"*Em kol ḥai*": Virtues and Vices in Benjamin ben ʿAnav of Rome's *Masa' gei ḥizayon*

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Benjamin ben ʻAnav of Rome's (c. 1215-c. 1295) rhymed prose narrative *Masa' gei ḥizayon* (Pronouncement of the Valley of Vision) has been described as a "moral discourse disparaging ostentatious wealth" and as reflective of the social reality of Roman Jewry in the author's day.[1] The prose of *Masa' gei ḥizayon* is of a high quality and saturated with clever plays on biblical and rabbinic quotations, even if it dims in comparison with the brilliance of Immanuel of Rome's writing later in the century. Dan Pagis compares the work's rhymed prose with the Iberian Hebrew rhymed prose tradition, with roots reaching back to the Arabic *maqāma*.[2] Iberian forms certainly became well ensconced on the Italian Peninsula later in the century, as is evident in the *Maḥbarot* of Immanuel, and, as I suggest below, Benjamin was familiar with the *Mivḥar ha-peninim* (Choice of Pearls) of Solomon Ibn Gabirol. Yet, apart from a short introductory poem not written in quantitative meter, Benjamin's narrative contains no verse, and the narrative development is hardly akin to what one might expect in the *maqāma* literature. Rhymed prose had already been utilized in Hebrew on the Italian Peninsula in the eleventh-century *Megilat Aḥimaʻaṣ*, and thus the ultimate inspiration for the adoption of rhyme in the work remains uncertain.[3]

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1 Kenneth Stow, *The Jews in Rome 1536-1551*, Leiden 1995, p. xxviii. Solomon Nahon likewise describes the text as a "satire lampooning the arrogance and overweening pride of the wealthy": see *Benjamin ben Abraham ʿAnau: Sefer Masa ge ḥizayon* [Burden of the Valley of Vision], Solomon Nahon (ed.), Tel Aviv 1966, p. 1 (all references to the book will henceforth appear parenthesized in the body of the paper). This edition is a facsimile of the first printed edition (Riva di Trento 1560), reprinted in order to commemorate the Vatican's abolition of the cult of Beatus Simone of Trento, a minor patron fabled to have been murdered by the Jews of the city for ritual purposes. In addition to this work, ben Anav produced a handful of *seliḥot*, glosses on Rashi's Torah commentary, a work on the calendar, and a lost halakhic work.

2 Dan Pagis, *Innovation and Tradition in Hebrew Secular Poetry* [in Hebrew], Jerusalem 1976, p. 258.

3 Robert Bonfil, *History and Folklore in a Medieval Jewish Chronicle: the Family Chronicle of Aḥima'az Ben Paltiel*, Leiden 2009.

The narrative divides rather neatly into three sections, the third of which contains an extended excursus on ethics which will be the primary subject of this article. I will argue that Benjamin refashioned the terminology of the Jewish ethical tradition into a structure that reflects interaction with contemporary Christian discourse on virtues and vices, which by the thirteenth century had penetrated Latin and vernacular writing throughout Europe and had become popularized through sermons and artistic renderings. Moreover, the author presents the ethical discourse in a dramatized form that, along with the setting in which the oration is delivered, recalls the style of Christian ethical preaching of the period. Finally, I will point to some semantic shifts in Hebrew ethical terminology that reflect the social concerns of thirteenth-century Europe broadly.

The story begins with the author, narrating in his own voice, describing the decadent social mores that he witnessed in the upper echelon of Roman Jewry, particularly their lust for money and pleasure and their disregard for wisdom and high character. While still fuming over what he saw, a deep sleep falls upon the narrator and he beholds visions in what I consider the second part of the narrative. A wind lifts Benjamin to the "Valley of Vision" (cf., Isaiah 22), where he beholds a statue in the form of an old man made of alloyed metals, a vision based on Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2:31-36: head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, feet of iron and clay. As in Daniel, the statue is then destroyed by a hewn stone. Next to Benjamin is an *ofan*, which orders him to fetch a scroll and record the vision in Hebrew and Aramaic "for the sake of your people."

Whereas Daniel had interpreted the statue of Nebuchadnezzar's dream to signify a sequence of kingdoms leading to the End of Days, the *ofan* explains that the different metals represent the strata of Jewish society, from the ministers who serve kings down to the poor. (The stratified social allegorization of a material object recalls such episodes as the third vision of the *Shepherd of Hermas* (second-century Rome), wherein Hermas is shown angels erecting a tower of stones which signify ecclesiastical officials, martyrs, the righteous, and converts, as well as neglected rocks unsuitable for masonry which represent the wealthy whose commerce interferes with their faith when persecution threatens.)[4]

The *ofan* then orders Benjamin to gather "all the Jews—men, women and children" and to share with them the vision and its interpretation. To the "River of Love" by the Valley of Vision "at the gate of upper Benjamin" (a self-reference),

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4 Richard Newhauser, *The Early History of Greed: The Sin of Avarice in Early Medieval Thought and Literature*, Cambridge 2000, p. 1.

