

**What's the Matter with Angels?  
Angelic Materiality and the Possible Intellect  
in Some Early Fourteenth-century Franciscans**

**¿Qué sucede con los ángeles?  
Materialidad angelical y el intelecto posible  
en algunos franciscanos de principio del siglo XIV**

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**Abstract**

While the question of whether angels are composed of matter and form, may seem, to the modern reader, somewhat odd, medieval thinkers saw it as a genuine puzzle. On the one hand, angels are purely intellectual creatures, which, according to some (perhaps most famously Aquinas), seems to imply that they are altogether devoid of materiality. On the other hand, however, angels are capable of change, which, according to the broadly-speaking Aristotelian framework, seems to imply an underlying material substrate. This paper traces the views of some early fourteenth-century Franciscan texts, according to which angels are material: the *Disputed questions* by Gonsalvus of Spain, a *De Anima* question-commentary sometimes attributed to the early Duns Scotus, and the *Sentences* commentaries of Peter of Trabibus and of Peter Auriol. As will be seen, the question of angelic materiality gave ample opportunity for these thinkers to elaborate on what they meant exactly by 'matter', and to hint at the ways in which this metaphysical principle is related to other important metaphysical notions in the neighborhood, such as change, corporeity, or potency.

**Keywords**

Angels; Matter; Peter Auriol; Peter of Trabibus; Gonsalvus of Spain

**Resumen**

Si los ángeles están compuestos de materia y forma puede parecer al lector moderno una cuestión algo extraña, pero los pensadores medievales la consideraban un auténtico enigma. Por un lado, los ángeles son criaturas puramente intelectuales, lo que, según algunos (quizás el más famoso es Tomás de Aquino), parece implicar que están completamente desprovistos de materialidad. Por otro lado, los ángeles son capaces de cambio, lo que, de acuerdo con el marco aristotélico, parece suponer un sustrato material subyacente. Este artículo presenta las opiniones de algunos textos franciscanos de principios del siglo XIV, según los cuales los ángeles son materiales, a saber: las *Quaestiones disputatae* de Gonzalo Hispano, un comentario al *De anima* que suele considerarse una obra temprana de Duns Scotus, y los comentarios a las *Sentencias* de Pedro de Trabibus y de Pedro Auriol. Como se verá, la cuestión de la materialidad angelical fue una gran oportunidad para que estos pensadores elaboraran exactamente qué entendían por 'materia' y para indicar cómo este principio metafísico está relacionado con otras importantes nociones metafísicas relacionadas, como las de cambio, corporeidad o potencia.

**Palabras clave**

Ángeles; materia; Pedro Auriol; Pedro de Trabibus; Gonzalo Hispano

Angels, in a broadly-speaking Christian framework, are spiritual, incorporeal beings, and yet capable of change.<sup>1</sup> But how can that be, if change, in a broadly-speaking Aristotelian framework, means matter (successively) taking on different forms?

This and some related questions troubled medieval thinkers starting from the earliest reception of Aristotle's writings in the West. And while angelology, or the discipline concerning angels, may seem to the modern reader as a somewhat obscure part of medieval theology, it has been well documented that angels often provide interesting test cases for various theories within metaphysics or the philosophy of mind.<sup>2</sup> This paper will focus on one particular such test case, namely, on the question of how to make sense of spiritual creatures capable of change within the metaphysical framework of hylomorphism.

Some parts of this story are relatively well known, while other parts are less so. In this paper, I offer a sketch of the debate concentrating on some early fourteenth-century Franciscan authors who advocated for positing a material principle in angels: Gonsalvo of Spain; the author of a *Quaestiones de anima* sometimes attributed to Duns Scotus; Peter of Trabibus; and, to a lesser extent, Peter Auriol. I will start by giving some background to the fourteenth-century debate, after which I turn to discuss the main arguments that the aforesaid authors proposed for their unusual view. My main aim will be to clarify the reasons why someone may think that mental acts imply the existence of spiritual matter, and to try to shed some light on what that spiritual matter is supposed to be. I will close with pointing out some ways in which considerations about spiritual matter may lead us to a better understanding of the more familiar, corporeal kind.

The discussion here will primarily focus on angels, since they provide a metaphysically simpler case than the human soul. While they share many characteristics, most importantly having intellect and will, the latter is a form joined to a material body, which, even if we consider it in its separated state, may or may not make a salient difference with respect to its metaphysical constitution. Thus, while Aquinas thinks that metaphysically speaking, the human soul (even in its separated state) is quite different from an angel,<sup>3</sup> some of the authors we will be looking at apply the angelic considerations directly to the human soul as well. In what follows, I will leave most of this application aside.

## Some Background

According to Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, serving as the well-established basis of theological education in the fourteenth century,<sup>4</sup> angels possess four attributes: they are simple essences (*essentiae simplices*, which, according to the Lombard, implies that they are indivisible and

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<sup>2</sup> For a general overview of this methodological point, see, e.g., Dominik Perler, "Thought Experiments: The Methodological Function of Angels in Late Medieval Epistemology," in *A Companion to Angels in Medieval Philosophy*, edited by T. Hoffmann (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 143–154; and the Introduction in the same volume.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., they are individuated differently – as Aquinas somewhat infamously maintains, angels are individual because they each belong to a different species, while the human soul is individuated by the body that it was first united with. See, e.g., *De ente et essentia*, ch. 5.

<sup>4</sup> For a general introduction, see G. R. Evans (ed.), *Mediaeval Commentaries on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2002); and Philipp W. Rosemann (ed.), *Mediaeval Commentaries on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

immaterial);<sup>5</sup> distinct persons; possess natural reason; and possess free will.<sup>6</sup> Based on this list and especially on its first item, it may seem puzzling why some thinkers concerned themselves with the question of angelic materiality at all.

Nevertheless, the question whether angels have matter as a metaphysical constituent had troubled medieval thinkers at least from the earliest Western reception of Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics*. As is well known, one way in which Aristotle introduces the distinction between matter and form is to account for change, primarily for change in the sublunary world, where things are generated and cease to be.<sup>7</sup> 'Matter,' according to this broad picture, is the underlying substrate of change: either something already composite, as in the case of accidental changes, receiving a new accidental form (Socrates becoming sunburnt after being pale); or prime matter, as in the case of substantial change, receiving a new substantial form (Socrates dying). While this very rough outline of the hylomorphist framework is relatively clear, its details are murky. We are going to leave most of this murkiness aside, and focus on one particular question, namely on whether this hylomorphic framework can be applied to angels as well. If so, how can we make sense of their material component, given that they are supposed to be purely spiritual? If not, how can we account for angelic mutability, if the main reason to introduce hylomorphic composition in more usual things was to account for change?<sup>8</sup>

The earliest commentators on Aristotle's physical and metaphysical works were already aware of these questions.<sup>9</sup> For instance, the early Franciscan Richard Rufus of Cornwall, one of the earliest commentators on Aristotle's physical writings,<sup>10</sup> spends five whole folios in his Oxford *Sentences* commentary on the question, considering in detail Augustine's, Hugh of St.-Victor's, and others' arguments in detail, only to conclude that "we cannot posit as more probable that angels have matter than that they do not".<sup>11</sup> Or, as he notes in the earlier treatise

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<sup>5</sup> Even though later he also notes that "Simul ergo visibilibus rerum materia et invisibilibus natura condite est, et utraque informis fuit secundum aliquid, et formata secundum aliquid" (Petrus Lombardus, *Sententiae in IV libris distinctae: Liber I et II*, edited by P.P. Collegii S. Bonaventurae (Grottaferrata: Ad Claras Aquas, 1971), II.2, c. 5).

<sup>6</sup> Petrus Lombardus, *Sententiae in IV libris distinctae: Liber I et II*, edited by P.P. Collegii S. Bonaventurae (Grottaferrata: Ad Claras Aquas, 1971), II.3, c. 1.

<sup>7</sup> See especially *Physics* II.1-3. (Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, edited by Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991)).

<sup>8</sup> A related problem, which is just the other side of this same coin, was the question of whether celestial bodies – bodies that are unchanging and unchangeable – can possess matter. I am not going to deal with this question in depth here, but for some analysis, see Edward Grant, "Celestial Matter: A Medieval and Galilean Cosmological Problem", *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 13 (1983): 157-186; and Edward Grant, *Planets, Stars, and Orbs: The Medieval Cosmos, 1200–1687* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), especially ch. 12. I will briefly return to this issue below.

<sup>9</sup> For the early debate, see D. Odon Lottin, "La composition hylémorphique des substances spirituelles: les débuts de la controverse", *Revue Néo-Scholastique de Philosophie*, 2e Serie 34 (1932): 21–41; David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); R. James Long, "Of Angels and Pinheads: The Contributions of the Early Oxford Masters to the Doctrine of Spiritual Matter", *Franciscan Studies* 56 (1998): 239–254; and Lydia Schumacher, "The *De Anima* Tradition in Early Franciscan Thought: A Case Study in Avicenna's Reception", *Mediaevalia: Textos e Estudos* 38 (2019): 97–115. For a helpful overview of the 13th-century debates, as well as plenty of further bibliography, see John F. Wippel, "Metaphysical Composition of Angels in Bonaventure, Aquinas, and Godfrey of Fontaines", in *A Companion to Angels in Medieval Philosophy*, edited by T. Hoffmann (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 45-78. See also Brendan Case, "Seraphicus Supra Angelicum: Universal Hylomorphism and Angelic Mutability", *Franciscan Studies* 78 (2020): 19–50 for a helpful setup of some of the problems.

