



Gregory of Nyssa: Creation and Bundles

Overview

Reminder: Creation

Gregory of Nyssa

Gregory on simultaneous creation

Bundle theory

- Philosophical motivations

- Early history

- Gregory on Bundles

- Later developments

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Creation

Christian, Jewish, Muslim consensus:

Genesis 1:1

“In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.”

Council of IV Lateran (1215)

“God [is] the first principle of the universe, the creator of all things, who by his omnipotent power brought about creation. . . at the same time, from nothing, at the beginning of time.”

God created:

- 1 everything
- 2 from nothing
- 3 all at the same time

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- In the beginning *of what?*
- heaven & earth? What are those?
- 6 days of creation?? Why?
- How???

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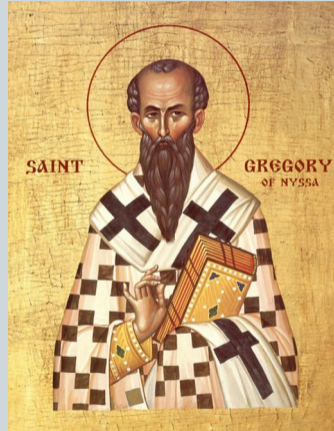
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Gregory of Nyssa (4th c.)

- Neoplatonic influences (Plotinus)
- How can an incorporeal God create a corporeal universe if effects are similar to their causes?
- Solution: bodies = bundles of thoughts in God's mind.



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Simultaneous Creation

- Biblical motivation (“created everything *simul*”)
- Philosophical motivation: why would God, who is omnipotent, require time to create? Also, the 6 days seem arbitrary.
- Also: time is the movement of the stars and planets. So there couldn't have been time *before* these had been created!
- Philo of Alexandria, Origen: the biblical texts can't be taken at face value

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In Hexaemeron, p. 27

“God in an instant sowed the catalysts and causes and powers of all the universe collectively, and in the first impulse of God’s will each specific substance combined: heaven, ether, stars, fire, air, sea, earth, animals, plants. . . . while a necessary chain followed, in keeping with some ordered sequence.”

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- 'Day 1' in *Genesis* means the principle of time
- God creates everything equally perfectly, all at once (agreeing with Origen and Philo): this is because God is the coincidence of will, wisdom, and power.
- God simultaneously created heaven and earth, = all of visible reality ('heaven' and 'earth' stand for the two extremes – i.e., the end-points of what we can see).
- But all this creation yields only the beginnings, or seeds, of things. — the following 6 days is the development of these seeds.
- So really, the 6 days describe how things unfold *in virtue of the already existing physical laws* or principles of development. No arbitrariness!

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The “Standard View”: Matter and Form(s)

What are substances composed of?

- **integral parts**: elements.
- **metaphysical parts**: parts that aren't integral parts.
- **substance** = **prime matter** [is it extended? is it real?] + **substantial form(s)** [how many?] + **accidents** [are they real? what do they inhere in?]

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The “Standard View”

Some implications of the Standard View:

- 1 qualities and the subject they inhere in are different sorts of things
- 2 matter is indefinitely divisible; there are no such things as physical atoms, and there is also no such thing as a vacuum. [Are these really implied? Why / why not?]

If you question either of these, you question thereby the hylomorphic theory as such:

- question (1) ⇒ **bundle theory**
- question (2) ⇒ **atomism**

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Bundle Theory: Some General Motivations

- How do we describe an individual? – by enumerating her properties.
- Substances seem imperceptible (cf. Locke!); otherwise we have to posit some “bare particular” that we don’t know.
- All sensory images we have are about accidents – so why assume there is anything else?
- **Theological motivation:** can matter be created, by something immaterial? If not, perhaps there is a danger of Platonism (2 principles). (“If God is immaterial, where does matter come from?” p. 23)

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All there is is just a bundle of properties. Objects *are* just these bundles of properties.

- Is this a meaningful theory?
- Were there any proponents of this theory?
- Cf. Berkeley; but what about before that?

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- **Pre-Socratics**: arguably no clear distinction between objects and properties (but this is no real bundle theory; for that, you *want* to have a distinction).
- **Plato?** According to some interpreters. (*Timaeus*: element of fire = hotness; things consist of elemental *properties*. *Theaetetus*: Theaetetus is an irrepeatable collection of characteristics.)
- **Aristotle**: rejects it, but the notion of prime matter is elusive!
 - Plotinus as interpreter: pure potency is nothing; hence, there is no substrate and no subject.
 - What can we sense? Clearly not PM; whatever we sense is qualities.
- **Epicurus, Stoics** – usually regard bundle theory as a target of arguments.

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De opificio hominis 24, tr. Sorabji, p. 160

“Thus, let an animal or a log be presented for us to consider. . . . By a process of mental division we recognise many things connected with the substratum and the definition of each of them is not mixed up with the other things we are considering at the same time. . . . The softness and the two-cubit length . . . are not conflated with each other nor with the body. . . . If upon each of these being removed from the substratum, the whole definition of body would be removed: what follows? If we find the absence of these things causes the dissolution of body, we must suppose their concurrence is what generates material nature.”

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In Hexaemeron, p. 25

“Indeed, we have a single solution for every problem about matter. . . . Being all-powerful, he by his wise and powerful will at once sowed as seeds all the components of matter for the production of the universe: the light, the heavy, the dense, the rare, the pliant, the resistant, the wet, the dry, the cold, the hot, colour, shape, surface, extension – which are all in themselves mere ideas and concepts. For none of these on its own is matter, but when they combine with one another, matter is generated.”

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- matter has no existence, by itself, but results from the composition of these properties
- “bundle theory”: no immanent substrate that would anchor the properties
- Question (not clear from the text): where does the unity of the individual come from? Is it from the divine idea alone, or is there something intrinsic to the individual that would unite its properties?

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Were there any bundle theorists in the later Latin Middle Ages?

- In short, No.
- **Theological concerns:** how can one have transubstantiation if there is no substance?
- **Philosophical concerns:** if self-identity is tied to properties only, does that imply that if a property changes, the self changes? (Identity of indiscernibles – somewhat problematic.)
- Later: Berkeley, Hume, A.J. Ayer

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Three Dialogues between Philonous and Hylas

“The notion or definition of material substance includes an obvious inconsistency, and that is not so for the notion of spirit. That ideas should exist in what does not perceive, or be produced by what does not act, is inconsistent. But there is no inconsistency in saying that a perceiving thing is the subject of ideas, or that an active thing causes them. . . . Surely to a Christian it cannot be shocking to say that the real tree existing outside his mind is truly known and comprehended by (that is, exists in) the infinite mind of God.”

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Some takeaways:

- Questions about creation remain
- If the doctrine of creation leads to a very strange metaphysical position, what is one to do?
- The metaphysical landscape, especially in the early Middle Ages, was quite diverse

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