Benjamin summons "all the members of society, my brethren and companions, my leaders and confidants, princes and elites, the lowly and the great, the young man and the virgin, the nursling with the aged." There he delivers an oration, which constitutes the third section of the narrative, consisting of a discourse on virtues and vices.[5]

Benjamin first warns the masses concerning three vices, beginning with Desire (*Ta'avah*) and Envy (*Qin'ah*), and pronounces, "he who has their bloodguilt upon him shall surely die," adopting the biblical refrain reserved for the most heinous and taboo of crimes (Lev. 20:11 and elsewhere). Desire and Envy together are described as the fathers of all impurities. To these two vices the author adds a third, Honor (*Kavod*; i.e., the pursuit of honor), described in the text as "the brother of Pride" (*Ga'avah*). The author states concerning these three, "when a man is caught by their cords, they drive him from the world," clearly referencing *Mishnah Avot* 4:21: "Rabbi Ele'azar ha-Qafar said, 'Envy, Desire, and Honor drive a man from the world [*moṣi'in et ha-adam min ha-'olam*].'"[6] The author then lists antidotes for these three primary vices: Contentedness (*Histapqut*) for Desire, Acceptance (*Raṣon*) for Envy, Humility (*'Anavah*) for Honor. It is striking in this part of the ethical discourse that virtues are introduced not as an independent, self-generating category but rather as counterparts or remedies for particular vices. Regarding Humility, Benjamin writes, "It is the most important *miṣvah*… for it is the mother of every living thing [*em kol ḥay,* evoking Eve in Gen. 3:20] and Love and Fear are her companions…. For this reason the friend of God said, 'The effect of humility is fear of the Lord' (Prov. 22:4)" (15a). Tellingly, Benjamin omits the more material rewards brought by humility in the conclusion of the verse from Proverbs, "…wealth, honor, and life."

After this introductory treatment of corresponding virtues and vices, the author expounds upon the origin and generation of other virtues and vices as a *sefer toledot yamim,* a book of genealogy—already hinted at when describing Envy and Desire as fathers and Humility as a mother. The section opens with a story about Reason and Folly (*Sekhel* and *Sikhlut*), both male, who cast lots to decide who will marry which of two women, Pride (*Ga'avah*) and Humility (*'Anavah*). It would seem that *Ga'avah* has now taken the place of *Kavod* in the introductory section, where the two were described as siblings. As we will see, Benjamin likely set *Ga'avah* as the primary vice following the Christian usage of Pride

5 Note that Benjamin does not have specific terms either for "virtue" or "vice." Nevertheless, it is clear from the nature of his excursus that virtue and vice were what he had in mind.

6 Maimonides, in his commentary on this *mishnah,* comments that any one of these three "necessarily ruins faith" and prevents one from attaining intellectual or moral virtues.

(Superbia) and associated it closely with *Kavod* in order to accommodate the rabbinic text.

These two marriages produce children—seven virtues and six vices. Reason and Humility produce Shamefacedness, Refinement, Patience, Kindness, Confidence, Truth, and Temperance; Folly and Pride generate Power, Flattery, Impatience, Industry, Anger, and Frivolity. Although there is no discussion of their marriages, these then give rise to further auxiliary virtues and vices. I have laid out the full genealogical tree with Hebrew terminology in the outline below:

Three Primary Vices and their Antidotes (12b-21b)

Desire/*Ta'avah* ≠ Contentedness/*Histapqut*
Envy/*Qin'ah* ≠ Acceptance/*Raṣon*
Honor/*Kavod* ≠ Humility/*'Anavah*

Genealogy of Virtues

Marriage of Reason/*Sekhel* and Humility/*'Anavah*

1. Shamefacedness/*Boshet*
   - Fear/*Yir'ah*
   - Modesty/*Ṣeni'ut*
   - Asceticism/*Perishut*
2. Refinement/*Musar*
   - Caution/*Zehirut*
   - Recognition/*Hakarah*
   - Habit/*Hanhagah*
   - Silence/*Shetiqah*
   - Learning/*Limud*
3. Patience/*Sevel*
   - Longsuffering/*Ye'ush*
   - Victory/*Niṣaḥon*
4. Kindness/*Ḥesed*
   - Recompense/*Gemul*
   - Rebuke/*Tokheḥah*
   - Generosity/*Nedivut*
5. Confidence/*Bitaḥon*
   - Faith/*Emunah*
6. Truth/*Emet*
   - Discretion/*Beḥinah*
   - Acknowledgment/*Hoda'ah*

7. Temperance/*Mitun*
    - Counsel/*ʻEṣah*
    - Peace/*Shalom*
    - Rest/*Menuḥah*
    - Tranquility/*Hashqet*

Genealogy of Vices

Marriage of Folly/*Sikhlut* and Pride/*Ga'avah*

1. Power, Temerity/*ʻAzut*
    - Iniquity/*ʻAverah*
    - Obstinancy/*ʻIqshut*
2. Flattery/*Ḥonef*
    - Falsehood/*Sheqer*
    - Slander/*Rekhilut*
3. Impatience/*Mehirut*
    - Stumbling/*Kishalon*
    - Regret/*Ḥaraṭah*
4. Industry/*Ḥariṣut*
    - Toil/*Ṭirdah*
    - Stinginess/*Kilut*
5. Anger/*Kaʻas*
    - Stupidity/*Ivvelet*
6. Frivolity/*Leiṣanut*
    - Disgrace/*Qalon*

A Gendered Dramatization

In his dramatized presentation of the genealogy of virtues and vices, Benjamin exploits the grammatical genders of ethical terminology. Tova Rosen has written extensively on the implications for the gendering of the soul in medieval Hebrew literature and demonstrated that the soul

> takes on biological and behavioral qualities believed to be essentially female. She is desirous, lusting, sinning, menstruating, in need of being cleansed and corrected; she is either servile or disobedient; she is emotionally feeble; but she is also capable of love and devotion. She is thus portrayed as a disloyal wife, a straying daughter, a penitent pilgrim, a toiling maid, a captive princess, a prostitute, or—a loving companion.[7]

