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# Chapter 9

## Digby on Accidents



Han Thomas Adriaenssen

**Abstract** In his *Two Treatises*, Digby rejects real accidents, or accidents conceived as actual beings in themselves over and above the substances whose accidents they are. At the same time, however, he also claims that there is a real ‘divisibility’ between a substance and its quantity. According to some commentators, this suggests that quantity for Digby is a real accident after all. In this paper I argue that it is not. The divisibility between substance and quantity Digby accepts is too weak to turn quantity into what Digby calls an actual being in itself. Once we have a better understanding of what Digby means when he denies that accidents are actual beings in themselves, some of the more problematic sides of the criticism he levels against his Aristotelian predecessors will also become apparent. When Digby criticizes accidents as actual beings in themselves, he often accuses the scholastic Aristotelians of treating locations as such. But once we take a closer look at the scholastic theory he criticizes in this connection, we see that this theory does not do that.

### 9.1 Introduction

According to Digby, the framework of the Aristotelian ten categories provides the most natural way to conceive of the objects we encounter. When objects leave their impressions on our senses, indeed, we are naturally led to conceive of them as substances endowed with accidents of various kinds. We are led to conceive of them as substances that have certain qualities and quantities, which bear certain relations to other substances, which exist in some given place and time, which have certain postures and habits, which engage in certain actions, and which undergo certain passions as they are acted upon by others:

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For when any object occurreth to our thoughts, we either consider the essential and fundamentall Being of it; or we referre it to some species of Quantity; or we discover some qualities in it; or we perceive that it doeth, or that it suffereth some thing; or we conceive it in some determinate place, or time, and the like. (TT 5)

Now as Digby knew well, the categories framework had traditionally come hand in hand with questions about the ontological status of accidents.<sup>1</sup> Are accidents real, in the sense that they are actual beings in themselves, over and above the substances whose accidents they are? Or can accidents somehow be reduced to these substances and their material parts?

In the opening chapter of the *Two Treatises*, the Digby seems to firmly deny real accidents.<sup>2</sup> When we hold an apple in our hands, he tells us, we may zoom in on its quantity or colour alone without consideration for the substance whose quantity or colour they are. But we must not be tempted to conclude from this that the quantity or colour of an apple are so many actual beings in themselves:

In my mind, every one of these notions is a distinct picture by it selfe, and is as much severed from any of the rest arising from the apple, as it would be from any impression or image made in me, by a stone or any other substance whatsoever, that being entire in it selfe and circumscribed within its owne circle, is absolutely sequestered from any communication with the other. . . . Whereby, if I not be very cautious, . . . I shall be in danger before I am aware, to give actual Beings to the quantity, figure, colour, smell, tast, and other accidents of the apple, each of them distinct from an other, as also from the substance, which they clothe. (TT 3)

But when, in chapter three of the First Treatise, Digby comes to the relation substances bear to their quantities, he warns his readers that a brief metaphysical excursus will be necessary:

I must entreate my readers favour, that he will allow me to touch upon metaphysickes a little more then I desire or intended: but it shall be no otherwise, then as is said, of the dogges by the river Nilus side; who being thirsty, lappe hastily of the water, onely to serve their necessity as they runne along the shore. (TT 22)

In the discussion that follows, we are told that ‘besides Quantity there be a substance’ whose quantity it is (TT 22), that we need to admit in bodies a ‘composition of substance with quantity’ (TT 24), and that, in brief, there is a ‘reall divisibility betweene quantity and substance’ (TT 26).

These claims raise a question about the ontological status of quantity. For to say that we need to admit in bodies a ‘composition’ of a substance and a quantity at least gives the impression that both the substance and the quantity are actual beings in themselves. And how can there be a ‘real divisibility’ between a substance and its quantity unless both of them are actual beings? According to some commentators, indeed, Digby’s claims about quantity here and elsewhere indicate that he was willing to accept at least one kind of real accident. Thus according to Robert Pasnau, Digby combines a ‘post-scholastic rejection of real qualities with the retention of

<sup>1</sup>This paper will exclusively be concerned with the accidents of material substances.

<sup>2</sup>See also Krook 1993, 29–31, and Nauta’s contribution to this volume.

quantity' (Pasnau 2011, 286). And towards the end of her helpful discussion of quantity in Digby, Martine Pécharman writes:

It is intriguing that Digby . . . is not a deflationist on quantity as he is on qualities. When Digby subjects the predicamental accidents to a nominalist razor, he . . . denies real qualities and asserts real quantity. (Pécharman 2020, 215)

In this paper, I argue that Digby's treatment of quantity does not mark a concession to his general anti-realism about accidents. He can consistently claim that no accident is an actual being of itself, and commit to a divisibility of quantity and substance. To see how, it will be necessary to clarify what he means when he denies that accidents are actual beings of themselves, and what he means when he commits to a divisibility of substance and quantity.

I will proceed as follows. Section 9.2 clarifies what, according to Digby, it would mean for an accident to be an actual being. In Sect. 9.3 we will see why it would be impossible for accidents such as colour to be actual beings in that sense. Section 9.4 takes a closer look at the divisibility of substance and quantity, and argues that Digby can commit to a divisibility of substance and quantity, without committing to quantities as actual beings in the sense he finds problematic.

Once we have a better understanding of what Digby means when he denies that accidents are actual beings in themselves, some of the more problematic aspects of the criticism he levels against his Aristotelian predecessors will also become clearer. For when Digby criticizes accidents as actual beings in themselves, he often accuses the scholastic Aristotelians of treating locations in this way as well. But once we take a closer look at the scholastic theory he appears to be criticizing in this connection, we see that this theory does not do that.

## 9.2 Real Accidents

Digby often warns against construing accidents as actual beings. But what does he mean by this and similar terms? And what does he believe is wrong with construing accidents in this way? As we will see in this section, Digby believes that to construe accidents as actual beings is to construe them on the model of substances, and that the notion of an accident that results in this way is conceptually confused.

