

MARÍA JESÚS SOTO-BRUNA (ED.), *CAUSALITY AND RESEMBLANCE. MEDIEVAL APPROACHES TO THE EXPLANATION OF NATURE*, GEORG OLMS VERLAG, HILDESHEIM–ZÜRICH–NEW YORK 2018 (EUROPAEA MEMORIA, REIHE I: STUDIEN, 127), 182 PP., ISBN 9783487156866.

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*Causality and Resemblance: Medieval Approaches to the Explanation of Nature* acts as a short history of topics related to the ‘unity’ and ‘multiplicity’ of the Logos in nature by compiling a collection of English and Spanish entries. In her introduction, María Jesús Soto-Bruna notes that the collection focuses primarily on Neoplatonic approaches to the subject, which see the plurality of creation as, one way or another, coming from an undivided Logos and which typically also emphasize the importance of ‘returning’ to God as the source of creation. Limited to late classical and medieval authors, the edition arranges the thinkers chronologically, starting with early church Father Gregory of Nyssa and ending with St. Thomas Aquinas. The collection aims to bring a ‘new perspective’ to the subject by focusing on thinkers of less renown, as well as lesser known aspects of more familiar figures, like Aquinas.

Establishing the historical context, Miguel Brugarolas opens the volume with « Teología del Logos: unidad y distinción en la exégesis de Gregorio de Nisa sobre Jn 10,30 », a piece which focuses on the relationship between both the ‘one’ and the ‘many’ in the Triune God, as well as nature qua created *ex nihilo*. Brugarolas argues that Gregory of Nyssa’s new approach to Trinitarian theology established the understanding of causality after the Patristics. To navigate the dilemma between affirming the unity of God at the expense of affirming the plurality of the divine persons (and vice versa), Gregory correlated the creator-creature distinction with the philosophical intelligible-perceptible distinction. Words thus have a diverse sense when referring to human versus divine realities. In the created human sense, ‘*Ingénito*’, ‘*Padre*’, and ‘*Hijo*’ imply generation, change, and composition, but in reference to God the terms only refer to the relationship within the Trinity: « la paternidad y filiación se encuentran en Dio de una manera propia » (p. 23). However, in the divine intelligible sense, the Son is not after, but completes the Father, such that there is « mutua inhesión de las personas divinas » (p. 23). Thus, the anthropomorphic language of Scripture is not figurative (resulting in apophaticism), but allegorical, such that the human meaning is ascribable to God only in a metaphorical or virtual way. Brugarolas

provides strong evidence that philosophical distinctions affecting causality and divine predication may be traced back to or through Gregory of Nyssa.

The second chapter seeks a fresh look at the famous Neoplatonic notion of 'return' in « Hermeneutics of Logos: Interpretation of Mystical Experience in Augustine's *Confessions* » by Agnieszka Kijewska. Combatting the stigma commonly associated with obtaining knowledge from religious experience, Kijewska analyzes Augustine's *Confessions* through the lens of William Alston's 1991 *Perceiving God. The Epistemology of Religious Experience* to highlight the 'epistemic side' of religious experience and its role in Augustine's biography. After arguing that Augustine's life aptly fits Alston's project, Kijewska shows how Augustine's recorded experiences fit five of Alston's essential features of mystical perception as: A) experiential or a kind of perception; B) immediate awareness of the mystical object, whether i. unmediated, ii. mediated (direct perception), or iii. mediated perception through another perceived object; C) object-oriented; D) an experience of God as the object; and E) an experience which « brings the subject into a relationship with another person » (p. 37). Using Alston's five features, Augustine's changing understanding of and relationship with the Divine is then mapped through his analogous, not literal, perception of the Divine through the *libri platoniorum*, Milan garden, and vision of Ostia. Kijewska concludes by positing that Augustine's purpose for recounting his experiences in the *Confessions* was to create a new medium through which his readers, perchance, may similarly experience God. While contemporary analyses always run the risk of anachronistic assessments, Kijewska provides a fresh perspective on Augustine's *Confessions* while reopening the discussion on the 'epistemic' value of religious experience.

