

Matterless Heavens: Durand of St.-Pourçain, John of Jandun, and Peter Auriol on the Question of Celestial Matter

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1. “But in the case of natural but eternal substances another account must be given. For perhaps some have no matter, or not matter of this sort but only such as can be moved in respect of place” (Arist., *Meta.* VIII, 1044b6–8 (Barnes 2:1649)).
2. “Necessarily, then, movements also will be either simple or in some sort compound simple in the case of the simple bodies, compound in that of the composite. . . . Supposing, then, that there is such a thing as simple movement, and that circular movement is simple, and that both movement of a simple body is simple and simple movement is of a simple body. . . , then there must necessarily be some simple body which moves naturally and in virtue of its own nature with a circular movement.” (Arist., *De caelo* I, 269a2–7 (Barnes 1:448)).
3. “[W]e assert that the proposition ‘the celestial body is not composed of matter and form in the manner of the transient ones’ is true beyond the shadow of doubt” (Aver., *De subst. orbis* I.2 (Hyman, 74)).
4. “And what is meant by the phrase ‘heaven and earth’? Was this expression used to indicate spiritual and corporeal creatures? Or does it refer only to the corporeal, so that we may presume in this book that the author passed over in silence the creation of spiritual beings, and in saying ‘heaven and earth’ wished to indicate all corporeal creation above and below? Or is the unformed matter of both the spiritual and corporeal worlds meant in the expression ‘heaven and earth’: that is, are we to understand, on the one hand, the life of the spirit as it can exist in itself when not turned towards its Creator. . . and, on the other hand, bodily matter considered as lacking all the bodily qualities. . . ? But perhaps we should take ‘heaven’ to mean spiritual beings in a state of perfection and beatitude from the first moment of their creation and take ‘earth’ to mean bodily matter in a state that is not yet complete and perfect” (Augustine, *De Gen. ad litt.* (PL 34:245, tr. J.H. Taylor)).
5. “I say that this question is to be answered differently according to the sayings of the Philosopher and the Commentator, and according to theology. . . . According to the Philosopher, we should say that it is a simple nature, extended by quantity, which does not have matter (that is in potency to form) as a part. And this is because they posit that the heavens are by themselves necessary formally, nor can they not be, which would, however, follow if they had matter. Nor do I see any reason to posit two kinds of prime matter. . . . But according to theology, we should say that the heavens are composite of matter and form.”

Scotus, *Lectura* IV.14 (Vaticana 19: 126–131):
Respondeo quod aliter respondendum est ad hanc quaestionem secundum sententiam Philosophi et Commentatoris, et aliter secundum theologiam. . . . Secundum Philosophum est dicendum quod est simplex natura extensa per quantitatem, non habens materiam partem sui, quae sit in potentia ad formam – et hoc, quia ponunt quod caelum sit ex se formaliter necessarium nec potest non esse, quod tamen sequeretur si materiam haberet. Nec video necessitatem ponendi duas materias primas alterius rationis. . . . Sed secundum theologiam est dicendum quod caelum est compositum ex materia et forma.
6. “To understand this opinion, we should note that ‘matter’ can be taken in two ways: in one way, as a part of the thing, making one composite with the form, and this is the way in which they intend to deny that matter be in the heavens, saying that the heavens are a simple body, not only according to the simplicity that is opposed to mixture, in which way the elements are [also] said to be simple bodies, but according to the simplicity that is opposed to composition, which is from parts of diverse nature, such as from matter and form, in which way no generable and corruptible body can be simple. In the other way, we can take ‘matter’ as a subject that is in act, as we say that all accidents have matter in which they inhere, because they presuppose a subject in act, even if [the thing that they are accidents of is] simple.”

Durand, *In Sent.* II.12.1 (transcr. by Jeschke):
Ad intelligendum autem hanc opinionem advertendum est quod materia potest accipi dupliciter: uno modo ut est pars rei faciens cum forma unum compositum, et sic intendunt isti negare materiam esse in celo, dicentes celum esse corpus simplex, non solum simplicitate opposita mixtioni, per quem modum elementa dicuntur corpora simplicia, set simplicitate opposita compositioni, quae est ex partibus | diuersarum naturarum, puta ex materia et forma, quae simplicitate nullum corpus 240 generabile et corruptibile potest esse simplex. Alio modo potest accipi materia ut est subiectum actu ens, sicut dicimus omnia accidentia habere materiam in qua sunt, quia supponunt subiectum actu ens, etiam simplex, sicut ponitur de anima respectu suarum potentialium.

