Christian thinkers in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were much concerned with protecting the absolute simplicity of God and, in their effort to support this point, by way of contrast often attributed some kind of composition to all created entities. By the mid-1280s, very different ways of doing this had been proposed by different philosophers and theologians. One widely held position maintained that in all created substances other than God there is a composition of matter and form—of a corporeal matter and a corporeal form in the case of corporeal entities, and of a spiritual kind of matter and a spiritual form in the case of purely spiritual beings such as angels and human souls according to some, or of one and the same kind of matter in both corporeal entities and in spirits according to others. Another position appealed to some version of a distinction and composition, originally proposed by Boethius, between quod est and esse in all beings with the exception of God, even though this distinction and composition was interpreted in widely divergent ways by different thinkers. Still other thinkers insisted that one could adequately defend the non-simple character of substances other than God without appealing to any real distinction and composition either of matter and form or of essence and existence (esse) within them. The present chapter will consider these three positions successively in three different sections as they were developed by Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, and Godfrey of Fontaines.

1. Matter-Form Composition of Angels: St. Bonaventure

The first theory, widely accepted by the mid-thirteenth century, is often referred to as universal hylomorphism, that is, the claim that in all beings with the exception of God there is a distinction and composition of form and matter. The historical origins of this theory were disputed in the thirteenth century and, for that matter, continue to be subject to some dispute today. On the one hand, certain defenders of this position, especially among the Franciscans, attempted to trace it back to Saint Augustine
and contrasted this and other Augustinian positions with the dangerous innovations which, they maintained, had recently been introduced into Christian thought by thinkers such as Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas. Certain modern scholars, especially Roberto Zavalloni, agree that the theory is indeed Augustinian in origin. On the other hand, various thirteenth-century figures, including Albert and Aquinas, maintained that its true originator was the Spanish-Jewish philosopher Avicebron (IbnGabir), who, writing in Arabic, produced an influential work known by its Latin title as the *Fons vitae* which had been translated into Latin in the twelfth century, and in which this theory is developed.

In his Commentary on Book II of the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, distinction 3, part 1, while considering the natural attributes of angels, Bonaventure introduces the issue of the simplicity of angelic essences by raising three questions: (1) whether an angel is simple, or composed of matter and form; (2) if it is granted that it is composed of matter and form, whether the matter present in spirits is essentially the same as that found

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1 Roberto Zavalloni, *Richard de Mediavilla et la controverse sur la pluralité des formes: textes inédits et étude critique* (Leuven: Éditions de l’Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1951), 422. While he recognizes the influence of Avicebron on the doctrine of universal hylomorphism, he denies that it is preponderant and cites Thomas of York in his effort to show that Augustine’s influence was more direct and decisive (see 442–43). Also see Gonsalvus of Spain, *Quaestiones disputatae* 11, ed. Leon Amorós, Bibliotheca Franciscana Scholastica Medii Aevi 9 (Quaracchi, Florence: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae Ad Claras Aquas, 1935), 221, who attributes this theory to Augustine.