

QUESTION 119

The Propagation of Man with respect to the Body

Next we have to consider the propagation of man with respect to the body. And on this topic there are two questions: (1) Is anything in the food converted into the very reality of human nature (*convertatur in veritatem humanae naturae*)? (2) Does semen, which is the principle of human generation, come from what is left over in the food (*sit de superfluo alimenti*)?

Article 1

Does anything of the food change into the very reality of human nature?

It seems that nothing of the food changes into the very reality of human nature (*transeat in veritatem humanae naturae*):

Objection 1: Matthew 15:17 says, “What enters the mouth goes to the belly and is expelled into the latrine.” But what is expelled does not change into the very reality of human nature. Therefore, nothing of the food changes into the very reality of human nature.

Objection 2: In *De Generatione and Corruptione* 1 the Philosopher distinguishes flesh according to its species (*caro secundum speciem*) from flesh according to its matter (*caro secundum materiam*), and he says that flesh according to its matter comes and goes. But what is generated from food comes and goes. Therefore, what food is converted into is flesh according to its matter and not flesh according to its species. But what pertains to the very reality of human nature is what pertains to its species. Therefore, food does not change into the very reality of human nature.

Objection 3: What pertains to the very reality of human nature seems to be “root moisture (*humidum radicale*),” which, as the physicians (*medici*) claim, is such that once it is lost, it cannot be restored. But this sort of moisture would itself be able to be restored if food were converted into it. Therefore, nutrients (*nutrimentum*) are not converted into the very reality of human nature.

Objection 4: If food changed into the very reality of human nature, then whatever is lost in a man could be restored. But man’s death occurs only through the loss of something. Therefore, a man could be guarded against death forever by the consumption of food.

Objection 5: If food changed into the very reality of human nature, then there would be nothing in a man that is not able to pass away and be replaced (*recedere et reparari*), since what is generated in a man from food is able both to pass away and to be replaced. Therefore, if a man lived for a long time, it would follow that nothing that was in him materially at the beginning of his generation remains in him at the end. And so he would not be numerically the same man throughout his whole life, since identity of matter is required in order for something to be numerically the same. But this seems absurd. Therefore, food does not change into the very reality of human nature.

But contrary to this: In *De Vera Religione* Augustine says, “When the flesh’s nourishment is corrupted, i.e., when it loses its own form, it changes into the stuff of the members of the body.” But “the stuff of the members of the body” has to do with the very reality of human nature. Therefore, food changes into the very reality of human nature.

I respond: According to the Philosopher in *Metaphysics* 2, each thing is related to true reality (*ad veritatem*) in the same way that it is related to *esse*. Therefore, what pertains to the very reality of any given nature is what enters into the constitution of the nature itself.

However, there are two possible ways to think about a nature: (a) *in general (in communi)*, in accord with the notion of its species, and (b) *insofar as it exists in this individual (in hoc individuo)*. Therefore, it is a nature’s form and matter taken in general that are relevant to the very reality of the

nature thought of in general, whereas it is the individual designated matter (*materia individualis signata*) and the form individuated by this sort of matter that are relevant to the very reality of the nature insofar as it is thought of as existing in *this* particular thing. For instance, what belongs to the very reality of human nature in general are a human soul and a human body, whereas what belongs to the very reality of human nature in Peter or Martin are *this* soul and *this* body.

Now there are some things whose forms cannot be preserved except in a singular designated matter (*nisi in una materia signata*); for instance, the sun's form cannot be preserved except in the matter that is actually contained under it. In this same way, some have claimed that the human form can be preserved only in a certain designated matter, viz., that matter which was informed from the beginning by such a form in the first man. The result is that whatever else has been added beyond that which flowed from the first parent to his descendants has nothing to do with the very reality of human nature and does not truly, as it were, receive the form of human nature. But the matter that was subject to the human form in the first man is increased within itself (*multiplicata in seipsa*), and it is in this way that a multitude of human bodies is derived from the body of the first man. According to these thinkers, food is not converted into the very reality of human nature. They claim instead that food is received as a sort of kindling wood (*fomentum*) for the nature in order that the nature might resist the action of natural heat, so that its radical moisture is not consumed—in the way that lead or an alloy is added to silver in order that the silver might not be consumed by fire.

However, this position is unreasonable in several ways.