### 9.2.1 *Accidents as Actual Beings*

According to Digby, the most fundamental content of our minds is the concept of being: it is 'the first of all notions' our minds contain (TT 394). Part of what this means is that the natural way for the mind to represent any content, is as a being. Thus when you look at the apple in your hand, your mind will conceive of it as a being with certain features, such as being red and shiny. And when it singles out one

of these features and considers, for instance, the red colour of the apple on its own, it will conceive of this red colour as a being on its own. But to conceive of a thing as a being on its own is to conceive of it as a substance. Hence in zooming in on the red colour of the apple, the mind will be led to conceive of it as if it were a substance:

We attribute the nature of substance to all our notions: if we see a thing white, or blacke, or doe, or suffer, or be in a place, or in time; presently in our apprehension we conceive these modifications of the thing, like substances; and accordingly we call them by substantive names, *Whiteness, Action, Ubication, Duration*, etc.<sup>3</sup>

According to Digby, this kind of conception of accidents was in fact a common one among the scholastic Aristotelians, who often

will have them to be reall *Entities* or *Things*, distinct from the bodies they accompany. (TT 39)

But to conceive of an accident as a real thing or entity in itself, distinct from its bearer, according to Digby just is to conceive of it as if it were a substance:

A reall Entity or thing, must necessarily have an *Existence* or *Being* of its owne: which they allow them. And whatsoever hath so, becometh a substance. (TT 39)

Digby does not refer to any particular sources here, but it is not difficult to find the kind of view he is describing here defended by prominent scholastic authors.<sup>4</sup> For the kind of assimilation of accidents to substances Digby is describing here was often deemed to be necessary to account for the miracle of the Eucharist.<sup>5</sup>

After the consecration of the host, we continue to perceive several accidents of the bread. Thus we continue to perceive its quantity and its colour. But since the bread whose accidents they were has gone to make place for the body of Christ, there no longer seems to be a bearer for these accidents. After all, the body of Christ does not look like bread, and in general, accidents do not migrate from one substance to another. So what the miracle of the Eucharist suggests is that, after the consecration of the host, accidents such as the quantity and colour of bread subsist without a bearer and so come to behave in the manner of substances. Or in the words of the sixteenth-century Dominican, Domingo de Soto,

by a divine power, they truly exist on their own, so that after the consecration of the host, they in some way come to be in the way of a substance.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>In his *On the Origine of Formes and Qualities*, Robert Boyle, too, argued that the human mind has a tendency to project its own substantial nature onto the things it considers:

The mind of men is prone to conceive almost every Thing (nay even Privations, as Blindnesse, Death, etc.) under the notion of a true Entitie or Substance as it self is. (B V 316–17)

This explains why we are tempted to conceive even of sensory qualities as if they were ‘real Beings in the Objects they denominate’, or substance-like entities in their own right.

<sup>4</sup>On quality realism as a scholastic majority view, see Pasnau 2011, 401–2.

<sup>5</sup>For overviews of late-medieval accounts of the Eucharist, see Bakker 1999 and Adams 2010.

<sup>6</sup>‘Vero per se substanti virtute divina, sic ut per consecrationem acquirant quodammodo illud esse, ut ad modum substantiae sint’. In *quartum Sententiarum* 11.1.1 (Soto 1569, 434). Suárez, citing Soto, adopts a similar position in *De sacramentis* 57.3.8 (in Suárez 1856–1878, vol. 21, 287).

Digby, however, rejects the idea that accidents could subsist without a substance to bear them, and reasons that, if to give actual being to accidents is in a way to turn them into substances, we must resist the temptation to give actual being to accidents. But if Aristotelians such as Soto were willing to accept that accidents could ‘in some way come to be in the way of a substance’, what does Digby believe is wrong with this view?

### 9.2.2 *Against Accidents as Actual Beings*

In the Fourth Replies, Descartes had claimed that it is a conceptual confusion to allow that an accident could exist apart from a substance to bear it. By definition, an accident is something that needs a substance to exist in, and whose accident it is. Hence, the moment we allow that some given accident could exist apart from a substance, we are actually denying that it is an accident:

If something real is understood to remain it must be thought of as something which subsists; and though the word ‘accident’ may be used to describe it, it must nonetheless be conceived of as a substance. . . . And though this may not be a verbal contradiction, it certainly involves a conceptual contradiction. (AT VII 253, CSM II 176)

A similar line of argument can be found in Digby. When Aristotelian scholastics describe an accident such as the colour of the host as a real being, they describe it as a substance, or something that does not need a bearer in which to inhere. But when they describe it as an accident, they describe it as something that does need a bearer in which to inhere, accidents being defined by a dependence upon a bearer. In describing the colour of the host as a real being that is also an accident, then, they describe it as something that does and does not need a bearer in which to inhere at the same time:

The very notion, that their first words seeme to express of them, they contradict againe, before they make an end of describing what they are. They will have them to be reall *Entities* or *Things*, distinct from the bodies they accompany: and yet, they deny them a subsistence or self being; saying they do not but inhere in their subject, which supporteth them; or which is all one, that their being is a dependence of a subject. (TT 39)

At this point it may seem as if Digby is not being entirely fair to his opponents. When he writes that ‘accidents do not but inhere in their subject’, or that ‘their being is a dependence of a subject’, he seems to assume that it is essential to the nature of an accident that it inhere in a substance. But this is a premise many scholastic theologians would wish to qualify. Indeed, according to a view tracing back at least to Thomas Aquinas, what is essential to the nature of accidents is not so much their actual inherence in a substance, but rather the fact that they incline towards inherence in a substance. On this view, even if after the consecration of the host the accidents of the bread cease to inhere in a substance,

they do not cease to be accidents, because the essence of an accident, which consists in an inclination towards a subject they always retain, and not in actual inherence in a subject, is not taken away from them.<sup>7</sup>

Digby does not discuss this view, so we can only speculate about how he would have responded to it. Perhaps he believed that accidents of material substances are not the kind of things that can be said to ‘incline’ to one mode of being rather than another. Or perhaps he found that, if accidents are construed as things that do not behave like substances for most of the time as a matter of natural but not necessary fact, the line between substances and accidents becomes suspiciously thin, and we are again on our way to abandoning the distinction altogether.