As in the discourse on the soul, *Sekhel* (Reason) is gendered masculine, as is *Sikhlut*

7 Tova Rosen, *Unveiling Eve: Reading Gender in Medieval Hebrew Literature,* Philadelphia 2003, p. 84.

(Folly), and both play the role of husband and father.[8] *'Anavah* (Humility) and *Ga'avah* (Pride) are wives and mothers. When Reason took Humilty, "delicate and comely" (*ha-me'unagah ve-ha-na'avah*), as a wife,

> he esteemed her soul and she, perfected in beauty, raised up grace and kindness before him. A wife of valor is a crown for her husband (Prov. 12:4). He brought her into his tent. He came unto her and impregnated her. She gave birth to seven children, wise and clever, and these are their names according to their generations…. (15b)

Similarly, Truth (*Emet*) is the father of the females Discretion (*Beḥinah*) and Acknowledgment (*Hoda'ah*), "her sister born at the time of her birth, in her form and likeness, to acknowledge Truth and Skill at times of satisfaction and indignation [*lehodot 'al ha-emet ve-'al ha-kisharon be'et ha-raṣon u-ve-'et he-ḥaron*]" (14a). Although the virtues and vices do not take on the full range of anthropomorphic and anthropathetic attributes found in the discourse on the soul, their gendered roles are nonetheless central and betray attitudes toward male and female social functions. The primary ideals for the female are to possess beauty and to show respect for her spouse, augmenting his station and reputation.

Terminology and Structure

In creating his genealogical tree, Benjamin draws upon a long tradition of Jewish ethical literature in which much of the Hebrew terminology can be found. Yet, as I will argue, Benjamin imagines an original interrelation among virtues and vices and presents them in such a way that betrays an affinity with contemporary Christian ethical discourse.

Apart from ethical sections of rabbinic writing, Benjamin may have accessed Jewish texts following the peripatetic tradition, for which Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* served as the base text. As is well known, Aristotle generally views virtues as the median point between opposing extremes. The number of virtues is as limitless as the number of possible extremes and the pursuit of the mean is tantamount to, or at least a prerequisite for, the pursuit of happiness. Plato's Republic, which focused on the four virtues of Fortitude, Prudence, Temperance, and Justice was of more limited interest to Jewish audiences. Muslim authors including al-Farābī, Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Bājja, and Ibn Rushd wrote commentaries on Aristotle's and Plato's

8 Although we might expect *sikhlut* to be feminine, nouns of this construction were often treated as masculine in medieval Hebrew texts such as the translations of the Ibn Tibbon dynasty. I wish to thank Raymond Scheindlin for making this point. On the other hand, *Ta'avah* and *Qin'ah* are described as "fathers" in the earlier section although they are grammatically feminine.

ethical writings, some known to Jewish writers, and authored original tracts on ethics, though we need not elaborate upon these here. [9]

Solomon Ibn Gabirol wrote the *Mivḥar ha-peninim* (Choice of Pearls, originally in Judeo-Arabic, surviving in the Hebrew translation of Judah Ibn Tibbon), a collection of aphorisms on miscellaneous subjects, including numerous virtues and vices, culled from the sayings of sages going back to Arabic, Greek, and Sanskrit sources.[10] Ibn Gabirol's Judeo-Arabic *Iṣlāḥ al-akhlāq* (Improvement of the Moral Qualities), also translated into Hebrew by Judah Ibn Tibbon as *Tikkun middot ha-nefesh*, is a far more systematic work that treats twenty qualities (*akhlāq*), four associated with each of the five senses such that every quality has one opposing it.[11] For example, associated with the sense of sight are the quality Pride (*al-shamkh*) and its opposite Meekness (*al-khushū'*), the quality Diffidence (*al-ḥayā'*) and its opposite Impudence (*al-qamḥ*) and so on. On occasion, Ibn Gabirol is concerned with the interrelation among virtues or vices, including their ontological sequence, though this does not constitute a major element of the text.

The most Aristotelian system of ethics pursued by a Jewish author was that explained by Maimonides in the introduction to his Judeo-Arabic commentary on *Mishnah Avot* (the introduction is known in Arabic as the *Thamāniyat fuṣūl* [Eight Chapters] and in Hebrew, through the translation of Samuel Ibn Tibbon, as the *Shemoneh peraqim*).[12] In his second chapter, Maimonides divides the virtues (Ar. *faḍā'il,* Heb. *ma'alot*), following Aristotle and al-Farābī, into moral and intellectual categories with corresponding categories of vices ("ignoble characteristics" or "deficiencies," Ar. *radhā'il*, Heb. *peḥitot*). The intellectual virtues belong to the

9 See for example Majid Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam*, Leiden 1991. On the Hebrew translation of Ibn Rushd's commentary on the Republic, see *Averroes: Commentary on Plato's Republic*, E.I.J. Rosenthal (ed. and trans.), Cambridge 1956; Ralph Lerner, *Averroes on Plato's Republic*, Ithaca, NY 1974.

10 *Solomon Ibn Gabirol: The Choice of Pearls*, from Hebrew: B. H. Ascher, London 1859. There is also an earlier edition by H. Filipowski, London 1851.

11 For the Arabic of the *Iṣlaḥ al-akhlāq* along with an English translation, see *Solomon Ibn Gabirol: The Improvement of the Moral Qualities,* Stephen S. Wise (ed. and trans.), New York 1952. The title of Ibn Gabirol's work recalls Miskawayh's *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*. In both titles, the term "*akhlāq*" might be translated most directly as "characteristics."

