



CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF
MEDICINE AND THE BODY
IN THE RENAISSANCE

INSTITUTIO SANTORIANA
FONDAZIONE COMEL



YALE UNIVERSITY
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences



University
of Exeter

Julius-Maximilians-
**UNIVERSITÄT
WÜRZBURG**



STUDIO FIRMANO
PER LA STORIA DELL'ARTE MEDICA E DELLA SCIENZA



PSMEMM
Palgrave Studies in Medieval & Early Modern Medicine

CSMBR
ONLINE
EVENTS

PLASTIC FORCES AND MEDIEVAL THEORIES OF GENERATION

19
DECEMBER
2023
5.00 pm CET

ALBERT THE GREAT AND THE 'VIRTUS FORMATIVA'

AMALIA CERRITO • Centre for the Study of Medicine and the Body in the Renaissance

In dialogue with the manifold medical, natural-philosophical, and theological doctrines on embryogenesis available in the 13th century, the Dominican master Albert the Great (ca. 1193-1280) gives a coherent account of embryo morphogenesis that harmonizes theological and philosophical perspectives on human generation. His embryological doctrine combines the theological tenet of a human soul created ex nihilo, and the physical and medical explanatory

model of epigenesis, which explains embryonic development as a passage from the imperfect to the perfect both of bodily and psychic functions. To overcome the inconsistencies between the theological and natural-philosophical explanations, Albert focuses on the dynamics of configuration of the embryo and on the principle responsible for them, the *virtus formativa*. This lecture will explore the dynamics involved in the hand-

ing down morphological and functional structures from generator to generated by focusing on the functioning of the formative power in the generative process. It will be shown that the formative power is able to grasp the likeness of the generating body and then reproduce the bodily design into the generated body by shaping it in the image and likeness of its parents..