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The Function of Metaphor in Medieval Neoplatonism, edited by Maria Mičaninová and Ivica Hajdučeková. Košice, 2014. University of Denver, Department of Philosophy and Center for Judaic Studies. ISBN 978-80-8152-123-2

The Function of Metaphor in Medieval Neoplatonism, edited by Mária Mičaninová and Ivica Hajdučeková, is a thought-provoking—and apropos of its theme, also visually beautiful—collection of essays on the intricacies and unfoldings of metaphor in medieval Neoplatonisms. Supported by project VEGA of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, this volume (proceedings from a conference at P. J. Šafárik University in Košice in October 2013) provides interdisciplinary and enriching points of entry into the space of metaphor, bringing together scholars from around the globe in dialogue with scholars and artists in Slovakia working on Ibn Gabirol, medieval Neoplatonism, and theories of metaphor. The volume—culminating with original art inspired by Ibn Gabirol—provides readers with valuable excursions into a theme with strong implications across Greek, Islamic, Jewish, and Christian thought.

In addition to exploring the Ps. Dionysian roots of Eriugena's insights on the non-substantiality of evil and the triadic structure of existence, John M. Dillon explores how Eriugena's Plotinian insights on the free nature of Divine Will help him read-away the problem of divine predestination: By placing a Neoplatonic emphasis on the metaphorical status of "all talk of futurity or planning in relation to God..." (25), Eriugena is able to use Greek insights to help make a [Judeo-]Christian theological problem disappear. Dillon refreshingly frames his essay with an account of how Eriugena's subtle Neoplatonic ruminations at once allow him to please and annoy Christian authority figures.

In his treatment of the thought of Abraham Ibn Ezra, Tamás Visi provides readers with samples of the Jewish medieval thinker's metaphorical Bible commentaries, while also arguing for reading Ibn Ezra as having essentially "transformed Ibn Gabirol's metaphysics into metaphors" (39). I find this invitation to reflect on the lines between metaphysics and metaphor quite valuable (though I might note that in my own recent work [Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire*, 2013], I have argued that much of Ibn Gabirol's so-called metaphysics is itself best understood as a metaphor). Visi also interestingly reflects on whether Ibn Ezra's more metaphorical—including more enigmatic—prose is part of why his work was allowed—while Ibn Gabirol's *Fons Vitae* was denied—inclusion in the Jewish-Aristotelian canon: Since it is less clear about its metaphysical commitments, it is less worrisome to Maimonidean readers.

Exploring three Plotinian approaches to the One (by analogy, by abstraction, and by ascension) and considering the metaphor of the One as king, Pavol Labuda explores metaphor's "transgress[ing] the boundary" of discursive reflection in a moment of linguistic "showing" (43) and isolates descriptions of the king's arrival (a metaphor for the emanation of the One) as "express[ing] the fact that predicates assigned to the One have only an indirect nature" (47), which is in part to say that in throwing into relief the limits of rational discourse they "[enable] us to see the One as the source that manifests itself via its emanations" (47).

While exploring Ibn Gabirol's and Aquinas' competing sensibilities about the constitution of angels, the unity of matter, the action of bodies, and the seminal vs. directly divine origin of intellect in the human embryo, Alžbeta Dufferová nonetheless sees in the two thinkers' shared search for truth equally strong concerns with ethical and practical insights for the world in which we live (59)—a point emphasized in her starting reflections on Mičaninová's insight on Ibn Gabirol's own work as aiming to uncover the purpose of human life and to achieve "true and full happiness" itself in way of "encourag[ing humans] to action" (53–54).

David R. Slavitt—whose translation of Ibn Gabirol's *Keter Malkhut* is a staple of any well-stocked medieval Jewish philosophy library—provides a unique autobiographical account of his own act of translation, including his own encounter with Ibn Gabirol's poem as a "global metaphor" (68) for human impurity and the "loathsomeness" of the human condition (70). Slavitt's account is viscerally energized in his linking up this poetic account of impurity in the poem with Ibn Gabirol's own viscerally embodied affliction with a skin disease that made him literally—and metaphorically—uncomfortable in his own skin and in the world-at-large.

