

# REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved  
OMB No. 0704-0168

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1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank) | 2. REPORT DATE | 3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE  
~~Prisca~~ *Prisca Theologica and Human Nature: A Study of Marsilio Ficino's Ontology of the Soul*

5. FUNDING NUMBERS

6. AUTHOR(S)  
*Brent J. Unger*

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)  
AFIT Students Attending:  
*Univ of Missouri-Columbia*

8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER  
AFIT/CI/CIA  
*94-167*

9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)  
DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
AFIT/CI  
2950 P STREET  
WRIGHT-PATTERSON AFB OH 45433-7765

10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER

11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

12a. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT  
Approved for Public Release IAW 190-1  
Distribution Unlimited  
MICHAEL M. BRICKER, SMSgt, USAF  
Chief Administration

12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE

13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 words)

DTIC  
SELECTED  
JAN 118 1995  
B

19950117 020

14. SUBJECT TERMS

15. NUMBER OF PAGES  
*167*

16. PRICE CODE

17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT

18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE

19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT

20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT

94-167

**PRISCA THEOLOGIA AND HUMAN NATURE:  
A STUDY OF MARSILIO FICINO'S ONTOLOGY OF THE SOUL**

A Thesis  
presented to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School  
University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in History

by  
BRENT JOSEPH UNGER

Dr. Charles G. Nauert, Jr., Thesis Supervisor

DECEMBER 1994

<b>Accession For</b>	
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Unannounced	<input type="checkbox"/>
Justification	
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Distribution/	
Availability Codes	
Dist	Avail and/or Special
A-1	

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to thank Lt Col Richard M. Coppock, USAF (Ret), Executive Vice President of the Association of Graduates, United States Air Force Academy, who funded my eighteen-month program through the Wolfe Trust fund for the Colonel Franklin C. Wolfe Fellowship. I would also like to thank the Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT), Special Programs Division (CISS), Civilian Institution Programs, for providing additional funding for my program. The Program Manager (PM), Major James P. Hogan, provided me with sound advice and prompt service throughout my stay at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

I also wish to thank my thesis supervisor, Dr. Charles G. Nauert, Jr., who consistently went out of his way to provide suggestions for study and research and who made sure that I had fulfilled all department requirements. In addition, I wish to thank the two other members on my committee, Dr. Mark A. Smith and Dr. Victor Estevez, both of whom volunteered time to read the rough draft of my thesis and provided me with valuable comments and criticisms.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Under the patronage of Cosimo de' Medici, Florentine scholar Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) devoted his life to the revival of Platonism in Italy as both a philosophical doctrine and as an intellectual movement. This task required him to translate the entire Platonic corpus into Latin. Finishing the *Corpus Hermeticum* in 1463, Ficino then translated the Platonic dialogues in 1464-68, some works of Porphyry and Proclus in 1489, and the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite and Plotinus in 1492. In addition to reviving Platonism as a philosophical doctrine through his translations, Ficino pursued Platonism as an intellectual movement at his villa in Careggi, which he appropriately called the Platonic Academy of Florence. Here, Ficino taught and lectured to promote Platonism among like-minded thinkers, artists, and literary men. Ficino's own writings on Platonism appear primarily in the short series of treatises which became his *Letters*, while the fundamental tenets of his Platonic thought appear in his principle work, the *Theologica Platonica*, written in 1474.

At the same time that Ficino considered himself the instrument for reviving Platonism, however, he continually asserted that he was first and foremost a Christian. His desire to remain within this orthodox mold is revealed by the fact that he was ordained into the priesthood in 1473 and began his pious work *De christiana religione* in the same year. He later became a Canon of Florence Cathedral, and he claimed that the priesthood is the highest function of all, "standing in God's place, performing his work among men."<sup>1</sup> He delivered a series of sermons and lectures on St. Paul's *Epistle to the Romans* in the church of S. Maria degli Angeli.<sup>2</sup> An early biographer even records that people flocked to hear Ficino preach in the Cathedral and that they were enthralled by his sermons on the gospels.<sup>3</sup> Ficino was not afraid to write to leaders of religious orders<sup>4</sup> and once to the Pope himself,<sup>5</sup> urging them faithfully

to perform their duties at a time when corruption in the church was widespread. He wrote earnestly out of a sincere conviction that the central purpose of Man is to return to his divine source, God.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout his life, then, Ficino was forced continually to mediate between his seemingly antithetical interests in Platonic philosophy and Christian theology. But his predicament was not unique. Inquisitive Christians throughout the history of Western Christendom had fought constantly with the conflict between pagan and pious wisdom. Ficino's method of solving this problem, however, was unique. Earlier Christian scholars had usually rectified the conflict by declaring pagan philosophy to be the "handmaid of theology" and using pagan philosophy only where it did not conflict with Christianity. Ficino, on the other hand, boldly asserted that philosophy was not subordinate to theology, but rather, equal to it. He called the two "sisters," and he succinctly affirmed that "lawful philosophy is no different from true religion; and lawful religion is no different from true philosophy."<sup>7</sup> In this manner, Ficino promoted the affinity between Platonism and Christianity and blended them together into his own conception of a Platonic theology.

But Ficino sought out this notion of a Platonic theology only as a means to the central end of his entire philosophy: to demonstrate the immortality of the human soul. Indeed, the full title of Ficino's *summa* is *Theologia Platonica de immortalitate animorum*. Platonic theology was the essential component of this quest in that it synthesized a Platonic metaphysical framework with a Christian formula of immortality, but it was still subordinate to Ficino's ultimate aim. Ficino's conviction of the soul's immortality led him ultimately to form a largely original speculative philosophy in which all divisions of that philosophy derived from and revolved around his psychology.<sup>8</sup> Ficino viewed the human soul as the absolute center of the universe, as an ontological entity which perfectly balanced the corporeal and intelligible spheres of Reality:

This [the soul] is the greatest of all miracles in nature. All other things beneath God are always one single being, but the soul is all things together. . . Therefore it may be rightly called the center of nature, the middle term of all things, the series of the world, the face of all, the bond and juncture of the universe.<sup>9</sup>

But though this notion had metaphorical appeal, Ficino knew that it was ontologically unsound. He knew that, because the soul was incorporeal,

it had to be incorporated entirely within the intelligible realm, and thus, that it could not realistically be centered ontologically. Nonetheless, he must be commended for the great advances he made into uncharted territory. The assertion that the soul is immortal did not become an accepted Christian doctrine until the Church convened the Fifth Lateran Council in 1513, and Ficino likely influenced this move.<sup>10</sup>

This study does not attempt to examine Ficino's psychology itself since his theory of the soul has already received extensive analysis.<sup>11</sup> Rather, it is concerned with the manner in which the *prisca theologia* contributed to Ficino's psychology. The *prisca theologia*, or "ancient theology," developed out of the misguided belief that a series of ancient pagan theologians had received philosophico-religious wisdom from God. This esoteric wisdom foreshadowed Christianity in that it bore witness to such doctrines as monotheism, the Trinity, and the use of the Word to create the world from nothing. Originating with Hermes Trismegistus and Zoroaster, who were near-contemporaries of Moses, the *prisca theologi* continued through Orpheus and Pythagoras and ended with Plato. These pagan theologians hid their wisdom from the superstitious and polytheistic masses, and they secretly prepared elite pagans for the rise of Christianity. Many early Church fathers had recognized the *prisca theologia*, but the tradition waned for nearly a millenium until it regained momentum with Ficino's translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum*.

The ancient theology played a major role in Ficino's psychology. His use of this tradition was so great that it influenced the erection a portrait of Hermes Trismegistus on the famous mosaic pavement of the Cathedral of Siena.<sup>12</sup> And yet, modern scholars have treated Ficino's dependence on the *prisca theologia* either in subordination to mainstream issues<sup>13</sup> or in isolation from the rest of his philosophy, especially as it relates to magic.<sup>14</sup> This study makes overtures toward placing the ancient theology in a more prominent light with a direct influence on Ficino's philosophical thought. The study therefore addresses two ways in which the ancient theology directly influenced Ficino's psychology: 1) The inherent authority of the *prisca theologia* legitimized Ficino's use of the Platonic theology, a tenet central to his psychology; 2) The inherent authority of the associated *prisca medicina* and *prisca magi* enabled Ficino to develop spirit as an ontological mediator between the



corporeal body and the incorporeal soul, a specific problem that had plagued his psychology for most of his life.

This study is divided into three chapters. The first chapter traces the authority of Ficino's psychology back to its source in the *prisca theologia*. In opposition to the traditional view of reason, Ficino saw natural religion as the vital factor that distinguishes man from animal. Consequently, the study of man's soul ultimately stemmed from his notion of natural religion. Ficino illustrated that, in its purest and most ancient form as represented by the *prisca theologia*, natural religion was composed equally and inseparably of both philosophy and theology. Only when man became corrupt did the two separate and follow different routes. Ficino thus traced the Platonic tradition back to its origins in the *prisca theologia* to prove that it evolved out of this initial unity. This evidence allowed Ficino to suggest a natural affinity between Platonism and Christianity and to attempt to revive their original philosophico-religious identity. He therefore posited a "Platonic theology," with which he developed a theological (Christian) notion of immortality grounded in a metaphysical (Platonic) framework. Thus, although the *prisca theologia* was not a central tenet in Ficino's psychology, it nonetheless played a critical role in allowing him to posit an immortal soul that was equally Christian and Platonic.

The second chapter does not address the *prisca theologia per se*, but rather, presents an ontological dilemma that the *prisca theologia* helped to resolve in the final chapter. In his theory of immortality, Ficino placed the human soul at the exact ontological center of the universe. In doing so, Ficino employed a cosmology that was based hierarchically on the *primum in alioque genere* and a modified form of the Plotinian hypostases. This same cosmology was fueled dynamically by the *appetitus naturalis* and the Proclan-Dionysian emanation-ascent cycle. Within this cosmology, Ficino asserted that the human soul is the balancing entity between the realms of the corporeal and incorporeal, and that it desires equally to live in the body and to seek the intelligibles. Ficino's theory was, *prima facie*, quite palatable. On further inspection, however, even Ficino himself realized that his approach could only be metaphorical at best. A number of problems arose, the most important of which was that, although the soul is the

lowest entity of the intelligible realm, it is nonetheless entirely incorporeal. Consequently, Ficino could not make it the exact ontological center of the universe without assigning to it corporeal qualities. Ficino unsuccessfully attempted to veil this dilemma in semantics. He often juxtaposed "temporal" and "eternal" rather than "corporeal" and "incorporeal," but without success. He also attempted to break the soul down into ontological components. He only succeeded, however, in creating many ambiguous entities without pinpointing that one quasi-corporeal, quasi-incorporeal entity that was supposed to serve as the true fulcrum of the universe.

The third and final chapter examines the way in which the *prisca theologia* appear to have helped Ficino solve this dilemma near the end of his career. Although he had always shown an interest in medicine, Ficino's medical interests peaked in 1489 at the time that he completed a major treatise on astrological medicine entitled *De vita*. This work brought together two auxiliary strains of the *prisca theologia*, the *prisca medicina* and the *prisci magi*. The *prisca medicina* revealed that the *prisci theologi* were simultaneously physicians and astrologers/astronomers, a finding which validated Ficino's practice of astrological medicine in the first two books of *De vita*. And the *prisci magi* revealed that the *prisci theologi* were also magicians, a finding which validated Ficino's practice of natural talismanic magic in the third and final book of *De vita*. In the first two books of *De vita*, Ficino used the spirit in its traditional medical sense as a subtle, but corporeal, entity that joins the soul to the body. In the third book, however, Ficino appears to have used spirit as a quasi-incorporeal agent that transmits forces between intelligible and mundane entities through talismanic magic. Ficino relied on the authority of an important image-making passage from the Hermetic *Asclepius* to develop the unprecedented notion of a quasi-incorporeal World-spirit. To what degree Ficino considered this macroscopic World-spirit analogous to the microscopic human spirit is difficult to determine. In turn, whether Ficino thus believed the human spirit to be the quasi-incorporeal ontological center of the cosmos is even more difficult to determine. At any rate, Ficino made headway towards a resolution of this perplexing ontological dilemma with aid from the *prisca theologia* and its variegated forms.

<sup>1</sup>Letter to the Priest Pace, Professor of Canon Law. In *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, trans. Members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science (London, 1975), 1:121-22.

<sup>2</sup>Paul Oskar Kristeller, "Marsilio Ficino and His Work After Five Hundred Years," in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone: Studi e documenti*, edited by Giancarlo Garfagnini, 2 vols (Florence, 1986), 1:15-196 at 23.

<sup>3</sup>Giovanni Corsi, *Vita Marsilii Ficini*, 11. In Ficino, *Letters*, 3:141.

<sup>4</sup>Letter to Pontico Germano. In Ficino, *Letters*, 1:201-02.

<sup>5</sup>*Marsilii Ficini Opera Omnia*, 2 vols. (Basel, 1576; repr. Turin, 1959, 1983), p. 808. Hereafter cited as *Opera*.

<sup>6</sup>Ficino, *Letters*, 1:20.

<sup>7</sup>Letter to Bernardo Bembo. In Ficino, *Letters*, 1:187.