But if accidents are not actual beings over and above the substances whose accidents they are, what are they? As we will see in the following two sections, the qualities of a body are a function of its atomic make-up. This of course makes it hard to see what it would even mean for them to subsist apart of a body.<sup>8</sup> And even though a body and its quantity are in some sense divisible and ‘condistinguished’, there is no implication that quantity for Digby would be able to survive without a material substance whose quantity it was.

### 9.3 Quality

According to Digby, the material substances we see around us are built up out of minute portions of the four Aristotelian elements of earth, water, fire and air. Even though he holds matter to be divisible without end, Digby often refers to these minute portions of the elements as atoms, apparently using that word in a loose sense to stand for portions of matter that resist further division in practice, even if not in principle.<sup>9</sup>

The way in which atoms of the four elements combine in some given body according to Digby determines how it will behave and what qualities it has. Or as Digby puts it towards the end of the First Treatise:

All the nature of bodies, their qualities, and their operations, are compassed by the mingling of atoms.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> ‘Non desinunt esse accidentia, quia nec separatur ab eis definitio accidentis, quae est aptitudo ad subjectum, quae semper manet in iis, non actualis inhaerentia’ (*Summa theologiae* 3.77.1). A similar view can be found in Suárez, *De sacramentis* 77.2 (in Suárez 1856–1878, vol. 21, 270–78).

<sup>8</sup> Digby offers no positive account of his own of what happens to the accidents of the bread after the consecration of the host. On Thomas White’s attempt to account for the accidents of the host without resorting to real accidents, see Connolly 2018, in particular 526–28. Also Southgate 1993, 117, and Tutino 2008, 34–35.

<sup>9</sup> On Digby on atoms, see Henry 1982 and Clericuzio 2000, 81–6. Also Newman 2001, 305–6.

<sup>10</sup> TT 343. See also TT 223. Digby also speaks of the bodies we see around as ‘mixtures’ of the four elements, and claims that this account traces back to Aristotle (TT 343). But whereas Aristotle had held that a true mixture of elements will result in a homogeneous material, Digby does not believe that mixture yields homogeneity, and holds mixed bodies to be ‘composed of heterogeneall partes’ (TT 143). On Digby and the Aristotelian notion of mixture, see Blank 2007, 7–14, and Adriaenssen and de Boer 2019, 62–65. Also Schmidgen 2012, 38–39.

Thus in metals, wet and dry atoms are mixed in such a way that the wet ones serve as the glue that binds the dry ones together. The fact that dry atoms are so bound together by a wet material, according to Digby, is what gives metals their suppleness:

Their ductility and malleability plainly telleth us, that the smallest of waters grosse partes, are the glew that holdeth the earthy dense ones together. (TT 125)

In Digby, this kind of account of the qualities of material substances goes hand in hand with a commitment to what has come to be known as the doctrine of potential parts. According to this doctrine, wholes and their parts differ in ontological status, in that wholes are actual beings, but their parts are not. The parts of a whole are potential beings, in the sense that they are things that could be obtained if the whole were to be divided. But prior to such division, the parts of a whole are not actual.<sup>11</sup> Or as Digby also puts it, prior to the division of a whole into parts, the parts are not really there. A body

is but one *whole* that may indeed be cut into so many severall partes: but those partes are not really there, till by division they are parcelled out: and then, the whole (out of which they are made) ceaseth to be any longer, and the partes succede in lieu of it. (TT 10)

This has implications for how we read the above account of the pliability of metals. Taken at face value, this account appears to invite a picture of a piece of metal as a string of actual parts of wet and dry matter, and seems to say that it is the way these actual parts of wet and dry matter are ordered that makes the string that results from them pliable and soft. But the doctrine of potential parts denies that there are any such actual parts of wet and dry matter. So given the potential parts doctrine Digby is committed to, how should we understand his idea that the pliability of a piece of metal is a function of the way it is made up of wet and dry bits of matter?

I take it that when Digby says that a piece of metal is pliable because of the alternation of wet and dry parts, what he means is something like this: the piece of metal is pliable, because it is such that, if we were to start on one side of the metal and slice it up into minute pieces, we would obtain wet and dry bits of matter in alternation. Conversely, when he says that a material is stiff because of the preponderance of dry parts in it, I take it he means something like this: the material is stiff, because it is such that, if we were to start on one side and slice it up into minute pieces, we would obtain mostly hard and dry bits of matter. In general, whenever Digby says that the qualities of a body are a function of its atomic make-up, his claims must be glossed in light of his commitment to the potential parts doctrine. What gives a body its qualities are not the actual atoms that compose it, but the order and nature of the atoms one would obtain if the body were to be subjected to division.

The atomic make-up of a body also accounts for its colours. A colour, according to Digby,

is nothing else, but the disposition of a bodies superficies, as it is more or less apt to reflect light. (TT 260)

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<sup>11</sup>On Digby on potential parts, see Holden 2004, 119–26, Pasnau 2011, 621–23, and P  charman 2020.



But this disposition in its turn is a function of the way in which dry and humid atoms blend in a body. A preponderance of hard and dry atoms in a body will cause it to reflect much light and to be of a light colour. A preponderance of soft and wet atoms will cause it to reflect little light and to be of a dark colour (TT 260–61).

Again, this analysis needs to be understood in light of the potential parts doctrine. What makes a body be of a light or dark colour, then, are not the actual atomic parts that compose it, because there are no such parts. What makes a body be of a light colour is something like the following: if it were subjected to division, we would obtain a preponderance of dry and hard bits of matter. Along the same lines, what makes it be of a dark colour is the fact that it is such that, if it were subjected to division, we would mostly obtain wet and soft bits of matter.

## 9.4 Quantity

According to Digby, there is a ‘divisibility’ between substance in the sense that ‘the one of them may be changed without the other’ (TT 25). To see what this divisibility amounts to precisely, we need to take a brief look at his account of rarity and rarefaction.