<sup>10</sup> Whether or not he was in fact the first one to comment on the *Physics* is contentious and does not matter for the present. See, e.g., Rega Wood, "Richard Rufus of Cornwall and Aristotle's *Physics*", *Franciscan Studies* 52 (1992): 247-281; and Silvia Donati, "The Anonymous Commentary on the *Physics* in Erfurt, Cod. Amplon. Q. 312 and Richard Rufus of Cornwall", *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales* 72 (2005): 232–362.

<sup>11</sup> Rufus, *Sententiae Oxonienses*, II.3: "[V]ideo quod non possit probabilius poni angelum [pro: angelus] materiam habere quam non habere" (MS London, BL Royal 8 C iv, fol. 84rb).

dedicated particularly to the topic, “What should we say to this? I do not know. But I do know truly that the kind and essence of those blessed spirits inexpressibly exceed our sense and reason.”<sup>12</sup> It is clear, however, in all these instances of Rufus’s treatment of the issue, that he thinks that certain characteristics of angels, especially mutability and individuation, provide strong motivations, if not demonstrative reasons, to attribute some material component to them. His examples of angelic mutation include change in place, acquiring new accidents (presumably new knowledge or acts of will), and, most importantly, the fall of angels.

Rufus was not the only one to call attention to these examples. Indeed, his treatment, as David Keck has pointed out,<sup>13</sup> strongly reminds one of Bonaventure’s, who, with his confrère, Peter John Olivi, was undoubtedly the most famous thirteenth-century advocate of spiritual matter. Since Bonaventure’s and Olivi’s views provide, in some way, the background for the discussion by our later authors, but since they have been analysed in detail elsewhere,<sup>14</sup> we can limit ourselves to a very brief summary of them here.

Bonaventure advances several reasons for positing matter in spiritual creatures, but one of them, just like Rufus’s consideration, relies on the possibility of angelic change. According to Bonaventure, all creatures are in some way changeable, and since matter is the principle of change, all creatures are also material. He also thinks that angelic individuation requires matter, and that unless material, angels would be pure actualities, which characteristic should pertain to God alone.<sup>15</sup>

Olivi treats the topic of spiritual matter in perhaps the greatest detail among his contemporaries.<sup>16</sup> In question 16 of the second book of his commentary on the *Sentences*, which asks whether angels contain matter at all, he examines twenty-two objections in detail, as well as six arguments for the alternative position, together with various contemporary views. In the first step of his argumentation, just like Bonaventure, he aims to provide a metaphysical description of the created world that applies universally to all created substances. The metaphysical description starts with the claim that there must be passive potency in all created things (otherwise they would be like God), which passive potency is something substantial

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<sup>12</sup> Rufus, *De materia in angelis*: “Quid dicemus ad hoc? Nescio. Sed hoc veraciter scio quod illorum beatorum spirituum species et essentia sensum nostrum et rationem ineffabiliter excedunt” (MS Assisi, Conv. Soppr. 138, fols. 263ra–264va, at 264rb). We should note that Long interprets Rufus to endorse the doctrine of spiritual matter (see Long, “Of Angels and Pinheads”, especially at 251), but this seems to be a somewhat hasty reading even of the Paris *Sentences* commentary, where Rufus does indeed conclude that “angelus habeat compositionem ex forma et materia,” but then explains also that by ‘materia’ he means “large sumpto nomine ‘materiae’ (pro) omne possibile” (MS Vat. Lat. 12993, fol. 143vb).

<sup>13</sup> Keck, *Angels and Angelology*, 99.

<sup>14</sup> For recent treatments of Bonaventure, see, e.g., Keck, *Angels and Angelology*, especially 93–105; Case, “*Seraphicus Supra Angelicum*”; and especially Alberto Ara, *Angeli e sostanze separate: l’idea di materia spiritualis tra il secolo XII et il secolo XIII* (PhD Thesis, Facoltà teologica dell’Italia Centrale, 2005), ch. 11, and the ample further literature cited therein. For Olivi, see the Introduction in Feliciano Simoncioli, *Il problema della libertà umana in Pietro di Giovanni Olivi e Pietro de Trabibus* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1956); Tiziana Suarez-Nani, “Pierre de Jean Olivi et la subjectivité angélique”, *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire Du Moyen Âge* 70 (2003): 233-316; Olivier Ribordy, “Materia Spiritualis: Implications anthropologiques de la doctrine de la matière développée par Pierre de Jean Olivi”, in *Pierre de Jean Olivi – Philosophe et théologien: Actes du Colloque de Philosophie Médiévale, 24–25 Octobre 2008, Université de Fribourg*, edited by C. König-Pralong, T. Suarez-Nani, and O. Ribordy (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 181–228; and the literature cited therein. See also the Introduction in Petrus Iohannis Olivi, *La matiere*, edited by T. Suarez-Nani (Paris: Vrin, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> See Bonaventura, *In Sententiarum* (henceforth: *Sent.*) II.3, p. 1, a. 2, q. 1–3, in *Opera Omnia* (Quaracchi: Collegium S Bonaventurae, 1882), 2: 102–110.

<sup>16</sup> The relevant part of this *Sentences* commentary is questions II.16–21, all of which take up almost a hundred pages in the modern edition (see Petrus Iohannis Olivi, *Quaestiones in Secundum Librum Sententiarum*, edited by B. Jansen [Quaracchi: Collegium S Bonaventurae, 1922], 291–388).

(*subsantialis*) in all things. As Olivi elaborates, this means that this passive potency must be a receptacle, and not be in a subject, which is just what we call ‘matter.’<sup>17</sup>

Second, having argued in these general terms for the necessity of matter in all created things, Olivi enumerates several reasons for positing spiritual matter in particular, one of which is of special interest here. As he argues, the only reason why Aristotle posits matter at all in regular sublunary bodies is to account for how they can undergo various kinds of changes, and this is also what spiritual matter enables. As this suggests, Olivi thinks that admitting the possibility of change in something without also admitting matter in it, would altogether undermine the foundations of hylomorphism.<sup>18</sup> Besides this, Olivi also thinks that positing matter in spiritual substances as well as in the human intellect is the only way to guarantee their substantial unity, and that it enables self-knowledge in intellectual substances.<sup>19</sup>

While Bonaventure and Olivi agree that positing matter in spiritual things is necessary, nevertheless, they disagree on the kind of matter that should be posited. While Bonaventure seems to think that matter is uniform in all creatures across the board,<sup>20</sup> Olivi argues that spiritual matter and corporeal matter differ in their accounts (*secundum rationes*), even if they are both purely potential.<sup>21</sup> Whether or how we can make sense of this difference will be a major issue for our early fourteenth-century authors as well.

As is well known, the early theories of spiritual matter came under attack already by Albert the Great<sup>22</sup> and more famously by Aquinas,<sup>23</sup> who seem to regard the position as resting on a confusion. More precisely, Aquinas seems to maintain that the positions just presented rest on two mistakes: the first is to attribute a potential intellect to angels at all; the second is to equate this potential intellect with matter.<sup>24</sup> Thus, while Olivi will think that being a receptacle and a potency just means having a material component, Aquinas denies that explicitly: “prime matter receives a form contracting it to individual being; but an intelligible

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<sup>17</sup> Even though Aquinas will reject Olivi’s final conclusion, he does admit that what we call ‘matter’ is a passive potency in the genus of substance: “id communiter materia prima nominatur quod est in genere substantiae ut potentia quaedam, intellecta praeter omnem speciem et formam, et etiam praeter privationem, quae tamen est susceptiva et formarum et privationum” (Aquinas, *De spiritualibus creaturis*, q. 1). [ZT: I don’t see what else this needs?]

<sup>18</sup> Bonaventura, *Sent.* II.16, in *Opera Omnia*, 2: 318–319: “Iis autem attestantur Augustinus et Aristoteles et omnes eius sequaces, quoniam non per aliam viam nec per aliam rationem probaverunt materiam esse in rebus corporalibus nisi per hoc quod in toto motu et sub contrariis terminis eius oportebat dare unum commune subiectum mobile et mutabile, hoc autem necessario ponunt esse materiam et nullo modo formam.”

<sup>19</sup> Bonaventura, *Sent.* II.16, in *Opera Omnia*, 2: 315–319. [ZT: I included an abbreviation in the previous Bonaventure note, in footnote 15. That should suffice.]

<sup>20</sup> Bonaventura, *Sent.* II.3, p. 1, a. 1, q. 3, in *Opera Omnia*, 2:100.

<sup>21</sup> Bonaventura, *Sent.* II.20, in *Opera Omnia*, 375–376.

