

**Douglas Hedley.** *The Iconic Imagination*. Bloomsbury 2016. 320 pp. \$120.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781441172174); \$34.95 USD (Paperback ISBN 9781441194633).

This book completes Douglas Hedley's careful and erudite three-volume study of the imagination. *The Iconic Imagination*, like the two earlier volumes, *Living Forms of the Imagination*, and *Sacrifice Imagined*, explores the possibilities for recovering the imagination for philosophy of religion and philosophical theology. Beyond this eloquent and original work on the image and imagination, the book brings Hedley's compelling defense of the legitimacy of transcendent metaphysics, and sustained, often inspiring resistance to the disenchantment of our time to a close.

Unapologetically Platonic in his metaphysics, Hedley forthrightly acknowledges his intellectual debt to the Cambridge Platonists. He is also deeply indebted to English Romanticism, especially Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In an age when Platonism is increasingly neglected, when not scorned, in academic philosophy, it remains a living tradition for Hedley, a tradition that he engages in a bold and original way. Indeed, as he points out, 'Platonism remains a force in the realm of the imagination,' and has never really ceased to characterize the creative minds of the twentieth century in spite of the antipathy of the modern academy Hedley argues that culture, especially through the intervention and articulation of great art, remains 'an imaginative abode still haunted by transcendence' (xvii).

*The Iconic Imagination* extends Hedley's metaphysical vision through an exploration of the relationship between the image (*icon* in Greek) and the imagination. He notes the tension between image and imagination, between the chaste image of the Christian icon and the unbound Romantic imagination by adding a 'metaphysics of the image as the bearer of transcendence' (259). Thus he completes one of the primary goals of the trilogy announced in the first volume, namely 'to produce an account of the imagination which culminates in a theory of inspired images which is based on the doctrine that man is made in the image of God' (*Living Forms of the Imagination*, 7).

While placing himself within the Platonic tradition, Hedley also takes a critical stance against the classical Platonist understanding of knowledge as justified true belief. He rejects what, in *Living Forms of the Imagination*, he calls the 'Socratic error,' the idea 'expressed classically in the *Theaetetus* that knowledge requires the capacity to give an adequate account or justification of true beliefs'. In place of this rational tendency in Plato, Hedley argues for 'recognition of a more poetic and imaginative apprehension of the Forms, which eludes articulation' (*Living Forms of the Imagination*, 5). This critique is the basis of what he calls 'experiential Platonism' in *Living Forms of the Imagination*. This is an account of our experience of the world as more than a mere intimation of the divine, but understood to constitute an intimacy with transcendence by means of imagination. This undergirds a theological vision of an enchanted world 'still haunted by transcendence,' of the uplifting imagination (*anagogic*) rooted in 'the experiential apprehension of the divine presence in the world, [and that] envisages the world as a sacrament of the transcendent Godhead, and history as the mysterious theatre of divine action' (*Living Forms of the Imagination*, 6). This philosophical theology understands sacred images, or icons, to be more than 'skillful devices to convey a content that can otherwise be conveyed conceptually. Rather, it is to encounter and to participate in a greater world. Such images participate in what they express' (xvii).

Thus, *The Iconic Imagination* complements Hedley's experiential Platonism with a theory of participation, in the sense of 'engagement or experience'. As a Platonist, Hedley rejects the modern, disenchanting view of the image as merely a metaphor. The image in the relevant sense is rather a site of contact with transcendence, and this experience is not limited to the realm of art, but extends to the world, which 'bears an image-like resemblance to its transcendent source'. The physical cosmos is construed as a grand theophany, the *visibilia* a 'luminous array of images... reflecting the perfect

being of the Divine'. Finally, for Hedley it is this intimacy with the world by means of the imagination that is the basis for the affirmation of the world, and the dignity of the human soul. 'Rather than a path to abstraction and cold asceticism, it is the vision of the eternal through the visible and in the temporal. The endorsement of transcendence is not the denial but the affirmation of the world' (259, 139).