<sup>8</sup>Professor James Hillman asserts, "Events are related first and foremost to soul rather than to theology of God, science of nature, or humanistic disciplines of language, poetics, and history. The question that asks what bearing this event has upon soul sees through and interiorizes, and so Ficino's thought has been called a 'philosophy of immanence'. . . . His basic premise and concern was *anima*, and so he must be read from within his own perspective, psychologically." *Re-visioning Psychology* (New York, 1975), pp. 201-02. And Professor Charles Boer asserts, "Read from the soul's perspective, Ficino is not only the man who set the philosophical course for much of the Italian Renaissance, but is its great psychologist as well. He may be the first psychologist of the modern world." *Marsilio Ficino: The Book of Life* (Irving, Texas, 1980), p. xviii.

<sup>9</sup>*Opera*, p. 131. "Hoc maximum est in natura miraculorum. Relique enim sub Deo unum quiddam in se singula sunt, haec omnia simul. . . ut merito dici possit centrum naturae, universorum medium, mundi series, vultus omnium nodusque et copula mundi." In Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters* (Rome, 1956), p. 268 and n. 7.

<sup>10</sup>Kristeller notes that "Ficino's polemic against the Averroists focuses on this central doctrine of immortality, and it seems to be no coincidence that the same Lateran Council of 1513 which condemned Averroism also established the immortality of the soul as an official dogma of the Church." In "Ficino and His Work," p. 28.

<sup>11</sup>See especially Paul Oskar Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino* (Florence, 1953; repr. 1988 with revisions), pp. 203-401; Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1970), 2:461-504.

<sup>12</sup>Francis Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago, 1964), pp. 42-3; *Letters*, 1:20.

<sup>13</sup>See James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1991) 2: Appendix 17, pp. 460-64 for a summary of Ficino's use of the *prisca theologia*. Hankins briefly examines the direct influence of the *prisca theologia* on Ficino's thought in 1:282-85. Otherwise, there are only scattered remarks on this tradition in Kristeller, *Philosophy*, chapter 1; D.P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology* (London, 1972), chapter 1; K.H. Dannenfeldt, "The Pseudo-Zoroastrian Oracles in the Renaissance," *Studies in the Renaissance* 4 (1957): 13 n. 34.

<sup>14</sup>See Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, chapters 2 and 4; D.P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic: From Ficino to Campanella* (Notre Dame, 1958), chapter 2.

## 2. PRISCA THEOLOGIA AND THE EVOLUTION OF FICINO'S PSYCHOLOGY

### Natural Religion and Man's Uniqueness

Ficino's psychology derived ultimately from his theory of natural religion. Just as he had no ethics or aesthetics, Ficino had no systematic philosophy of religion. Nonetheless, religion played a fundamental role in his world system.<sup>1</sup> Ficino believed that religion, in all manifestations, is tantamount to the worship of God:

Nothing displeases God more than to be despised, nothing pleases Him more than to be worshipped. . . . Therefore divine Providence does not permit any region of the world at any time to be entirely without religion, though it does permit different rites of worship to be observed in various places and at various times. This variety ordered by God does, perhaps, produce admirable beauty in the universe.<sup>2</sup>

This passage illuminates two important facets of Ficino's thought. First, all religions, primitive and sophisticated, seek the one true God, even if unconsciously. Second, the rites and ceremonies conducted in all religions share the universal expression of a relationship with God called worship, which is reciprocated with divine love.<sup>3</sup> Ficino's syncretic notion that all forms of religion ultimately pursue the one true God allowed him to develop the concept of "natural religion," which marks a significant point in the history of religious thought. Ficino pursued the following syllogism: Everything that accompanies the essence of a natural species is natural and thus present in all individuals within that species without fail. Religion is natural to man since all men practice some form of religion. Since all religion is directed toward the worship of God, natural religion is equated with the natural desire of man for God. Ficino asserted:

The human mind is led by its divine nature to feel and to worship and to fear God. . . . But by a free choice of reasoning, it changes the rites of worship. . . . From the above argument it may be concluded that the common religion of all nations, having one God as its object, is natural to the human species.<sup>4</sup>

"Divine worship," Ficino thus concluded, "is as natural for men almost as neighing is for horses or barking for dogs."<sup>5</sup>

Ficino then made the peculiar assertion that natural religion alone is what distinguishes man from all other living creatures. He thus strayed from the traditional position that reason represents the unique distinction between man and beast. Ficino asserted that, like man, animals share in artistic ability, language, and even a sense of active reason and the rational contemplation of natural things. But only man is capable of using his reason to contemplate divine things:<sup>6</sup>

If man is the most perfect of the animals, as is confirmed by many reasons, he is perfect especially because of that part and potency which he has as peculiar to himself and not in common with other animals. But this is in religion alone. For the more clever beasts seem to have some traces of reason, but no sign of religion.<sup>7</sup>

In turn, because religion is peculiar to man and because God is the object of man's religion, God shares a unique relationship with man. This relationship distinguishes the myriad of man's activities from those of beasts and compensates for the defects and weaknesses of man's nature. It is a guarantee of grace that elevates man's appetite from a naturalistic sense of survival to an optimistic assurance of eventual salvation. Ficino thus stated, "It is not right that the human genus, which through divine worship comes very close to God, who is highest happiness, should always be unhappier than brute animals, which are very far removed from God, since they are deprived of such worship."<sup>8</sup>

Ficino was acutely aware, however, that his contemporary situation made it paramount that he place the Christian religion above all other religious cults rather than relegate it to a nondescript and egalitarian place among them. This necessity presented no problem, however, since Western thinkers had grown accustomed to using ontological hierarchies in their philosophical systems. Thus, if natural religion is viewed as a genus that contains all possible religions as species, the hierarchical notion of *primum in alioque genere* enables Christianity to fall out as the superior species in the genus. Ficino took this approach, first advocating religion as a genus and then declaring Christianity to be a special case of this religion.<sup>9</sup> He even stated explicitly, "Those above all others, or rather only those, worship God sincerely who revere Him through goodness of action, truth of the

tongue, clarity of the mind as they may and through charity as they must. Such, as we shall show, are those who worship God in the way that Christ, the master of life, and His disciples have taught."<sup>10</sup> Ficino came to believe that he could establish a Christian theology based on these suppositions and his syncretic view of natural religion.<sup>11</sup>

### **"Philosophy and Religion are Sisters"**

Ficino confronted a new dilemma at this point, however. He believed it would be difficult, if not impossible, to develop a convincing Christian theology unless it were first grounded on a solid philosophical foundation. Ficino thus strove to reconcile philosophy with theology. His endeavors closely resembled the medieval scholastic formula that considers philosophy "the handmaid of theology." St. Thomas Aquinas had illustrated that philosophy and theology are not incompatible, but rather, that they complement each other since the revealed truths of Christian theology begin where the reasoned truths of metaphysical speculation end.<sup>12</sup> But here again, Ficino chose to tread unorthodox ground. He took the position that philosophy is not subordinate to, but rather, equal to theology.<sup>13</sup> He held that true philosophy and true religion must agree since they both possess an identical origin in the contemplative inner relationship with God, and he thus sought to establish a relationship between philosophy and religion by reconstructing the inner harmony between them.<sup>14</sup> Ficino presented a syllogism in his *Laus philosophiae*: "If philosophy is defined by all as the love and study of truth and wisdom and if truth and wisdom itself is God alone, consequently legitimate philosophy is nothing else than true religion, and legitimate religion is nothing else than true philosophy."<sup>15</sup> He further stressed this relationship in a letter entitled "Philosophy and Religion are Sisters."<sup>16</sup> Ficino concluded that a harmonious co-existence must ensue since the dichotomous natures of philosophy and theology, epitomized by intellect and will, knowledge and love, are but dualistic manifestations of the same internal experience.

### **Establishing a Platonic Theology**

At the same time that Ficino was seeking a philosophico-religious unity, he sought a philosophical system that would be most compatible with Christianity. For just as Christianity was the *primum* in a genus

of natural religions, so too there had to be a philosophical *primum* in a genus of philosophical systems. Ficino had to approach this endeavor carefully for fear of the accusations of heresy associated with a radical approach. Ficino believed that Platonism was the one philosophical system that could be reconciled with Christianity. One reason may simply be that Platonism was his personal preference at a time when the influx of philosophical Greek works from Byzantium revealed four distinct Hellenistic schools, Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism, and Epicureanism, an influx which dispelled the assumption that there was an internal unity in ancient philosophy. The rise of independent schools called for new followers. Ficino, after briefly exposing himself to all four schools in his earliest works, settled on Platonism, for which he developed a profound and independent position as his philosophy matured.<sup>17</sup> But a more thoughtful reason is that Platonism appeared to be the only philosophical system that was both compatible with Christianity and capable of proving the truths of Christian doctrine through rational means. In his Preface to the *Theologia Platonica*, Ficino stated:

I believe, and this belief is not in vain, that it was decided by divine Providence that even the perverse minds of many people who do not easily give in to the authority of divine law should at least acquiesce to the Platonic reasons which come to the aid of religion and that all those who too impiously separate the study of philosophy from sacred religion shall recognize some day that they are going astray, just as if someone should separate love of wisdom from the honor of wisdom itself or true intelligence from right will.<sup>18</sup>

Here, Ficino revealed not only his belief in the reconciliation between Platonism and Christianity, but also his desire to take on the most formidable type of heathen, the intellectual elite.

Ficino perceived many affinities between Platonism and Christianity. First and foremost, he believed that Plato supported his position on the universality of natural religion. "Religion, as Plato shows in the *Protagoras*," Ficino observed, "is given to man as the first of all things---not only before all arts necessary for living but also before speech and commerce. But since it is most common and stable among all gifts, it is the most natural of all."<sup>19</sup> Ficino wrote brief treatises in which he presented analogies based on Platonic and Mosaic doctrines and on the lives of Socrates and Christ.<sup>20</sup> Plato's own

ascetic denigration of the body and his puritanical views of sex closely resembled contemporary Christian moral practices.<sup>21</sup> Ficino thus addressed Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato as "religious philosophers" and forerunners of Christianity, and he provided them a place in eternal salvation next to the Old Testament prophets.<sup>22</sup> Ficino also observed many Christian affinities in Plato's dialogues, such as Socrates' discourse on love in the *Symposium*, the discussion of creation in the *Timaeus*, the good kinds of madresses in the *Phaedrus*, the allegorical "religious" myth of the Cave in the *Republic*, and the use of abstractions that could easily be manipulated toward religious ends in the *Parmenides*. Furthermore, he observed that Plato wrote in an esoteric style filled with mythical and poetical allusions, a style which would allow for a flexible interpretation of his writings.<sup>23</sup>

Ficino even found strong affinities between Christian theology and the Platonic tradition. Although Plato's dialogues were generally weak in theology, the more rigorous and exacting presentations of his Neoplatonic successors preserved a continuity. Although the One and the Good seem distant relatives of the personal Father professed in Judaism and Christianity, Plato nonetheless upheld monotheism by professing one supreme God. Pseudo-Dionysius was thought to have propagated the tradition by introducing a wholly transcendent One into the Christian tradition. The later Neoplatonists explained away the multiplicity of ancient gods by defining them metaphysically as hierarchical emanations from the monotheistic One. Ficino believed that Plato and many post-Christian Neoplatonists had presented concepts closely related to the Trinity.<sup>24</sup> The *Phaedo* and other Platonic dialogues asserted notions of the immortality of the Soul and an afterlife of rewards and punishments, including eternal damnation.<sup>25</sup> The *Timaeus* could be interpreted as an allegorical account of the creation by God of a world with a beginning.<sup>26</sup> The *Parmenides*, however, provided Ficino with the most convincing evidence of Plato's divine nature. In a manner similar to Proclus and Olympiodorus, Ficino believed that the *Parmenides* held the essence of Plato's theology and represented the innermost sanctity of Platonic thought.<sup>27</sup> In his *argumentum* to *Parmenides*, he said:

While Plato sprinkled the seeds of all wisdom throughout all his dialogues, yet he collected the precepts of moral philosophy in the



books on the *Republic*, the whole of science in the *Timaeus*, and he comprehended the whole of theology in the *Parmenides*. And whereas in the other works he rises far above all other philosophers, in this one he seems to surpass even himself and to bring forth this work miraculously from the adytum of the divine mind and from the innermost sanctum of philosophy.<sup>28</sup>

And in his *Philebus* commentary, Ficino recorded the influence of *Parmenides* among Church fathers and Neoplatonists alike:

Also in the *Parmenides*, since [Plato] compared everything to the one God, he didn't think God's names ought to be despised. Dionysius the Areopagite, having copied Plato here, searches in the divine names for all the mysteries of theology. Origen in his book *Contra Celsum* says a miraculous power exists in certain holy names. . . . Plotinus and Proclus also have things to say about names.<sup>29</sup>