<sup>22</sup> For Albert, see *Sent.* II.1.4 (*Super II Sententiarum*, ed. Auguste Borgnet, *Opera Omnia* 27 (Paris: Ludovicus Vivès, 1893)); for some analysis, James A. Weisheipl, “Albertus Magnus and Universal Hylomorphism: Avicbron”, *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 10/3 (1979): 239–260; and Anna Rodolfi, *Il concetto di materia nell’opera di Alberto Magno* (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> Aquinas treats the issue multiple times during his career, most extensively in the *De substantiis separatis* and in the first article of the disputed question *De spiritualibus creaturis*, but also in the earlier *Sententiarum* II.3.1.1. The positions he introduces in these works, as well as Aquinas’s own stance on the question, do not seem to change.

<sup>24</sup> We should note, however, that Aquinas is less than perfectly clear on the precise mode of angelic cognition. He seems to maintain that the angelic intellect is not in potency to the intelligible species in the same way as the human intellect is in potency to them, whence Kainz argues that angels do not have potential intellect at all, but instead know analogously to the way in which a starfish sees all at the same time (Howard P. Kainz, *Active and Passive Potency in Thomistic Angelology* [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972], 56). But in the *Quaestiones de spiritualis creaturis* (henceforth: QDSC), Aquinas also notes that “in a created spiritual substance there must be two elements, one of which is related to the other as potency is to act” (q. 3). [ZT: q. 3 should remain as it is the precise reference.]

form is in the intellect without such a contraction . . . Therefore, an intellectual substance is not capable of receiving form on account of prime matter, but rather because of the opposite [i.e., on account of lacking prime matter].”<sup>25</sup> As Aquinas argues, we can very well account for some kind of composition in angels without invoking hylomorphic composition of matter and form; and in fact, hylomorphic composition is not only unnecessary but rather impossible, since it would be incompatible with both the angels’ incorporeity as well as their intellectual nature.<sup>26</sup>

These are questions in Aquinas’s thought that would merit studies of their own.<sup>27</sup> What we need to keep in mind for the present one is that the early fourteenth-century authors seem to be largely familiar with these points of criticism, and these questions – that is, whether there is change in the angelic intellect, and whether that change implies matter – were discussed often and also sometimes separately.<sup>28</sup> (Olivi already addresses both of these concerns in his treatment, but we can disregard the details of that treatment for now.)

## Angelic Matter

With this background in mind, let us turn to see in more detail the considerations that led some early fourteenth-century Franciscan authors to posit matter in angels. As will become clear, their positions are far from homogenous, as they disagreed both on some of the arguments for positing spiritual matter, as well as, more importantly, on the nature of spiritual matter itself. But before turning to these details, perhaps it will be helpful to say a few words about our sources.

I will be focusing on four texts. The first is from Gonsalvo of Spain’s *Disputed Questions* (especially q. 11), written probably around 1302–3, when Gonsalvo was in Paris.<sup>29</sup> The second is a *De anima* question-commentary, sometimes attributed to Duns Scotus (and indeed edited as part of Scotus’s *Opera Philosophica*).<sup>30</sup> While some doubts surround the authenticity of this text, especially since some of the doctrines represented in it are in stark contrast with Scotus’s views expressed elsewhere, my interest here is on the positions themselves rather than on the authors who endorsed them; thus I will remain noncommittal on the question of authorship. The date of this work is also somewhat dubious; if it was indeed written by Scotus, then, as the editors argue,<sup>31</sup> it must have been composed early in his career, around the turn of the century

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<sup>25</sup> *QDSC*, q. 1 [ZT: see previous footnote]. “[N]am materia prima recipit formam contrahendo ipsam ad esse individuale; forma vero intelligibilis est in intellectu absque huiusmodi contractione [...] Non est ergo substantia intellectualis receptiva formae ex ratione materiae primae, sed magis per oppositam quamdam rationem.”

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g., *Sententiarum*, II.3.1, and the *De spiritualis creaturis*, q. 1. Some of the issues are also raised in *De ente*, c. 5; and *De veritate*, q. 9, a. 1. [ZT: not sure what's the problem with these. Can you elaborate?]

<sup>27</sup> There is a discussion of some of these issues in Kainz, *Active and Passive Potency*; and John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Godfrey of Fontaines: A Study in Thirteenth-Century Philosophy* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1981), 275-280.

<sup>28</sup> E.g., Bernard of Trilia, a Dominican thinker around Aquinas’s time, devotes a rather long quodlibetal question to the the first of them, while not treating the second at all (See his *Quodl.* I.9: “Utrum angeli proficiant in scientia vel cognitione”, edited in Bernard of Trilia, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Cognitione Animae Separatae*, edited by P. Künzle, *Corpus Philosophorum Medii Aevi* [Bern: A. Francke Verlag, 1969]).

<sup>29</sup> For the text, see Gonsalvus of Spain, *Quaestiones Disputatae et de Quodlibet*, edited by P. L. Amorós (Florence: Collegium S Bonaventurae, 1935) (henceforth *QD*). For an analysis, see also Michael B. Sullivan, “The Debate over Spiritual Matter in the Late Thirteenth Century: Gonsalvus Hispanus and the Franciscan Tradition from Bonaventure to Scotus” (PhD thesis, The Catholic University of America, 2010), ch. 4.

<sup>30</sup> See Johannes Duns Scotus, *Quaestiones Super Secundum et Tertium de Anima*, in *Opera Philosophica* 5, edited by B. C. Bazán, K. Emery, R. Green, T. Noone, R. Plevano, and A. Traver (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: Franciscan Institute, 2006) (henceforth *QDA*). For a brief comparison with Gonsalvus, see Sullivan, “The Debate over Spiritual Matter”, ch. 5.2.

<sup>31</sup> See the Introduction to the volume, especially 139\*-143\*. On the question of authenticity, see 121\*-137\* and the literature cited therein.

or even in the early 1290s. The third text is the *Sentences* commentary of Peter of Trabibus, also a Franciscan theologian, heavily influenced by Olivi; this work also originates from around the turn of the century.<sup>32</sup> Finally, fourth, I will also make use of the undoubtedly most well-known text of this group, the *Sentences* commentary of Peter Auriol, who will serve more as a reference point here than a focus in his own right. The second book of Auriol's *Sentences* dates from a short generation later than our other texts, from around 1316–17.<sup>33</sup>

Concerning the general issue of the materiality of angels and of the human soul, Gonsalvo of Spain, the *Quaestiones*, Peter of Trabibus, and Auriol all agree: there is some material component in angels. Thus, when the *Quaestiones* addresses the problem whether the soul is composed of matter and form, its answer is a somewhat unassertive affirmative: “I say that in a probable way it can be said that there is matter in the soul, both according to the principles of the Philosopher, and of those who posit the opposite.”<sup>34</sup> Gonsalvo agrees, more decidedly: “Every created thing is matter or having matter, so that matter is in corporeal things just as well as in incorporeal things.”<sup>35</sup> So do Peter of Trabibus (“we have to grant therefore that an angel has matter”<sup>36</sup>) and Auriol (“the philosophers and saints who most diligently inquired about their nature explicitly meant that they are composed of matter and form. And so this is what I hold with them”).<sup>37</sup>

Besides sharing the main position, the authors' arguments also have a lot in common. In general, they all seem to think that angelic materiality follows from Aristotle's principles, and that – *pace* Aquinas – it does not violate any theological givens about the angelic nature. In

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<sup>32</sup> For Peter in general, see Franz Pelster, “Beiträge zur Bestimmung der theologischen Stellung des Petrus de Trabibus (vor 1300)”, *Gregorianum* 19 (1938): 37-57, 376-403, with a (very) partial edition of the relevant questions in 388-390; Simoncioli, *Il problema*; Hildebert Alois Huning, “Die Stellung des Petrus de Trabibus zur Philosophie: Nach dem zweiten Prolog zum ersten Buch seines Sentenzenkommentars, Ms 154, Biblioteca Comunale, Assisi”, *Franziskanische Studien* 46 (1964): 193-286; and Antonio Di Noto, *La théologie naturelle de Pierre de Trabibus, OFM: Choix de questions du Ier Livre des Sentences (MS 154 de la Bibliothèque Communale d'Assise)* (Padua: Antonio Milani, 1963). For the state of current research on Peter, see especially Russell L. Friedman, “Peter of Trabibus (fl. 1295), o.f.m., on the Physical and Mental Abilities of Children in Paradise”, *Syzetesis* 6/2 (2019): 433-460; and Tuomas Vaura, “Peter de Trabibus on Creation and the Trinity”, *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales* 89/1 (2022): 145-195. I am very grateful to Russell Friedman for providing me with a preliminary version of his forthcoming edition of Peter's text, which I have checked against MS Florence, Bibl. Naz. Conv. Soppr. cod. B 5 1149 (henceforth 'F'). While it may be less than ideal to call people by the name of their place of origin, in what follows, I will refer to Peter of Trabibus as ‘Trabibus’ in order to avoid confusion with his namesake, Peter Auriol.

