



*A Philosopher at the Crossroads: Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola's Encounter with Scholastic Philosophy.* Amos Edelheit.

Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 338. Leiden: Brill, 2022. x + 568 pp. \$179.

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Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–94) is often called the Prince of Concord for his efforts to harmonize various philosophical and theological schools. Nowadays Pico is also considered the first European scholar who focused on the Christian kabbalistic tradition in a serious way. However, Amos Edelheit's monograph, divided into three thematically interrelated parts, highlights yet another aspect of Pico's thought by placing him at the crossroads of two worlds: that of Renaissance humanistic intellectuals and that of Renaissance Scholastic scholars. From the very beginning of his intellectual career, Pico seems to have intended to be on the boundary of both worlds.

In the first section, Edelheit focuses his attention on Pico's quest for knowledge. In addition to Pico's studies in Bologna and Ferrara, Edelheit introduces us to the center of Paduan Aristotelianism, where Pico met and was inspired by brilliant scholars such as Nicoletto Vernia and Elijah del Medigo (chapter 2). As a center of Scholastic disputation, Paris was an equally stimulating place for Pico (chapter 3). It must be said that the intellectual struggles carried out in this environment provided the Prince of Concord with the impetus for drafting of some of his works with Scholastic themes. In this context we can mention *Oratio* (1486), *Conclusiones* (1486), *Apologia* (1487), and *De ente et uno* (1491) in particular.

The second section of the book (chapters 6–11) introduces Pico as a promoter and a defender of Scholastic disputation, not as a mere exercise but as a thorough critical analysis of selected texts from various philosophical schools. In this context, Edelheit chooses six of their representatives (Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Francis of Mayronnes, John Duns Scotus, Henry of Ghent, and Giles of Rome), with whom Pico was engaged in a polemical dialogue in his *Conclusiones* and *Apologia*. Of course, the aim of such a debate was, on the one hand, to expose the argumentative limits of the philosopher or theologian in question, and, on the other hand, to reach the truth and, consequently, true wisdom. Although the public disputation with the prominent intellectuals of that time never took place, Pico's *Conclusiones* and his *Apologia* aroused unprecedented interest among his opponents (including the papal commission), as well as among his admirers and critics in theology and natural philosophy.

The third section of Edelheit's work is therefore reserved for reactions to Pico's humanistic style of Scholastic disputation. The dialogue is thus conducted between the theologian Pedro Garsia (see his *Determinationes magistrales*, 1489), who is convinced of the necessity of theological truth, and Pico, who defends his supposed probable opinions in *Apologia* and *Conclusiones* from the position of "ancient nominalists" (chapter 14). Another participant is the eminent Florentine theologian Giovanni Caroli (see his *Super quibusdam conclusionibus Iohannis Pici Mirandule principis*, 1498), whose example is used to underline the boundary between theology and philosophy

(chapter 15). A different form of dialogue is chosen by the natural philosopher Bernardo Torni, who is engaged in a polemic not only with Pico but also with the Renaissance Thomists (chapter 12).

Similarly, Galgani da Siena, Torni's pupil, enters the polemic from the position of a natural scientist, and criticizes not only Pico but also Aristotle (whom he also defends), Albert the Great, and Thomas Aquinas (chapter 13). Pietro Pomponazzi, a representative of Paduan Aristotelianism, debates with Pico on the nature of astrology (chapter 17). Subsequently, Antonio Cittadini di Faenza asks Pico and his nephew Gianfrancesco Pico to clarify different metaphysical issues—for example, the relationship between good and evil, and the relationship between being and essence (chapter 16).

Edelheit's monograph undoubtedly represents a significant advance in the study of Pico's thought. In this context, it must also be said that it is based on a precise analysis of sources (many of them newly discovered). There is no doubt that it will transform the hitherto constructed portrait of Pico as a Renaissance humanist, philosopher, and mystic. Therefore, it can be useful for all scholars who are interested in the field of medieval and Renaissance culture and philosophy.

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doi:10.1017/rqx.2023.588

*Andalus and Sefarad: On Philosophy and Its History in Islamic Spain.*

Sarah Stroumsa.

Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019. xxii + 220 pp. \$35.

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*Andalus and Sefarad: On Philosophy and Its History in Islamic Spain* by Sarah Stroumsa continues her innovative exploration of Islamic intellectual history with what she deems an “integrative approach” across social and religious boundaries in Islamdom during the ninth through twelfth centuries. In a sense, this singularly important aspect of her work mirrors the challenge scholars of the Cairo Geniza pose to Islamic studies historians who have made scant use of this documentary resource. Stroumsa also breaks with some students of philosophy in interrogating its practice and textual manifestations in time and place—that is, as inseparable from the historical process. This method is critical for the study of philosophy in al-Andalus/Sefarad because of the reputation it acquired for tacking in a distinctive direction. Here too Stroumsa's preferred term (*integrative*) applies in how she masterfully incorporates social, economic, and political developments in her study of the history of Andalusian philosophy. In the process she challenges more than a few conventional notions in the history of scholarship regarding speculative thought in al-Andalus derived from highly constructed, ideologically infused literary sources.