The unique affinity between Platonism and Christianity encouraged Ficino to call Platonism a religious philosophy, or *pia philosophia*.<sup>30</sup> Ficino applied another syllogism: If Platonism is the true philosophy, and if philosophy is equal to theology, then Platonic philosophy is also Platonic theology.<sup>31</sup> It is for this reason that Ficino called his most important work the *Theologia Platonica*. And he contended that, since Platonism and Christianity are compatible, Platonic theology agrees with Christian theology in content, although they obviously differ in form and presentation.<sup>32</sup> Ficino believed this so earnestly that he even felt free to present his philosophical lectures in a Christian church.<sup>33</sup> It was in light of this philosophico-religious unity that Ficino gave Platonic philosophy the mission of enticing men back to the Christian faith. He believed that any heathen with philosophical training could only be led into the faith through Platonic reason (*ratio platonica*) and patristic-approved authority.<sup>34</sup> As historian Eugenio Garin observes, the conversion of the human mind towards God "is accomplished with the help of Platonic theology because that theology has succeeded in discovering, under the mists of the poetic imagination in which religious revelation is clothed, the deep meaning of truth."<sup>35</sup> It is with this mindset that Ficino wrote a letter to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola in which he lauds Platonic doctrine as a fish net that catches questioning minds and converts them to Christianity.<sup>36</sup>

Ficino thus believed that Christianity was the *primum* in the genus of natural religions and that the philosophico-religious continuity between Platonism and Christianity would eventually lead all men to this highest religion in the divine scheme of world history. Having been

ordered by Cosimo de'Medici to translate the Platonic *corpus* for the first time into Latin, Ficino was almost single-handedly responsible for reviving the Platonic tradition. He therefore considered himself an instrument of divine Providence whose mission was to devote his life to the task of reconciling Christian theology with Platonic philosophy.<sup>37</sup> In the Preface to his translation of Plotinus, written near the end of his career, Ficino summed up his life's quest:

We must not think the acute and philosophic minds of men can ever be gradually allured and led toward perfect religion except by a philosophical lure. For acute minds for the most part trust themselves only to reason, and when they receive it from a religious philosopher they at once willingly accept the common religion, and when imbued with that they are more easily brought to the better species of religion contained in the genus. . . . But it pleases Divine Providence in these times to confirm the genus of its religion through philosophical authority and reason, until at a certain moment it will confirm the truest species of religion through manifest signs among all peoples, as it once did. Guided by divine Providence, we have translated divine Plato and great Plotinus.<sup>38</sup>

Evaluating Ficino's success is less important, however, than examining the methods by which Ficino undertook this endeavor.

#### **The *Prisca Theologia* in Ficino's Platonic Theology**

Ficino's decision to pursue a philosophico-religious unity between Platonism and Christianity did not come solely from the affinities he himself perceived between the Platonic and Neoplatonic texts and Christian doctrine. Rather, Ficino was greatly influenced by evidence which suggested that Plato ultimately derived his philosophy from an ancient tradition of *prisci theologi* who originally held no distinction between religion and philosophy.<sup>39</sup> Ficino thus relies heavily on the example of the *prisci theologi* to stress the union between philosophy and religion.<sup>40</sup> In the Preface to *De Christiana religione*, he asserted that, among ancient peoples, men doubled as philosophers and priests:

And that was right. For since the Soul, as our Plato believes, can fly back to the celestial father and fatherland only on two wings, namely, intellect and will, and since the philosopher depends mainly on the intellect, the priest on the will. . . it is obvious that those who by their intelligence were the first either to find divine things by themselves or to attain them with divine help were also the first to worship rightly divine things through their will and to spread their right worship and their way of worshipping among others.<sup>41</sup>

According to this tradition, only later did mankind deteriorate to the point that faith and knowledge separated, in which religion precipitated out of ignorance and philosophy out of impiety. "O men, citizens of the

celestial fatherland and habitants of the earth," Ficino thus urged, "let us at last free philosophy, the sacred gift of God, from impiety . . . and let us redeem the sacred religion from detestable ignorance as much as possible."<sup>42</sup> Ficino understood that this ancient tradition offered unquestioned legitimacy to his argument for the common origin of religion and philosophy, and therefore, a Platonico-Christian unity. Ficino's foremost task, then, was to trace the Platonic theology from Plato back to its ancient origin and forward to his own day.

The *prisca theologia* was a tradition of Christian apologetic theology based on misdated texts. A number of early Church Fathers, especially Lactantius, Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius, applied some supposedly very old texts in their apologetic works directed against pagan philosophers: *Hermetica*, *Orphica*, Sibylline Prophecies, Pythagorean *Carmina Aurea*, and others. Most of the texts actually date from the first four centuries A.D., but they were believed to have been written by a string of ancient sages beginning with Hermes Trismegistus, continuing through Orpheus and Pythagoras, and ending with Plato. The texts are banal expressions of a spirituality concerned mainly with theology, cosmogony, cosmology, anthropogony, anthropology, psychology, ethics, soteriology and eschatology.<sup>43</sup> And yet, they were shown to have contained traces of the true religion: monotheism, the Trinity, and the use of the Word to create the world from nothing.<sup>44</sup> They also suggested the immortality of the soul, God as both perceivable and imperceptible, and man as a reflection of God, with the attributes of God.<sup>45</sup> The uniqueness of the Judeo-Christian revelation was upheld by the common argument that the *prisca theologia* derived ultimately from Moses, or stretched back even farther to Noah and his good sons, Shem and Japhet, to the antediluvian Patriarchs, such as Enoch, or to Adam himself.<sup>46</sup> Many of the patristic apologists believed Plato took the religious elements of his philosophy from this tradition. The Neoplatonists also quoted some of these texts, especially the *Orphica*, and added to them the *Oracula Chaldaica*. The tradition found its way into the Renaissance when the Byzantine Platonist Gemistus Pletho acknowledged the *prisca theologi* and attributed the *Oracula Chaldaica* to Zoroaster, who thus entered the pious chain of the *prisca theologi*. The tradition first reached Florence through Ficino's translation of *Corpus Hermeticum*.<sup>47</sup>

The *prisca theologia* is usually referred to as the Hermetic tradition since Hermes Trismegistus was thought to be its founder. The Greeks identified Thoth, the Egyptian God who was the divinity of wisdom and scribe of the gods, with their Hermes, who was sometimes given the epithet of "Thrice Great"; hence, Hermes Trismegistus. The Romans adopted this identification of Hermes (their Mercurius) with Thoth. Cicero contended in his *De natura deorum* that there were actually five Mercuries, the fifth of whom killed Argus and fled into exile to Egypt, where he "gave the Egyptians their laws and letters" and took the title Theuth or Thoth.<sup>48</sup> The Egyptian Hermes was highly revered since it was commonly believed that Egypt was the original dwelling-place of all knowledge, whence Greek philosophers went on pilgrimages to converse with Egyptian priests and where Christian apologists believed Moses had deposited divine writings.<sup>49</sup> Justin's *Cohortatio ad Gentiles*, for example, introduced the Orphic *Palinode* by explaining that Orpheus and the other *prisca theologi* who followed Hermes Trismegistus were converted to monotheism through these pilgrimages:

Some of you, I think, must be aware, if you have read Diodorus Siculus and other historians of those times, that Orpheus and Homer, and Solon, who gave the Athenians their laws, and Pythagoras and Plato and several others, having visited Egypt and profited by Moses' writings, afterwards published things that were the opposite of what they previously had wrongly thought about the gods. For even Orpheus, who was indeed your first teacher of polytheism, later announced to Musaeus and other noble listeners the following about the one and only God.<sup>50</sup>

A philosophical literature increasingly built up around the sacred name Hermes, or Mercurius, Trismegistus, who was thought to have established this religious center that taught Hebrew wisdom and foreshadowed Christianity.<sup>51</sup>

The *Hermetica* divided into two groups: 1) The *Asclepius*<sup>52</sup>, a dialogue surviving only in a Latin translation attributed in the ninth century to the second-century Latin Middle Platonist Apuleius of Madaura. The *Asclepius* described the Egyptian religion and the nature of the magic rites and processes Egyptian priests used to attract cosmic powers down into the statues of their gods. 2) The *Corpus Hermeticum*,<sup>53</sup> a compilation of fifteen brief Hermetic dialogues in Greek. The first dialogue, *Pimander*,<sup>54</sup> provided an account of the creation of the world that resembles Genesis somewhat. The remaining dialogues provided

descriptions of the ascent of the soul through the planetary spheres to the divine realms above, or ecstatic descriptions of a regeneration process in which the soul breaks loose from the chains of the material world and fills with divine virtues and powers.<sup>55</sup> No treatise reflected a rationally constructed philosophy, but each possessed a religious system that recorded individual struggles to achieve divine gnosis, revelation, and intuition into the divine through cosmic forces rather than a personal God.<sup>56</sup> The heterogeneous content of the treatises as a whole inhibited the derivation of a coherent system of thought. It did, however, make the *Hermetica* the most important source of the *prisca theologica* since its enigmatic nature allowed it to be assimilated easily into orthodox Christianity.<sup>57</sup>

Orpheus was the most important *priscus theologus* next to Hermes Trismegistus. His diversity as a mythical hero, religious teacher, philosopher, and poet made him one of the most important Greek figures. He was thought to have been the founder of an esoteric mystery religion and to have provided original sacred writings in addition to his commentaries on the existing Greek religious tradition. Furthermore, Diodorus Siculus asserted that Orpheus had learned his religious rites in Egypt, a fact which linked him to Mosaic writings in the eyes of Christian syncretists.<sup>58</sup> The *Orphica* included verse fragments embedded in ancient writings, particularly those of Proclus, the Greek Fathers, Pseudo-Justin, Clement of Alexandria, and Eusebius. These had various dates, some of which were pre-Platonic and some of which were likely Christian or Jewish forgeries, and they readily lent themselves to Christian and Platonic interpretations.<sup>59</sup>

Ficino had been exposed to the Hermetic tradition even before he translated the *Corpus Hermeticum* in 1463, but he had not yet conceived of its vast implications. The first evidence of Ficino's knowledge of the *prisca theologia* comes from a passage in his school oration *De laudibus philosophiae* from the mid-1450s, in which he asserted that the *prisci theologi* had "in a certain way" a knowledge of the Christian Trinity.<sup>60</sup> In this crude, early sketch of the ancient theology, however, Ficino made no mention either of Orpheus or Zoroaster and he made no attempt to reconcile the tradition with Christian theology. Instead, Ficino mentioned a *prisca theologia* that had been initiated

among the Egyptians and the "Arabs" and was then passed on to the Greeks through Pythagoras, Heraclitus, and Plato. It was then given to Hilarius and St. Augustine, "the best of the Latin theologians," via Dionysius the Areopagite, who was "first a Platonist, then a Christian."<sup>61</sup> Ficino did not yet distinguish between periods of "inspiration" and "interpretation." Therefore, he did not yet mention the Providence of the coming of Christ as playing a visible or a leading role at the head of this venerable tradition. After the late 1450's, however, Ficino removed himself from youthful toying and earnestly attempted to interpret the ancient theology in a harmonious and pragmatic manner with respect to orthodox Christianity.<sup>62</sup> Ficino first named Hermes Trismegistus as the ultimate source of this tradition in a letter of 1457 entitled *De divino furore*, which was, in effect, a commentary on Plato's *Phaedrus*.<sup>63</sup>

Cosimo de' Medici had acquired the complete *corpus* of Platonic dialogues in Greek, and he commissioned Ficino to translate them into Latin. But he instructed Ficino to translate the *Corpus Hermeticum* first before going on to Plato.<sup>64</sup> Ficino completed the Hermetic translations in a few short months in 1463, and then began his Platonic translations in 1464, the year Cosimo died. That Cosimo had ordered Ficino to translate these newly-acquired Greek texts in this order attested to Hermes' sacred and genuine authority, and undoubtedly impressed on Ficino the true importance of the Hermetic Tradition.

