explanation we do not achieve a mechanical description or a truly reductive analysis of a process, that is not necessarily a sign of failure but can actually be a sign of success. A metaphysical explanation can clarify basic processes, not necessarily by reducing them to something even more basic but sometimes by calling attention to some curious feature of reality. As Rufus has argued, the principles of generation and corruption are matter, form, and privation, which is ultimately pure nothing (*pure nihil*); he has shown

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<sup>57</sup> *Phys* I.7, 190<sup>b</sup>29–191<sup>a</sup>22.

that the metaphysical texture of created reality is not perfectly dense with being, but just like *Fantastica*, interspersed with patches of Nothing.