### 9.4.1 *Rarity and Rarefaction*

According to some philosophers, Digby tells us, the rarity of a body is a function of its porosity. On this account, a body rarefies when its pores grow larger or become more numerous. Now this account of course raises the question of what fills these pores. A first option here would be to say that the pores of a rare body are a kind of inter-atomic voids (TT 19). But Digby rejects this version of the porosity account of rarity on the ground that ‘no vacuity is possible in nature’ (TT 21). Moreover, if rarity were the result of inter-atomic voids, one would expect rare materials to have a discontinuous structure. But the case of fluids shows this to be false:

If such vacuities were the cause of rarity; it would follow that fluide bodies being rarer then solide ones, they would be of themselves standing, like nettes or cobbewebbes: whereas contrariwise, we see their natures are to runne together, and to fill up every little creeke and corner: which effect, following out of the very nature of the thinges themselves, must needs exclude vacuities out of that nature. (TT 21)

On a second version of the porosity account of rarity, the pores of a rare body are filled up by an even rarer material. But this version fails as well. For even if material *a* may be rare in virtue of filler material *b* and *b* may be rare in virtue of the even rarer filler material *c*, Digby denies that there can be an actual infinity of ever rarer materials. Thus at some point we must arrive at a maximally rare material, and of the rarity of this material the porosity view cannot give an account. Its rarity cannot be a function of its inter-atomic voids because there are no such voids. And it cannot

be a function of an even rarer material that fills up its inter-atomic pores either, because there is no such material.<sup>12</sup>

But if the porosity account fails, in what do the phenomena of rarity and rarefaction consist? Among late medieval and early modern Aristotelians, it was common to hold that bodies can increase in quantity or extension in two ways. First, they can increase in quantity or extension by the addition of new matter. Animals increase in quantity or extension in this way as the result of nutrition. Second, they can increase in quantity or extension without the addition of new matter. When this happens, a constant portion of matter as it were inflates in a way that causes it to be spread out over a larger area of space. This is what happens in rarefaction.<sup>13</sup>

On this account, the rarity of a body can be expressed as a kind of ratio between its matter and its quantity or extension. A small mass of matter with a large quantity or extension makes for a rare body. A large mass of matter with a small quantity or extension makes for a body that is dense and compact. In the words of Francisco of Toledo:

That is called rare, which contains little matter under a large quantity. Conversely, that is called dense, which contains a lot of matter under a small quantity.<sup>14</sup>

Digby appears to commit to a similar kind of position when, in the third chapter of the First Treatise, he defines rarity and density as follows:

The essence of Rarity and Density, standeth in the proportion of quantity to substance. (TT 24)

On this account, when a body rarefies, the proportion between its substance and its quantity changes. More precisely, when a body rarefies, the same material substance will gain quantity. What does this mean? According to Digby, quantity can be defined in terms of extension and divisibility:

When we consider that Quantity is nothing else, but the extension of a thing . . . we conclude, that *Quantity or Biggnesse*, is nothing else but divisibility; and that a thing is bigge, by having a capacity to be divided, or (which is the same) to have partes made of it.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup>TT 19. The same argument can be found in White 1642, 31. For discussion, see Adriaenssen 2021, 29–30.

<sup>13</sup>For discussion, see Maier 1966, and Des Chene 1996, 107–108, 351–52. A clear formulation of the distinction between both types of increases in quantity or extension can be found in Pietro Pomponazzi's *De nutritione et augmentatione*. At the beginning of book II of that work, he describes rarefaction as follows:

Dicitur rarefactio, quando ex nullo extrinseco superveniente, aliquod ampliorem locum occupat quam occupabat. (Pomponazzi 1525, 133ra)

He notes that we sometimes say of sponges and similar bodies that they rarefy as the result of the intrusion of alien matter, but dismisses this as an improper use of the word. What happens to a sponge absorbing water is a rarefaction 'secundum nomen', not 'secundum veritatem'.

<sup>14</sup>'Rarum autem dicitur id, quod parvum materiae sub multa continet quantitate: econtra, densum, quod sub parva quantitate multum continet materiae'. In *libros Physicorum* 4.9.11 (in de Toledo 1985, vol. 4, 132).

<sup>15</sup>TT 9. See also, on the same page: 'Extension or divisibility is the common notion of Quantity'.

Hence, when a body rarefies, two things will happen to it. First, it will become more divisible. It will become more divisible, in the sense that it will become easier to divide it. As Digby explains: if the same force is applied to a body before and after rarefaction, it will divide that body into more, and more minute, parts after rarefaction than before:

If wee looke well into it, we shall find that . . . the same force will breake the rarer thing into more and lesser partes, then it will an equall one that is more dense.<sup>16</sup>

Second, it will gain extension, in the sense that the body will increase in spatial spread:

We see that the addition of a very small degree of heate, rarifyeth the ayre in a weather glasse, (the ayre receiving the impression of heate, sooner then water) and so maketh it extend it selfe into a greater place. . . . And likewise we see quickesylver and other liquors, if they be shutt up in glasses close stopped and sett in sufficient heate (and a little is sufficient for this effect) they will swell and fill their glasses; and att last breake them, rather then not find a way to give themselves more roome. (TT 145)

Note that, on the account Digby is providing, when a rarefying body increases in extension, this increase is not accompanied by the addition of matter connatural to it, the intrusion of alien material, or an increase in porosity. Indeed, the increase in extension that occurs in rarefaction appears to amount to the dilation over a larger area of a constant portion of matter whose organization remains intact in the process.

A concise statement of this account of rarefaction can also be found in Thomas White's *Euclides physicus*. In that work of 1657, White describes rarefaction as follows:

That is rarefied, which is made larger in all dimension, without the addition of new matter.<sup>17</sup>

For a fluid to rarefy, for instance, is for it to gain extension, without the addition of more fluid of the same kind, and without the intrusion of alien matter in its atomic constitution.