<sup>33</sup> That Auriol advocated for spiritual matter has been noted, but has also resulted in some puzzlement in certain commentators. Thus, Duhem thinks that Auriol's endorsement of spiritual matter is a “purely verbal concession” (Pierre Duhem, *Le Système du Monde: Histoire des doctrines cosmologiques de Platon à Copernic* [Paris: A. Hermann, 1913], 6: 414), while Petagine leaves the details somewhat blurry (Antonio Petagine, *Il fondamento positivo del mondo: Indagini francescane sulla materia all'inizio del XIV secolo (1330–1330 Ca.)* [Rome: Aracne editrice, 2019], especially chs. 7.1 and 9.3.1). I will point to some of the reasons below as to why Auriol advocates for the position, but will leave the detailed analysis to elsewhere. For Auriol's text, I will give page numbers to the early modern edition (Peter Auriol, *Commentariorum [Sic] in Secundum Librum Sententiarum* [Rome: Zannetti, 1605]), which, being notoriously unreliable, I have silently corrected against MS Padua, Bib. Ant. 161 and, when in doubt, against the other manuscripts.

<sup>34</sup> Johannes Duns Scotus, *QDA*, q. 15, 131: “Respondeo quod probabiliter potest dici quod in anima est materia, et secundum fundamenta PHILOSOPHI et eorum qui ponunt contrarium.”

<sup>35</sup> Gonsalvus of Spain, *QD*, q. 11, 204: “[O]mne creatum est materia aut materiam habens, ita quod materia sit tam in rebus corporalibus quam in incorporalibus.”

<sup>36</sup> *Sententiarum* (henceforth: *Sent.*) II.3.1.2: “Concedendum igitur est angelum materiam habere” (F 23rb).

<sup>37</sup> *Sent.* II.3.1.3: “Philosophi et Sancti qui diligentissime investigaverunt de naturis illorum, expresse intellixerunt quod essent compositae ex materia et forma. Ideo teneo cum eis [...]” (1605, 59a). Auriol's treatment of this particular issue is rather brief, but he thinks that once he has established that there is pure potentiality in angels, their materiality follows; more about that later.

order to get an overview of the main arguments for the view, I have collected them into four groups.

### 1. *The Argument from Passibility*

One argument that is shared between the *Quaestiones*, Gonsalvo, Peter of Trabibus, and Auriol is what we have already alluded to when discussing the earlier authors. It goes like this: (1) both angels and the soul can undergo passion (in other words, they are mutable or passible); but (2) pure forms are pure acts and hence cannot undergo passions; therefore, (3) angels (and the human soul) must have some non-formal, hence material constituent. As Gonsalvo notes, “just as being and acting show forth form, so potency and passion show forth matter; but in angels and in the soul, there can be real passion”.<sup>38</sup> Peter of Trabibus talks about mutability rather than passibility, but the reasoning is the same: “from the immutability of God the saints conclude his simplicity and immateriality; but from the mutability of a creature, they conclude that it has matter.”<sup>39</sup>

Auriol’s argumentation is somewhat similar. He dismisses the Boethian (and Thomistic) solution of accounting for angelic composition in terms of *quod est* and *quo est* and argues that one could not account for angelic willing and understanding except by positing a purely potential component: “in the genus of intellectual substances, there is something that can receive all actual entities in the genus of intelligibles. But that which receives in this way cannot be in act, whence it is in pure potency without any actuality.”<sup>40</sup> As Auriol argues, an angel is capable of understanding, or mentally entertaining, possibly any created thing, which, in the Aristotelian framework, means that he is capable of receiving any intelligible form. But then, since all these intelligible forms are actual, and “the receiver must be devoid of the nature of the received,”<sup>41</sup> Auriol concludes that this is only possible if a part of the angelic intellect is pure potency at least in a similar way to that in which prime matter is pure potency.<sup>42</sup>

### 2. *The Argument from Act and Potency*

Another common argument, defended in the *Quaestiones* as well as by Peter of Trabibus and Auriol, relies on the notion of a common genus. As the author of the *Quaestiones* puts it,

If in any genus, there are common and really distinct principles . . . then everything falling in that genus must be composed of those; but matter and form are such principles in the genus of substance. Proof: act and potency are the most common principles in any genus; but act, in the genus of substance, is form, and potency in the same genus is matter; therefore, matter and form are the most

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<sup>38</sup> Gonsalvus of Spain, *QD*, q. 11, 217: “Sicut esse et agere attestatur formae, ita potentia et passio attestatur materiae; sed in angelis et in anima potest esse vera passio.”

<sup>39</sup> Peter of Trabibus, *Sent.* II.3.1.2: “Ex immutabilitate enim Dei concludunt sancti eius simplicitatem et immaterialitatem, ex mutabilitate autem creaturae concludunt ipsam habere materiam” (F 23rb).

<sup>40</sup> Peter Auriol, *In Sententiarum* (henceforth: *Sent.*), II.3.1.1: “[I]n genere substantiarum intellectualium est dare aliquid quod potest recipere omnem entitatem actualem in genere intelligibilium. Illud autem sic recipiens non est ad actum trahibile, quare illud est ens in pura potentia absque omni actualitate” (1605, 56b). [ZT: cf. footnote 33, whence this abbreviation should be clear. There is really no other way to write this.]

<sup>41</sup> See Averroes, *In De anima* III.4; *Auct. Arist. De an.*, 212: “Omne recipiens debet esse denudatum a natura recepti” (Jacqueline Hamesse [ed.], *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis: Un Florilège Médiéval* [Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1974], 191).

<sup>42</sup> *Sent.* II.3.1.1: “[I]n istis substantiis intellectualibus et in anima sunt duae verae substantiae, quarum una est mere potentialis et alia est mere actus, ex quibus intrinsece componuntur. Et una dicitur intellectus possibilis, quo talis substantia patitur, id est, recipit intellectionem aliorum a se, et per consequens, quo formaliter intelligit; alia vero est intellectio sui per quam est in actu” (1605, 59a).



common principles in the genus of substance . . . . Therefore, since the angel is a species of [the common genus of] substance, it is composed of [matter and form].<sup>43</sup>

The argument is somewhat convoluted but seems to amount to this: (1) If there are some general constituents of a genus, then everything that falls under that genus must have those constituents. (For example, if the genus of mammals is characterized by having lungs, then any species that falls under the genus ‘mammals’ must also be characterized by having lungs.) (2) Act and potency, however, are the most general characteristics of all creatures – not only in the sense of being what Scotus originally called ‘disjunctive transcendentals’ (one of the pair being true of every single thing), but also in the sense that *both* members of the pair apply to everything, including all things in the genus of substance. (3) But in the genus of substance, in particular, act corresponds to form, while potency corresponds to matter; (4) therefore, in any species falling under the genus ‘substance,’ including that of angels, we must posit matter and form.

Both this and the previous argument (as well as the one briefly seen in Olivi) rest on the crucial and controversial premise that potency, insofar as it is a potency in something that falls under the category of substance, must mean ‘matter’. While our authors rarely discuss this premise and their justification for it explicitly, they do offer a consideration that seems to support it. For instance, as Peter of Trabibus puts it, potency can only be accounted for by the thing that is *primarily* in potency (just as heat can only be accounted for by the thing that is primarily hot, namely fire). But what is primarily in potency is matter, which means that whatever has potency, must also have matter.<sup>44</sup> We will return to this issue later, but it is worth pointing out here that according to Trabibus and the other proponents of this argument, it is difficult to make sense of the concept of matter if one thinks that it is not exhausted by the notion of potentiality, since besides being potential, matter is supposed to be devoid of all characteristics or forms.

### 3. The Argument from Proper Characteristics

A third argument is shared by the *Quaestiones*, Gonsalvo, and Peter of Trabibus. According to this, something cannot possess the most characteristic properties (*proprietaes*) of matter without also possessing matter as a metaphysical constituent; these properties, however, can be found in spiritual as well as in corporeal things. There are two of these properties that the *Quaestiones* calls attention to: one is that of ungenerability and incorruptibility; and the other is that of standing under accidents.

First, the soul as well as the angels are ungenerable and incorruptible.<sup>45</sup> But these characteristics primarily belong to matter, since matter is the ungenerable and incorruptible substrate of all substantial generation and corruption. But, resembling the argument made above, this means that it is only by possessing matter that these characteristics belong to other

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<sup>43</sup> Johannes Duns Scotus, *QDA*, q. 15, 134: “[Q]uia in quocumque genere sunt principia communia [...] et realiter distincta, oportet omnia illius generis esse ex eis composita; materia et forma sunt talia principia in genere substantiae. Probatio: actus et potentia sunt principia communissima in quolibet genere; actus autem in genere substantiae est forma, potentia in eodem genere est materia; igitur materia et forma sunt principia communissima in genere substantiae [...] Igitur cum angelus sit species substantiae, est ex eis compositus.”

<sup>44</sup> *Sent. II.3.1.2*: “[C]um natura potentialis per se non sit nisi materia, erit ibi compositio materiae et formae, et sic positio implicat contradictionem ponendo in angelo compositionem ex actu et potentia et negando compositionem ex materia et forma [...] Et necesse est talem potentiam ad primum possibile reduci, et cum haec sit materia, necesse est angelum habere materiam ex quo habet compositionem ex potentia et actu” (F 23ra). [ZT: cf. fn. 32. And please, DON'T correct it to 'f', which denotes 'folio' and is a completely different thing.]