Following in the third chapter is Francisco O'Reilly's « Causality, Flux, and Procession. An Unexpected Encounter Among Proclus, and Avicenna ». The 'unexpected encounter' refers to the *Liber de causis primis et secundis*, a short Latin work, of which seventy percent is comprised of paraphrases from Eriugena, Avicenna, and the *Liber de causis*, plus Augustine, Boethius, Aristotle, and al-Farabi, which seeks to explain the origin of multiplicity in the simplicity of God. O'Reilly aims to confirm Marie-Therese D'Alverny's view that the anonymous author found a relationship between three distinct Neoplatonic systems and, thus, integrated choice texts from each. As such, the *Liber de causis primis et secundis* is not just a 'copy and paste' job but serves as an illustration of how Arabic translations were integrated by Latin thinkers into the framework of existing authorities, creating new variants of the Neoplatonic tradition in the process. The key takeaway is reiterating D'Alverny's claim that neither the *Liber de causis primis et secundis* nor Arabic influence should be overlooked as mere translation efforts.

María Jesús Soto-Bruna's own « Harmony in the Conception of the Universe. Unity and Plurality in Eriugena » appears fourth. She explains how the integrating motif of Eriugena's universe – the notion of 'harmony' – emerges from the key term *processio* which « implies a relationship between the first principle, which is the unity of simplicity, and the different realities which proceed from it » (p. 58). Citing Eriugena's classic text *Periphyseon*, Soto-Bruna shows that harmony is a basic principle of being and knowledge for Eriugena, rooted in the Logos, which can resolve *ab un non nisi unum* issues when linked with his former discourse on proportionality and relation (p. 59–60). Since Eriugena's universal cause is a unity it « confers unity on its effects » establishing a basis for the extension of harmony from the eternal to the temporal world (p. 61). However, Eriugena's primordial cause is not a Parmenidean unity because it eternally contains plurality harmoniously (understood proportionally or as a relationship). Eriugena's *processio* is a 'correspondence' between the first cause (which includes the Logos) and the diverse realities it effects. Thus, the world results from the Logos expressing itself in the form of unity making the world a kind of theophany or divine apparition before it returns to its origin. This explains the harmony and intelligibility of nature in relation to the First and other created things. Soto-Bruna downplays Eriugena's pantheistic stigma to reconsider his model of causal unity (the relationship of harmony) which grounds multiplicity in creation as a theophany (Eriugena's third division of nature). Eriugena's solution to the one-many problem may be appealing insofar as creation's *telos* is the Neoplatonic return to unity, as Soto-Bruna claims, and not the disconcerting notion of the divine making an effable expression to understand its ineffable self.

In the fifth chapter, Nicola Polloni's « Nature, Souls, and Numbers: Remarks on a Medieval Gloss on Gundissalinus's *De Processione Mundi* » shows Gundissalinus's numerological take on creation which synchronizes al-Farabi's metaphysical procedure with Avicbron's universal hylomorphism and Avicenna's modal ontology through two demonstrations. Polloni shows how each proof is grounded in the 'reason of numbers', (i.e., if 'two', then 'one' must have preceded, but the converse is not necessarily true), such that if there is form and matter, 'two', then a single principle – God – must have preceded. Thus, the procession starts with 'one' as God, then 'two' as matter and form, then 'three' as genera of beings performing secondary causality (angels, spheres, and elements), and 'four' as sensible things which are generated and corrupted. Thus, the first demonstration shows « the completeness of the ontological order of the universe » (p. 86). The second, in which numbers one to four now refer to « very peculiar substances », is perplexing since it is a direct quote of Avicbron's *Fons vitae*, which contains a cosmology Gundissalinus rejected. One solution is to interpret the series as *psychological* and not *hypostatical*, but 'four' in this series

relates to 'nature' which is difficult to render as a *psychological* reading. This problem was recognized in the thirteenth century, resulting in a gloss which is deleted from critical editions. However, Polloni shows that the glossarist understood the passage well; it helpfully points to Gundissalinus's *De anima* which links the vegetative soul to the four powers of nature, thereby confirming the psychological interpretation. Thus, the gloss is crucial in seeing the second demonstration as « the completeness of the *gnoseological* faculties through which the universe is animated and discovered » (p. 86–87).