First, a form's being able to come to exist in a different matter (*feri in alia materia*) is equivalent to (*est eiusdem rationis*) its being able to withdraw from its own matter (*deserere propriam materiam*); and this is why all generable entities are corruptible, and vice versa. But it is clear that the human form is able to withdraw from that matter which is subject to it (*deficere ab hac materia quae ei subiicitur*); otherwise, the human body would not be corruptible. Hence, it follows that the human form is likewise able to come to a different matter (*advenire alii materiae*), so that something else changes into the very reality of human nature.

Second, in all those things whose matter is found as a whole in a single individual, there is just a single individual in the relevant species; this is clear in the case of the sun and the moon and other things of this sort. So, then, there would be only a single individual in the human species.

Third, an increase of matter (*multiplicatio materiae*) is impossible except either (a) merely with respect to quantity, as happens in the case of things that are rarified and whose matter takes on bigger dimensions, or (b) with respect to the substance of matter as well. Now as long as the very same substance of matter remains, one cannot claim that the matter is increased; for the same thing does not constitute a multitude with respect to itself, since all multiplicity must be caused by some sort of division. Hence, some other substance of matter must come into play, either through creation or through the conversion of something else into the substance of matter. Hence, it follows that matter cannot be increased except either (a) through *rarefaction*, as when air comes to be from water, or (b) through the *conversion* of some other thing into the matter, as when a fire is increased through the addition of pieces of wood, or (c) through the *creation* of matter. But it is clear that the increase of matter in human bodies does not occur through rarefaction, since if that were so, then the bodies of men who have reached a full age would be more imperfect than the bodies of children. Nor, again, does it occur through the creation of new matter, since, according to Gregory, all things were created together with respect to the substance of matter, even if not with respect to the species of form. Hence, what follows is that the increase of the human body occurs only through food being converted into the very reality of the human body.

Fourth, since man does not differ from animals and plants as far as the vegetative soul is concerned, it would follow that the bodies of animals and plants likewise increase not through the conversion of food into the nourished body, but through some sort of increase that cannot be natural, since matter by its

nature extends only to some set quantity. Nor, again, does anything increase naturally except through rarefaction or through the conversion of something else into it. And so all the work of the generative and nutritive powers, which are called natural powers, would be miraculous. But this is altogether ridiculous.

Hence, others have claimed that the human form can come to exist *de novo* in some other matter, as long as human nature is considered in general, but not if it is considered insofar as it exists in *this* individual, in which the human form remains fixed in a certain determinate matter on which it was first impressed in the generation of *this* individual—with the result that the form never leaves that particular matter until the ultimate corruption of the individual. And they claim that it is this matter that pertains *principally* to the very reality of human nature. However, since matter of this sort is not enough for the right quantity, it is required that a distinct matter come into play through the conversion of food into the substance of the thing that is nourished, as much as is required for the right amount of increase. This matter, they claim, pertains *in a secondary sense* to the very reality of human nature, since it is required for the individual's quantity but not for his primary *esse*. And if anything else comes from the food, it does not pertain to the very reality of human nature, properly speaking.

However, this is likewise absurd.

First, this opinion thinks of the matter of living bodies along the same lines as the matter of non-living bodies, which are such that even if they have the power to generate something similar to themselves in species, they nonetheless do not have the power to generate something similar to themselves within the individual (*secundum individuum*)—which is the sort of power that the nutritive power is within living things. Therefore, nothing would be added to living bodies through the nutritive power if food were not converted into the very reality of their nature.

Second, as was explained above (q. 118, a. 1), the active power that exists in the semen is a certain impression derived from the soul of that which generates. Hence, semen cannot have a greater power to act than does the very soul from which it is derived. Therefore, if by the power of the semen some matter truly assumes the form of human nature, then *a fortiori* the soul would be able through its nutritive power to impress the very form of human nature on a conjoined nutriment.

Third, nutrition is needed not only for growth (since otherwise it would not be necessary once growth ends), but also for the restoration of what is lost through the action of natural heat. But there would be no such restoration if that which is generated from food did not take the place of what has been lost. Therefore, just as that which first existed belongs to the very reality of human nature, so too does that which is generated from food.

And so, according to others, one should reply that food is truly converted into the very reality of human nature insofar as it truly receives the species of flesh and of bone and of the other parts of the body. And this is why the Philosopher says in *De Anima 2* that food nourishes insofar as it is flesh in potentiality.