In the *argumentum* to his *Pimander*<sup>65</sup> translation, Ficino appears to have developed a more serious attitude towards the ancient theology. His earnestness arose in light of the treatment of the *prisca theologia* in writings of the Church Fathers, especially Augustine, Lactantius, and Clement, and through his own careful study of Proclus' *Platonic Theology*. Ficino now linked the Egyptian and Greek theologians to Moses as sources that prefigured the Christian faith, and he viewed Hermes Trismegistus as a prophet who, like his Hebrew counterpart, foresaw the coming of Christ.<sup>66</sup> Ficino opened the *argumentum* with a slightly distorted Augustinian genealogy of Hermes that nonetheless placed Hermes in extreme antiquity as a near-contemporary to Moses.<sup>67</sup> Ficino stated, "At the time when Moses was born flourished Atlas the astrologer, brother of the natural philosopher Prometheus and maternal grandfather

of the elder Mercurius, whose grandson was Mercurius Trismegistus."<sup>68</sup> Ficino added that Cicero, Augustine, and Lactantius all had written of Mercurius, and that Cicero said Hermes had given laws and letters to the Egyptians. Hermes was venerated as a god; temples were built for him; his name could not be openly spoken; the first month was named after him; and, he himself had founded Hermopolis.<sup>69</sup> Ficino continued:

They called him Trismegistus or thrice-greatest because he was the greatest philosopher and the greatest priest and the greatest king. . . . Just as he outdid all philosophers in learning and keenness of mind, so also he surpassed every priest. . . . in sanctity of life and reverence for the divine. . . . Among philosophers he first turned from physical and mathematical topics to contemplation of things divine, and he was the first to discuss with great wisdom the majesty of God, the order of demons and the transformations of souls. Thus, he was called the first author of theology, and Orpheus followed him, taking second place in the ancient theology. After Aglaophemus, Pythagoras came next in theological succession, having been initiated into rites of Orpheus, and he was followed by Philolaus, teacher of our divine Plato. In this way, from a wondrous line of six theologians emerged a single system of ancient theology, harmonious in every part, which traced its origins to Mercurius and reached absolute perfection with the divine Plato. Mercurius wrote many books pertaining to the knowledge of divinity, . . . often speaking not only as philosopher but as prophet. . . . He foresaw the ruin of the old religion, the rise of the new faith, the coming of Christ, the judgment to come, the resurrection of the race, the glory of the blessed and the torments of the damned.<sup>70</sup>

Ficino contended that, among Hermes' writings, the *Asclepius* and the *Pimander* were especially divine. He then briefly described the content of each before bringing his *argumentum* to a close:

Mercury knows how to instruct. . . in divine matters. He cannot teach divine things who has not learned them; and we cannot discover by human skill what is above nature. The work is therefore to be accomplished by a divine light, so that we may look upon the sun by the sun's light. For, in truth, the light of the divine mind is never poured into a soul unless the soul turns itself completely toward the mind of God, as the moon turns toward the sun. . . . For this reason Mercury simply puts aside the fogs of sense and of fancy, bringing himself thus to an approach to mind; and presently *Pimander*, that is, the divine mind, flows into him, whereupon he contemplates the order of all things, whether they exist in God or flow from God. At length he explains to other men what has been revealed to him by the divine power. This, then, is his book, this is his purpose and method. Read it joyfully, O happy Cosimo, and live daily in such a way that your country may live long.<sup>71</sup>

This final passage is what ultimately validated Ficino's use of the *prisca theologia*. In it, Ficino traced the wisdom of Hermes back to "the divine power" of God Himself and thus affirmed the divine authority behind the *prisca theologia*. As historian Wayne Shumaker notes, "the pedigree of the *Pimander* terminates in God Himself, whose word must perforce be accepted."<sup>72</sup>

Ficino finalized the form of this genealogy six years later when, in his 1469 *Philebus* commentary, he added Zoroaster and omitted Philolaus. Thus, the order of the *prisci theologii*, which he applied consistently from that point forward, included Zoroaster, Hermes, Orpheus, Aglaophemus, Pythagoras, and Plato.<sup>73</sup> In his *Theologia Platonica*, for example, Ficino consistently repeated this genealogy:

In those things which pertain to theology the six great theologians of former times concern. Of whom the first is said to have been Zoroaster, head of the *magi*; the second is Hermes Trismegistus, originator of the priests of Egypt. Orpheus succeeded Hermes. Aglaophemus was initiated to the sacred things of Orpheus. Pythagoras succeeded Aglaophemus in theology. To Pythagoras succeeded Plato, who in his writings encompassed those men's universal wisdom, added to it, and elucidated it.<sup>74</sup>

Although the "apostolic succession" of ancient theologians culminated with the divine Plato, Ficino observed that the tradition continued unabated through the Neoplatonists who succeeded him. Ficino contended that, following their exposure to Christian inspiration, the early Neoplatonists preserved and propagated the divine wisdom:

The *prisca theologia* of the Gentiles, in which Zoroaster, Mercury, Orpheus, Aglaophamus, Pythagoras agree, was all contained in the books of our Plato. Plato predicted in his letter that true mysteries could at length become manifest to man after many centuries. This, indeed, happened, for in the times of Philo and Numenius the mind of the *prisci theologii* first began to be understood in the pages of the Platonists, namely immediately after the preaching and writing of the Apostles and apostolic Disciples. For the Platonists used the divine light of the Christians for interpreting the divine Plato.<sup>75</sup>

The *prisca theologia* tradition then continued through the succeeding Platonic schools of antiquity. Ficino claimed, "The multitude of Platonic interpreters was divided into six 'academies,' three in Athens and three abroad. In Athens the oldest flourished under Xenocrates, the next under Arcesilaus, and the last under Carneades. Among foreign academies the Egyptian under Ammonius, the Roman under Plotinus, the Lycian under Proclus."<sup>76</sup> The continuous tradition was first severed following the fall of the school of Proclus. Nonetheless, traces of the Platonic tradition continued in succeeding centuries. Ficino took great care to investigate these traces. He translated Psellus from the Byzantines<sup>77</sup> and he commented on Nicolaus of Methone.<sup>78</sup> Ficino also recommended for their Platonic tendency Avicenna, Alfarabi, and Avicenna among medieval Arabic and Hebrew philosophers and Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus among the Scholastic philosophers.<sup>79</sup> Ficino also



cited Dante and Guido Cavalcanti as Platonists.<sup>80</sup> Among more contemporary figures, Ficino mentioned Pletho only incidentally,<sup>81</sup> but explicitly praised Bessarion and Cusanus for their Platonism.<sup>82</sup>

Ficino's ultimate attempt to reveal the single origin of both religion and philosophy rested most heavily on the ability to prove that Hermes was a contemporary or descendent of Moses. Moses had to be placed at the head of the *prisca theologia* in order for the tradition to be derived from the Pentateuch. But in order to assert that the *prisca theologia* derived from Moses and foreshadowed Christian revelation, Ficino had to illustrate either that the Jewish revelation was the only pre-Christian revelation, which filtered to the Gentiles mainly through Egypt (where Moses had instructed the priests or left books),<sup>83</sup> or that there were partial pre-Christian Gentile revelations in addition to the Jewish revelation. Although the first possibility was more orthodox since it preserved the unique authority of the Old Testament, the two were not necessarily mutually exclusive since a Gentile revelation could easily have been reinforced or completed by a Jewish revelation. Ficino was convinced by the pre-Gentile revelations, but linking Hermes historically to such revelations was a formidable task.<sup>84</sup> Augustine had placed Hermes as the great-grandson of a contemporary of Moses.<sup>85</sup> In his *argumentum* to the *Pimander*, Ficino agreed with Augustine. Here, Ficino was profoundly struck by the parallels of the Egyptian creation to the Biblical genesis. He noticed that "here Mercurius is seen to be treating of the Mosaic mysteries," and he elaborated on the parallels.<sup>86</sup> That Ficino was more concerned here about the similarities between Hermes and Moses rather than Hermes and Plato illustrates his early concern with the very legitimacy of the *prisca theologia* itself. Ficino continued to mull over this problem in later years. He even wondered, in the *Theologia Platonica*, whether Hermes Trismegistus might actually be Moses himself. After mentioning the creation account in Plato's *Timaeus*, Ficino avowed, "Trismegistus Mercurius teaches more clearly such an origin of the generation of the world. Nor need we wonder that this man knew so much, if this Mercurius was the same man as Moses, as Artapanus the historian shows with many conjectures."<sup>87</sup> Ficino even conceded that Hermes was superior to Moses in that he alone understood the creative Word to be the Son of God long before the Incarnation.<sup>88</sup>

Ficino only exacerbated the situation when he placed Zoroaster at the head of the tradition in his 1469 *Philebus* commentary. During his most mature and involved treatment of the Hermetic tradition that followed (1469-74), he failed to establish an adequate genealogy.<sup>89</sup> Pliny, Lactantius, Aeneas Gazaeus, Proclus, and Olympiodorus all had discussed the relationship between Plato and Zoroaster,<sup>90</sup> but the implications of this relationship were problematic for the Christian thinker since Zoroaster's authority effectively replaced the priority of a Judaic revelation with that of a Gentile revelation. It appears that Ficino decided to evade the problem altogether by emphasizing the geographical nature of the *prisca theologia* instead. Ficino seems to have divided the tradition into three schools of gentile theology, with the Persian being the oldest, the Egyptian (related to, if not directly derived from, Mosaic theology) the next oldest, and the Greek tradition, beginning with Orpheus and culminating with Plato, the youngest.<sup>91</sup> Each of the three continents, Asia, Africa, and Europe (divided according to medieval and early Renaissance cosmography), received its own tradition: a Chaldaean one for Asia, a Hermetic one for Africa, and an Orphic one for Europe.<sup>92</sup> Perhaps in an effort to resolve this dilemma partially, in the Preface to his 1490 Commentary on Plotinus, Ficino no longer considered Zoroaster older than Hermes, but instead bracketed him in first place alongside Hermes.<sup>93</sup> Although Ficino never adequately resolved this dilemma, at the same time, he never appeared steadfast in his interest to do so. Ficino was no Lorenzo Valla, and his failure to rigorously examine the Hermetic genealogy merely confirmed that he had never been greatly concerned with critical historical exegesis.<sup>94</sup> He easily overlooked his failure and remained steadfast in his conviction of the authenticity and authority of the *prisca theologi*.<sup>95</sup>

One source of authority (albeit ancillary) from which Ficino gained credence for his recognition of the *prisca theologia* was the support given by many distinguished pagan thinkers to the ancient tradition. Plutarch called "the venerable theologians the oldest of the philosophers,"<sup>96</sup> Diogenes Laertius held this tradition in high regard,<sup>97</sup> and even Celsus recognized the ancient wise men.<sup>98</sup> Cicero considered himself a Platonist, and in the opening discussion of the *Academia*, he described the Platonic Academy as "that school which, as you know, I

approve."<sup>99</sup> Many of the later Neoplatonists supported the *prisca theologia*, including Porphyry,<sup>100</sup> Iamblichus,<sup>101</sup> and Numenius, who asked, "What is Plato but Moses talking Attic Greek?"<sup>102</sup> Proclus showed great interest in the *prisca theologia*, and even went as far as explicitly stating that the *Chaldaic Oracles* and the *Timaeus* were the two most valuable books written up to that time.<sup>103</sup>

But a more powerful source of authority for Ficino came from the acknowledgment of the *prisca theologia* by the Church Fathers. Although they treated the *prisca theologia* inconsistently, these early thinkers provided doxographic support for the ancient tradition. Some rejected the *prisca theologia* and pagan influences altogether for a purely fideistic approach to Christianity. Tertullian had contended:

What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? . . . Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition! We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ Jesus, no inquisition after enjoying the Gospel! With our faith, we desire no further belief.<sup>104</sup>

And St. Jerome avowed in his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, "How many nowadays know the works or even the name of Plato? A handful of idle old men."<sup>105</sup> Many of those Church Fathers who did acknowledge the *prisca theologia* vacillated between admiration for and bitter condemnation of the tradition.<sup>106</sup> Some, like Origen and Lactantius, used it in an attempt to convince contemporary pagans that Neoplatonism and Christianity could be reconciled. Others, like the Cappadocian Fathers and Augustine, defended Christianity by asserting that the greatest pagan philosophers had stolen their wisdom from the Chosen People. But all adopted pagan terminology and methods of argumentation for their debates, and thus, they inevitably platonized their accounts of Christianity somewhat.<sup>107</sup> And, in any case, the mere doxographic acknowledgment of the *prisca theologia* by the Fathers proved satisfactory to Ficino. His undeveloped historical exegesis allowed him to selectively determine which Fathers to cite in his own behalf.

Ficino took his first cue from the Christian-Platonic synthesis of Dionysius the Areopagite. Ironically, the support of Dionysius only convoluted the problem further since Pseudo-Dionysius was another forgery based on the inaccurate attribution of a body of works to one Dionysius, whom St. Paul converted on the Athenian Areopagus in Acts

17:37.<sup>108</sup> The works of the Pseudo-Dionysius were written some time in the sixth century A.D. and were based primarily on Proclus' *Elements of Theology*. But the source of his doctrine of a "mystical theology" ultimately derived from Plato's *Parmenides* and the interpretations of this dialogue in Plotinus, Syrianus, and Proclus. In both the *Divine Names* and *Mystical Theology*, Pseudo-Dionysius applied a Parmenidean theme in which he transformed Plato's dialectical approach to the One into the theologian's approach to the Deity.<sup>109</sup> In the *Celestial Hierarchy*, he established hierarchical levels that enabled man to rise incrementally to God through purification, illumination, and perfection, and that closely resembled the cosmologies devised in the early Hermetic literature.<sup>110</sup>

The Pseudo-Dionysius' reconciliation of Platonism with Christian theology was validated by his supposed status as the disciple of St. Paul. Both his reputation and his demonstration of a Christian-Platonic affinity were carried well into the Renaissance.<sup>111</sup> In his commentary on the *De Mystica Theologia*, Ficino lauded Pseudo-Dionysius as the *culmen* of Christian theology and Platonic philosophy.<sup>112</sup> He believed that not only Proclus, but all later Neoplatonists such as Philo, Numenius, Plotinus, and Iamblichus developed many of their doctrines from the teachings of Pseudo-Dionysius---and even from St. John and St. Paul themselves.<sup>113</sup> Ficino thus followed a long line of commentators, especially Nicholas of Cusa, who acknowledged the authority of Pseudo-Dionysius and his implicit recognition of the *prisca theologia*.<sup>114</sup>