The sixth chapter is « Hermann de Carintia (Siglo XII): Una encrucijada en la explicación de la causalidad » by Elisabeth Reinhardt. Her goal is to 'revisit' Hermann de Carintia and advance the understanding of his specialized *De essentiis*. After a brief biography of Hermann and his relation to his teacher Thierry, Reinhardt gives an overview of the peculiar *De essentiis*. Using the precise definitions of *idem* and *diversum*, Herman provides a natural science demonstration for the primordial cause.<sup>1</sup> However, Hermann is a man of faith. Thus, he allows humans to obtain knowledge beyond human capacity through revelation from the Creator, « dándole acceso a realidades inalcanzables con el solo esfuerzo intelectual » (p. 95). The Trinitarian God is shown to be the transcendent cause of the universe through creation and generation, revealing Hermann's mixed usage of theology and natural science. By highlighting the similarities and differences between Hermann and his philosophical predecessors, while noting Hermann's terminological innovation, Reinhardt lays out the status of Hermann scholarship. After a quick overview of other authors citing Hermann, Reinhardt concludes that Hermann is not a theologian like his teacher Thierry, but « es un científico creyente que desarrolla razones naturales sin eclipsar el horizonte de la fe » (p. 102). To this end, she advances the conversation in recommending both thematic and historical future studies, e.g., a study on the harmony between faith/theology and reason/natural science and a study on what Hermann worked on after *De essentiis* and why Thierry never replied, respectively.

The seventh entry is Laura Corso de Estrada's « The Ciceronian Tradition of *Ius Naturae* in the Diffusion of the *Bonum*. The Lecture of Philip the Chancellor ». She shows how Philip the Chancellor developed a speculative notion of *natura* – combining unity and plurality – where the *natura* of man is both « part of the world and, the same time, emerging from it » (p. 105). For Philip, the unity of the world follows from two senses of *bonum*: first, a Neoplatonic sense where *esse* and *bonum* are the same and predicable of the divine essence; and second, a sense of

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<sup>1</sup> The two pillars of his thought are precise meanings of *idem* and *diversum*, where *idem* includes *essentia* as the 'matter' of the rational soul and the immutable part of the universe and *diversum* includes *substantia* as the matter which designates the substrate of accidents and the changeable part of the universe (while *essentiae* refers to five immutable principles).

*bonum* as communicating being to all other things. Thus, the same *bonum* can be said of both God (directly) and created beings (indirectly). The question Philip wishes to answer is how creaturely participation in the divine *bonum* applies to human moral acts. Corso de Estrada's analyzes the definition of virtue Philip attributes to Cicero as « the habit of the soul in harmony with the order of nature and reason » (p. 110). Philip's main issue is determining what *natura* and *ratio* say and how they find conformity in each other. Corso de Estrada argues that one of the primary medieval sources for the stoic thesis grounding morality in 'conformity with nature' is thus Cicero. Following the idea that *ius naturae* serves as a universal governing Logos, Philip claims that « reason is itself natural » or that « the ratio itself is like a certain nature » (p. 114). This explains how *bonum* is diffused through all created being and Cicero's virtue: « reason insofar as it is nature, is a certain principle » which disposes humans to perfect themselves (p. 114). Corso de Estrada gives a strong case for the primacy of Ciceronian influence on medieval natural law, and it would be interesting to see whether this fact can impact contemporary ethical discussions where reason is unhitched from nature.