<sup>45</sup> That is, save by divine creation and annihilation.

things, which leads to the conclusion that the soul and the angels must possess matter as well.<sup>46</sup> (Interestingly, Auriol does not share this argument. As he makes clear when he argues for the immateriality of celestial bodies, he thinks that having matter is precisely what makes something corruptible.<sup>47</sup>)

Second, Peter of Trabibus elaborates more on the characteristic of *sub-standing*. As he notes, it is clear that substance itself underlies (or substands, *sub-stare*), since it underlies all its accidents. A cat underlies its being tabby, or a human being underlies its being pale rather than being tanned. But this kind of underlying is derivative of that first and foremost underlying that is a characteristic of matter: matter underlies the substantial form that inheres in it (or perhaps multiple substantial forms successively or even simultaneously<sup>48</sup>). In other words, without the matter underlying the substantial form, there would be no substance to start with, so no substance underlying its accidents. Moreover, Trabibus argues, there is no further entity that would be underlying matter itself, which means that indeed, matter is what first and primarily underlies, and the underlying of all other substrates are derivative of this primary underlying. As Trabibus concludes, this means that every substance must have matter, since otherwise we could not account for its characteristic sub-standing of its accidents. Angels also underlie their accidents, such as their volitions and other mental acts, and thus, like all other substances, must possess matter.<sup>49</sup> Gonsalvo's argument is virtually identical to Peter's, thus there is no reason to repeat it here.<sup>50</sup>

#### 4. The Argument from Individuation

A further argument is shared by the *Quaestiones* and Gonsalvo, as well as by the earlier authors briefly mentioned above. The argument maintains that the materiality of the soul and the angels follows from Aristotle's view of individuation: that having multiple individuals in the same species requires matter.<sup>51</sup>

In particular, Gonsalvo and the *Quaestiones* cite *Metaphysics* 12, where Aristotle arguably claims that there are no multiple celestial movers within a species, since they lack matter.<sup>52</sup> But, as the argument continues, it is obvious that there are multiple individuals in the

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<sup>46</sup> Gonsalvus of Spain, *QD*, q. 11, 214: “[P]rincipia debent proportionari principiatis illorum; igitur magis et verius sunt aliqua principia in quibus magis inveniuntur proprietates illorum principiorum; sed proprietates materiae [...] verius inveniuntur in incorporalibus omnibus quam in corporalibus; ergo magis et verius erit materia in incorporalibus quam in corporalibus. Assumpta patet: quia proprietates materiae, quantum ad suum esse, est quod sit ingenerabilis et incorruptibilis [...] Haec autem singulariter conveniunt incorporalibus; [...] Ergo etc.” For the Johannes Duns Scotus, *QDA*, see q. 15,133.

<sup>47</sup> See his arguments in Auriol, *Sent. II.14.1.1*.

<sup>48</sup> Again, the debate about the plurality of substantial forms – i.e., whether matter can have, simultaneously, more than one substantial form – is orthogonal to the present issue, but it should be noted that Trabibus is a pluralist. See Hildebert Alois Huning, “The Plurality of Forms According to Petrus de Trabibus o.f.m”, *Franciscan Studies* 28 (1968): 137-196.

<sup>49</sup> Trabibus, *Sent. II.3.1.2*: “[S]ubstare sive subsistere primo et per se et principaliter convenit materiae secundum quod probat Aristoteles, VII *Metaphysicae*, tali ratione: illud quod substat aliis subsistit et ei nihil habet magis rationem substantiae. Sed materia est quae substat omnibus aliis, substat enim formae et mediante forma accidentibus, sibi autem omnino nihil substat; ergo materia magis habet rationem substantiae. Ergo cuicumque convenit ratio subsistendi, convenit ei per materiam cum substare sive subsistere dicatur de aliis per attributionem quandam ad materiam. Cum ergo manifestum sit angelum quibusdam accidentibus subsistere, necesse est angelum materiam habere” (F 23ra).

<sup>50</sup> See Gonsalvus of Spain, *QD*, q. 11, 214-215.

<sup>51</sup> Angelic individuation was, as has been well documented, a vexed issue for most of the medieval period. On Scotus's view (not identical with that of the *Quaestiones*), see Giorgio Pini, “The Individuation of Angels from Bonaventure to Duns Scotus”, in *A Companion to Angels in Medieval Philosophy*, edited by T. Hoffmann (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 79-116. See also Tiziana Suarez-Nani, *Les Anges et la Philosophie: Subjectivité et fonction cosmologique des substances séparées à la fin du XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Vrin, 2002), 39-50.

<sup>52</sup> See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 12.8, 1074a 32-36.

species of the rational soul; hence it follows that this rational soul must have matter. The same is true of angels, for which Gonsalvo argues explicitly, quoting Saint Paul that the angels rejoice with one another and genuinely care for one another, which would not be possible if they belonged to different species (as Gonsalvo remarks, a deer does not care for or rejoice with a cow!).<sup>53</sup>

As both the *Quaestiones* and Gonsalvo are aware, an opponent of spiritual matter could make a rejoinder along the lines of Aquinas, who suggests that once matter has individuated the rational soul, it can remain individual even if the originally individuating matter is no longer joined to it. Gonsalvo notes, however, that this answer would result in some serious metaphysical difficulties: saying that the rational soul is individuated by the human body that it perfects would imply that the soul receives its (individual) existence from the body, and thus is metaphysically secondary to the body, which is not true. Or, as he puts it again, a soul can be united to a particular body only if it is already different from other souls, and thus, the soul itself must have its individuality prior to and independently of this union and of the body to which it is united.<sup>54</sup>

Apart from these arguments that are almost uniformly shared among the four authors considered here (and some with Bonaventure and Olivi as well), there are some that are more unique. Thus, for instance, Gonsalvo argues that matter perfects being (otherwise it would not have been created to start with!), and thus spiritual things, which are in general more perfect than corporeal ones, should not lack it.<sup>55</sup> Or, as Peter of Trabibus notes, since every substance is either matter or form or a composite of these two, and since angels cannot be the former two, they must be the latter.<sup>56</sup> Trabibus also thinks, similarly to Olivi,<sup>57</sup> that we need to posit matter in both the human intellect and the angels in order to account for their unity, despite having distinct faculties or powers.<sup>58</sup> But the primary aim here was to give an overview of the main considerations thinkers endorsed for maintaining hylomorphic composition in angels, and for that, this overview will suffice. Besides these general hylomorphic considerations, our authors also often endorsed theological ones; e.g., by alluding to Augustine's literal commentary on Genesis, according to which when the Bible says that "God created heaven and earth," what is

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<sup>53</sup> Gonsalvus of Spain, *QD*, q. 11, 215-216: "[Q]uacumque sunt plura eiusdem speciei habent materiam [...] sed anima et angeli sunt plures eiusdem speciei; ergo habent materiam. Minor patet [...] nisi angeli essent eiusdem speciei, sequeretur quod inter eos non esset amor naturalis." For the *Quaestiones*, see Johannes Duns Scotus, *QDA*, q. 15, 131-132. ZT: again, this was in a previous footnote, fn. 30.

<sup>54</sup> Gonsalvus of Spain, *QD*, q. 11, 215: "Sed ad hanc plurificationem et distinctionem animarum sub eodem specie non sufficit materia in qua sunt et quam perficiunt, ut corpus humanum, quia corpora sunt propter animas, et anima est finis corporis [...] ergo plurificatio et distinctio animarum non est per corpora, sed magis e contra." See also the Johannes Duns Scotus, *QDA*, q. 15, 132, making the very same point: "Anima non est propter corpus, sed potius e converso; igitur nec distinctio nec pluralitas animarum est propter distinctionem corporum, sed potius e converso."

<sup>55</sup> Gonsalvus of Spain, *QD*, q. 11, 214: "[Q]uod facit ad perfectionem substantiae in quantum substantia est ens distinctum . . . et tale ponendum est in entibus nobilioribus sive magis perfectis [...] Sed materia est huiusmodi, quod ipsa facit ad perfectionem substantiae . . . ergo etc."

<sup>56</sup> Trabibus, *Sent. II.3.1.2*: "[O]mnis substantia aut est materia aut forma aut compositum. Sed materia et forma secundum quod in hac divisione accipiuntur sunt partes essentialis substantiae compositae, materia enim non est substantia ut totum sed ut pars; nec forma similiter, cum dicantur relative. Ergo omnis substantia aut est substantia composita aut pars substantiae compositae. Sed non potest dici quod angelus sit pars substantiae compositae. Ergo est substantia composita ex materia et forma" (F 22vb).

<sup>57</sup> Petrus Iohannis Olivi, *Sent. II.16*, esp. 315-316.

<sup>58</sup> See especially his *Sent. I.8.4.4*.

denoted by ‘earth’ is the formless matter of all creatures, spiritual as well as corporeal.<sup>59</sup> But we will leave these theological considerations aside for now as well.

## The Nature of Angelic Matter

While this shared background may suggest that the four texts examined here ultimately agree on the main metaphysical characteristics of spiritual matter, that is not the case. While Gonsalvo and the author of the *Quaestiones* think, agreeing with Bonaventure and earlier perhaps with Avicbron, that the same kind of material component is found across all creation, spiritual and corporeal alike, Peter of Trabibus and Auriol argue, agreeing with Olivi, that matter must be different in spiritual and corporeal things. The way they account for this difference, in turn, will also shed some light on their notions of spiritual matter, corporeity, and matter in general.