Mária Mičaninová, who has co-translated into Slovak Ibn Gabirol's *Keter Malkhuth* (2010) and parts of his *Fons Vitae* (2012), views Ibn Gabirol's work as an important blend of scientific/conceptual and "mystical" methodologies in which he presents us with definitions and axioms alongside metaphors. For Mičaninová, there is no conflict between Ibn Gabirol's conceptual and metaphorical approaches because, she argues, for Ibn Gabirol "[a] substance is an energy" (81), an idea that she explains in terms of the importance of "point of view" in Ibn Gabirol's language (on "point of view" or "perspectival" aspects of Ibn Gabirol's Neoplatonic use of language, see too Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire*, 2013): On Mičaninová's view, Ibn Gabirol uses conceptual language to describe things in their "changeless, static" aspect (81) and metaphorical language to describe things in their "dynamic" aspect (82); in this sense, she notes that "[a]ccording to the dynamic aspect of the universe, a substance

is an energy, a dynamical power, i.e. a motion" (82) and that "[a]ccording to the static aspect, the universe is described as a set of intellects, souls, nature, heavens and earthly world, a result of God's Will..." (82). On the static aspect of this "points of view" approach, she concludes: "In short, the static aspect needs a "static" language, i.e. defined concepts..." (82), and she also goes on, in this spirit, to emphasize the *Fons Vitae's* construction of definitions and proofs as its "logical nature" and its use of metaphors as its "metaphorical nature" (83).

Ivica Hajdučeková provides "methodological starting points" for work on metaphor in Ibn Gabirol, related to ongoing work with Mičaninová. In particular, Hajdučeková points to their engagement with "contemporary Slovak literary-critical methodology" with emphasis on Viktor Krupa's work on metaphor and Ján Sabol's semiotic work on symmetry and asymmetry (89). Hajdučeková lays out four interpretive principles in her approach to Ibn Gabirol based on Krupa's five-fold categorization of metaphors (90-93) as well as his emphasis on the role of metaphor in "bridg[ing] the old with the new [and] revealing the depth and the continuity of reality" (91). Pointing to Sabol's semiotic work on imagery's connection to the iconic-symbolic that "opens a new/other view of familiar phenomena" (93), Hajdučeková points us to three additional hypotheses that help inform a new approach to reading metaphor in Ibn Gabirol and beyond (94).

Kristína Bosáková explores points of sameness and difference in Gadamer's and Ortega y Gasset's approaches to metaphor informed by their broader theories of translation, communication, and language. Reminding us that "the metaphorical meaning is not a secondary one after the literal meaning because we never use the words only literally even in everyday communications..." (101), Bosáková emphasizes that translation is at once the "destruction and construction of the text" (118), and concludes with the Gadamerian insight that all inter-human understanding is a hermeneutical experience in which "we have to break down the opposition in our interior during the conversation to be able to listen to the other as the other" (118), an insight about hermeneutical experience that Bosáková notes "probably represents one of the fundamental aspects of human existence" (119).

Anabela Katerničová addresses challenges in translating metaphors from the Latin text of the *Fons Vitae* into Slovak. She identifies three categories of translation challenges in this regard: (1) Encountering Latin terms without equivalents in Slovak, (2) dealing with subtle meaning changes based on the Latin's syntactical structures (e.g. a term's being followed by a phrase in the genitive versus that same term's being followed a few lines later by the preposition "de"), along with the recognition that sometimes the Latin might simply be written incorrectly, and the case that Katerničová identifies as the most

difficult, viz. (3) dealing with terms whose meaning changes depending on the context—e.g. “*substantia*” used sometimes to signify being, but sometimes to signify a particular kind of being.

The volume ends with Katarína Blažová’s artwork inspired by Ibn Gabirol, along with an essay in which she shares her own creative process including her own encounter with Ibn Gabirol’s *Keter Malkhuth/ Kingly Crown* poem, her own study of *Kabbalah* and the intricacies of the *Sephirot*, and her own work in weaving together tapestries as well as threads of insight from Ibn Gabirol, from *Kabbalah*, and from a vibrant range of other mythic, literary, and symbolic contexts.

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