Isabel María León-Sanz's chapter « La mediación creadora del Verbo, origen de las bellezas expresivas de las criaturas en S. Buenaventura » touches upon many of the themes prevalent in the following chapters. León-Sanz uses the notion of the Word as 'mediator' between God and creation – particularly creation as art and the Word's relation to creation's beauty – as an opportunity to better appreciate the scope of Bonaventure's doctrine. León-Sanz claims that the idea of creation as art in early Platonism took full root in later biblical contexts since 'la operación artística' allows creation to be intelligent, free, and distinct while related to the creator without anthropomorphizing God. She continues arguing that 'art' for Bonaventure can be « trasladar analógicamente a Dios » in two dimensions: first, as an operation from the Trinitarian character and second, a dispositive habit, namely the Word as the art of the Father. Thus, creating art – the creation – is an expression of the Trinity, while, within the Trinity, the Word proceeds from the Father's self-understanding as the image or art of himself. In linking the Word with the *ratio* of beauty, Buenaventura roots the beauty of creation in the three transcendentals – form, light, and truth – through the beauty of the Word. Consequently, it is through the dimension of art that creation is linked to God and fits the *exitus-reditus* theme: the Word is the art of God by whom God first created and redeemed the world and conversely through whom his creatures know and are renewed by God. In showing Platonic idea in Bonaventure, León-Sanz's article has a wide potential audience ranging from aesthetics to theology.

Juan José Herrera, in chapter nine, addresses Thomas Aquinas's doctrine of divine causality in artistic terms in « The Exemplarity of God: Between Nature and Intellect ». Citing *In Sententiarum*'s explanation that the form of a horse and

the form of life exist in God according to different modes, Herrera notes two major interpretations of God's exemplarity of created beings: the first maintains two distinct types of divine exemplarity in which the divine nature is the cause of *esse*, goodness, and life, while divine ideas are the cause of specific forms like 'horseness'; the second emphasizes the divine ideas which determine the exemplarity of the divine essence to guide the creative act. Herrera argues for a third integrated approach uniting God's essence and ideas by making the essence or the divine nature of God the *exemplar primum* and thus the ultimate source of exemplarity of divine ideas. God thus creates with his essence through the intellect and divine ideas: « God communicates the perfections of his nature according to certain measures that correspond to the created beings in his singularity. Life and truth are contained in the idea of the horse and the colour in terms of the similarity and differences they bear to the divine essence » (p. 144). Herrera sees this approach avoiding an unnamed Avicennian necessitarianism, preserving the freedom of God to create creatures that participate in his attributes while maintaining God's simplicity and perfection. Herrera's new approach solves the problems of others but will likely need to be defended from objections of anthropomorphizing God.

Alice Ramos provides the second entry on Thomas Aquinas, « The Human Person as *Imago Dei* and the Perfection of the Universe » to investigate the *exitus-reditus* theme (p. 146). The essay explores the different ways God's presence appears in all things and how God's likeness appears in his effects. Ramos explains Aquinas's account of God's immanence in creation, the *imago dei* in human souls, and angels as imitating aspects of the Trinity. However, the image within the human needs to be perfected to become like God (p. 151) leading to a discussion about the perfection of creation. Building upon the idea that higher bodies must contain lower bodies (e.g. the bodies of animals must contain the bodies of the elements), God contains all creatures *qua* simple before they are produced as corporeal creatures. Since creation is a diffusion of the divine goodness, the universe requires intellectual creatures (humans) to fully reflect God and his intellect. Still, all things imperfectly reflect their divine source and are only perfected upon returning to God. Ramos relates this to her investigation into the relationship between two instances of 'all in all': Apostle Paul's eschatological claim that after all things are subjected to Christ, then « God will be all in all »; and Aquinas's (Aristotelian) claim that after a spiritual substance cognitively comprehends all things (insofar as it is able) it will be 'all in all'. Intellectual souls' capacity to cognize all that exists is likened to God's knowledge of all things, which makes intellectual creatures more perfect especially as souls mirror the perfection of the universe in its return to God through their knowing « since they tie things together that are diverse and multiple into a unity (*colligatio*) » (p. 156). However, the human intellect will remain imperfect until its

complete return and 'seeing' or possessing of God who is 'all in all'. Ramos's account of the complete actualization of human intellectual potentiality conjures up thoughts about Islamic conceptions of separated souls and the continuation of personal identity which would be beneficial to see in dialogue.

