



Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context

Robert Wisnovsky

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An analysis of the sources and evolution of the metaphysics of Abu Ali ibn Sina (d. 1037 AD) -- known in the West by his Latinized name Avicenna -- this book focuses on the answers Avicenna and his predecessors gave to two fundamental questions: what is the soul and how does it cause the body? and what is God and how does He cause the world? To respond to these challenges Avicenna invented new concepts and distinctions and reinterpreted old ones. The author concludes that Avicenna's innovations are a turning point in the history of metaphysics. Avicenna's metaphysics is the culmination of one period of synthesis, during which philosophers fused together the Neoplatonic project of reconciling Plato with Aristotle, with the Peripatetic project of reconciling Aristotle with himself. Yet Avicenna also stands at the beginning of another period of synthesis, during which philosophers sought to integrate the Arabic version of the earlier synthesis with Islamic doctrinal theology (kalam). Avicenna's metaphysics significantly influenced European scholastic thought, but it had an even more profound impact on Islamic intellectual history, where the philosophical problems and opportunities associated with the Avicennian synthesis were to be debated up to the end of the 19th century.

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