7. "Things that proceed from God have more or less composition according to their more or less distance from the first cause; for the angels, as being closer to the first cause, do not have any intrinsic composition of their essences, for they do not have a plurality of parts either of the same nature or of different natures. . . . Nevertheless, they have some extrinsic composition, for they are composed with their accidents. . . . Corporeal things, on the other hand, which are more distant from God, apart from extrinsic composition, also have intrinsic composition, but differently, since incorruptible bodies, as more perfect, only have intrinsic composition of parts that are of the same nature (for they are quantified), and any part is of the same nature as they whole. . . . But generable and corruptible things, as they are most distant, have all the compositions above, and beside these, also that, which is from parts of different natures, which are properly called the parts of essence, such as matter and form."
8. "We should not posit a multitude [of things] unless an evident argument shows that they are necessary, [i.e.,] otherwise by fewer things [the phenomena] cannot be saved; for God and nature does nothing in vain. But there is no necessity in positing matter in the heavens."
9. "Therefore, the heavens are not form, because form is not in potency to its ultimate perfections; nor is it matter, because matter is in potency to the first act; therefore, it is something as if in the middle, having the nature of a subject, and a conjoined essence. . . . The heavens are a quantified [body], which is not composite, namely by matter and form, neither form, nor matter, but a subject that only has dimensions in its act."
10. "The heavens, which is the fifth essence, if we do not consider the mover, is not composed of matter and form, but is a simple subject, always subject to its mover, having matter not as [potency] to being but as potency to location [*potentia ad ubi*]."
11. "Although a heavenly body is a being in act by itself, so that it does not receive its actuality from another form, nevertheless, it is not a *per se* existing thing, but is a subject in act – a subject of its form, which is the mover with which it always exists. . . . And just as prime matter cannot be understood except by the form, since it cannot exist without form, in the same way, nor can that heavenly nature [be understood] except with respect to the form, which is the mover, since without it it is not, nor can it be."

Some arguments for the Matterless Heavens View:

1. The Argument from Potency
2. The Argument from Parsimony
3. The Argument from Indeterminate Dimensions
4. The Argument from the Hierarchy of Beings

Durand, *In Sent.* II.12.1 (transcr. by Jeschke): Res que procedunt a Deo incidunt in compositionem maiorem uel minorem secundum maiorem uel minorem distantiam ad causam primam; angeli enim ut propinquiore cause prime non incidunt in aliquam compositionem intrinsecam sue essentie; neque enim habent pluralitatem partium eiusdem rationis. . . . incidunt tamen in quandam compositionem extrinsecam. Componuntur enim cum suis accidentibus. . . . Corporalia uero, que magis distant a Deo preter compositionem extrinsecam, incidunt in compositionem intrinsecam, set differenter, quia corpora incorruptibilia, sicut perfectiora, incidunt solum in compositionem intrinsecam, que est ex partibus eiusdem rationis; sunt enim quanta, et quilibet pars est eiusdem rationis cum toto. . . . Generabilia uero et corruptibilia tanquam summe distantia incidunt in omnes has compositiones, et preter hoc in illam que est ex partibus diuersarum naturarum, que proprie dicuntur partes essentie, sicut sunt materia et forma.

Auriol, *In Sent.* II.14.2 (1605, 189a): Multitudo ponenda non est, nisi ratio euidentis necessaria illud probet, aliter per pauciora saluari non posse. Deus enim et natura nihil faciunt frustra. Sed materiam ponere in caelo nulla est necessitas.

Auriol, *In Sent.* II.14.2 (1605, 188b): Non ergo est forma, quia forma non est in potentia ad suas postremas perfectiones; nec est materia, quia materia est in potentia ad actum primum; ergo est quasi medium, ut sic, ratio subiecti, et essentia coniuncta. . . . Caelum [est] quantum non compositum, scilicet ex materia et forma, nec forma, nec materia, subiectum habens dimensiones tantum in actu suo.

Jandun, *In De substantia orbis*, q. 1 (1552, 51rbB): Caelum, quod est quinta essentia, circumscripto motore, non est compositum ex materia et forma, sed subiectum simplex est, suo motori semper subiectum, habens materiam, non quae ad esse, sed quae ad ubi potentia est.

Jandun, *In De substantia orbis*, q. 1 (1552, 52raC-D): Licet corpus coeleste sit actu ens de se, ita quod actum non retinet ab alia forma, non tamen est existens per se, sed est subiectum in actu ipsius formae, quae est motor cum qua semper existat. . . . Et sicut materia prima non potest intelligi nisi per formam, eo quod non potest existere sine forma, ita nec ista natura coelestis nisi respectu formae, quae est motor, eo quod sine ista non est, nec potest esse, cum suum esse sit propter motorem.