12 Here we need not delve into the debate regarding the extent to which Maimonides does or does not follow Aristotle's doctrine. The Eight Chapters also bears an affinity for al-Farābī's *Fuṣūl al-madāni*. See Herbert Davidson, "Maimonides' '*Shemonah peraqim*' and Alfarabi's '*Fuṣūl al-Madāni*,'" *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 31 (1963), pp. 33-50. For Maimonides, see the Judeo-Arabic text edited by Yosef Kafaḥ, *Mishnah ʿim perush Rabenu Mosheh Ben Maimon: maqor ve-targum* [Mishnah with Interpretation by Maimonides: Original Text and Interpretation], Qiryat Ono 1993, *masekhet avot*.

rational faculty and include Wisdom (understood as knowledge of direct and indirect causes of things) and Reason (consisting of axioms, acquired intellect, and acuity). The intellectual vices are the *opposites* of such qualities. Moral virtues belong to the appetitive faculty. Here the virtues are "very numerous" and include Moderation, Liberality, Honesty, Meekness, Humility, Courage, etc. Vices in this area are understood as *deficiencies* or *exaggerations* of these qualities. In chapter four, Maimonides expands upon this discussion and describes, following Aristotle, each moral virtue as the mean between two extremes. As in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the virtues given here are merely examples since the virtues are determined by the extremes, which are infinite. By the early thirteenth century, ethical literature had become sufficiently ensconced in Jewish writing that Judah al-Ḥarizi wrote a parody of the genre in his *Book of Taḥkemoni*.[13]

As stated, most of the ethical terminology found in Benjamin's narrative can be traced to earlier works of ethical writing in Hebrew. It seems likely that Benjamin's most immediate source was Ibn Gabirol's *Mivḥar ha-peninim* since many of Benjamin's terms appear there as chapter titles. Of Benjamin's virtues, the following appear as chapter titles in the *Mivḥar*: *'Anavah; Mitun; Boshet; Ḥesed; Hakarah; Musar; Hanhagah; (She'elat) ha-'Eṣah; Tokhekha(t) ha-Ahavah; Ṣeni'ut; Shetiqah; (Ahavat) ha-emet; Perishut.* Of Benjamin's vices, the following appear in the *Mivḥar: Qin'ah; Ḥonef; Ḥariṣut (u-me'at ha-biṭaḥon ba-elohim); Rekhilut; Kesilut* (Benjamin actually has the synonymous *Sikhlut*); *Ga'avah; Ivvelet; 'Iqshut; Qalon; Mehirut*. Interestingly, *Niṣaḥon* (Victory) appears as a vice in the *Mivḥar* but as a virtue in *Masa' gei ḥizayon*. Ibn Gabirol has the idea of "contest" in mind, the notion that seeking to vanquish one's enemy leads to vileness in oneself.[14] Ben 'Anav seems to associate the idea with the Latin Victoria, which is often included as a virtue in Latin texts and artistic representations and is proverbially said to stem from Harmony (Concordia); in *Masa gei ḥizayon,* its progenitor is Patience (*Sevel*).[15] In some instances, the order of virtues and vices in Ben 'Anav's list roughly follows the sequence of chapter titles in the *Mivḥar*, though Ibn Gabirol's listing is disjointed and miscellaneous rather than hierarchic. Further, there is little sense in Ibn Gabirol's *Mivḥar* that virtues or vices have any interdependence or ontological relationship.

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13 See Jonathan Decter, "Concerning The Terminology of al-Ḥarizi's Virtues Debate," Wout Van Bekkum and Naoya Katsumata (eds.), *Giving a Diamond: Essays in Honor of Joseph Yahalom on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, Leiden 2011, 159-173.

14 Ibn Gabirol, note 10 above, p. 130.

15 On the representation of Victoria, see Colum Hourihane (ed.), *Virtue and Vice: The Personifications in the Index of Christian Art*, Princeton 2000, p. 302.

Turning now to Christian ethical literature, which had become vast by the thirteenth century, Benjamin's selection of virtues and vices is not identical with the most typical lists created by Christian authors. Christian ethical writing actually grew out of two independent traditions, one pertaining primarily to virtues and the other to vices, which medieval authors tried to reconcile with some difficulty. Early enumerations of virtues usually count seven, consisting of the four cardinal virtues given by Plato and supplemented by three "theological" virtues given by Paul in I Corinthians 13:13—Faith, Hope, and Charity. These seven became the basis of systematic Christian discussions following the peripatetic tradition of such figures as Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas.[16]

The vices, on the other hand, grew out of a tradition of challenges that monks faced in the Egyptian desert, which were then adopted by Cassian in the early fifth century and then famously by Pope Gregory the Great in his *Moral Commentary on Job* in the sixth century. These vices became known as the "Seven Deadly Sins," so called because they were believed to lead to the death of the body and the soul and to damnation.[17] As Morton Bloomfield wrote in a classic study of the vices in English literature, medieval writers faced great difficulties in trying to oppose virtues and vices: "Pride, avarice, lust, envy, gluttony, anger, and sloth just cannot be perfectly balanced with fortitude, prudence, temperance, justice, faith, hope, and charity without violent damage to the validity of the contrast."[18] Returning to Benjamin's list, of the so-called "Seven Deadly Sins," Pride, Envy, and Anger are all present, but Gluttony and Lust are not (*Ta'avah* is used in the sense of desire for material wealth and does not seem to include Libido). Humility, Patience, and Temperance are among Benjamin's virtues, but the Pauline theological virtues of Hope and Charity are not.