Ficino readily discovered other early Fathers who supported the use of *prisca theologi* in a reconciliation with Christianity. Ficino observed that some of the early Fathers who gave especial support for the use of Platonism included Philo, Varro, Eusebius, and Cyrillus.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, Origen supported pagan philosophy in his *Contra Celsum*, and again in a letter to his pupil Gregory Thaumaturgus:

I wish to ask you to extract from the philosophy of the Greeks what may serve as a course of study or a preparation for Christianity, and from geometry and astronomy what will serve to explain the sacred Scriptures, in order that all the sons of the philosophers are wont to say about geometry and music, grammar, rhetoric, and astronomy, as fellow-helpers to philosophy, we may say about philosophy itself, in relation to Christianity.<sup>116</sup>

Ambrose compared Plato to the Alexandrians, saying that they all had been instructed by Jeremiah and followed the precepts of "the Jew Pythagoras." Claudianus Mamertus, in his *De statu animae*, emphatically praised Plato as the genius who prophetically announced the unity of the threefold Deity long before the Revelation. And in his *Consolatio*, Boethius implicitly paralleled the formation of the world in Plato's *Timaeus* with the account of creation in Genesis.<sup>117</sup>

Even St. Augustine, who vacillated nebulously between acceptance and condemnation of pagan philosophy, can be shown to have supported the *prisca theologia* tradition. Augustine's Neoplatonic elements extend back through Ambrose and the Latin translations of Origen to early Alexandrian philosophy and Philo's view of Platonism, and even through Apuleius to the Middle Platonic school.<sup>118</sup> According to his own account in the *Confessions*, Augustine was converted from Manichaeism to Christianity at least partly through reading Platonic works, in which he discovered the negative conception of evil and recognized the beginning of St. John's Gospel except for "the Word was made flesh."<sup>119</sup> In Book 8 of his *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine supported pagan philosophy, asserting, "But the same Apostle tells him not to decry all as materialistic philosophers. . ."<sup>120</sup> He advocated the resemblance of Platonism to Christianity in the same book:

Whatever philosophers they were that held this of the high and true God, that He was the world's Creator, the light of understanding, and the food of all action; that He is the beginning of nature, the truth of doctrine, and the happiness of life; whether they be called Platonists (as is fittest) or by the name of any other sect. . . them we prefer before all others, and confess their propinquity with our belief.<sup>121</sup>

Hence, Ficino called Augustine "the man of divine genius, who gave the truest expression of the sublimity of Plato."<sup>122</sup> He added that the study of Plato

consists of a universal understanding of things and the basis of all life and complete happiness, especially since Plato spoke about these things in such a way that Aurelius Augustinus chose him, since he was the nearest of all to Christian truth, as the one out of all the (number of) philosophers who might be imitated, and asserted that by changing a few things the Platonists would be Christians.<sup>123</sup>

But even more important to Ficino was the fact that Augustine recognized Hermes Trismegistus as an early *prisca theologus*, without whom the sublimity of the divine Plato would have been impossible. In his *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine asserted that Hebrew language and wisdom,

prophets and patriarchs, were older than all Gentile equivalents. Nonetheless, he implicitly acknowledged the antiquity, piety, and genealogy of Hermes:

And what was their [the Egyptian's] goodly wisdom, think you? Truly nothing but astronomy, and such other sciences as rather seemed to exercise the wit than to elevate the knowledge. For as for morality, it stirred not in Egypt until Trismegistus' time, who was indeed long before the sages and philosophers of Greece, but after Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, yea and Moses also; for at the time when Moses was born, was Atlas, Prometheus' brother, a great astronomer, living, and he was grandfather by the mother's side to the elder Mercury, who begat the father of this Trismegistus.<sup>124</sup>

Augustine noted, too, that "this Hermes says much of God according to the truth," even though he was blinded by his admiration for Egyptian idolatry and prophesied through the devil.<sup>125</sup> Through these passages, Augustine confirmed the sacred importance of Hermes, and thus, of the *prisca theologia* itself.<sup>126</sup>

But Ficino was forced to look to other sources for more explicit support since Augustine wielded the condemnatory side of his double-edged sword elsewhere in his writings. In his *De Doctrina Christiana*, for example, Augustine accused the Platonists of stealing Christian truths: "Whatever those called philosophers, and especially the Platonists, may have said true and comfortable to our faith, is not only not to be dreaded, but is to be claimed from them as unlawful possessors, to our use. . ." <sup>127</sup> In his *Retractiones*, he announced his regrets for his earlier advocacy of Platonism.<sup>128</sup> And in his *Contra Julianum*, he claimed that all activities of pre-Christian pagans were sinful since they were not done in the Christian faith.<sup>129</sup> Augustine also made specific attacks against Hermes Trismegistus. In his *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine severely rebuked "Hermes the Egyptian, called Trismegistus" for advocating the magical animation of idols of Egyptian gods, and he quoted the *Asclepius* at length on this matter.<sup>130</sup> He added that the prophesied end of the Egyptian religion foreshadowed the end of idolatry and the rise of Christianity. Thus, although he viewed Hermes Trismegistus as a seer who foresaw the rise of Christianity, he nonetheless considered Hermes disreputable for having gained his foreknowledge through the evil demons he worshipped:

Hermes presages these things as the devil's confederate, suppressing the evidence of the Christian name, and yet foretelling with a sorrowful intimation, that from it should proceed the wreck of all their

idolatrous superstitions: for Hermes was one of those who (as the apostle says), 'Knowing God, glorified Him not as God, nor were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was full of darkness. . . .'<sup>131</sup>

Because Augustine's attacks applied specifically to the *Asclepius*, however, his condemnation could be minimized through an apologetic argument: since the *Asclepius* existed only in the Latin translation of Apuleius, a known magician and idolater, the religious sanctity of the Greek original might have been corrupted. Ficino understood that he could not rely on Augustine's vacillating position alone. He needed clear and uncontroverted evidence that both supported the *prisca theologia* and had the authority to neutralize Augustine's attacks.

Clement of Alexandria provided some of the authoritative ammunition that Ficino was seeking. Clement was a strong adherent of Hermes as the founder of a *prisca theologia*. He avowed in his *Stromata*, "Philosophy was given to the Greeks directly and primarily, till the Lord should call the Greeks. For this [Greek philosophy] was a schoolmaster to bring the Hellenic mind, as the law the Hebrews, to Christ."<sup>132</sup> Elsewhere in the *Stromata*, he described the procession of Egyptian priests, and he asserted that the singer who led the procession carried two books of hymns and music composed by Hermes; the horoscopus carried four books by Hermes on celestial bodies. Throughout the description, Clement avowed that Hermes wrote forty-two books, thirty-six of which contained the entire philosophy of the Egyptians, and the other six of which contained treatises on medicine.<sup>133</sup> Clement never actually mentioned the Hermetic writings that were included in Ficino's translations, an omission which suggests that Clement either did not know them or knew them to be recent forgeries. Nonetheless, Ficino would have believed he had in the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Asclepius* the valuable works to which Clement referred.<sup>134</sup>

Lactantius joins Clement of Alexandria as an even stronger adherent of Hermes and the *prisca theologia*. Ficino was able to play Lactantius against Augustine since Lactantius was as much in favor of Hermes and pagan philosophy as Augustine was in disapproval of them.<sup>135</sup> Lactantius remarked in his *De ira Dei* that Trismegistus was much older than both Plato and Pythagoras.<sup>136</sup> In his *Divine Institutes*, Lactantius

quoted Cicero's fifth Mercurius as he "who gave letters and laws to the Egyptians," and he added that this Egyptian Hermes

even though he was a man, he was most ancient and well instructed in every kind of learning---to such a degree that his knowledge of the arts and of all other things gave to him the cognomen or epithet Trismegistus. He wrote books ---many, indeed, pertaining to the knowledge of divine things---in which he vouches for the majesty of the supreme and single God and he calls Him by the same name which we use: Lord and Father.<sup>137</sup>

Lactantius quoted and referred to Hermes in his *Institutes* a number of other times as well. He observed the Christian and Hermetic parallel use of "Father," a term used quite often in the Hermetic literature to describe the Supreme Being. Lactantius drew attention to Hermes' teaching on "the majesty of the supreme and only God," who was "lord" and "father,"<sup>138</sup> but himself "motherless" and fatherless.<sup>139</sup> Lactantius recorded that the Hermetic God was "the one without a name" since His unity exempted Him from need of qualification.<sup>140</sup> Lactantius also observed that even more revealing was Hermes' use of "Son of God" for the demiurge.<sup>141</sup> The opening to the *Pimander* also used the expression "Son of God," in which the act of creation was said to have been through a luminous Word, the "Son of God." Using supporting Scriptural quotations, Lactantius asserted that the Son of God was the creative Word and added Gentile confirmation of the same by illustrating that the Greeks and Trismegistus spoke of Him as the Logos.<sup>142</sup> Probably in relation to the opening of the *Pimander*, Lactantius stated, "Trismegistus, who by some means or other searched into almost all truth, often described the excellence and the majesty of the Word."<sup>143</sup> Because of such references, in three passages of the *Institutes*, Lactantius asserted that both Hermes and the Sibyls confirmed the coming of Christ.<sup>144</sup> Lactantius also quoted in Greek a passage from the *Asclepius* (which proves the existence of a lost Greek original) to demonstrate Christian truth as foretold by this ancient writer:

Hermes, in that book which is entitled [*The Perfect World*] used these words: 'The Lord and Maker of all things whom we rightly call god, since He made a second god, visible and sensible. . . . since therefore he made this one, the first and only and one, he appeared good to him and exceedingly full of all good, he was delighted with him, and loved him perfectly as his own son.'<sup>145</sup>

Lactantius thus viewed Hermes explicitly as a sacred Gentile prophet.



Ficino, who considered the *Asclepius* and the *Pimander* to be the two most sacred works of Hermes, supported Lactantius over Augustine to justify the sacred authenticity of the *Asclepius* in his *argumentum* to the *Pimander*. Ficino was convinced of the Egyptian origin of the *Asclepius*, for he believed it had been written in Egyptian before being translated into the Greek version used by Lactantius.<sup>146</sup> Apart from his attraction to the *Asclepius*, Ficino believed in the sacred authority of the Hermetic tradition for other reasons. First, Ficino flatly asserted the prophetic authority of Hermes and consistently emphasized the importance of Hermes as the *fons et origo* of a theological tradition throughout his works.<sup>147</sup> In his *De Christiana religione*, for example, Ficino even includes Hermes with the Sibyls as testifying to the coming of Christ.<sup>148</sup> Second, in his *argumentum* to the *Pimander*, Ficino observed the ecstatic illumination typical of the Hermetic works. He suggested that a light of divine illumination emanated from these works and taught men how to raise their minds above sensory and fantastical deceptions. If they would turn their thoughts toward the Divine Mind, just as the Moon turns to the Sun, the Divine Mind would illuminate their minds and allow them to contemplate the nature of all things as they exist in God.<sup>149</sup> And finally, Ficino believed, the *prisca theologi* concealed their truths in esoteric doctrine so as to preserve the purity of the sacred wisdom. "The ancient theologians," he claimed, "covered all the sacred mysteries of divine things with poetic veils, that they might not be diffused among profane people."<sup>150</sup> Ficino likely read the Justinian version of the Orphic *Palinode*, which presented Orpheus closing the doors on the profane and revealing the esoteric truths of monotheism to his disciple Musaeus so that he might live eternally.<sup>151</sup>

Ficino therefore reinforced his conviction that there once was a *prisca theologia* in which philosophy and religion were one and the same. As Hermes noted in the *Asclepius*, "Philosophy is nothing else than striving through constant contemplation and saintly piety to attain the knowledge of God."<sup>152</sup> Ficino viewed Hermes and the *prisca theologi* as pious thinkers who preserved pagan wisdom and anticipated the secret truths of Christian revelation. He believed divine Providence offered the wisdom of this tradition to sublime pagan thinkers so that they might be persuaded that man is unique through natural religion, and that

man can achieve ultimate fulfillment through the superior Christian species of this genus.