With this dilation over a larger area, the fluid also gains divisibility. If, for example, the fluid used to be divisible into four parts of some determinate size, in rarefaction it will come to be divisible into a larger number of parts of that size:

That which in this way becomes divisible in all dimensions in a larger number of parts of the same size, has more divisibility than before. And if it has more divisibility than before without any addition, it is clear that there is a larger proportion of quantity to substance in such a thing than before, and that the same substance accordingly participates more in the effect of quantity, that is, in divisibility.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup>TT 17. See also TT 27 and 96.

<sup>17</sup>'Quod absque additione fit majus secundum omnes dimensiones, est rarefactum'. White 1657, 101.

<sup>18</sup>'Quod itaque secundum omnes dimensiones est divisibile in plura aequalia quam prius est majus, et habet plus divisibilitatis quam prius. Et si habeat plus divisibilitatis citra additionem, manifestum est in tali quanto majorem esse proportionem Quantitatis ad substantiam quam prius fuerat, et per consequens eandem substantiam magis participare effectum Quantitatis, hoc est, divisibilitatem'. White 1657, 102.

On the account of rarefaction in Digby and White, then, a material substance can change in quantity even as its material make-up remains intact. It can do so, in the sense that it can increase in quantity without the addition of new matter of the same kind, the intrusion of alien materials, or an increase in porosity.

It appears to be in this sense that Digby holds quantity to be divisible from the substance whose quantity it was, and that ‘the one of them may be changed without the other’. But if this is correct, there seems to be no reason to think that quantity for Digby is an actual being in the sense he finds problematic. In order for quantity to be an actual being in the sense Digby finds problematic, it would have to be able to behave like a substance. It would have to be able to subsist on its own, apart from a material substance that it extends. But his account of rarefaction in no way commits Digby to this. What this account says, is that it is possible for the quantity of a body to change even as the body remains constant on the level of its material make-up.<sup>19</sup> But that does not entail that the quantity of a body could survive the body that it extends, or that it could subsist apart from a material substance to extend.

In other words, what Digby has said is that if  $S$  is a substance constituted by a certain portion of matter and  $Q$  the quantity it has at some given moment of time,  $S$  can persist without  $Q$  and continue to exist with a larger or smaller quantity instead. What he has not said, however, and need not say, is that  $Q$  can persist without  $S$ , or that it can in any way exist without  $S$  or some other substance whose quantity it is. When Digby applies Ockham’s razor to accidents understood as actual beings in themselves, he does not appear to make an exception for quantity.

## 9.5 Location

As we have seen, among the examples of accidents treated as substances, Digby mentions location, or what he calls ‘ubication’.<sup>20</sup>

In the opening chapter of the First Treatise, he tells us that this notion had been developed by some ‘scholastic masters’ in response to a perceived problem with Aristotle’s account of place. According to Aristotle, the place of an object is the boundary of the body that contains it.<sup>21</sup> Thus the place of the water in front of me is

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<sup>19</sup> Here Digby of course parts ways with thinkers such as Hobbes and Descartes, who held that the quantity or extension of a body can increase only as the result of the addition of new matter. As Descartes puts it in Chapter 7 of Part 2 of the *Principles of Philosophy*: ‘It is a complete contradiction to suppose that something could be augmented by a new quantity or new extension without new extended substance—that is, a new body—being added to it at the same time’ (AT VIIA 44, CSM I 226). See also Pasnau 2011, 71–76 for discussion.

<sup>20</sup> See TT 400, cited above at note 4. On several occasions, Digby also accuses the scholastics of treating locations as ‘entities’ (TT 7), which, as we have seen, for him amounts to treating them as substances (TT 39).

<sup>21</sup> *Physics* IV 4, 212a5–7. For detailed discussion, see Morris 2002, chapter 5.

the inner boundary of the bottle that contains it, and the place of the air that fills my room is the surface limit of the walls that surround me.

Now as Aristotle himself had been the first to point out, this account faces a problem when it comes to cases such as the world as a whole. The world as a whole arguably is somewhere, but lacks a place or containing body. Later Aristotelians added to this the case of angels. Angels are somewhere, but being immaterial, they are not contained by bodies in the way of portions of water and air, and so lack a place. This led them to conclude that it must be possible to be somewhere without having a place. It must be possible to have a location but no place.

But what can a location be if not a place? According to Digby, some Aristotelian scholastics had argued that a location is ‘an entity in the thing’ that is located (Digby 1652, 49). On this account, the location of an object is some kind of inner state of that object. And because material and immaterial substances alike can be in that kind of state, it becomes possible to locate material and immaterial substances alike, even if only material substances can be placed, or contained by surrounding bodies. As Digby summarizes in the *Two Treatises*:

They racke their thoughts to speculate out some common notion of being in place, which may be common these, as well as to bodies; like a common accident agreeing to diverse subjects. And so in the end, they pitch upon an Entity, which they call an Ubi: and they conceite the nature as formall reason of that to be, the ranking of any thing in a place, when that Entity is thereunto affixed. And then they have no further difficulty, in settling an angell or any pure spirit, or immateriall essence, in a place as properly, and as completely, as if it were a corporeall substance. It is but assigning an Ubi to such a spirit, and he is presently riveted to what place you please. (TT 7)

‘Ubies’ according to Digby, are ‘entayled’ to the things they locate (TT 33). And because ubies can be attached to material and immaterial substances alike, they provide locations for all kinds of substances alike.

Digby does not mention any proponents of the ubi theory of location by name, but accounts of this kind can be found in various scholastic authors, including perhaps most notably the Spanish Jesuit, Francisco Suárez. Below, I will describe the ubi account of location as it can be found in Suárez in some more detail. This will help us better understand the criticism Digby levels against it, and to see that he misrepresents the account at a crucial juncture.

### 9.5.1 *Suárez on Location*

In Disputation 51 of his *Metaphysical Disputations*, Suárez provides what is one of the most detailed accounts of location by a scholastic author extant today. In it, he argues that locations are a special kind of inner states of located objects. But before

he arrives at this conclusion, he begins with a brief review of the main competing accounts of location.<sup>22</sup>

The first of these says that location is simply Aristotelian place. Suárez dismisses this account on the now familiar ground that angels and other immaterial substances have a location, but no place.<sup>23</sup> They must be able to have locations, because the Bible tells us that they are capable of motion, and to move simply is to go from having one location to having another. But being immaterial substances, they are not contained by bodies in the way that the water in a bottle or the air in a room is. They have a location, but no Aristotelian place.<sup>24</sup>

According to the second account Suárez discusses, the location of a substance is a certain region of space. On this account, a substance can have a location, regardless of whether or not it is contained by a body. Location consists in the occupation of a certain region of space, not in containment by one or more surrounding bodies. So far, then, the notion of location as a region of space seems to fare better than the first account, which construed location as Aristotelian place.

