Angels present a puzzle for the metaphysician. Pure spirits and superior in being to incarnate spirits, they are nevertheless inferior to the Infinite Spirit, whom Christians call God.\textsuperscript{1} They are also in some fashion different from each other. It was in part to account for these distinctions that Christian theologians of the thirteenth century were drawn to the curious doctrine of spiritual matter, originally the inspiration of the Jewish thinker Ibn Gabirol.\textsuperscript{2} Among the first schoolmen to embrace this teaching was the Paris Arts master, later Franciscan theologian, Roger Bacon. It is my purpose in this paper to explore Bacon’s angelology, focusing in particular on the angel’s metaphysical constitution\textsuperscript{3} and its location in the world of things.

\textsuperscript{1} Christian belief concerning angelic beings was framed by the pronouncements of the Council of Nicea, which declared God to be the “maker of heaven and earth, of all things, visible and invisible” (Denzinger-Schönmetzer, Enchiridion Symbolorum, 1963, n. 125) and the 4th Lateran Council, which added that God was the “creator of all things visible and invisible, spiritual and corporeal, who by his almighty power together (simul) from the beginning of time formed out of nothing the spiritual creature and the corporeal creature, that is, that angelic and the terrestrial” (Denzinger, n. 800). All later pronouncements have simply been reaffirmations of Nicea and 4th Lateran.


\textsuperscript{3} The question of the metaphysical constitution of angels was raised first by Alexander of Hales in his Gloss on the Lombard’s Sentences. His solution, however, was to resurrect the Boethian distinction between quo est and quod est; in God there is no such distinction, in the angel there is. See Marcia Colish, Early Scholastic Angelology, in: Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale, 62 (1995), 106-9.

For a good study of Bacon’s hyliomorphic doctrine see Theodore Crowley, Roger Bacon, The Problem of the Soul in his Philosophical Commentaries, Louvain 1950, 81-91. Crowley, however, ignores the De plantis commentary, the text that will be analyzed below.
One of Bacon’s earliest expositions of the doctrine of spiritual matter, written between 1240 and 1247, is to be found in his *Quaestiones super De plantis*, a collection of questions which take as their point of departure issues raised in the recently available Pseudo-Aristotelian text. There he distinguishes two understandings of matter:

Some matter is matter only, namely lacking form and existing in the being of the essence... the other is matter that is matter and subject, namely “informed” with substantial and accidental forms, and this simply speaking is substance.

Of this first kind of matter Bacon then asks if it is a body, and his response is that it seems not to be, because the incorporeal does not come to be out of the corporeal. Yet out of matter (in the first sense) come into being incorporeal substances, like the angels, in which there is matter and which have matter as a part of their make-up.

To this objection Bacon replies that although the intelligences and spiritual substances of this sort have matter, which is the root, foundation, and origin of corporeality, as a part of their constitution, they are nevertheless not corporeal. The reason for this is that the formation of these spiritual substances is not educed or elicited from the potency of matter, but is instead created together (concreata) with matter. Hence this latter kind of matter is potency only in the sense that in it, as in a receptacle, are introduced forms whose provenance is from without and which come into being with matter via a simultaneous creation or “con-creation” (per concreationem). Thus this kind of matter can be said to be in potency to spiritual forms, as for example those of the intelligences (read the angels), as well as certain corporeal forms (read the heavenly bodies)—though these latter are “less corporeal” than those which are educed from the potency of matter, like the forms of sensible bodies and the forms of the elements.

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5 On the question of which version of the *De plantis* was utilized by Bacon see S.D. Wingate, *The Medieval Latin Versions of the Aristotelian Scientific Corpus, with Special Reference to the Biological Works*, London 1931, 61-4.

6 *Questiones supra De plantis*, ed. Robert Steele, in: *Opera hactenus inedita Rogeri Baconi XI*, Oxford 1932, 53: “Solutió ad hoc, quod duplex est materia; quedam est materia que est materia tantum, scilicet carens forma, existens in esse essentie, et de hac fit questio; alia est materia que est materia et subjectum, scilicet informata formas substantialibus et accidentibus, et hae simpliciter est substantia.”


8 *Ibid.*, 55-6: “Ad primam igitur que probabat quod esset simpliciter incorporalis dicen-