Reply to objection 1: Our Lord does not say that *the entirety of (totum)* what enters the mouth is expelled into the latrine, but rather *each thing (omne)* that enters the mouth. For in every sort of food there is something impure that is expelled into the latrine.

An alternative reply is that, as Jerome explains, if anything is generated from food, it can likewise be dissolved by natural heat and emitted through certain hidden pores.

Reply to objection 2: By 'flesh according to its species' some have understood that which first receives the human species that is taken from the one who generates it, and this, they claim, always remains for as long as the individual endures. On the other hand, they claim that it is 'flesh according to its matter' which is generated from food, and this, they claim, does not remain forever but instead goes just as it comes.

However, this reply is contrary to what Aristotle means. For in the place in question he says that just as in everything that has a species in matter, e.g., wood or stone, so too in flesh there is something

according to its species and something according to its matter. But it is clear that the distinction mentioned above [in the previous paragraph] has no application in the case of inanimate things, which are neither generated from seed nor nourished. And, again, since that which is generated from food is adjoined to the nourished body in the manner of a mixture, in the way that water is mixed with wine—the example that the Philosopher uses in the same place—the nature of that which comes cannot be different from the nature of that to which it comes, since it has already been made one with it through a genuine mixture. Hence there is no reason why the one should be consumed by natural heat and the other should remain.

And so one should reply that this distinction of the Philosopher's has nothing to do with diverse kinds of flesh. Rather, it is a distinction within the same flesh according to the different ways of considering it. For if flesh is considered according to its species, i.e., with respect to what is formal in it, then it always remains the same, since the nature of flesh always remains, along with its natural disposition. On the other hand, if the flesh is considered according to its matter, then it does not as such remain, but is gradually consumed and restored—as is clear in the case of a fire in a furnace, the form of which always remains, even though its matter is gradually consumed and another matter is substituted in its place.

Reply to objection 3: *Root moisture* is thought of as having to do with the entirety of what the power of the species is grounded in. If it is taken away, then it cannot be restored, just as if a hand or a foot or something of that sort were amputated.

On the other hand, *nutrimental moisture* is that which has not yet reached the point of receiving the nature of the species perfectly, but is on its way toward this, in the way that blood and other things of that sort are. Hence, if such things are taken away, the power of the species still remains in its root, which is not destroyed.

Reply to objection 4: Every power in a passible body is weakened by continual action, since agents of this sort are also acted upon. And thus the power of conversion is at the beginning so strong that it can convert not only what is sufficient to restore what has been lost, but also what is sufficient for growth. But afterwards it is able to convert only what is sufficient for replacing what is lost, and at that point growth ceases. In the end, it cannot do either of these, and then diminution occurs. Then, when a power of this sort is totally lacking, the animal dies. Similarly, to use the Philosopher's example in *De Generatione et Corruptione* 1, the power of wine to convert water mixed with it is weakened little by little by the wine's being mixed with more water, until in the end the whole becomes watery.

Reply to objection 5: As the Philosopher says in *De Generatione et Corruptione* 1, when a given matter is converted by itself (*per se*) into a fire, then the fire is said to be generated *de novo*, but when a given matter is converted into a preexistent fire, then the fire is said to be 'nourished'. Hence, if the whole matter loses the species of fire all at once, and another matter is converted into fire, then the latter will be a numerically distinct fire.

On the other hand, if, while one piece of wood is being gradually consumed by a fire, another piece is added, and so on until the all of the first piece of wood is consumed, then numerically the same fire will always remain, since it is always the case that what is being added changes into the preexistent fire. Something similar should be understood to occur in the case of living things, in which what is restored by nourishment is what has been consumed by natural heat.

Article 2

Does the semen come from what is left over in the food?

It seems that the semen comes not from what is left over in the food, but rather from the substance of the one who generates:

Objection 1: Damascene says, “Generation is a work of nature which produces what is generated from the substance of the one who generates.” But what is generated is generated from the semen. Therefore, the semen comes from the substance of the one who generates.

Objection 2: A son is similar to his father because he receives something from him. But if the semen from which something is generated came from what is left over in the food, then a man would receive nothing from his grandfather or his more distant ancestors, in whom this food did not in any way exist. Therefore, a man would not be more similar to his grandfather or to his more distant ancestors than he is to other men.