Ficino clearly saw that he could preserve and propel this sacred tradition to its ultimate end by disseminating Plato's religious philosophy through his own translations, writings, and personal activities.<sup>153</sup> Based on his conviction that "Plato was imbued with the divine mysteries of Hermes Trismegistus,"<sup>154</sup> Ficino asserted his hope that, "by the Platonic reasonings that support religion," he might enlighten his contemporaries "who did not easily cede to the one authority of divine law" and "who impiously separate the study of philosophy too much from holy religion."<sup>155</sup> He wrote to Johannes Pannonius:

We must not think that the subtle and philosophical minds of men can ever be gradually enticed and led to the perfect religion by any lure other than a philosophical one. For subtle minds trust themselves only to reason, and if they receive religion from a religious philosopher, at once and of their own volition they recognize religion in general and from there pass more readily to the best species of religion included in that genus. It was, therefore, by the will of divine Providence, which leads all men unto itself admirably as befits the nature of each particular individual, that a religious philosophy arose among the Persians under Zoroaster and likewise among the Egyptians under Trismegistus, that it was then nursed by the Thracians under Orpheus and Aglaophemus, to be later developed among the Greeks and Italians under Pythagoras and finally perfected in Athens under the divine Plato.<sup>156</sup>

Although many humanists since the days of Petrarch had openly lauded Plato despite their meager direct knowledge of Plato's works, Ficino alone had the complete Platonic *corpus* and a knowledge of Greek which allowed him to first fully reveal Plato to the West.<sup>157</sup> Ficino thus avowed that he "was born of his father, but reborn of Cosimo de' Medici, who consecrated him to the divine Plato."<sup>158</sup> He characterized his Platonic translations as a "rebirth" or "resurrection" of Plato,<sup>159</sup> and he viewed his own school as a rebirth of the ancient Academy.<sup>160</sup> Similarly, Poliziano exalted Ficino, who "more fortunate than Orpheus, brought back to life the true Eurydice, in other words, Platonic wisdom."<sup>161</sup> Ficino's celebration of Plato's birthday among his circle of friends at his "Academy"---the first such celebration since the days of Plotinus and Porphyry---thus assumed especial symbolic importance.<sup>162</sup> Ficino's work in Platonism, then, was not merely another philosophy developed in the Renaissance, but a manifestation of Renaissance philosophy itself, the quintessential example of the leading philosophical ideas coming out of this period. But just as Plato led

Ficino to a Christian philosophy, Hermes and the *prisca theologia* led him to Plato.<sup>163</sup>

### **Platonic Theology and Ficino's Psychology**

Ficino's exposure to the Hermetic tradition is undoubtedly the pivotal point in his philosophical career. Before he translated the *Corpus Hermeticum* in 1463 and the Platonic dialogues in 1464, Ficino had received exposure to the normal Scholastic and Aristotelian teachings, as well as to Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Plato through the *Timaeus*. But Ficino had illustrated no real preference for a particular philosophical school until his formal introduction to Platonism and its Hermetic background set him fully on a course toward a Platonic theology. Once Ficino had embarked on this course, he accentuated its authority by contrasting the divine Plato with the profane Aristotle. Ficino avowed that, whereas Plato combined his philosophy with theology, Aristotle taught a pure, natural philosophy that was secular and religiously neutral, and that emphasized logic and natural science.<sup>164</sup> Ficino recognized the inherent difficulties involved in reconciling Christianity with an Averroist form of Aristotelianism. Irreconcilable differences arose over questions of the eternity of the world, the unicity of the intellect, the mortality of the soul, and an astrological determinism that perceives the individual person, and even religion, as transient phenomena imprisoned in astrological cycles. Therefore, Ficino used his Platonic theology to combat the heretical influences of Alexandrism, Averroism and Epicureanism.<sup>165</sup> A letter he wrote late in life to Pannonius explained his mission:

The whole world is now in the hands of the Peripatetics and is divided mainly into two sects, Alexandrists and Averroists. Both deny any form of religion. If anyone thinks to destroy by the simple preaching of faith an impiety so diffused among men and defended by such subtle minds, he will soon be refuted by the results. Stronger measures are needed: either divine miracles manifested on all sides or at least a philosophical religion to which philosophers will listen more readily and which will some day succeed in convincing them. But in these times it pleases divine Providence to confirm religion in general by philosophical authority and reason until, on a day already predestined, it will confirm the true religion, as in other times, by miracles wrought among all peoples.<sup>166</sup>

Ficino embarked on this mission from the outset, believing Platonism could be used as an intellectual tool to dispel Aristotelian fallacies at the same time that it could be reconciled with Christianity.<sup>167</sup>

Ficino appears to have believed that the immortality of the soul presented the greatest affinity between Platonic and Christian theology at the same time that it presented the greatest discrepancy between Christians and Peripatetics. This fact helps to explain why Ficino developed his philosophy around his psychology so early in his career. Indeed, from the outset, Ficino's metaphysics was dominated by his concept of Soul and God, and the Platonic interaction between them. This is revealed by the title of his primary work, *Theologia Platonica de immortalitate animorum*, and through the assertion in his Preface to Lorenzo de' Medici: "Whoever. . . accurately reads Plato's works will learn everything, especially two things, namely, the pious worship of God and the divinity of Souls, which taken together constitute the understanding of things and all institution of life and all happiness."<sup>168</sup> Ficino claimed that the worship of God could be achieved in part by following the insights of Plato "since he never dealt with any subject whether ethics or dialectics or mathematics or physics which he did not soon lead back towards the contemplation and worship of God with fullest piety."<sup>169</sup> He added that man could best seek God by examining the human soul using Plato's own example:

But since he considers the soul to be like a mirror in which the image of the divine countenance is readily reflected, for that reason [Plato], while he diligently sought God himself through His separate vestiges, continually turned towards the mirror of the soul knowing that that oracular saying 'know thyself' most potently urges that whoever wished to know God should first know himself. As a consequence anyone who seriously studies the Platonic writings, which I have now translated entirely into Latin, will, of course, discover all things, but especially these two things out of all the rest, the pious worship of the known God and the divinity of souls. . .<sup>170</sup>

By applying a Platonic approach to the soul, then, Ficino recognized the divinity of man as an image of God at the same time that he recognized the divinity of God through His image in man. Ficino emphasized "that in the very divinity of the created mind, as a mirror in the middle of all things, we might on the one hand gaze upon the works of the Creator Himself, and also contemplate and worship the mind."<sup>171</sup> Ficino's approach to the soul thus involved the transformation of a secular Platonism into a Christian Platonism where God became the ultimate object of Plato's intelligible world, including the soul itself.<sup>172</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Kristeller, *Philosophy*, p. 316. Hereafter cited as *PMF*.

<sup>2</sup>*De Christiana religione*, *Opera*, p. 4. In *PMF*, p. 317. Ficino says elsewhere in *De Christiana religione*, "God does not wholly reject any cult so long as it is human and is directed in some way to Him. . . . God is the highest good and truth, the light of the intellect, and the ardor of the will. Those therefore. . . who sincerely honor God revere Him constantly through their good works, the truth they speak, the clarity of the intelligence that they possess, and as much charitable will as they should have." Translated in Eugenio Garin, *Portraits of the Quattrocento*, trans. Victor A. and Elizabeth Velen (New York, 1972), p. 150. Ficino states elsewhere that "God is worshipped among all peoples at all times, because it is natural, though not with the same customs and rites." *Opera*, p. 324; cf. *Opera*, pp. 2, 317. In *PMF*, p. 176.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. *Opera*, p. 325.

<sup>4</sup>*Opera*, p. 324. In *PMF*, p. 318.

<sup>5</sup>*Opera*, pp. 319f; cf. *Opera*, p. 2. In *PMF*, p. 318.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.* In *PMF*, pp. 318-19.

<sup>7</sup>*Opera*, p. 474. In *PMF*, p. 319.

<sup>8</sup>*Supplementum Ficinianum--Marsilii Ficini Florentini opuscula inedita et dispersa*, ed. Paul Oskar Kristeller, 2 vols (Florence, 1937; repr. in 1973), I:II. "I think if we take away divine worship, the human genus will be unhappier than all the animals." *Opera*, p. 647. "It is impossible that man, who through the worship of God comes closer than any mortal creature to God, the author of happiness, should be the most unhappy among them all." *Opera*, p. 79. In *PMF*, p. 319.

<sup>9</sup>*Opera*, pp. 872, 1537; cf. *Opera*, pp. 12, 849. In *PMF*, pp. 319-20.

<sup>10</sup>*Opera*, p. 4. In *PMF*, p. 320.

<sup>11</sup>He attempted such an endeavor in his 1474 apologetic *De Christiana religione* and his fragmentary commentary on St. Paul, but an accurate appraisal of his success has yet to be made. *PMF*, p. 320.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Etienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Edward Bullough (New York, 1993), pp. 37-54; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, esp. I.1-10, II.2-4; *Summa Theologica*, I, I, 5-6; *De Verit.* 14, art. 9-10.

<sup>13</sup>Ardis Collins suggests that Ficino actually relied heavily on Aquinas in this endeavor. In his *Theologia Platonica*, 18.8, *Opera*, pp. 208-09, Ficino lauds Aquinas as the "splendor of Christian theology." Collins explains that "this acceptance of Thomas Aquinas as the leading exponent of Christian theology is especially important for Ficino's thought. According to Ficino, philosophy cannot be separated from holy religion, and Aquinas is the authority on the theology which explicitly joins itself to that religion. Therefore, to examine the relationship between Platonism and Thomism in Ficino's thought is to examine Ficino's position on the unity of philosophy and theology, a unity which manifests the inseparability of philosophy and religion." *The Secular is Sacred: Platonism and Thomism in Marsilio Ficino's Platonic Theology* (The Hague, 1974), p. 6.

<sup>14</sup>*PMF*, pp. 320, 323.

<sup>15</sup>*Opera*, p. 668. In *PMF*, pp. 322-23.

<sup>16</sup>*Opera*, p. 853. In *PMF*, p. 323.

<sup>17</sup>*PMF*, pp. 23-4.

<sup>18</sup>*Opera*, p. 78; cf. *Opera*, p. 855. In *PMF*, pp. 24, 321-22.

<sup>19</sup>*Opera*, p. 474; cf. Plato, *Protagoras* 322a. In *PMF*, p. 318.

<sup>20</sup>*Opera*, pp. 866ff. Ficino emphasizes the affinity between Platonism and Mosaic and Christian doctrine by quoting Numenius and Augustine on numerous occasions. *Opera*, pp. 855, 769, et passim. He composed two small tracts proving the harmony between Mosaic and Platonic doctrine and between Socratic and Christian ethical conduct. *Opera*, pp. 866ff.

<sup>21</sup>In addition, Stoic indifference to all things outside the soul and the ideal of *ataraxia*, the full dominance by the soul over passions, pleasure and pain, closely resemble certain aspects of St. Paul's teachings, such as I Corinthians 7:29-31. *PMF*, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup>*Opera*, p. 806; *Supplementum Ficinianum* I:12ff.

<sup>23</sup>Walker, *Ancient Theology*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>24</sup>Ficino found evidence from Plato's sixth *Epistle* (which he thought to be genuine) that Plato had understood the ultimate mystery of the Trinity. *Opera*, p. 1533. Ficino also found evidence that Plotinus had mentioned the Trinity in three different places (*Enneads* 1.8.2, 5.1.8, 6.7.42), and that Proclus had mentioned it in his *Theologia Platonica* (2.8f). Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (Penguin, 1967), pp. 242-43. In his *Commentary on the Symposium*, 2.1, Ficino adds that the Pythagoreans knew of the Trinity as well: "The Pythagorean philosophers believed that the trinity was the measure of all things, for the reason, I think, that God governs things by the ternary number, and also that things themselves are completed by the ternary number." Translated by Sears Jayne in *Marsilio Ficino: Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love* (Dallas, 1985), p. 45.

<sup>25</sup>*PMF*, p. 5. The *Apology* does leave this question open. Pre-existence and metempsychosis were problematic areas in Plato's notion of the Soul.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.* Unlike Plato, the Neoplatonists considered the world to be eternal. Next to pre-existence of the Soul and metempsychosis, the Trinity and the creation from the world from nothing and its eventual destruction were the most perplexing inconsistencies for Ficino and the Renaissance syncretists. Homosexuality presented a difficult moral obstacle.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* I.7 and *Comment. in Parmen.*; Olympiodorus, *Comment. in Alcibiad.* In Klibansky, *Parmenides*, p. 33 n. 4.

<sup>28</sup>Klibansky, *Parmenides*, p. 34.

<sup>29</sup>*Commentary on Philebus* 11 in Allen, *Philebus*, p. 140. Ficino is referring to Plato, *Parmenides* 147D, 142B-157B; Pseudo-Dionysius, *On the Divine Names*, *passim*; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5.613. Allen, *Philebus*, p. 540 nn. 62-64.

<sup>30</sup>*Opera*, p. 871.

<sup>31</sup>Kristeller explains the syllogism: "The Platonic philosopher is also called a theologian, not because Ficino happened to be a priest or had studied dogmatic theology based on Scripture and authority, but because the Platonic philosopher attained through reason and contemplation and through his philosophical authorities a truth about God and the intelligible world that was in basic agreement with dogmatic theology, but derived from independent sources." In "Philosophy and Humanism in Renaissance Perspective," in *The Renaissance Image of Man and the World*, edited by Bernard O'Kelly (N.P., 1966):29-51 at 45.

<sup>32</sup>*PMF*, p. 322.

<sup>33</sup>*Opera*, p. 866; cf. *Supplementum Ficinianum* II:233f.

<sup>34</sup>Ficino writes to the Archbishop of Amalfi, "Confiding in them, I thought it worth while---it being necessary to philosophize---to philosophize rather in the Academy," i.e. in the Platonic tradition. *Opera*, p. 855. In *PMF*, p. 24. It is significant that Ficino specifically characterizes the medieval principle of *ratio as ratio platonica*. He identifies Plato both with independent philosophical reflection and as an *auctoritas* among the church fathers. Ficino also asserts that the Neoplatonists "rely mainly on two principles, their own reason and Platonic authority." *Opera*, p. 393. And in a letter to Johannes Pannonius Ficino states that "divine Providence at present supports the Christian religion with philosophical authority and reason." *Opera*, p. 872. Ficino thus considers the authority of Plato to be on a par similar to that of the Bible, and at one point he uses the known expression: "the Platonic doctrine is related to divine law. . . as the moon to the sun." *Opera*, p. 855. In *PMF*, p. 25.