In the first of his eight chapters, 'Images, Representation and Imagination,' Hedley considers the image with respect to art history. Against a view of the image prevalent in contemporary art history, influenced by Heidegger and others, whereby the integrity of a work of art is degraded if it is understood to be anchored in a transcendent reality, Hedley opposes the Panofsky-Hegel-Plato view that subordinates the image to the idea. For an alternative to the 'freshman' Platonism he considers the aesthetics of Plotinus, which he thinks offers important insight for broadening our conception of the possibilities within the Platonic tradition and for understanding the relationship between the work of art and ideal meaning such that the image is a non-propositional articulation of truth that transcends the work and exceeds linguistic articulation. Rather than degrading the image, on this view transcendence is necessary to the integrity of the image.

Chapter two, 'Human Nature and the *Imago Dei*,' explores the problematic that emerges in the wake of our understanding of the evolutionary history of humanity. The idea that humanity is created after the image of God, the doctrine of the *imago Dei*, which implies the uniqueness of the humanity as a species, becomes difficult to sustain after Darwin. Hedley rejects traditional theological models of the *imago Dei*, for example, the property model, whereby human uniqueness is specified in terms of properties unique to the species. He argues, however, that not all versions of the *imago Dei* doctrine are problematic. His discussion of the *imago Dei* in Meister Eckhart is the highlight of the chapter, and a great example of how Hedley relies on his command of the history of philosophy to inspire original approaches problems presented in light of modernity.

Although clearly of primarily theological significance, the question addressed in chapter two points to a wider problematic with respect to human dignity, independently of the theological problem of the image of God. The question goes beyond the theological since even a secular philosophy must confront the question of the basis of human dignity, which also presupposes human uniqueness.

Chapter three, 'The Anagogic Imagination,' considers the role that the imagination plays in uplifting or raising the soul to God, especially through the contemplation of beauty. This is what Hedley calls the 'anagogic' dimension of the imagination, from the Greek *ana-gogēin*. In this chapter Hedley is inspired by the work of Roger Scruton, and includes an extended discussion of Scruton's concept of the imagination in his work on aesthetics. Hedley reads Scruton as a fellow Platonist, at least in the spirit of his aesthetics. Indeed, Hedley places Scruton's aesthetics alongside that of Plotinus and Coleridge. The following chapter, 'Freedom and the Narrative Image,' is an examination of the role of imaginative narrative in morality, and images of freedom through a study of C.S. Lewis's late novel *Till We Have Faces*.

'Symbol, Participation and the Divine Ideas,' chapter five, explores the distinction between symbol and image, distinguishing both from metaphors. This chapter also has an important defense of the continued relevance of the doctrine of divine ideas. This chapter also includes a very helpful discussion of participation, a notion central to the distinction between symbol, which implies a metaphysics of participation, and metaphor, which does not. Indeed, for Hedley, the 'doctrine of participation is more than an abstract theory: it is a summons to conversion' (148).

The book would hardly be complete without an extended discussion of idolatry and mythology. Hedley takes up these two topics in chapters six and seven, respectively. In 'Idolatry and Icono

clasm' the discussion thoughtfully considers just how deeply the image is embedded in the religious history of humanity. In this chapter and the next Hedley draws on Hinduism, demonstrating deep familiarity with the Indian religious and philosophical tradition, and an ability to draw on non-European sources. 'Mythology and Theogony' engages with Hinduism and Indian philosophy more extensively. Building on this comparative religion and philosophy, Hedley makes the case in this chapter for an understanding of history inspired by Schelling and Eric Voegelin.

The final chapter, 'Imagination and Revelation,' begins with a meditation on the New Testament text full of images, St. John's Apocalypse. Rather than an exegesis, Hedley mines the book for the metaphysical implications as a poetic and imaginative work. This chapter also explores the importance of the imagination for the Romantic vision of the theophanic dimension of the natural world as an 'icon of divinity' (225). The chapter brings the book to a close with a really wonderful discussion of the images of the holy mountain, holy city, and heavenly banquet.

*The Iconic Imagination* is the final volume in what is really a three-volume treatise on the imagination, so for a complete picture of Hedley's philosophical and theological vision I highly recommend reading all three books in the trilogy. Each book, however, is conceptually independent enough from the others to be read alone. Taken as a whole, the trilogy is a monumental achievement. It is also a real pleasure to read. The book is of obvious value for scholars and students interested in the legacy and continuing relevance of Platonism, and the Romantic tradition, but I also highly recommend it for anyone interested in philosophy of religion, and theology. Because of the breadth of Hedley's learning, and his engaging style, I recommend it especially highly to graduate students as a model of scholarship in its field.

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