Objection 3: The food of a man who generates sometimes comes from the flesh of cows or pigs or other animals of this sort. Therefore, if the semen came from what is left over in the food, a man generated from that semen would have more affinity to a cow or a pig than to his father or other blood relatives.

Objection 4: In *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 10, Augustine says, “We existed in Adam not only with respect to the seminal idea (*secundum seminalem rationem*), but also with respect to the corpulent substance.” But this would not be the case if the semen came from what is left over in the food. Therefore, the semen does not come from what is left over in the food.

But contrary to this: In *De Generatione Animalium* the Philosopher proves in many ways that the semen is what is left over in the food.

I respond: This question depends in some sense on what has gone before (a. 1 and q. 118, a. 1). For if there exists in a human nature a power to communicate its own form to another matter not only within some distinct being but also within itself, then it is clear that food, which is in the beginning dissimilar to human nature, becomes in the end similar to it through the communicated form. But the order of nature is such that a thing is brought gradually from potentiality to actuality, and so in those things that are generated we find that each is at first imperfect and afterwards is brought to perfection.

Now it is clear that what is general is related to what is proper and determinate as the imperfect is related to the perfect. And so we see that in the generation of an animal, the animal is generated before the man or the horse (cf. q. 118, a. 2). So, then, food itself likewise receives at first a certain general power with respect to all the parts of the body, and afterwards is channelled (*determinatur*) to this part or that part.

Now it is impossible that what has already been converted into the substance of members of the body should then be used for the semen through some sort of decomposition (*per quandam resolutionem*). For if what is decomposed did not retain the nature from which it was decomposing, then it would already be withdrawing from the nature of the generating thing and would be on a path to corruption, so to speak; and so it would not have the power to convert a distinct thing into a similar nature. On the other hand, if it retained the nature from which it was decomposing, then, since it would have been channelled (*esset contractum*) to a determinate part [of the body], it would have the power to effect movement only toward the nature of that part and not toward the nature of the whole. Perhaps someone might claim, though, that it would be decomposed from *all* the parts of the body and that it would retain the nature of every part. In that case the semen would be like a sort of small animal in actuality (*quasi quoddam parvum animal in actu*), and the generation of an animal from an animal would

occur only through division—in the way that mud is generated from mud, and as happens in the case of animals that live after having been divided. But this is absurd.

Therefore, it follows that the semen is not separated off from anything that was an actual whole; instead, as was explained above (a. 1 and q. 108, a. 1), it is a whole in potentiality, having the power to produce the whole of the body that is derived from the soul of the one who generates. But what is in potentiality to the whole is what is generated from food before it is converted into the substance of the members of the body. And so this is what the semen is taken from. And the nutritive power is said to serve the generative power because what is converted through the nutritive power is received as semen by the generative power. The Philosopher posits, as an indication of this, the fact that animals with large bodies, which need a lot of nourishment, have little semen in proportion to the quantity of their bodies and few instances of generation—and, similarly, fat men have little semen, and for the same reason.

Reply to objection 1: In plants and animals generation comes from the substance of that which generates, because the semen has its power from the form of that which generates and because it is in potentiality with respect to the substance of that thing.

Reply to objection 2: The similarity between what generates and what is generated does not come about because of the matter; rather, it comes about because of the form of the agent, which generates something similar to itself. Hence, for someone to be similar to his grandfather, it is not necessary that the corporeal matter of the semen should have existed in the grandfather. Instead, what is necessary is that the semen have a power derived from the soul of the grandfather, through the mediation of the father.

Reply to objection 3: The reply to the third objection is the same. For affinity is thought of not with respect to the matter, but rather with respect to the derivation of the form.

Reply to objection 4: This passage from Augustine should not be understood to be saying that there actually existed in Adam either (a) a seminal idea related to *this* man or (b) *this* man's bodily substance. Instead, both of these existed in Adam as in their origin (*secundum originem*). For corporeal matter, which is supplied by the mother and which is what Augustine is calling "the corpulent substance," is derived from Adam as its origin. And the same thing holds for the active power which exists in the father's semen and which is the proximate seminal idea of *this* man.

However, Christ is said to have existed in Adam with respect to His corpulent substance and not with respect to His seminal idea. For the matter of His body, which was supplied by His virgin mother, is derived from Adam, but the active power was not derived from Adam, since His body was formed not by the power of a man's semen, but by the operation of the Holy Spirit. For "such a birth was becoming to Him," who is the blessed God over all things, forever and ever. Amen.