

Substantial Form(s): How Many?

6AANB051, 7AAN2047/7AAN6019

Zita Toth, zita.v.toth@kcl.ac.uk

Overview

Reminder & introduction

- Substantial Form

Plurality debate

Elements and mixture

- The problem of mixture

- Plurality

- Qualified plurality

- Unicity

Form of Corporeity

What are substances composed of?

- of course: elements = **integral parts**. But what if we can show that something about a substance can change independently of its integral parts? E.g., integral parts remain while the substance changes or vice versa?
- **metaphysical parts**: parts that aren't integral parts.
- Aristotle: there are 2 of these: matter and **form**.

Reminder &
introduction

Substantial Form

Plurality debate

Elements and mixture

The problem of mixture

Plurality

Qualified plurality

Unicity

Form of Corporeity

Why should we posit it?

- corpuscularian theory (= no substantial form) cannot account for the distinction between alteration and generation
- it explains why a thing exists as long as it does (diachronic identity)
- it also accounts for synchronic identity (where is the boundary between one thing and another?)

2 aspects of substantial form:

- 1 **Metaphysical**: as an abstract entity; they account for the metaphysical structure of the world
- 2 **Physical**: as a kind of cause (efficient cause?) that regulates the existence of substance.

Reminder &
introduction

Substantial Form

Plurality debate

Elements and mixture

The problem of mixture

Plurality

Qualified plurality

Unicity

Form of Corporeity

The Plurality of Substantial Form

How many Substantial Forms do we need to posit in a substance?

- **Unitarian position:** Aquinas, Albert the Great, etc.: we must posit only 1 substantial form; otherwise can't account for substantial unity.
- **Pluralism:** Ockham, Scotus, etc.: there are special cases where more than 1 substantial form should be posited.

2 main cases discussed in the debate:

- ① **Elements** composing a mixture – what happens with their substantial form?
- ② **Corporeity** and the problem of surviving accidents

Reminder &
introduction

Substantial Form

Plurality debate

Elements and mixture

The problem of mixture

Plurality

Qualified plurality

Unicity

Form of Corporeity

The Problem of Mixture

How do the elements compose a body?

- do the elements remain after they compose a body?
 - if they do, then it seems there is no real composition
 - if they don't, how can they *explain* anything? (And we also want them to be retrievable.)
- elements consist of prime matter + substantial form
- \implies the real question: do the substantial forms of the elements remain after they compose a body?



Reminder & introduction

Substantial Form

Plurality debate

Elements and mixture

The problem of mixture

Plurality

Qualified plurality

Unicity

Form of Corporeity

Positions regarding the Mixture

- 1 **Avicenna's position:** the substantial forms of the elements remain.
(Plurality view)
- 2 **Averroes's position:** the substantial forms of the elements remain as reduced to some intermediate. (Qualified plurality view)
- 3 **Aquinas's position:** the substantial forms of the elements don't remain at all; there is always just 1 substantial form in every composite.
(Unicity view)

Reminder &
introduction

Substantial Form

Plurality debate

Elements and mixture

The problem of mixture

Plurality

Qualified plurality

Unicity

Form of Corporeity

1. The Plurality View (Avicenna)

Argument for the view:

- if the elements don't remain, there is corruption of the elements, not a mixture
- (Assumption: if the substantial forms of the elements don't remain, the elements don't remain – substantial form is an essential metaphysical part.)

Reminder &
introduction

Substantial Form

Plurality debate

Elements and mixture

The problem of mixture

Plurality

Qualified plurality

Unicity

Form of Corporeity

1. The Plurality View (Avicenna)

Against the view (Aquinas):

- If the SF of elements remain, are they in the same part of matter or different parts?
- the same chunk of matter cannot take on contrary forms, so they must be in different parts.
- In order for matter to have different parts, it must have quantity already.
- So, these different parts of matter: consist of matter, have quantity, and (per our assumption) have a substantial form (sc. the form of the element).
- But this is just what a body is! So, the different parts of matters would be themselves bodies.
- **But one body cannot be many bodies at once.**
- So, if the elements remain, there is no true mixture.

Reminder & introduction

Substantial Form

Plurality debate

Elements and mixture

The problem of mixture

Plurality

Qualified plurality

Unicity

Form of Corporeity

2. The Qualified Plurality View (Averroes)

Argument for the view: both the alternatives are absurd.