But Suárez rejects the space account of location too, and points out that its proponents have so far failed to deliver a satisfactory account of what space is.<sup>25</sup> According to a view Suárez traces back to Simplicius, space is a special kind of body. But this cannot be correct, because space must be penetrable by the bodies it hosts, and bodies resist penetration by others. According to others, space is a kind of void apt to be filled up by bodies that so come to be located. But since the void exists in the imagination only, this account entails that space is imaginary.<sup>26</sup> Hence if locations are regions of space, this account entails that locations are imaginary too. But this is false again. The location of an object is a real feature it has, not a product of the imagination.<sup>27</sup>

Having ruled out these options, Suárez puts forth his own position that location is an inner state of located objects. That location must be an inner state of located objects can be seen from an analysis of local motion, or change of location. For an object to be in motion, according to Suárez, is for that object to be in a certain kind of inner state. Now this state has a beginning and an end point. But these points are just limits of the state itself. Hence they are not beings over and above the state the moving object is in. But the beginning and end points of motion are locations:

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<sup>22</sup> I here discuss the most important two of these competing accounts. For a more detailed overview, see Ribordy 2018. On Suárez on location, see also Pasnau 2011, 371–73, and Adriaenssen 2021, 14–20.

<sup>23</sup> See *De angelis* 4.1 (in Suárez 1856–1878, vol. 2, 422).

<sup>24</sup> ‘Existencia in loco est proprium corporum’. *De angelis* 4.1 (in Suárez 1856–1878, vol. 2, 422).

<sup>25</sup> ‘Statim occurit inquirendum in hac sententia quid sit hoc spatium, in quo explicando mire hallucineti sunt auctores eius’. *Disp. Met.* 51.1.10 (in Suárez 1856–1878, vol. 26, 975).

<sup>26</sup> On the notion of ‘imaginary space’ in scholastic philosophy, Grant 1981, chapters 6 and 7, and Leijenhorst 1996.

<sup>27</sup> *Disp. Met.* 51.2.5 (in Suárez 1856–1878, vol. 26, 980). Interestingly, Thomas White in his dialogues *De mundo* offers a similar argument against treating locations as regions of imaginary space. See White 1642, 26.

The local motion of a body, according to all, subjectively inheres in the mobile object itself. This is clear to the senses, for local motion, just like any other kind of motion, is but a path to an intrinsic end point. Hence the intrinsic end point of such a motion, too, is in the mobile object itself. For the path and its end point cannot be entirely distinct, and so cannot be in distinct subjects. But the end point of local motion just is a location.<sup>28</sup>

Suárez refers to these inner states as *ubies*, or *ubications*.<sup>29</sup> A major advantage of this *ubi* theory of location, he claims, is that it can account for bodily and angelic location alike. *Ubies* are states that can be possessed by material and immaterial substances alike, meaning that there is a univocal sense in which bodies and angels alike can be said to be somewhere, or to have a location.<sup>30</sup>

In Suárez, then, we find an account of location that is similar in a number of ways to the *ubi* theory we have seen Digby describe above. An *ubi* for Suárez is an inner state of located object. Or as Digby had formulated it, an *ubi* is ‘an entity in the thing’ that is located. And most importantly, it is because locations are construed as inner states in this way that even substances that do not stand in the kind of containment-relation to surrounding bodies that would give them an Aristotelian place can be said to be located.

On at least one central point, however, Digby misrepresents the *ubi* theory of location as it can be found in Suárez and other early modern scholastics. As we have seen, Digby takes *ubies* to be paradigmatic cases of real accidents, or accidents conceived of as substance-like being that can exist independently of their bearers. Thus we have seen him describe *ubies* as ‘entities’, and claim that actions, durations, and *ubications* are called by ‘substantive names’ precisely because they are conceived of along the model of substances. But is not how Suárez, or any other scholastic Aristotelian I am aware of, conceived of *ubications*.

Here is how Suárez understands the relation between *ubications* and the objects they locate. First, the *ubication* of a substance does not supervene on the constituent prime matter and substantial form of that substance. This is clear from the case of local motion, where a substance changes location, but does not change with regard to its prime matter and substantial form. Again, the *ubication* of a substance does not supervene on any of the other inner accidental states the substance has either. A substance may well change location, without there being a change with regard to such accidental forms as its colour or shape. In conclusion:

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Motus localis corporis ex sententia omnium est subiective in ipso mobile, quod fere ad sensum etiam patet; motus autem localis, sicut et omnis alius, non est nisi via ad suum intrinsecum terminum; ergo etiam intrinsecus terminus talis motus est in ipsomet mobile, et consequenter terminus talis motus est in ipsomet mobile, quia via et terminus non possunt esse res omnino distinctae, et consequenter neque in subiectis distinctis; sed terminus motus localis est ipsum ubi; ergo’. *Disp. Met.* 51.1.25 (in Suárez 1856–1878, vol. 26, 979).

<sup>29</sup> See for instance *Disp. Met.* 51.1.5 (in Suárez 1856–1878, vol. 26, 973), where he introduces the term ‘*ubicatio*’ with the remark that ‘non enim habemus aliud abstractum nomen’.

<sup>30</sup> For a detailed discussion of this point, see *De angelis* 4.1–2 (in Suárez 1856–1878, vol. 2, 421–33).