Benjamin's presentation of virtues and vices is neither a systematic treatise nor a simple collection of aphorisms. His treatment is certainly ordered, beginning with three cardinal vices—Envy, Desire, and Honor—and their corresponding antidotes. Although he grounds his treatment in a rabbinic source, he thoroughly recasts the meaning of the passage by prescribing specific antidotes, essentially

16 See various essays in the volume by István P. Bejczy, *Virtue Ethics in the Middle Ages: Commentaries on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics 1200-1500*, Leiden 2008, especially Chapter 2 on Albert the Great and Aquinas. See also Alan of Lille's Latin *Treatise on Virtues and Vices and Gifts of the Holy Spirit*. Ramon Llull (1232-1315), who was active for a time in Italy, made the combination of moral and divine virtues and vices the center of his *Ars Magna*.

17 Columba Stewart, "Evagrius Ponticus and the 'Eight Generic Logismoi,'" Richard Newhauser (ed.), *In the Garden of Evil: The Vices and Culture in the Middle Ages*, Toronto 2005, pp. 3-34.

18 Morton Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature*, East Lansing, MI 1952, p. 67.

remedia, as one might also expect from a Christian author.[19] The two vices of Envy and Desire are said to bring about death—"for he who has their bloodguilt upon him shall surely die"—which also smacks of the discourse on the Seven Deadly Sins. Benjamin then expounds upon the vertical interrelation of virtues and vices in the form of genealogical trees, though it does not seem that these virtues are prescribed as antidotes for the specific vices cited.

When presented with Honor in the text from *Avot*, Benjamin readily associates it with Pride/*Ga'avah* by making the two siblings. As suggested, Pride was of paramount importance in the Christian discourse on the vices, from Cassian and Gregory down through Chaucer and Dante, and constituted the primary transgression—the "Queen of Vices," according to Gregory—preceding the others in the moral order.[20] It is thus fitting in Benjamin's genealogy that Pride is the mother of the other vices and that its counterpart, Humility/*'Anavah*, is the mother of the virtues and "*em kol ḥay.*"

One wonders whether the hierarchy of virtues and vices is intended to be practical (that is, to teach that the cultivation of a given virtue or vice leads to another) or ontological (that is, to describe a hierarchy or set of relations among virtues and vices that is embedded in the very nature of being). Christian authors approached the virtues and vices in both ways, though the former was certainly paramount in the popular presentation of the subject in preaching.[21] Benjamin's presentation exhibits characteristics of both practical and ontological systems. On the one hand, the author warns that pursuing given vices can lead one to sin (20b, see quotation below). On the other hand, he is illustrating how the virtues and vices exist according to their nature and the interrelations among them. When introducing the section, he writes, "and now for testament to you is this book of genealogy which has always existed [*she-kevar hayah le-'olamim*]" (15b). Hence he is not describing how virtues and vices succeed one another in time but is providing a cognitive map of their structure.

19 On the concept of *remedia,* see Bloomfield, note 18 above, p. 67 and index.

20 On Gregory, see Carole Straw, "Gregory, Cassian, and the Cardinal Vices," Newhauser (ed.), note 17 above, p. 36. On Chaucer, see below. Dante structures his seven levels of hell according to the seven vices. See also Stan Benfell, "Avarice, Justice, and Poverty in Dante's 'Comedy,'" *Laster im Mittelalter/Vices in the Middle Ages*, Christoph Flüeler and Martin Rohde (eds.), Berlin 2009, pp. 201-229. Immanuel of Rome, by the way, does not structure his *Tofet* according to specific sins, though his hell is certainly full of sinners of many sorts.

21 Aquinas rejected the idea that sins could give rise to other sins. Using Aristotelian categories of causality, he argued that cardinal sins were not efficient causes (i.e., ones which give rise to other sins) but rather final causes (the ultimate purposes to which all sins lead). This allowed for all sins to be included within the system.

It is likely that Benjamin gave such prominence to the subject of virtue and vice because it fit well with the moralizing tone of *Masa' gei ḥizayon* and because it had become central within various types of discourse throughout Latin Christendom by the thirteenth century. The transformations that swept across Christian Europe beginning in the late twelfth century—the development from agrarian to mercantile economies, the increased power of the bourgeoisie, the establishment of mendicant orders that ministered to the townspeople—also gave rise to new social concerns, such as the relationship between wealth and sin, and to new literary genres addressing them.[22] Discourse on the virtues and vices was composed both in Latin and in the vernacular and transcended the formal treatise to be executed in many genres including sermons, poems,[23] educational manuals (catechisms), and exegesis, enjoying artistic renderings as well.[24]

The ethical *summa* by Servasanto de Faenza (d. c. 1285/6), the *Book of Virtues and Vices* (*Liber de virtutibus et vitiis*), is a preaching handbook that combines three genres: alphabetical arrangements, exempla collections, and sermons proper.[25] Virtue and vice was an indispensable subject of the preacher's repertoire; at one point in his *Summa of Vices and Virtues (Summam de vitiis et virtutibus*), Guillaume Peyraut (c. 1200-71) simply includes the instruction for the preacher, "here you can go into individual vices and virtues," indicating that the preacher must have

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22 Bloomfield, note 18 above, p. 91.