But what does this mean?

- the substantial forms of the elements do remain
- but they remain as reduced to some kind of an intermediate
- the forms of these elements are midway between substantial and accidental forms
- they admit of degrees

Reminder &
introduction

Substantial Form

Plurality debate

Elements and mixture

The problem of mixture

Plurality

Qualified plurality

Unicity

Form of Corporeity

2. The Qualified Plurality View (Averroes)

Against the view (Aquinas): There cannot be such an intermediary between substantial and accidental forms.

- there cannot be an intermediate between affirmation and negation (law of excluded middle); but substance and accident are such (an accident is in a subject, a substance isn't); therefore, there can't be an intermediate between substance and accident.
- there cannot be an intermediary between things that are not in the same genus; but substance and accident are such.
- substantial forms cannot admit of degrees.
- SF determines the species. So if there are degrees of SF, then the change in degree will be a change in species – but then we end up with many species of fire, which would be absurd.

Reminder &
introduction

Substantial Form

Plurality debate

Elements and mixture

The problem of mixture

Plurality

Qualified plurality

Unicity

Form of Corporeity

3. The Unicity View (Aquinas)

Recall the desiderata: we need *true* mixture, and yet not totally corrupted elements.

- let's start from the active and passive qualities of the elements (hot, cold, dry, wet); these admit of degrees and are pairs of contraries.
- \implies an intermediate can be constructed (analogy: white+black \rightarrow gray; hot+cold \rightarrow tepid, etc.).
- So, the quality of the mixed body is constructed like these from the elementary qualities.
- The resulting quality will be the disposition proper to the substantial form of the mixed body; but it will also contain the elemental qualities.
- The elementary qualities are due to the elements' substantial form.
- \implies the substantial forms of the elements are preserved, but not in their actuality, but only *virtually* (= by their power)

Reminder & introduction

Substantial Form

Plurality debate

Elements and mixture

The problem of mixture

Plurality

Qualified plurality

Unicity

Form of Corporeity

Composite = prime matter + substantial form + accidents

- **Puzzle:** accidents (at least some of them) seem to survive throughout substantial change — how is that possible?
- Scotus: the body of a living thing can exist w/o the living thing! (cf. funerals, etc.)
- (Assumption: accidents cannot jump from substance to substance – otherwise, we wouldn't know what individuates them.)

Reminder &
introduction

Substantial Form

Plurality debate

Elements and mixture

The problem of mixture

Plurality

Qualified plurality

Unicity

Form of Corporeity

1. The Pluralist

- **From observation:** The unitarian must hold that for any substance, when its corrupted, only its prime matter remains. But if all the qualities are numerically distinct from what they were when in the substance, then why are they so similar?
- **Ingredients-argument:** More than just prime matter must endure through substantial change, otherwise the ingredients would not matter.
- **Ice-cube argument:** Some of the accidents seem to have explanatory power why a change happens; but this would be impossible if they didn't survive.
- (Possible solution: accidents inhere in prime matter directly)

Reminder &
introduction

Substantial Form

Plurality debate

Elements and mixture

The problem of mixture

Plurality

Qualified plurality

Unicity

Form of Corporeity

2. The Unitarian

- There would be no way to account for the unity of substances if they had more than 1 substantial forms.
- In the human case, the Plurality View could also lead to mind-body dualism (a la Plato et al.).
- We need 1 organising principle for a substance to be organised; hence, 1 substantial form must be responsible for all the substance's behaviours and characteristics.

Reminder &
introduction

Substantial Form

Plurality debate

Elements and mixture

The problem of mixture

Plurality

Qualified plurality

Unicity

Form of Corporeity

- 1 Unitarianism: Just 1 substantial form. — Implies that only prime matter survives substantial change; a corpse has absolutely nothing to do with the body that once the living human possessed, there is no accident in common between them.
- 2 If we want to say that accidents survive, then we have to say that something more survives through substantial change than prime matter. This is possible in two ways:
 - 1 there is more than one substantial form; some accidents inhere in the composite of PM + the lower SF (but then problems about the unity of substances)
 - 2 some accidents inhere in prime matter directly, and this mixture survives (weird; it would make accidental forms prior in the order of explanation than substantial forms)

Reminder & introduction

Substantial Form

Plurality debate

Elements and mixture

The problem of mixture

Plurality

Qualified plurality

Unicity

Form of Corporeity