<sup>35</sup>Eugenio Garin, *Italian Humanism: Philosophy and Civic Life in the Renaissance*, translated by Peter Munz (New York, 1965), p. 91.

<sup>36</sup>*Opera*, p. 930. In *PMF*, p. 322.

<sup>37</sup>*PMF*, p. 28.

<sup>38</sup>*Opera*, p. 1537; cf. *Opera*, pp. 871f. In *PMF*, p. 322. Ficino elsewhere exclaims, "O you happy times which have kept sound this divine bond of wisdom and religion, . . . [but how] unhappy when . . . separation and wretched divorce occurs . . . between wisdom and decency . . . [and] teaching is left largely to the profane. . . . I beg you, let us now free philosophy, God's holy gift, from impiety . . . [and] do all we can to save holy religion from detestable ignorance." Quoted in Brian P. Copenhaver and Charles B. Schmitt, *A History of Renaissance Philosophy. Vol. III: Renaissance Philosophy* (Oxford, 1992), p. 148.

<sup>39</sup>Renaissance thinkers did not subscribe to the Hegelian notion of history as a progressive force in which the accomplishments of the new build on the old as man's achievements continually become more noble. Rather, they advocated the idea of history as a cyclical force with recurring golden ages. Believing themselves to be part of an evolving golden age, they looked back to move forward. They believed that what was ancient was naturally more noble and sacred. Thus, they each looked to a certain aspect of Antiquity to reinstate a golden age; the classical humanists looked back to Cicero and rhetorical literature, the exegetes to the Gospel and Patristic Father, and the magi back to their own misdated golden age of magic. Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup>Cf. *Opera*, pp. 268, 321, 686. In *PMF*, p. 322.

<sup>41</sup>*PMF*, p. 321.

<sup>42</sup>*Opera*, p. 1. In *PMF*, p. 321.

<sup>43</sup>*Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Charles B. Schmitt, et. al. (Cambridge, 1988), p. 281. Historian A.-J. Festugière states, "The Hermetic literature presents us with the most varied forms [of art]: under the patronage of Hermes were put writings on astrology and astrological medicine, magical recipes, works on alchemy, small philosophical or theosophical treatises, questions of astronomy, physics, psychology, embryogeny, natural history (Kyranides)--in short, everything which, with the decline of rationalism, was taken to be science." *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste, L'Astrologie et les Sciences occultes*, I (Paris, 1944): 82. Quoted in S.J. Tester, *A History of Western Astrology* (Woodridge, 1987), p. 21.

<sup>44</sup>Of monotheism, the Trinity, and Creation, the Orphic tradition addresses the first two. Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 25. Two important Orphic fragments (Kern, Fr. 167, 168) that are used in defense of monotheism and lead on to the Trinity usually occur together as they do in Proclus. They are part of the particular Orphic theogony, in which Zeus swallows Phanes, the first-born god, and therefore unifies the multiplicity of the world, as Proclus asserts. Renaissance thinkers believed Orpheus to have preceded Hesiod. Therefore, they interpreted fragments of Hesiod and Homer to have been derived from Orpheus rather than to have been taken by Orpheus. At any rate, these fragments possess a certain metaphysical content. The first, translated by Thomas Taylor (Proclus, *Comm. on Timaeus*, tr. Th. Taylor, London, 1820, p. 263; Kern, Fr. 167b), reads: "Hence with the universe great Jove contains/ Extended aether, heav'n's exalted plains; The barren restless deep, and earth renowned,/ Ocean immense, & Tartarus profound;/ Fountains & rivers, and the boundless main,/ With all that nature's ample realms contain; And Gods & Goddesses of each degree;/ All that is past, and all that e'er shall be,/ Occultly, and in fair connection, lies,/ In Jove's wide belly, ruler of the skies." The other fragment, sometimes referred to as the *Hymn of Jove*, might be referred to in Plato's *Laws* 4.715e (in Kern, Fr. 21). It is quoted in the Pseudo-Aristotle's *De Mundo* (Kern, Fr. 21a) and in a longer version by Porphyry (apud Eusebium) and Proclus (Kern, Fr. 168). It begins: "Zeus is the first, Zeus the last, high-thunderer: Zeus the head, Zeus the middle; from Zeus all things spring; Zeus is male and immortal bride." It then distinguishes "fire and water and earth and aether, night and day, and Wisdom, first creator and sweet Love"; these all lie in the great body (or palace) of Zeus. These fragments can be interpreted as assertions of a monotheistic belief in one creator, with Wisdom and Love respectively representing the Son and the Holy Ghost.

Ficino interprets them slightly differently. In a letter on the Platonic *furores*, *Opera*, p. 612, Ficino quotes the *Hymn of Jove* and equates Jove with the *anima mundi*, after having just quoted the well-known passage from Virgil's *Aeneid* 6.724-7: "The sky and the lands, the watery plains, the moon's gleaming face, the Titanic Sun and the stars are all strengthened by Spirit working within them, and by Mind, which is blended into all the vast universe and pervades every part of it, enlivening the whole mass," trans. W.F. Jackson (Baltimore, 1956), p. 169. In Ficino's earlier letter containing the *Palinode*, *Opera*, p. 1371, he quotes the *Hymn of Jove* again in full, along with Porphyry's commentary on the *Hymn* (Apud Eusebium, *Praep. Evang.* 3.9), a work that interprets Jove as the *mens mundi*, "who created all things therein, containing the world in himself." This interpretation, repeated by Agrippa (*De Occ. Phil.* 3.7), nearly makes Jove the creative *Logos*, God the Son. *Ancient Theology*, pp. 35-7. The *Orphica* provided allusions to God the Son: Wisdom and Love in the *Hymn of Jove* and the Divine Word in the *Palinode*. Ficino even suggests Pallas Athene, *Opera*,

p. 18, who surfaces in Proclus' quotation of *Orphica*, where she is said to have sprung from the head of Zeus so that she might create many works (Kern, Fr. 174-7. Cf. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 7.28, in which Varro equates Minerva with the Ideas of Plato); Plato, *Cratylus* 407b. *Ancient Theology*, p. 39.

<sup>45</sup>John Scarborough, "Hermetic and Related Texts in Classical Antiquity," p. 25. In Ingrid Merkel and Allen G. Debus, *Hermeticism and the Renaissance: Intellectual History and the Occult in Early Modern Europe* (Washington, 1988): 19-44.

<sup>46</sup>Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 2. Ficino is both a convenient and justifiable starting point for a study of the *prisca theologia*, because he first possessed the ability to accurately render into Latin the surviving Greek texts of Plato, Plotinus, many of the later Neoplatonists, the *Corpus Hermeticum*, and Greek Fathers like Eusebius and Clement of Alexandria, all of whom were great proponents of the *prisca theologia*. But Ficino was not the first Renaissance adherent of the *prisca theologia*. The Byzantine Platonist Giorgio Gemisto Pletho (1355-1450) had already propounded the idea. But the influence Pletho had on Ficino appears minimal, if not non-existent. Ficino states in the 1490 Preface to his translation of Plotinus, *Opera*, p. 1537, that Pletho's 1438 Florentine lectures gave Cosimo de' Medici the idea of establishing the Platonic Academy. Pletho would not have personally influenced Ficino at this time since Ficino was still only a youth, but Pletho indeed must have left some tangible influence in Florence. Furthermore, Pletho and Ficino possess a fundamental difference. Whereas Pletho was largely a political reformer, applying Platonic philosophy to attack Christian theology and to provide an allegorical interpretation of ancient Greek mythology, Ficino had no interest in political problems and always sought to reconcile Platonic philosophy and Christian theology. If Ficino had been at least moderately acquainted with the ideas of Pletho, he would have realized that Pletho was an anti-Christian Platonist even if he had not read the attacks against him in George of Trebizond's *Comparationes Phylsophorum Aristotelis et Platonis* (c. 1455), and would thus have rejected or at least been extremely wary of Pletho's teachings. At any rate, Walker notes that "once Ficino had begun reading such authors as Eusebius, Proclus, or even Augustine, the general theory of the ancient theology would occur to him in any case." Kristeller believes Ficino first heard of the tradition from Pletho while Walker believes the evidence remains inconclusive. *PMF*, p. 15 and Walker, *Ancient Theology*, pp. 12-3. Hankins believes the only evidence that gives demonstrative proof of Ficino's use of Pletho is the identification of Zoroaster as the author of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, which Pletho asserted in his commentary on the *Oracles*. Ficino was clearly aware of Pletho's commentary by 1467/69, but he does not make this attribution to Zoroaster until he wrote his *Theologia Platonica* 17.1. Hankins, *Plato* 2:463. Also see D.P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic: From Ficino to Campanella* (Notre Dame, 1958), pp. 60-3; Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1970), for details on Pletho's *prisca theologi*.

Neither was Ficino greatly influenced by Pletho's student, Bessarion. for by the time the two began to correspond, Ficino had already begun to develop his own philosophy. *PMF*, p. 15. Cardinal Bessarion (1403-1472) also maintained great admiration for this "reincarnation of Plato", as he called Pletho in a condolence letter to Pletho's sons. Cardinal Bessarion was not a source for Ficino's Platonic revival, however, for Ficino had already translated the Platonic dialogues by the time Bessarion personally sent him a copy of his *In Calumniatorem Platonis* in 1469. Furthermore, although Bessarion was also a crucial starting point for the Renaissance revival of Platonism, he did not share a strong interest in the *prisca theologica* apart from his comment in the *In Calumniatorem Platonis*, a defense of Plato against Trebizond's above work, in which he notes that Plato was a follower of Orpheus, *In Cal. Plat.* 121. (Bessarion even possessed a manuscript copy of the Orphic Hymns and the *Argonautica*.) He also states here that Plato learned a great amount from Mosaic writings while he was in Egypt, *In Cal. Plat.* 245, based on Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 8.11; Cyril, *Contra Julianum* 1; Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, *passim*. He recounts the suggestion of Pseudo-Justin that the example of Socrates' death prevented Plato from explicitly stating his religious views, *In Cal. Plat.* 229; cf. Pseudo-Justin, *Cohortatio ad Gentiles*, c. 20. He further provides an in-depth and competent examination of the similarities and differences between the Christian Trinity and Platonic and Neoplatonic triads, all of these of which were common and persistent



endeavors of the Renaissance syncretists, *In Cal. Plat.* 93 seq., 297 seq. Walker, *Ancient Theology*, pp. 13-4, 14 n. 1.

<sup>48</sup>Cicero, *De natura deorum* 3.22.

<sup>49</sup>The thinkers of antiquity believed that what is old is more sacred; that the earliest thinkers existed closer to God than their rational inheritors. They also believed that what is spatially more distant is also more sacred, which accounts for the interest in Indian gymnosophists, Persian Magi, and Chaldean astrologers, whose search for knowledge was more religious than that of the Greeks. An attractive stereotype developed especially around the ancient and mysterious nature of Egyptian religion and the sacred knowledge, ascetic practices, and religious magic of Egyptian priests. Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 5.

<sup>50</sup>Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 26. The passage comes from the *Cohortatio ad Gentiles*, c. 14-5, which may or may not have actually been composed by Justin.

<sup>51</sup>The origins of this strain have not been dated, but two of the most important of the philosophical *Hermetica*, the *Asclepius* and the *Corpus Hermeticum*, most likely date between A.D. 100 and 300. Many scholars believe that although these works are set in a pseudo-Egyptian framework, there are few authentic Egyptian elements. Some believe a native Egyptian influence is more prominent. Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 2. Although these works profess to be Egyptian, the best modern authority on them, French Historian A. J. Festugiere, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1950-4), believes that they are primarily Greek in origin, a Hellenistic conglomeration of Judaism, Christianity, Platonism, and Stoicism, set in a magical and gnostic framework. Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 17. Festugiere thus devotes almost all his attention to Greek influences in the *Hermetica*. But M.W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (N.p., 1952) offers another perspective: "These writings are chiefly the product of Egyptian Neoplatonists who were greatly influenced by Stoicism, Judaism, Persian theology and possibly by native Egyptian beliefs, as well as, of course, by Plato, especially the *Timaeus*. They were perhaps the bible of an Egyptian mystery religion, which possibly in kernel went back to the second century B.C." p. 46; see also p. 342. Festugiere opposes this theory. Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 2. The potential of Egyptian influence may be strengthened by the discovery of a Coptic version of the *Asclepius*. See J. Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics* (London, 1960), pp. 255ff. *Ibid.*, p. 431 n. 2.

<sup>52</sup>Otherwise known as *De Voluntate Divina*, "On the Divine Will."

<sup>53</sup>Otherwise known as the *Definitiones Asclepii*.

<sup>54</sup>Otherwise known as *De Sapientia et Potestate Dei*, "On the Power and Wisdom of God." *Pimander* is often used interchangeably with *Corpus Hermeticum* as an umbrella title for the whole group.