It is easily proven that [location] is distinct in nature from a subject and its quantity and other accidents, because a subject can gain and lose this [location] without any change in the subject, its quantity, or any one of its other qualities.<sup>31</sup>

But even though locations do not supervene on a substance's constituent matter and form, Suárez explicitly denies that locations or ubications can exist apart from their bearers. Locations are modes, or ways of being, of located objects, and so cannot even be conceived of without some object whose location they are:<sup>32</sup>

Such a mode cannot be understood to be without a subject that has some location.<sup>33</sup>

Locations or ubications for Suárez, then, are very far away from being actual beings, or things, or entities, as Digby understands these terms.

Fortunately, Digby's criticism of ubications is not dependent on his understanding of them as substance-like entities only. The next section will take a closer look at his objections to location as ubication, and the notion of location he puts in its place.

### 9.5.2 Digby on Location

As Digby acknowledges in the *Two Treatises*, his discussion and criticism of the ubi theory is indebted to the dialogues *De mundo* of his friend, Thomas White.<sup>34</sup> In *De mundo*, White had raised two main objections to the ubi theory. His first objection is that to say that  $x$  is located somewhere because of its ubi is circular, and just as vacuous as defining a house as a thing whose nature it is to be a house:

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<sup>31</sup> 'Facile probabatur hunc modum esse distinctum ex natura rei a subiecto, quantitate et caeteris accidentibus eius, quia hic modus acquiri et perdi, nulla alia mutatione facta in subiecto, neque in quantitate aut caeteris qualitatibus eius'. *Disp. Met.* 51.1.16 (in Suárez 1856–1878, vol. 26, 976).

<sup>32</sup> Suárez distinguishes between two kinds of accidental beings: accidental beings that are things, and accidental beings that are modes or ways of being of things. The first can, at least by divine intervention, subsist on their own. The second cannot even be conceived of without a thing whose way of being they are. For a helpful summary of this distinction, see Tuttle 2016, 140–42. Digby occasionally refers to the location of an object as a 'moode'. See for instance TT 33.

<sup>33</sup> 'Intelligi non potest talis modus sine aliquo subiecto quod alicubi sit'. *Disp. Met.* 51.1.13 (in Suárez 1856–1878, vol. 26, 976).

<sup>34</sup> Digby refers his readers to 'what M. White hath discoursed of *Place* in the first of his Dialogues *De Mundo*' in TT 7. According to White in *De mundo*, the scholastic Aristotelians had used the ubi theory of location to make sense of the possibility of a plurality of worlds separated by a distance. White criticizes the ubi theory in the context of his attempt at proving the unicity of the world. See White 1642, 26–27. Suárez at one point indeed uses the ubi theory in this way. See *De Angelis* 4.8 (in Suárez 1856–1878, vol. 2, 456). In his *Observations upon Religio Medici*, Digby praises 'Master Whites Dialogues of the world' for showing that the unicity of the world can be 'demonstrated by Reason'. Digby 1643, 42–43. On White's argument for the unicity of the world, see Adriaenssen 2021, 8–22.



Suppose you did now know of houses, churches, plants, ships and the like, that you would ask for an explanation of what these things are, and that you were told that a house is a thing whose essence it is to be a house, and that similarly a church or ship is a thing whose nature it is to be a church or a ship. Would it be possible to consider your teacher to be anything but an imposter or a mocker? Do you not know that the first rule of the dialecticians is that, in building a definition, the thing that is to be defined should not feature in the definition?<sup>35</sup>

White's second objection is that the concept of location as an inner state of a substance flies in the face of ordinary parlance. For when asked where something is, we normally answer in terms of the Aristotelian notion of place. Thus when asked about the location of the water I am about to drink, we will normally say that its location is the bottle that contains it, and we will identify the walls of my room as the location of the air I breathe:

I call upon all men, and the daily words they use to express where something is. Do not all think of the location of an object as a thing that surrounds it, or as Aristotle puts it, as a kind of immobile container?<sup>36</sup>

Similar objections can be found in Digby. To say that an object is somewhere in virtue of a thing called 'somewhere' is explanatorily vacuous.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, Digby submits that, when you ask someone about the location of some given person or house, your respondent will normally give you an answer of the following form:

the man you aske for, is in such a church, sitting in such a piiew, and in such a corner of it, and that the howse you enquire after, is in such a streete, and next to such two buildings on each side of you. (TT 6)

What this suggests, according to Digby, is that the common notion of location, or the notion of location that comes naturally to us when objects leave their impressions on our senses, just is the Aristotelian container notion of place. It is

no other, then a bodies being environed and enclosed by some other, or severall others that are immediate unto it. (TT 6)

Now according to Digby, this common notion sets boundaries for philosophical explorations into the nature of location.<sup>38</sup> In particular, he holds that philosophers

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<sup>35</sup> 'Pensa enim tecum si domus, Cathedrae, platae, navis, alicuiusve alterius quod ignorares, Entis explicationem peteres: refert autem domum esse rem, cuius natura esset esse domum, et cathedram similiter vel navim res esse, quarum hec natura foret navim et cathedram essendo esse: poterat aliter quam vel leuteum existimare doctorem vel irrisorem? Nescis hoc primum Dialecticorum in condendis definitionibus esse praeceptum ne definitum in definitione maneat inclusum?' White 1642, 27.

<sup>36</sup> 'Ad hos omnes apello et quotidianas eorum voces, quibus ubi situm sit quippiam exponunt, si non omnes ambiens quippiam et ut Aristoteles vocat, vas quoddam immobile pro loco reddant'. White 1642, 28.

<sup>37</sup> See his general criticism of what he considers to be the scholastic tendency to reify accidents: 'this is the generall course of their Philosophy; whose great subtilty, and queint speculations in enquiring how things do come to passe afford no better satisfaction then to say upon every occasion, that there is an Entity which maketh it so' (TT 345).