23 In one of the Italian lauds of Jacopone da Todi (c. 1230-1306), man in his perfect state is likened to a tree that is planted in Humility; in its soaring trunk the poet sees Hope, and where the branches first shoot out from the trunk he sees Charity. On one of the branches, vices and virtues do battle in a manner that recalls Prudentius' *Psychomachia*. The pairs here are Humility/Pride, Envy/Charity, Meekness/Anger, Justice/Sloth, Mercy/Avarice, Chastity/Lust, and Temperance/Gluttony. For the poem, see Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, from Italian: Serge and Elizabeth Hughes, New York 1982, Laud 88, pp. 247-253. This corresponds to Laud 77 (Omo che pò la sua lengua domare) in the Italian edition, Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, Franco Mancini (ed.), Rome 1974, pp. 224-231. The poem is also discussed briefly by Lina Bolzoni, *The Web of Images: Vernacular Preaching from Its Origins to Saint Bernardino da Siena*, Aldershot 2004, pp. 99-101. Petrarch also describes a "tree of virtue" in three parts: see Bolzoni, pp. 86-89.

24 For a sense of the scope of the discourse, see the truly massive Morton W. Bloomfield, *Incipits of Latin Works on the Virtues and Vices, 1100-1500 A.D.*, Cambridge, MA 1979. Even this is incomplete; see the article by István Bejczy and Richard Newhauser, *Towards a Revised Incipitarium: A Preliminary List of Additions, Corrections, and Deletions to Update Morton Bloomfield et al., Incipits of Latin Works on the Virtues and Vices*, Instrumenta Patristica et Mediaevalia, Turnhout, 2007. On artistic presentations of the virtues and vices, see Hourihane, note 15 above; Jennifer O'Reilly, *Studies in the Iconography of the Virtues and Vices in the Middle Ages*, New York 1988; Gerald B. Guest, "'The Darkness and Obscurity of Sins': Representing Vices in the Thirteenth-Century Bibles Moralisees," Newhauser (ed.), note 17 above, pp. 74-103; A. Katzenellenbogen, *Allegories of the Virtues and Vices in Medieval Art*, Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching 24, London 1939, reprinted Toronto 1989.

25 D. L. d'Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars,* Oxford 1985, pp. 76-77.

had this knowledge at his fingertips.[26] Preachers linked the seven vices to other heptads appearing in biblical literature (the seven Canaanite nations, the seven devils driven out by Mary Magdalene, the seven turns of Israelites around the walls of Jericho, etc.) and the topic was given special prominence on Good Friday.[27]

It was the popularization of the ethical sermon that allowed for its representation in Geoffrey Chaucer's (1342-1400) *Parson's Tale*, wherein Pride is featured as the root of a tree whose branches are the other Deadly Sins, which can be remedied with contrasting virtues, presented in a parallel tree. By the sixteenth century, the sins had become so commonplace in preaching that an English story tells of the Friar "John Ten Commandments," so-called because he taught the theme of the Decalogue so often; his servant pleaded with him to try a new subject, whereupon John asked him if he could name all Ten Commandments. Responding in the affirmative, the servant began to list them: Pride, Covetise, Sloth, Envy, Wrath, Gluttony, and Lechery.[28]

I have not come across a Jewish sermon from this period which details virtues and vices in a manner similar to *Masa' gei ḥizayon*.[29] In his narrative, Benjamin does not present himself delivering a sermon in the synagogue but rather orating before throngs from all ranks of society outdoors at the Valley of Vision. Such a scene recalls stories of popular Christian preachers who attracted crowds outdoors, such as the thirteenth-century German Franciscan Berthold of Regensburg (d. 1272), reported to have preached to spellbound masses gathered in open fields (one of his favorite topics was the Seven Deadly Sins).[30] On the Italian Peninsula as well, there is ample evidence that preaching was not limited to the confines

26 d'Avray, note 25 above, p. 107.

27 On Good Friday, preachers drew correspondences between Jesus' torment and the vices such that, as Holly Johnson has written, "Jesus' tormented body and the related vices became a 'meditative map' to understand the totality of the experience of sin": see "The Hard Bed of the Cross: Good Friday Preaching and the Seven Deadly Sins," Richard Newhauser (ed.), *The Seven Deadly Sins: From Communities to Individuals*, Leiden 2007, pp. 129-144.

28 See Siegfried Wenzel, "Preaching the Seven Deadly Sins," Newhauser (ed.), note 17 above, p. 145. Another useful work is Carlo Delcorno, *La predicazione nell'età communale*, Florence 1974; on pp. 86-88 there is a sermon by Servasanto da Faenza (d. c. 1285/6) which Delcorno locates within the discourse of Vices and Virtues.

29 On the history of the Jewish sermon in general, see Mark Saperstein, *Your Voice Like a Ram's Horn*: *Themes and Texts in Traditional Jewish Preaching,* Cincinnati 1996, esp. p. 493 on capital vices and corresponding virtues in a later sermon from Ashkenaz; and Shaul Regev, *Oral and Written Sermons in the Middle Ages* [in Hebrew], Jerusalem 2001, which treats the Jewish sermon between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. The earliest example of a practical guide for Jewish preachers was Joseph Ibn Shem Tov's (Castile, fifteenth century) *'Ein ha-qore'*.

