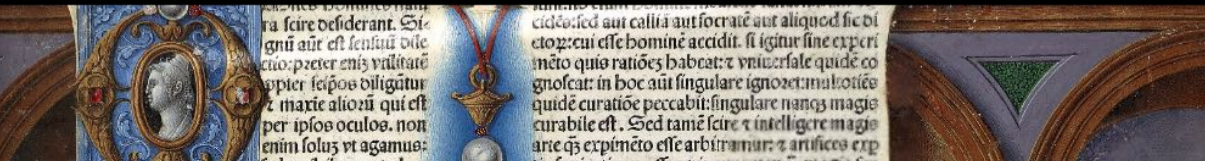




Avicenna on Matter, Form, Creation



Overview

Avicbron (Ibn Gabirol)

Creation

Creatio ex nihilo

Will, Wisdom, Intellect

Universal hylomorphism

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Medieval Jewish Philosophy

- Bible, Talmud (commentary by authorities); Rabbinic authority
- Aristotle, but also strong Neoplatonic influence
- Heavy Arabic influence as well, and most philosophical writing is done in Arabic.
- Some important authors: Isaac Israeli (9th–10th c.); Al-Fayyumi (12th c.); **Salomon Ibn Gabirol**; Judah Halevi (12th c.); **Maimonides** (12th c.); **Gersonides** (13th c.); **Crescas** (14th c.); **Joseph Albo** (15th c.).



Avicenna (Ibn Sina)

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Avicenna (Ibn Gabirol), ca. 1021–1057

- born and died in Spain (Andalusia); the first Spanish philosopher!
- somewhat strained relationship with the local Jewish community; various legends about the cause and extent of his anti-social behaviour
- vast corpus of Hebrew poetry
- *Fons vitae = The Fountain of Life*
- There may have been some other works that are lost (Biblical commentary, etc.)



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- originally written in Arabic; translated into Latin in the 12th c. by Dominicus Gundissalinus, and made it into some Hebrew summary version in the 13th c.
- the original Arabic is lost; the contemporary scholarship is based on the Latin version.
- extensive use of Jewish, Islamic, Neoplatonic, Pythagorean, philosophical material; but never quotes the Bible!
- The later medievals didn't know it was written by a Jewish thinker; they assumed it was by a muslim or by a Christian.

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Fons Vitae I.7

“In the whole of existence, there are three divisions of knowledge: (1) the knowledge of matter and form (as-sûra), (2) the knowledge of Will, and (3) the knowledge of the First Essence. Among substances, there is nothing other than these three. First Essence is cause; matter and form, effect; and Will is the intermediary between the two extremes.”

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Not entirely clear how the various pieces of Avicbron's view of creation fit together:

- creation ex nihilo
- emanation
- the role of the will, reason, and desire

Creation ex nihilo, or Emanation?

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Fons Vitae III.3

“The making of the first maker is to create something ex nihilo.”

- God is a simple unity, exceding the grasp of the human mind (apophaticism)
- This unity consists in a purely hidden Essence, but also in the manifesting activity of the divine will and divine wisdom.
- Creation is described as creation ex nihilo (cf. Fons Vitae 3.3; 3.25).
- But also, often, emanation metaphors (“flow of light”, “flow of water”) – Neoplatonic influences(?)
- The creative act begins with creating matter and form (possibly a creation ex nihilo, but not entirely clear); then, via an emanating flow, the remainder of existence follows.

Avicbron (Ibn Gabirol)

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Universal hylomorphism

- Will is the power of God infused in all things
- it is the power of unity in the universe
- it brings forth and moves all of existence; a divine force that sustains the essence of all things – it joins form to matter!
- It is also an intermediary, between matter and form and the divine Essence.

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Universalhylomorphism

- source of *form* (not matter!)
- creation is like the utterance of a word – unfolding of the divine wisdom

Cf. the Neoplatonic notion of Hierarchy:

- 1 God
- 2 Pure (universal) Matter / Pure Form
- 3 Intellect
- 4 Souls
- 5 Individual material things

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Universal hylomorphism

- matter stems directly from the divine essence; form from the Divine Will.
- strong link between God and materiality (but never says God *is* matter): both matter and God are hidden and grounding for everything else
- reality is moving from a more hidden / material to a more manifest / formal reality
- all things are grounded in matter, and matter is a marker of desire (→ all reality is grounded in desire!).

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Universal hylomorphism

- *All things* (except God) are composed of matter and form (including the soul, angels, etc.)
- core: first/spiritual matter, which is present in everything and in everywhere.

First Matter, Fons Vitae I.10

“existent in and of itself, of a single essence, sustaining diversity, and giving to everything its essence and name.”

- fundamental receiver, seeking its form, the Universal Form
- Universal Matter + Universal Form = the First Intellect

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- Hard to characterize!
- It has no quantity or quality (or any of the “9 categories”)
- fundamental, hidden
- existence is given to it by form!! (at least, actual existence – but then, how can it be a principle?)

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Universal hylomorphism

Intellect = Matter + Form

Soul = Matter + Form

Heavenly Body = Matter + Form

Terrestrial Body = Matter + Form

- the matter-form union happens through the divine will.

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- Often associated with later Franciscan authors, especially the doctrine of Universal Hylomorphism
- Criticized by Aquinas for the same
- Helped to introduce some Neo-Platonic thinking into the (Latin) Middle Ages

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