

Bert Beynen

Philadelphia, USA

The Philosophical Bases of Shota Rustaveli's *The Man in the Panther Skin* (MPS): From Neoplatonism to Levinas

Rustaveli's poem contrasts King Rostevan and Tariel, the mysterious man in the panther skin, and their opposite ways of thinking and acting: Rostevan thinks and acts rationally, Tariel is impulsive. These characteristics are based on Aristotle's idea that both humans and animals perceive reality, but only humans draw logical conclusions from perceptions. Animals are impulsive: they react to their perceptions on basis of instincts and reflexes. Additionally, Aristotle assumed that humans and animals do not change but stay human or animal, respectively. Neoplatonists assumed the existence of other unchanging categories—or hypostases – – in addition to humans and animals, but the Pseudo – Dionysios and Iamblichus argued that humans, after all, can change: into angels, the category between humans and the One, the Supreme Being. Additionally, Rustaveli allows for a change of animals into humans as well when describing Tariel's change from an impulsive animal into a rational human. This change enables Tariel to find a rational solution to his problem and free Nestan – Darejan. Anticipating Hegel, Tariel becomes his and Avtandil's synthesis, as he combines his and Avtandil's characteristics: love for Nestan – Darejan and logical thinking. Avtandil changes into his antithesis, when he accepts Tariel's priority: freeing Nestan – Darejan, but does not change into a synthesis, as he is only a secondary hero. Hegel states that "Self – consciousness ... has lost its own self, since it finds itself as an *other* being," without explaining why self – consciousness acts. Rustaveli provides friendship as the explanation, anticipating Levinas who posits that an individual feels a "guiltless responsibility" towards an Other. First Tinatin and then Avtandil help Tariel because they feel this "guiltless responsibility" toward him. Hence Rustaveli is curiously modern in his anticipation of Hegel and Levinas.