30 Bloomfield, note 18 above, p. 91.

of the church but was performed in fields in the countryside around the city (*il contado*) and in city plazas.[31]

By Benjamin's day, the virtues and vices were also widespread in Christian iconography, not only in private books intended for the clergy but also in public architecture. The *Index of Christian Art* includes representational personifications of some 109 virtues and 118 vices; many of these are structured as auxiliary virtues and vices surrounding the major groupings.[32] They were frequently presented in medallion form, most famously above the doorway and on the window of Notre-Dame in Paris, where each of ten virtues and vices is depicted through personification. On the Italian Peninsula, the twelfth-century mosaic of the presbytery in Piacenza's church of San Savino features seven virtues, and Giotto's decoration of the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, completed in 1305, also depicts seven virtues and seven vices, all personified.

Apart from the simple array, other popular representational arrangements of virtues and vices include the wheel and, most importantly for our purposes, the tree. As in Chaucer's *Parson's Tale,* the vices were often depicted as branches growing from a root vice, usually Pride, and were sometimes presented with a parallel tree of virtues.[33] In written discourse, Cassian had already described the interrelation among the vices as a tree with a root and branches. By the eighth century, Boniface had greatly elaborated upon the image, and in a twelfth-century work attributed to Victor of Hugo, one finds the image of "two trees: a tree of vices springing from the root of Pride and a tree of virtues springing from the root of Humility."[34] In Ramon Llull's Catalan *Gentile and the Three Wise Men,* virtues and vices are illustrated in the forms of trees, which function as a central reference point of rationalist discourse in the narrative.[35] Although I have not found the specific use of a *toledot yamim* by a Christian author as we do with

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31 I wish to thank my graduate student Lucia Finotto for research assistance pertaining to preaching and iconography in Italy and for numerous valuable suggestions on an earlier draft of this essay. On preaching outside of the church setting, see Daniel R. Lesnich, *Preaching in Medieval Florence*, Athens, GA 1989, pp. 17 ff. See also Beverly Mayne Kienzle, "Medieval Sermons and their Performance: Theory and Record," Carolyn Muessing (ed.), *Preachers, Sermons and Audiences in the Middle Ages*, Leiden 2002, pp. 89-124. On the political function of preaching, see Augustine Thompson, *Revival Preachers and Politics in Thirteenth Century Italy: The Great Devotion of 1233*, New York 1992.

32 See the convenient catalogue in Hourihane, note 15 above.

33 See Bolzoni, note 24 above, especially Chapter 3, "Trees and Other Schema: Some Examples of their Use." See also note 24 above concerning the laud of Jacopone da Todi.

34 Bloomfield, note 18 above, p. 84; see also Katzenellenbogen, note 25 above, pp. 65-66.

35 See *Ramón Llull: Doctor Illuminatus, a Ramón Llull Reader,* Anthony Bonner (ed. and trans.), Princeton 1993, pp. 73-102. Llull also used the tree metaphor to present the organization of the sciences, with philosophy as the root, in his *Arbre de ciéncia*.

Benjamin, the structural affinity of the genealogical tree with the arbor seems obvious, however different some of the particular virtues and vices might have been.[36] As with much Christian iconography, the use of the genealogical tree may have held mnemonic and pedagogic functions, but more than this it offered an efficient and illustrative means of representing an ontological structure.

In sum, Benjamin's excursus on the virtues and vices consists of ethical terminology that had reached him through Jewish writings, yet the construction of his presentation, the way in which virtues and vices are ordered and conceived in relation to one another, seems a part of the contemporary Christian discourse that had become so prominent by his day. Benjamin's self-presentation as a preacher in the countryside, the allegorical style of his discourse, and the very subject matter of his exposition are all typical of Christian culture in the thirteenth century.

Sin and Society

Richard Newhauser has argued that examining the groupings and shifting semantic usages of particular virtues and vices over time can allow for a social constructivist reading of medieval Christian societies. In an edited volume, he investigates the medieval development of the seven deadly sins as "concrete examples of vitally important ethical ideas which experienced new and constantly changing definitions even as the vocabulary used to articulate them in a series of shifting communal, institutional, and individual surroundings remained remarkably stable."[37]

Virtues and vices, even when their terminology is constant, are social constructions whose meanings are negotiated in specific cultural settings. Looking at the long history of Avarice, for example, we learn that the initial social concern with Avarice was not directed toward the very wealthy but rather toward those beneath them who aspired to acquire more wealth, for this threatened to subvert the dominant social paradigm. Avarice became a central concern in monastic literature, based in ascetic ideals, and was seen to infect even those who had sworn off worldly possessions. The desire for wealth was considered illicit in itself. The sin was to be remedied not only by the redistribution of wealth but also by the spiritual reorientation of the sinner. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the turn to a money economy and the rise of the mercantile class lead to new anxieties concerning wealth, which was likely the reason some ethical

36 In a personal correspondence for which I am most grateful, Richard Newhauser told me that he does not know of a genealogical representation of virtues and vices. However, he is aware of presentations of the virtues and vices that also evoke genealogical information (Philadelphia, Free Library, shelf mark MS. Lewis E.249; Bodleian Library, MS lat. th. c. 2, *Summary Catalogue* no. 30590).

37 Newhauser, note 28, p. 1.

thinkers ranked Avarice ahead of Pride as the chief vice.[38] At the same time, in educational manuals and sermons, one often finds Avarice given a rather restricted definition that does not encompass all desire for profit but only those desires that exceed certain bounds. The reason for this stemmed from a need to justify existing behaviors within the laity of an urbanizing, commercializing Europe. Of course, a monastic audience would have remained wary of any desire for profit and its deleterious effects on the soul.

