Scipion Dupleix, royal historian and tutor to the nobility, as well as the author of a popular textbook, *Corps de la philosophie*, wrote in 1603: “There is so much great noise among the Scholastics about the foundation of matter, that if I wanted to appease all sides, I would waste too much time.”¹ So, at the start of the seventeenth century, Aristotle’s theory of matter and form was problematic even for scholastic philosophers. Questions such as “whether matter is a substance,” “whether potency is the essence of matter,” “whether some forms preexist in matter,” “in what way form arises from matter,” and “whether there can be any prime matter separate from forms,” were commonly discussed, but their answers produced little consensus. For example, on the question of “whether there can be any prime matter separate from forms,” one can see Dupleix strongly endorsing a Scotist position against a Thomist one: “[Thomas Aquinas’] opinion is too bold, too mistaken, and as such it has been rejected by Scotus the Subtle [Doctor] and by several others who convicted Saint Thomas by his own words.”² According to Thomas, prime matter is pure potency (having only potential being), can only be created in conjunction with form, and cannot subsist without form. Dupleix opposed the view that matter needed form for existence on the grounds that God could create matter itself. He took this a step further, however, by claiming that such a doctrine “is not repugnant to nature.” Matter even preceded form in the generation of natural things and “deserves the name substance.”³ This modification of the doctrine, Dupleix argued, was better able to explain the miracle of the Eucharist. Some scholastics at the time, for example the Jesuit Franciscus Toletus and the tutor of the nobility Theophraste Bouju, maintained the Thomist position, arguing that matter is imperfect in itself and cannot be in act without form. Others, such as the Jesuit Francisco Suárez and the Feuillant Eustachius a Sancto Paulo, sided with Scotus; as Eustachius said:

³ Dupleix, *La physique*, p. 132.
“God can strip naked all forms, substantial and accidental, from matter, or create it naked, without form, *ex nihilo*, and allow it to subsist by its own power in such a state.” Moving half a century forward, the same scholastic debate continued even as non-scholastic conceptions of matter were becoming more popular. For example, the ex-Jesuit René de Cerisiers argued that there could be no form without matter and no matter without form by natural means. However, citing the miracle of the Eucharist, he claimed that God could make accidents subsist without substance and matter without form. Another textbook author, the Dominican Antoine Goudin, noted Scotus’ criticism about the doctrine limiting God’s power but concluded: “it seems that matter cannot exist without form even by means of God’s absolute power. That is what Saint Thomas states.”

The debates about the roles of matter and form in the early seventeenth century reflected a tendency toward a more dualistic and less hylomorphic metaphysics. This trend was readily apparent in Dupleix’s claim that matter is endowed with being. There was also a shift in some of the functions of matter to form. Aristotle claimed that matter individuated things, and Aquinas specified that *signate* matter, matter standing in a particular relationship to quantity, served as the principle of individuation. Dupleix remarked that the Thomists could not adequately explain the individuation of non-corporeal entities such as angels because intelligences, which are altogether simple in their essences, would then have to be considered as both universal and individual. Moreover, quantity, despite Aquinas’s promotion of it as a principle of individuation, was still an accident and could not properly operate at the level of essences. Dupleix thus rejected all Thomist interpretations of matter as principle of individuation. He adopted instead Scotus’ claim that there is an ultimate specific difference (*haecceitas*) for each individual. The Scotist position seems to have gained followers in the seventeenth century. Most held views similar to Dupleix’s.

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