### a.) The Uniform Matter View

The first position, endorsed by the author of the *Quaestiones* and by Gonsalvo, is what we can label as the ‘uniform matter view’, that is, that “that matter [in the spiritual substances] is of the same nature as the matter of corporeal things, so that in all created things, there is matter of the same nature”.<sup>60</sup> Gonsalvo is already keenly aware that this is a somewhat controversial position even among those who endorse spiritual matter; as he notes, “of those maintaining this opinion [i.e., that there is matter in angels], some say that matter is of a different nature in those three kinds of things, because of their intransmutability to one another; and some say that in everything there is [matter] of one and the same nature, which seems to me more probable”.<sup>61</sup> This latter position is what we may also call ‘universal hylomorphism’: the hylomorphic composition of creatures is fundamentally of the same in kind, regardless of the kind of creature in question.<sup>62</sup>

While both Gonsalvo and the author of the *Quaestiones* think that this view is simply more plausible than its alternative, they also provide a few arguments for the position.

According to the first, what we may call the *Argument from Hierarchy*, if spiritual and corporeal matter were not of the same kind, then one would be more noble than the other, in some sense of ‘nobility’. Regardless, however, of how we flesh out this hierarchy – that is, whether we posit spiritual matter to be more or less noble than the corporeal one – we will run into difficulties.<sup>63</sup> The same argument was indeed often proposed against the distinction

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<sup>59</sup> For Augustine’s less than unambiguous account, see his *De genesi ad litteram*, I.1 (Aurelius Augustinus, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis I: Books 1–6*, edited and translated by J. Hammond Taylor [New York, N.Y.: Newman Press, 1982], 19-20).

<sup>60</sup> Gonsalvus of Spain, *QD*, q. 11, 219: [D]icendum est quod non solum materia est in rebus spiritualibus, sed quod illa materia eiusdem rationis est secundum se cum materia corporalium, ita quod in creatis per se entibus est materia unius rationis.” For the *Quaestiones*, see Johannes Duns Scotus, *QDA*, q. 15, 135-136. [ZT: what’s the question?]

<sup>61</sup> Gonsalvus of Spain, *QD*, q. 11, 204: “Sed de numero istam opinionem tenentium, quidam dicunt quod materia est alterius rationis in isto triplici gradu entium propter eorum intransmutabilitatem ad invicem; quidam vero quod in omnibus sit unius rationis et eiusdem, quae videtur mihi probabilior.”

<sup>62</sup> Universal hylomorphism was of course best known in the West through Avicbron’s theory; as Weisheipl already noted, one can trace the lineage from Avicbron to Gundissalinus to the later Western commentators. See Weisheipl, “Albertus Magnus”.

<sup>63</sup> See Gonsalvo, even though his argument, as stated, is about celestial matter: “[S]i in caelo esset materia alterius rationis quam in istis corporalibus, et in rebus spiritualibus quam in rebus corporalibus, oportet quod materia in corporibus caelestibus esset nobilior quam materia istorum inferiorum [...] Ergo forma perficiens materiam in

between celestial and terrestrial matter, that is, of the matter of immutable celestial bodies and mutable corporeal ones, in which case the difficulties hinted at are in fact easier to see. On the one hand, if celestial matter is more noble than the terrestrial one, then it must be perfected by a more noble form; but it is not, since the rational soul is more noble than the form of an inanimate celestial body. On the other hand, if celestial matter is less noble, then it must be perfected by less noble forms than those perfecting terrestrial matter; but this is not the case either, since the form of a celestial body is more noble than the form of a terrestrial element or of an inanimate body.<sup>64</sup> Gonsalvo seems to think, although without elaborating on the details of how it is exactly supposed to work, that the same consideration applies to spiritual matter as well. Moreover, he and the author of the *Quaestiones* claim that even if one could establish a hierarchy without immediate metaphysical contradictions, nevertheless, since – according to Augustine – matter is between something and nothing,<sup>65</sup> one of the kinds would either fall into pure nothingness or into full actuality.<sup>66</sup>

The second argument Gonsalvo and the author of the *Quaestiones* propose for their position is what can perhaps be regarded as the main challenge of the opposite view: namely, that if one were to accept the diversity view, one would have to account for where the diversity of matter comes from. It clearly cannot come from form or the composite itself, since matter as such is devoid of these; but it is difficult to see what other option there could be, since in all other things, it is form that gives difference. Gonsalvo also thinks that the view that would place the origin of the difference in the diverse aptitudes for form (a view perhaps advocated for by Auriol, as below), is mistaken: matter as such, being pure potency, must be in potency to all kinds of forms and hence cannot have diverse aptitudes.<sup>67</sup>

What can the diversity view say to these arguments, and indeed, how can it maintain that matter can be diversified? Both Peter of Trabibus and Auriol think that the matter of spiritual things is different in kind from the matter of corporeal ones, and besides giving some arguments for this position, they also clarify how one can conceive of the distinction.

### ***b.) The Diverse Matter View***

The first way in which both Trabibus and Auriol characterize the difference between corporeal and spiritual matter is that “the matter of corporeal things according to its essence has extension, while the matter of spiritual things according to its essence lacks extension”.<sup>68</sup> Trabibus thinks that corporeal matter includes extension in its essence because he thinks that every corporeal form already presupposes a more or less determinate extension – which means that this extension cannot come from that corporeal form. For instance, when the substantial form of a cat is united to matter, that matter already has to be of a certain size; one cannot take the matter of a small droplet and turn it into a cat by informing it with a cat-soul. (In this sense,

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caelestibus esset nobilior forma perficiente materiam in generabilibus animatis; et sic caelum esset animatum anima intellectiva, quod tamen falsum est” (Gonsalvus of Spain, *QD*, q. 11, 220).

<sup>64</sup> The argument, used for establishing the unity of celestial and terrestrial matter, can be found in many authors, including Scotus, Ockham, and earlier Francis of Marchia. For a more detailed analysis of the argument, see Mark Thakkar, “Francis of Marchia on the Heavens”, *Vivarium: A Journal for Mediaeval Philosophy and the Intellectual Life of the Middle Ages* 44 (2006): 21-40.

<sup>65</sup> See Augustine, *Confessionum libri tredecim*, XII.7, lin. 13: “[U]nde fecisti caelum et terram, duo quaedam, unum prope te, alterum prope nihil” (Patrologia Latina 32:659).

<sup>66</sup> This same argument can also be found in some opponents of spiritual matter, who regard it as a *reductio* against the view; see, e.g., Landolphus Caracciolo, also a Franciscan contemporary, *Sent.* II.3.1.2 (Landolphus Caracciolo, *Liber Secundum Super Sententias* [Venice: Adam de Rottweil, 1480]).

<sup>67</sup> Gonsalvus of Spain, *QD*, q. 11, 219-220.

<sup>68</sup> Peter of Trabibus, *Sent.* II.3.1.4: “[M]ateria corporalium secundum suam essentiam habeat extensionem, materia autem spiritualium secundum suam essentiam extensione careat” (F 24va).

Peter seems to believe in a principle akin to the preservation of quantity of matter.<sup>69</sup> As Auriol puts it, somewhat similarly, all forms received by corporeal prime matter are quantized, and consequently, the matter that can stand under this kind of form must also be intrinsically quantized, in the sense of having indeterminate quantity.<sup>70</sup> Trabibus and Auriol also note that extension must be a characteristic that follows upon corporeal matter (as opposed to form), since it does not make a composite substance active but rather passive.<sup>71</sup> Finally, they argue, if matter is essentially extensionless, then it cannot receive extension without changing its essence – and since the latter is implausible, we must grant that corporeal matter inherently possesses extension.<sup>72</sup> (In contrast, the author of the *Quaestiones* and Gonsalvo explicitly argue for the claim that neither extension nor its lack is part of the essence of matter.<sup>73</sup>)

The second main argument for the diverse matter view is also shared between Trabibus and Auriol. As they note, matter, primarily, is the source of passive potency, by which things can undergo passion (as was seen above, this was one of the main reasons to posit matter in the first place, among spiritual things). However, the passive potency of corporeal and of spiritual things are different; and thus, so must be their matter. For Trabibus and Auriol, the difference of passive potencies consists in the fact that while corporeal things undergo substantial transmutation, spiritual things do not, but only accidental ones.<sup>74</sup> Thus, Trabibus concludes that the matter of corporeal and spiritual things has identity by analogy only, which analogy is based on three characteristics that are shared amongst the different kinds: matter is perfectible and perfected by the form; it sub-stands; and it is a potency.<sup>75</sup> These characteristics do not imply, however, that the different kinds of matter would share a common essence or a common definition.

Both Peter of Trabibus and Auriol are aware that the main reason why someone may endorse the unicity view is that it seems implausible (if not impossible) to posit any distinction in things that altogether lack formal characteristics, since all distinction comes from the form.

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<sup>69</sup> For some discussion of this principle, see, e.g., Robert Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes, 1274-1671* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), ch. 4.5, 71-76.