A comprehensive diachronic study of the shifting semantic senses of ethical vocabulary in Jewish writing seems a major desideratum.[39] The usage of the virtues and vices in Benjamin's narrative fits into several trends of thirteenth-century Christian treatments of the subject. As discourse on the virtues and vices became vernacularized for the benefit of the laity, it became concerned not only with the abstract struggle of the soul but entered into the realms of the body and society. Benjamin writes most directly about the benefits and dangers for the development of the intellect—not identical with the struggle for the soul, but nonetheless turned toward internal development. Regarding *Ka'as,* Anger, for example, he writes, "Every wise person knows that anger removes knowledge [*mesaleq daʿat*]" (20a). However, he also situates the ethical discussion within the overall frame of the narrative, which calls for economic justice and decries the idolization of wealth.[40] At the conclusion of his discussion of the vices, Benjamin writes,

> These are the children of Foolishness and Pride, children of injustice, a seed that destroys both the living and the dead. Marry them not for they are wicked outside and in. Let them not dwell in your land lest they will lead you to sin, and if they call you to go with them, prevent your feet from following their paths. This generation is stubborn and rebellious! May all the God-fearing and pure-hearted be alert in avoiding mischief. For this may all who praise offer praise and every righteous man pray, that he might fulfill his desire in the Torah of God and cast off his idols of silver and gold. (20b)

38 Lester Little, "Pride Goes before Avarice: Social Change and the Vices in Latin Christendom," *American Historical Review* 76 (1971), pp. 16-49. There is some precedent for this also in the New Testament, Timothy 6:10.

39 Another important thirteenth-century text that should be included in such a study is Yeḥiel ben ʿAnav's *Sefer bet middot.*

40 Newhauser, note 4 above, p. 126.

The author, we thus see, is concerned with the social detriments of individual imperfection.

While I cannot review here the social dimensions of all aspects of Benjamin's treatment of virtues and vices, a few brief comments are in order. I have already discussed the shift in meaning of *Niṣaḥon* (Victory) between Ibn Gabirol's and Benjamin's writing. Also, as mentioned, the usage of *Ta'avah* is non-sexual but focuses on the pursuit of wealth only. It might even be appropriate to translate the term here as "Avarice," especially as it is remedied by *Histapqut*, satisfaction with what one has. This materialist understanding may be linked with the overall concern of the book, the searing critique of the Roman Jewish elite's seemingly unbridled pursuit of wealth. At the same time, it is in concert with one of the paramount spiritual and social concerns of thirteenth-century Christendom.

One other interesting area in which we might observe the shifting semantic sense of a term pertains to Benjamin's discussion of the vice *Ḥariṣut* (Industry). In Ibn Gabirol's *Mivḥar ha-peninim*, *Ḥariṣut* carries a limited negative valence as "Industry without proper trust in God."[41] Yet Industry in itself is not necessarily a danger. In fact, in the *Iṣlaḥ al-akhlāq,* Ibn Gabirol discusses the Arabic term *al-nashāṭ* as a *virtue*, which he clearly links with *Ḥariṣut* since he quotes Proverbs 12:27 as a prooftext: "The industrious man has precious wealth [*hon adam yaqar ḥaruṣ*]."[42] In his translation of the work, Judah Ibn Tibbon appropriately used *ḥariṣut* to translate *al-nashāṭ*. Ibn Gabirol emphasized exercising alacrity in affairs pertaining to this world and the next and considered the opposite of Industry to be Idleness and an inability to order one's affairs, which lead, in turn, to weakness of intellect. For Benjamin, Industry begets Toil and Stinginess and the industrious man is likened to a helmsman on the Dead Sea: when he thirsts he drinks from the water of the sea, which only increases his thirst (19b). Industry is a sign of overconsumption with material wealth, which leads to social decay and the kind of greed against which he fulminates throughout his work. His understanding closely approaches the obsession with the amassing of wealth characteristic within medieval Christian discussions of Avarice.

However, Benjamin's discussion of Industry is not tempered in order to allow for measured levels of commercial activity as one finds in thirteenth-century Christian discourse on Avarice. Jews, of course, had long been associated with being motivated by profit and their economic prosperity was already linked to

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41 Ibn Gabirol, note 10 above, pp. 112-114.

42 Arabic section, 29-31; Eng. 91-92. He also quotes Proverbs 12:24, "*Yad ḥaruṣim timshol*" ("The hand of the industrious shall rule"). The only caveat is that Industry should not lead to haste.

mercantile and usurious practices. While the image of Jews may (or may not) have improved as activities for which they had been known exclusively became less tainted, a moralist such as Benjamin did not see any need to exculpate Jews driven by a desire for wealth in any way. The very character trait of Industry was dangerous and had to be safeguarded against.

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that Benjamin ben 'Anav of Rome recast traditional Jewish ethical terminology into a particular structure and narrative framework consistent with intellectual and popular trends of thirteenth-century Christendom. His dramatized presentation of Jewish ethics amounts to a Jewish rendition of contemporary Christian discourse on the virtues and vices, which was central both at learned and popular levels. As is well known, public oration served as a mediator between learned and popular audiences in Jewish and Christian societies alike. The presentation of an oration outside of the confines of the house of worship, as we find in *Masa' gei ḥizayon*, is also a feature of thirteenth-century Christian preaching. Finally, I have begun in this article to examine shifts in the semantic meaning of particular vices in Benjamin's list of terms, shifts that pertain to changing social values within medieval Christendom and its Jewish population in particular, though much remains to be done in this area as part of a larger project on the evolution of Jewish ethical discourse.

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