Mirela Oliva concludes the volume by introducing the importance of the subject to contemporary discourse in the eleventh and final entry « Beauty and Meaning: From Aquinas to Gadamer and Nancy ». She challenges any separation between cognitive and aesthetic experiences by claiming that beauty is necessary in experiencing meaning. Her goal is to show that the « medieval paradigm of beauty » continues in Gadamer and Nancy through the actuality of being and the reflective nature of light. She begins by expounding Hans-Georg Gadamer's claim in *Truth and Method* that art « lost its cognitive and metaphysical value » under the scientific method (p. 160). Quoting Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, Gadamer sees good, truth, and beauty as identical, since they are diffused by the Trinity, but differ insofar as goodness is desired by the appetite and beauty is assessed by the cognitive faculty. Oliva shows how Gadamer connects this medieval paradigm to Christ the *verbum* in the Neoplatonic tradition of light reproducing the *exitus-reditus*: « light originates in one source, but spreads itself on everything and comes back, as it were, from everything, as its reflection shines back from everything » (p. 163). Beauty is said to have the same 'reflective' nature as light, « beauty is visible only by making something else visible, namely the beautiful thing » (p. 164), which depicts the interior *verbum* traced back to God's mind. The result is language and meaning which depend upon the phenomenon of beauty. In the second section, Oliva shows how Jean-Luc Nancy also draws on Aristotle and Aquinas to link beauty and meaning in his concepts of *sens* and *signification* (a distinction, Oliva warns, English obscures).<sup>2</sup> Nancy also claims we have lost the 'sense of the world' since secularization has disconnected the world from its source of signification. The process of not seeing the world as 'having sense' reveals that the world is 'being sense'; thus sense precedes, succeeds, and exceeds signification because « sense is the opening of being, the manifestation of existence itself » (p. 167). In short, sense cannot be reduced to signification, as best illustrated through music, which differs from other art forms since it suppresses signification and reveals the 'circularity' of beauty and sense (meaning). Oliva concludes that meaning is not merely intellectual content (signification), but a process which makes signification possible through the manifestation of beauty. While Oliva's account should cause the reader to desire more aesthetics in their life, the article also shows how medieval ideas are more than historical peculiarities and can challenge contemporary discourse.

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<sup>2</sup> *Sens* covers the range from the five senses to a disposition and ultimately meaning, while *signification* covers the notion of indicating, being a sign, and also meaning.

In addition to a name index (p. 173–177) and author biographies (p. 179–182), *Causality and Resemblance: Medieval Approaches to the Explanation of Nature* offers a wide breadth of topics and interests that should provide something of interest to any scholar in medieval philosophy and theology, especially those with Neoplatonic interests. The collection does not pretend to serve as a comprehensive guide to the Neoplatonic one–many tradition, so readers should not expect to see a smooth, chronological evolution of Neoplatonic thought sweeping through the successive chapters. But the book provides punctuated accounts of the status and usage of Neoplatonic thought from various traditions at various stages prior to the Renaissance. Due to the breadth of thinkers covered, scholars may feel that attention to certain influential thinkers and works is lacking (e.g. Arabic thinkers or the *Liber De Causis*). The volume succeeds in its stated goal of sketching ‘major routes’ which address the unity and multiplicity of the Logos in creation and, as such, the authors are to be congratulated for contributing to this grand collection.