<sup>70</sup> The notion of indeterminate quantity or indeterminate dimensions has received some attention in Silvia Donati, “The Notion of *Dimensiones Indeterminatae* in the Commentary Tradition of the *Physics* in the Thirteenth Century”, in *The Dynamics of Aristotelian Natural Philosophy from Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century*, edited by C. Leijenhorst, C. Lüthy, and J.M.M.H. Thijssen (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 189-224. For Auriol’s view, see Petagine, *Il fondamento positivo*, 78-84.

<sup>71</sup> Even though Auriol also thinks that corporeity itself must be a formal characteristic (being due to one of the most universal forms on the Porphyrean tree). See his treatment of immaterial celestial bodies, [Sent. II.14.1.2 \(1605, 189a\)](#).

<sup>72</sup> Peter of Trabibus, [Sent. II.3.1.4](#), F 25ra-26ra.

<sup>73</sup> E.g., Johannes Duns Scotus, *QDA*, q. 15, 139: “Ratio autem materiae secundum se est quod nec est quid nec quantum, et caetera, sed est potentia unumquodque.”

<sup>74</sup> Peter Auriol, [Sent. II.3.1.1](#): “Tertia differentia est ex natura transmutationis, quia materia prima est illud quo aliquid recipitur cum transmutatione et cum abiectioe alterius, et hoc accidit sibi ratione trinae dimensionis, quae necessario trahitur ad determinatam figuram et exigentiam formae receptae; sed intellectus possibilis est illud quo aliquid recipitur sine transmutatione et abiectioe alicuius” [\(1605, 57b\)](#). Peter of Trabibus, [Sent. II.3.1.4](#), F 25vb: “[N]isi esset materia non esset passio; pati enim aequivoce dicitur de spiritualibus et corporalibus, quia in corporalibus passio est cum substantiali transmutatione quo modo in spiritualibus esse non potest. Ergo nec materia potest esse unius rationis hic et ibi.”

<sup>75</sup> Peter of Trabibus, [\[what's the question?\] Sent. II.3.1.4](#): “Ex quo concluditur necessario quod . . . habet identitatem secundum analogiam tantum, quae quidem analogia attendatur in tribus. In comparatione essentiae, quia sicut substantiae corporales habent essentiam compositorum ex duplici principio quorum unum est de se imperfectum et interminatum, quod dicitur materia, perfectibile et terminabile ab alio [...] In ratione subsistentiae, quia sicut in substantiis corporalibus invenitur aliquid cui primo convenit ratio subsistentiae, quod quidem est materia, sic et in substantiis spiritualibus se habet. In ratione potentiae, quia sicut in corporibus invenitur aliquid per quod sunt in potentia ad communem perfectionem substantialem vel accidentalem, sic et in substantiis spiritualibus aliquid est per quod sunt in potentia ad aliquam perfectionem quae eis potest acquiri” (F 25vb).

As was seen above, this was indeed a common objection against the diversity view. Trabibus thinks, however, that the main assumption of this reasoning is false. As he notes,

The aforementioned argument for the position, without doubt, posits something false, namely that matter in itself does not have actuality, but all its actuality is from the form, and because of this it cannot have any distinction except by the form. For this is false, because all essences, necessarily, have some actuality, a complete essence complete [actuality], and an incomplete [essence] incomplete [actuality].<sup>76</sup>

Thus, in Trabibus's view, whether we can distinguish various kinds of matter is strongly tied to the question of whether or not matter has any actuality. Trabibus thinks that all essences must have some kind of actuality, otherwise they would not be essences. Since an essence is that which pertains to a thing when all other things are bracketed or removed, if matter has an essence, it pertains to it in actuality when all other things (including forms) are removed.<sup>77</sup>

While Trabibus's argument, starting from the actuality of matter, seems to indicate that the distinction between various kinds of prime matter indeed implies that prime matter is not purely potential, we should note here that some form of the distinction thesis was relatively wide-spread, even among those who thought that matter had no actuality on its own. Thus, Aquinas, while arguably thinking that matter is pure potency,<sup>78</sup> also argues that the matter of celestial bodies and the matter of terrestrial elements differ.<sup>79</sup> When explaining how such a distinction can be made between purely potential prime matters, he gives the analogy of distinguishing the highest genera from one another: it cannot be done based on some specific difference (since they do not fall under any further common genus), but rather, they are *just* different.<sup>80</sup> The distinction was also drawn on similar grounds by Hervaeus Natalis, between the possibly very many kinds of prime matter, referring to the different essential grades that these different matters have, while all of them being purely potential.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Peter of Trabibus, *Sent.* II.3.1.4: "Ratio autem praedictae positionis indubitanter ponit falsum, scilicet quod materia de se non habeat actualitatem, sed tota eius actualitas sit a forma, ac per hoc nec aliquam possit habere distinctionem nisi a forma. Hoc enim est falsum, quia omnis essentia necessario habet aliquam actualitatem, completa completam, incompleta incompletam" (F 24va).

<sup>77</sup> Peter of Trabibus, *Sent.* II.3.1.4: "Item, essentia cuiuslibet rei dicitur illud quod res est absolute omni alio circumscripto. Sed essentia materiae aliqua essentia est. Ergo habet aliquod esse de se omni alio circumscripto. Ergo forma nec simpliciter | dat esse materiae nec distinctionem" (F 24va-vb).

<sup>78</sup> Whether matter is indeed purely potential for Aquinas has been the subject of some controversy; see, e.g., Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes*, ch. 3.1; and for a different take, Jeffrey E. Brower, *Aquinas's Ontology of the Material World: Change, Hylomorphism, and Material Objects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), chs. 5.4 and 5.5. See also Matthew Kent, *Prime Matter According to St Thomas* (PhD diss., Fordham University, 2006).

<sup>79</sup> See, e.g., Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.66.2: "Materia enim, secundum id quod est, est in potentia ad formam. Oportet ergo quod materia, secundum se considerata, sit in potentia ad formam omnium illorum quorum est materia communis . . . Sic ergo materia, secundum quod est sub forma incorruptibilis corporis, erit adhuc in potentia ad formam corruptibilis corporis . . . Impossibile ergo est quod corporis corruptibilis et incorruptibilis per naturam, sit una materia." See also Aquinas, *Sent.* II.12.1.

<sup>80</sup> Aquinas, *Sent.* II.12.1.1: "[S]imiliter etiam genera generalissima non dividuntur aliquibus differentiis, sed seipsis."

<sup>81</sup> Hervaeus Natalis, *In Quatuor Libros Sententiarum Commentaria* (Paris: Dionysius Moreau, 1647), II.12.3, 239b: "[P]otentiae aliquo distinguuntur essentiis suis intrinsece et realiter, ita quod in essentiis suis habent diversos gradus." Hervaeus thinks we may need as many kinds of prime matter as there are celestial bodies, in order to preserve their incorruptibility; a view that Ockham will ridicule later (William of Ockham, *Quaestiones in Librum Secundum Sententiarum (Reportatio)*, in *Opera Theologica* 5, edited by G. Gál and R. Wood [St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1981], II.18, 398).

Auriol does not delve into the metaphysical specificities of matter at least in this context;<sup>82</sup> he merely notes that although both the prime matter of corruptible things and the possible intellect are recognized by transmutation, they do not undergo the same kind of transmutation: we learn of prime matter by observing substantial change, while we learn of the possible intellect by observing mental change in human beings and assuming change of intellect and perhaps of will in angels. Now, transmutation in the Aristotelian framework means the actualization of a potency; thus, having these altogether different kinds of transmutations point to different underlying substrates, or different potencies of spiritual and corporeal things.<sup>83</sup>

Apart from pointing out the difference in these general terms, Auriol also thinks that matter in spiritual and corporeal things can be distinguished based on the kinds of act they are contrasted with. (Aquinas would, again, agree at least with this much: as he explains the difference between kinds of matter, “the different matters themselves are distinguished by analogy to the different acts, inasmuch as a different grade [ratio] of possibility can be found in them”.<sup>84</sup>) In other words, in order to understand how corporeal and spiritual matter differ as passive potencies, we need to look at the kinds of forms to which they are in potency. On the one hand, the matter of an earthly corporeal body,<sup>85</sup> such as cat, is the kind of matter that is in potency to all particular substantial forms – it can receive the substantial form of a cat, the substantial form of a cat-corpse, and so on. However, unlike the potential intellect of an angel, it cannot receive universal or intelligible forms. And the reverse is true as well: while the material component or possible intellect of an angel is in potency to receive all intelligible (and hence universal) forms, it is not in potency to receive the substantial form of a particular cat. Thus, Auriol thinks that the underlying substrate of angels and material things can be characterized by saying that the former is in potency to all universal intelligibles, while the latter is in potency to all forms of particular sensible objects, while both of them being purely potential since they can receive any form in the realm of universal or particular forms, respectively.<sup>86</sup>

## Spiritual and Corporeal Matter

What can we say about angelic matter, or matter in general, in light of these considerations? One, perhaps obvious immediate conclusion is that even among authors who advocated for spiritual matter, the positions diverge. Some maintained that this spiritual matter essentially differs from the corporeal kind; some denied this distinction. Proponents of the diverse matter view think that the matter of corporeal things is necessarily extended; proponents of the unicity view, on the other hand, believe that matter as such can acquire extension but that extension

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<sup>82</sup> For a brief examination of what he says about them elsewhere, see Russell L. Friedman, “Is Matter the Same as Its Potency? Some Fourteenth-Century Answers”, *Vivarium* 59 (2021): 123-142.