<sup>38</sup> On this role for common notions, see for more detail Blank 2007, 14–18. See also Blank's contribution to this volume.

may build on this common notion to spell out its details and implications, but that they may not go so far beyond the common notion of location as to contradict it. Thus, if our common notion of location is a relational one, or a notion that defines location in terms of the relations an object bears to the objects that surround it, a technical notion of location may not turn it into an intrinsic feature, or a feature an object possesses independently of the relations it bears to other objects. But this is of course just what the ubi theory does. Its proponents, then, have gone astray

in framing Metaphysicall and abstracted conceptions, instead of contenting themselves with those plaine, easy, and primary notions, which nature stampeth a like in all men of common sense, and understanding. (TT 7)

Now of course, Digby knew as well as anyone that the Aristotelian notion of place does not work well for immaterial substances such as angels. And this raises the question of whether, according to Digby, angels and other immaterial substances have any kind of location at all.

On some occasions, it looks as if the answer to this question is a clear no. Thus at one point in the Second Treatise, we are told that a separated soul is ‘no where’ (TT 424). And in the opening chapter of the First Treatise, Digby criticizes the proponents of ubi theories on the ground that

they receive it as an Axiome in their sense, that whatsoever is, must be somewhere, and whatsoever is no where, is not at all.<sup>39</sup>

Passages such as this give the impression that Digby himself rejects this axiom, and that for him, being real does not imply being somewhere.

Matters are a little more complicated, however. For even though at times Digby will explicitly say that to be does not imply to be somewhere, it appears that, in making this claim, he often just means to stress once more that to be does not imply to have an Aristotelian place:

Therefore, as it were an absurd illation to say, *it is*, therefore *it is in a Body*, no less is it to say, *it is*, therefore *it is somewhere*, which is equivalent to, *in some Body*. (TT 424)

According to this passage, to be does not imply to be contained by a body. But there is no further implication that, according to Digby, there can be real beings that are absolutely nowhere, or real beings that lack a location in every sense of the word.

In fact, shortly after the above passage, Digby continues to explain that, even if a separated soul is nowhere insofar as it lacks an Aristotelian place, yet at the same time it is everywhere insofar as it can manifest its activities and operations everywhere.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>TT 6. A statement of this ‘axiom’ can be found in Suárez, *Disp. Met.* 40.4.19: ‘Nulla enim res intelligi potest, quae alicubi praesentiam suam realem non exhibeat’ (in Suárez 1856–1878, vol. 26, 548). As Pasnau has documented, the axiom that to be implies being somewhere or other was indeed widespread among scholastic philosophers, and can be found in some form or other in thinkers as diverse as Anselm, Aquinas, Scotus, Ockham, and Suárez. See Pasnau 2011, 328–33.

<sup>40</sup>Apparently he thinks that ordinary parlance and the common notion of location permit this extended sense of ‘being somewhere’ and ‘being everywhere’.

She is no where; and yet (upon the matter) . . . she is everywhere, . . . she is bound to no *Place*, and yet remote from none; . . . she is able to worke upon all, without shifting from one to an other, or coming neere any. (TT 424)

But even if Digby may not go so far as to reject the axiom that underlies the ubi theory, and according to which being real implies being somewhere in at least some sense of the term, we must not underestimate his disagreement with philosophers such as Suárez.

For while Digby seems happy to allow that, in some cases, a substance can be present at a location just because that is where the substance manifests its activity, Suárez in his *De angelis* launches a detailed criticism of just this kind of theory.<sup>41</sup> According to Suárez, to say that a substance acts at a certain location is to already assume that it is present at that location. After all, presence at a location is a necessary condition for, and is conceptually prior to, acting at that location:

The exercise of an action is not a necessary condition for presence at a location. Rather, the reverse is true. Nor is the exercise of an action in any way prior to presence at a location.<sup>42</sup>

If a substance is to act somewhere, ‘its essence needs to be really present there’.<sup>43</sup> Again:

In the order of nature, an angel is present to a body before it acts upon that body. The first, however, does not depend on the second.<sup>44</sup>

On this view, to say that a substance acts at some location just begs the question of how it is present at that location. Suárez has an answer to this question: a substance is present at the location where it acts, because its ubi locates it there. Digby, however, rejects that answer, and instead tells us that some substances can act at all locations ‘without coming neere any’. To Suárez, this would be deeply unintelligible.

## 9.6 Conclusion

According to Digby, substance and quantity are ‘condistinguished’, but quantity is not an actual being in itself. In this paper, we have explored in detail just what this claim means. There is what Digby calls a ‘divisibility’ between substance and

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<sup>41</sup> According to Suárez, versions of this theory were defended by Thomists such as Ferrariensis and Giles of Rome. Although he admits that Aquinas on several occasions appears to adopt this kind of theory, Suárez doubts that it can be ascribed to Aquinas without qualification. See *De angelis* 4.4, in Suárez 1856–1878, vol. 2, 437.

<sup>42</sup> ‘Actio non est conditio necessaria ad praesentiam, sed potius e converso, nec in ullo genere est prior’ (*De angelis* 4.4, in Suárez 1856–1878, vol. 2, 439).

<sup>43</sup> ‘Si Angelus ibi est, ubi operatur, . . . etiam per essentiam ibi esse debet realiter praesens’ (*De angelis* 4.4, in Suárez 1856–1878, vol. 2, 438).

<sup>44</sup> ‘Prius natura Angelus corpori praesens est, quam in illo operatur, prius autem non pendet a posteriori’ (*De angelis* 4.4, in Suárez 1856–1878, vol. 2, 439).

quantity, in the sense that the quantity of a substance can become larger or smaller even as the material make-up of the substance remains intact. But this divisibility does not make quantity an actual being in the sense Digby finds problematic. It does not make quantity a real accident, or an actual being that could subsist without a substance whose quantity it was.

In the final two sections of the paper, we have looked at a more problematic aspect of the criticism Digby levels against the early modern scholastic metaphysics of accidents. According to Digby, the scholastic Aristotelians had been prone to treat even locations as actual beings, or things in their own right. As we have seen, however, the ubi theory of location he appears to have in mind here does not treat locations in this way. But even if Digby may to some degree misrepresent the ubi theory, his criticism reveals some points of genuine disagreement. Like White, Digby holds that to account for a substance's location in terms of its ubi or ubication is explanatorily vacuous. According to Digby, the common notion of location is that of Aristotelian place. Immaterial substances can be said to be present at a certain location only insofar as they manifest their activities at that location.

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