<sup>83</sup> See Peter Auriol, *Sent. II.3.1.1*, as quoted above (n. 74).

<sup>84</sup> Aquinas, *Sent. II.12.1.1*, ad 3: “[D]iversae materiae seipsis distinguuntur secundum analogiam ad diversos actus, prout in eis diversa ratio possibilitatis invenitur.” For the claim that passive potencies are individuated based on the corresponding actualities, see, e.g., *ST I.77.3* and *ScG III.45*, and for some analysis, Gloria Frost, *Aquinas on Efficient Causation and Causal Powers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), ch. 5.2.

<sup>85</sup> As was mentioned above, Auriol thinks that the celestial bodies are corporeal yet immaterial, hence this qualification. See Peter Auriol, *Sent. II.14.1.1*.

<sup>86</sup> Auriol, *Sent. II.3.1.1*: “Prima [differentia] est quod sicut totum genus sensibilibium differt a toto genere intelligibilium, sic haec materia ab illa, quia materia est quoddam ens trahibile ad totum genus sensibilibium, non intelligibilium; intellectus vero potentialis econtra ad totum genus intelligibilium, non sensibilibium” (1605, 57b).



does not become part of its essence. (Again, in this they agree with some of the spiritual immaterialists, such as perhaps Aquinas.)

As it has been mentioned in passing but is worth making explicit, the debate on spiritual matter closely resembles the one on the matter of celestial bodies. The resemblance is not incidental, as the two cases indeed seem to be two sides of the same coin: while angels (or indeed, the separate human soul) present an instance of incorporeal but changeable substances, celestial bodies present an instance of corporeal but unchangeable ones.<sup>87</sup> Consequently, some authors who thought that angels must be material precisely for the reason that they are changeable, also thought that celestial bodies are incorporeal precisely for the reason that they are unchangeable.<sup>88</sup>

It is interesting to note, however, that no specific view about celestial matter is obviously implied by any specific view about spiritual matter, or vice versa, and hence a variety of combinations emerges. Some thinkers, such as Gonsalvo and the author of the *Quaestiones*, think that the same matter underlies all creation, be it spiritual or corporeal, celestial or terrestrial. Others, such as Auriol, think that while spiritual beings are material, having matter that is distinct from the matter of terrestrial bodies, the heavenly bodies are not material at all. Trabibus takes the diversity view in both cases: while he thinks that there is spiritual matter, this spiritual matter is distinct from corporeal matter (the latter is essentially extended while the former is not), and that the matter of celestial and terrestrial bodies also differ.<sup>89</sup> Some deniers of spiritual matter, such as Ockham, will argue that while spiritual substances are immaterial, the matter of heavenly bodies is the same as that of the terrestrial elements<sup>90</sup>; while other deniers, such as Aquinas or Hervaeus, think that the matter of celestial bodies differs from that of the terrestrial ones (and perhaps even from one another).<sup>91</sup>

If one would like to attempt to systematize some of these positions, perhaps it is useful to pay attention to two interrelated issues. The first is the relationship between corporeity and materiality; the second is that between matter and its potency.

First, while it may be tempting for the modern reader to treat corporeity and materiality as identical characteristics, that was not so for some of the medieval thinkers we have considered here. For instance, for Auriol, materiality and corporeity come apart in such a way that neither one of them implies the other. In other words, Auriol conceives of matter strictly as an underlying substrate of change, dividing it altogether from the question of whether something is a body in the sense of being made of “stuff”. (As was mentioned above, he regards corporeity as a formal characteristic.<sup>92</sup>) This means that, for Auriol, as we have seen, there can

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<sup>87</sup> On some of Aristotle’s empirical data for this unchangeability, see Grant, *Planets, Stars, and Orbs*, ch. 10, esp. 203-205; for a helpful general introduction of Aristotle’s cosmology, David C. Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 52-60.

<sup>88</sup> Again, this is Auriol’s view. While this was the main reason why Duhem regarded Auriol’s endorsement of spiritual matter as merely “verbal”, this does not seem to me plausible. These two positions point to Auriol’s conception of matter as a purely metaphysical substrate of change. I examine Auriol’s view in more detail in “Heavenly Stuff: Peter Auriol on the Materiality of Angels and Celestial Bodies,” *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, forthcoming.

<sup>89</sup> The view is more complex; they differ according to certain conceptions but are analogically speaking identical. See Trabibus, *Sent. II.12.4, F 72ra-va*.

<sup>90</sup> William of Ockham, *Reportatio II.18*.

<sup>91</sup> Aquinas, *Sent. II.12*; Hervaeus Natalis, *Subtilissima Hervei Natalis Britonis Theologi Acutissimi Quolibeta Undecim Cum Octo Ipsius Profundissimis Tractatibus* (Venice: Antonius Zimara, 1513), III.10, 82vb ff.; idem, *De materia caeli*, q. 3 in the same volume; and idem, *Sent. II.12 (1647, 235 ff.)*.

<sup>92</sup> Auriol, *Sent. II.14.1.2*: “Materiam enim esse in caelo non concludit corporeitas; forma enim dat esse corporeum, non materia. Nec illam concludit quantitas, licet enim quantitas interminata sit ratione materiae, tamen quantitas terminata inest ratione formae (in caelo autem tantummodo est quantitas terminata). Tertia, non sensibilis qualitas” (1605, 189a).

be immaterial and yet corporeal substances, such as the celestial bodies, and also material yet incorporeal ones, such as angels. Our everyday objects, cats, statues, and the like, happen to be both material and corporeal, but that implies nothing with respect to the logical relation between these notions.

Other proponents of spiritual matter, such as Trabibus, Gonsalvo, or the author of the *Quaestiones*, seem to think that one must have matter in order to have a body, but the former does not imply the latter. Thus, they admit of material and yet incorporeal things (angels, souls), but not of things that are corporeal and yet immaterial.

For other authors, materiality seems to imply corporeity, and vice versa. For instance, as was briefly seen above, Aquinas thinks that spiritual substances must be immaterial, since, for one, materiality would hinder their intellection. In particular, for Aquinas, a material intellect could not understand for the precise reason that it would then be a body; thus, it seems that for him, materiality implies corporeity. He also thinks that celestial bodies must be material because they are *bodies*, in other words, corporeal beings; which indicates that corporeity also implies materiality.<sup>93</sup> In other words, for Aquinas, something is material just in case it is also corporeal, and the same seems to be the view of most of the later Franciscan authors as well, including Ockham.<sup>94</sup>

The question of how matter and its potency are related is a convoluted one that we cannot deal with in this paper.<sup>95</sup> But it is worth noting that for some, like Bonaventure and Gonsalvo, who think that the same matter underlies all creation, ‘matter’ indeed seems to be synonymous with ‘potency’, as contrasted with pure actuality. For these authors, just as for Auriol, having matter does not imply being corporeal; but, in contrast with Auriol, it does not necessarily imply being changeable either (since celestial bodies are not such, even though they possess matter). Being material, in this sense, merely implies that the thing in question is not purely actual in the way God is purely actual – which is, of course, true of all created things. Aquinas (following Albert) explicitly criticizes this identification of matter and potency, and as is well known, argues that there can be potency where there is no matter; but he does agree with the position at least in thinking that there can be matter where there is no potency for change (as in the case of heavenly bodies). All this seems to indicate that while virtually everyone in our period agreed that matter is (or implies) potency, the understanding of ‘potency’ here differed greatly: for some, it meant a kind of incomplete essence as distinguished from pure actuality, for others, it meant particularly a potency for successively taking on different forms, in other words, a potency for change.

All in all, as this brief sketch shows, the question of angelic materiality gave ample opportunity for thinkers to elaborate on what they meant exactly by ‘matter’, and to hint at the ways in which this metaphysical principle is related to other important metaphysical notions in the neighborhood, such as change, corporeity, or potency. How to make sense of spiritual substances that are changeable (including both angels and the human soul), and of celestial bodies that are unchangeable, was a challenge that well illustrates some of the emerging, more subtle problems with Aristotelian hylomorphism. But we need a fuller study of the later,

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<sup>93</sup> As Aquinas notes: “[D]imensiones quantitativae sunt accidentia consequentia corporeitatem, quae toti materiae convenit” (*Summa Theologiae* I.76.6 ad 2, emphasis added). For some analysis of Aquinas’s conception of materiality and body, see Antonio Petagine, *Matière, Corps, Esprit: La notion de sujet dans la philosophie de Thomas d’Aquin* (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2014).

<sup>94</sup> Scotus in notoriously noncommittal regarding the question of the materiality of celestial bodies, seemingly regarding Aristotle’s view as incompatible with theology. The perhaps most detailed treatment is in the *Reportatio*, II.14.1 (Johannes Duns Scotus, *Ioannis Duns Scoti Reportata Parisiensia*, in *Opera Omnia* 11.1, edited by L. Wadding [Lyon: Laurentius Durand, 1639], 336-339).

<sup>95</sup> For an overview of some of the fourteenth-century intricacies, see Friedman, “Is Matter the Same as Its Potency?”.

fifteenth-century developments to see how these problems influenced the ultimate fate of the theory.

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