<sup>55</sup>Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 17; Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 3. Additional philosophical works of Hermetism arise in the fragments in the anthology of excerpts compiled by Stobaeus. Cf. Scott, *Hermetica*, vol. I (Boulder, 1982): *Stobaei Hermetica*, pp. 378-533. For other fragments, cf. *Fragmenta*, pp. 534-49. There also is the astrological, alchemical, and magical literature, which cannot be completely isolated from the former. In the first volume of his account, Festugiere believes a study of the latter is necessary to understand the former. Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 44. It is not known exactly when the *Corpus Hermeticum* was first compiled as a collection, but Michael Psellus knew of it in this form in the eleventh century. Hermetic interests in the Medieval era were generated by the Latin translation of the *Asclepius* and the pseudo-Hermetic *Liber Hermetis Mercurii Triplicis de VI rerum principiis*, which is a highlight of the twelfth-century Renaissance. These works influenced Hugh of St. Victor in his *Didascalicon*. *Ibid.*, p. 13 n. 3.

<sup>56</sup>For example, *The Secret Discourse on the Mountain of Hermes Trismegistus to his Son Tat* (*Corpus Hermeticum*, 13) discusses Egyptian regeneration using dualistic gnosis. Hermes mentions in the Cosmos the terrible "irrational punishments of matter." The twelve worst include Ignorance, Sadness, Incontinence, Concupiscence, Injustice, Cupidity, Deceit, Envy, Fraud, Anger, Precipitation, and Malice which force the soul of man to suffer through the senses while imprisoned in the human body. But man is regenerated and the Powers of God enter him and force out the punishments with the corresponding Powers: Knowledge, Joy, Continence, Endurance, Justice, Generosity, Truth and with Truth comes the Good, accompanied by Life and Light, which drive out the remaining Punishments; the Decade of the Powers thus destroys the Dodecade of the

Punishments. The twelve Punishments represent the twelve signs of the zodiac which oppress man while he is still material and influenced by matter, and thus represent the influence of the stars. Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 29. *The Mind to Hermes* (*Corpus Hermeticum* 11) discusses the Egyptian reflection of the universe in the Mind and *Hermes Trismegistus to Tat on the Common Intellect* (*Corpus Hermeticum* 12) discusses the Egyptian philosophy of man and of nature. Both apply optimistic gnosis and present almost a Stoic pantheist vision of the universe. The latter strongly reemphasizes the "Egyptian" natural philosophy on the divinity, eternity, and life of the world and of matter. *Ibid.*, pp. 31, 33, 34.

<sup>57</sup>Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, pp. 21-2; Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 17. The Renaissance syncretists generally accepted the antiquity of the *Hermetica* although they sometimes doubted the specific attribution of the works to Hermes Trismegistus, whom had early been associated with the Egyptian God-king, Thoth, mentioned by Plato. *Phaedrus* 274c-275b; *Philebus* 18b-d. Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 18.

<sup>58</sup>Although Diodorus specifically links these rites with Dionysius, Orpheus was nonetheless considered the source of all esoteric Greek religion. Proclus notes in his *Theologia Platonica* 1.6, "All the Greeks' theology is the offspring of the Orphic mystical doctrine." The Pythagoreans are an especially important sect connected with Orpheus. Iamblichus, in *Vita Pythagorae*, and Proclus after him, asserted that Pythagoras was taught by the disciples of Orpheus that numerical proportions dictate the structure of all things, and that Plato, in turn, learned this from Pythagoras. Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 22.

<sup>59</sup>The *Orphica* also derives from two other sources, both of which are not relevant here: 1) Orphic Hymns, of which there are at least 24 manuscripts, mostly from the fifteenth century but none earlier, and the first of which appears to have been brought from Constantinople by Giovanni Aurispa in 1424. These Hymns are not quoted by ancient authors and appear to have come from the second or third century A.D. They do not specifically contain Orphic content, but are thought by modern scholars to be authentic examples of hymns used in certain religious sects. Similar to other Hellenistic hymns, they largely comprise strings of epithets. 2) The *Argonautica*. This poem of the late fourth century A.D. derives largely from the *Argonautica* of Apollonius of Rhodes. Although the Hymns have no specific value to the Christian or Neoplatonist, their nebulous content make them suitable for creative, Proclus-like interpretations. A good example is Ficino's commentary on the *Hymn to Nature*, found in a letter to Germain de Ganay in Ficino's translation of Athenagoras' *De Resurrectione* (Paris, 1498). Reprinted by Kristeller, "The Scholastic Background of Marsilio Ficino," in *Traditio* 2 (1944): 257. Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 16. The *Argonautica* was relevant mainly for passages in which Orpheus sings short cosmogonies and at one point mentions that he had traveled to Egypt (*Orph. Arg.*, 1.419; cf. Apollonius Rhod., *Arg.*, 1.492). Only in the fifteenth century did these texts become known to Western Europe. The primary Orphic fragments in group 1 became easily accessible with George of Trebizond's 1470 Latin translation of Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica*. Although the Hymns and *Argonautica* were not published until 1500, Ficino first translated the Hymns in 1462 and often cites them in his works. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-6. Renaissance scholars knew that a number of the Orphic poems came from widely different times and from the *Suidas Lexicon* that many authors wrote under the pseudo-name Orpheus. Renaissance syncretists rarely discussed the origin of Orphic fragments; they assumed that the *Orphica* came from authentic sacred works of an ancient religious tradition even if Orpheus was not the author. *Ibid.*, pp. 16-7. Leonardo Bruni, about 1420, and Gian-Francesco Pico, in 1496, both recall Aristotle's denial that Orpheus was the originator of the *Orphica* and that he even existed to begin with. Cf. Cicero, *De natura deorum* 1.38.

<sup>60</sup>*Opera*, p. 768. Hankins, *Plato* 2:460.

<sup>61</sup>*Opera*, p. 768. "Arabi" was a mistranslation for *Ἡρσσαι* from Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* I.1 by Traversari, whom Ficino undoubtedly followed here. Ficino takes the pagan aspect of this tradition from the first Book of Diogenes Laertius, which he knew in Traversari's translation; he makes the connection between Hilary of Poitiers and St. Augustine through Augustine's *De Trinitate*; and the Pseudo-Dionysius was already a well-established figure in the early Christian tradition. It is strange that Ficino makes no mention here of either Orpheus or Zoroaster considering the general Renaissance assumption that earlier means better. Hankins, *Plato* 2:460 and n. 3.

<sup>62</sup>Hankins, *Plato* 2:461-62.

<sup>63</sup>*Opera*, p. 612. In Hankins, *Plato* 2:463 n. 10. Ficino states, "Those philosophers I have just mentioned [Heraclitus, Empedocles, Pythagoras, Plato] had learnt from Mercurius Trismegistus [*Pimander* 1.6-8], the wisest of all the Egyptians, that God is the supreme source and light within whom shine the models of all things, which they call ideas." *Letters* 1:42, 206, letter 7, n. 3. Ficino is referring to the ideas developed by Plato in the *Republic* 5.476 seq., *Timaeus* 28 seq. The substance of this letter derives from Plato's *Phaedrus* 244-56, and *Phaedo* 81-3, 66-8. *Ibid.* 1:206, letter 7, n. 4.

<sup>64</sup>Ficino himself notes in his dedication to Lorenzo de' Medici of his epitome and commentaries on Plotinus, *Opera*, p. 1537, the impetus given to Greek studies with the arrival of Gemistus Pletho and other Byzantine scholars to the Council of Florence, and that Cosimo had commissioned him to translate the Greek philosophies infiltrating the West from Byzantium. Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 13.

<sup>65</sup>Ficino translated these first fourteen dialogues of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and entitled his translation *Pimander*, which was actually the title of the first dialogue. Ficino did not translate the *Definitiones* since they were missing in the first Greek manuscript of the *Hermetica* brought to Florence in 1460; they were translated by Lazarelli and printed in Champier's *Liber de Quadruplici Vita* (Lyons, 1507). Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 17. Yates says that this manuscript of the *Corpus Hermeticum* contained fourteen of the fifteen manuscripts, with only the last one missing. *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 12. Ficino's Latin translation of the *Pimander* was published in 1471.

<sup>66</sup>Hankins, *Plato* 2:462-63 and Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, pp. 14-5

<sup>67</sup>Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 14. In his commentary on the *Pimander*, Ficino established several parallels between this "Egyptian Genesis" and the Mosaic Genesis. Moses describes a darkness over the abyss and the spirit of God looking out over the waters; Hermes sees a darkness and the World of God heating the Moist Nature. Moses says creation is by the word of God; Hermes equates the word with the Logos or Son of God. Both portray man as having been made in the image of God, both exhort a command to the species to be fruitful and multiply, and both describe how man may regain immortality. *Opera*, p. 1850. In Stephen A. McKnight, *The Modern Age and the Recovery of Ancient Wisdom: A Reconsideration of Historical Consciousness, 1450-1650* (Columbia, Mo., 1991), pp. 36-7.

<sup>68</sup>*Argumentum to Pimander*, *Opera*, p. 1836. In Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, p. xlvi.

<sup>69</sup>Wayne Shumaker, *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance: A Study in Intellectual Patterns* (Berkeley, 1972), p. 202.

<sup>70</sup>*Argumentum to Pimander*, *Opera*, p. 1836. In Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, p. xlvi. Ficino later amended his continuum, placing Zoroaster ahead of Hermes and eliminating Philolaus, but he maintained a strong conception of a theological genealogy, as would other European intellectuals for the next two centuries. *Opera*, p. 1836. Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, p. xlvi; cf. Marsilio Ficino, *Commentarium in Philebum Platonis de Summo bono*, ed. and trans. by Michael J.B. Allen as *Marsilio Ficino: The Philebus Commentary* (Berkeley, 1975; repr. 1979), pp. 50-1, 110-11.

<sup>71</sup>*Argumentum to Pimander*, *Opera*, p. 1836, in Shumaker, *Occult Sciences*, p. 203.

<sup>72</sup>Shumaker, *Occult Sciences*, p. 204.

<sup>73</sup>For example, Ficino states in relation to the Ideas, "But as the ancient theologians said---those whom Plato followed, Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Aglaophemus, Pythagoras---the vain belief in many gods arose universally from the many names of the Ideas. But the Christian theologians, Dionysius the Areopagite and St. Augustine, also maintain that the Ideas must be thus accepted as true and that they were so accepted by Plato. Arguments selected from Plato's books, which I'll bring in later, will prove it." *Philebus Commentary* 17, in Allen, *Philebus*, p. 180. Ficino later states in Chapter 26 that, with the splendor of light, God's ray "reveals to all those who desire it the clarity of truth. Therefore, the ancient theologians, Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Aglaophemus, Pythagoras, since they brought themselves as near as possible to God's ray by releasing their souls, and since they examined by the light of that ray all things by uniting and dividing through the one and the many, they too were made to participate in the truth." *Ibid.*, p. 246. See also the letter Ficino wrote to Cavalcanti at about the same time (at least after 1467), *Opera*, p. 634. However, it is in a second letter Ficino writes to Cavalcanti

(as a preface to his translation of two Platonic *opuscula*) that Ficino may actually have initiated the genealogy with Zoroaster as the first *theologus*. Incidentally, in this letter, he ends the golden chain not with Plato but with Plato's students Dion of Syracuse and Xenocrates. *Opera*, p. 1945.

<sup>74</sup>*Opera*, p. 386; cf. *Opera*, pp. 25, 156, 268, 854, 1836. Translated in Charles B. Schmitt, "Perennial Philosophy: Steuco to Leibniz," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27 (1966): 505-532, reprinted in his *Studies in Renaissance Philosophy and Science* (London, 1981): Section I at 508. See also *Opera*, p. 1, in which the Druids are mentioned, and *Opera*, pp. 871-2 in which the list extends to Plotinus and Ficino himself. In works following the *Theologia Platonica*, Ficino was to repeat this genealogy on numerous occasions with some emendations, but Hermes always either came first, second only to Zoroaster (whom Pletho favored as the first *priscus theologus*), or concurrent with Zoroaster. In his preface to the Commentary on Plotinus, Ficino states that the ancient theology began concurrently with Zoroaster among the Persians and Mercurius among the Egyptians, and continued with Orpheus, Aglaophemus, Pythagoras, and Plato. *Opera*, p. 1537. Although Pletho saw Zoroaster as the originator of the ancient theology, and included different figures in his genealogy, he and Ficino both eventually reached and included Pythagoras and Plato. Pletho's view can be better ascertained from his commentary on Plato's *Laws* and his replies to Scholarios. Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 15. Pletho strongly believed Zoroaster wrote the *Chaldean Oracles*, forgeries dating from the second century A.D. Since Ficino's views on the *Hermetica* corresponded to those of Pletho, and since Hermes and Zoroaster were roughly contemporaries, Ficino was able to "mingle the waters of these two pristine founts" and thus reconcile his position with that of Pletho. *Ibid.*, p. 18 and n. 1. A general list, but one more complete than any actually found, might run (with textless theologians in parentheses): (Adam, Enoch, Abraham, Noah), Zoroaster, Moses, Hermes Trismegistus, (the Brahmins, the Druids), David, Orpheus, Pythagoras, Plato, the Sibyls, with its ultimate fruition in the New Testament, at which point, because the *prisca theologia* is oriented toward a Christian-Platonic reconciliation, it continues with Pseudo-Dionysius and the Neoplatonists. Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 20.

<sup>75</sup>*De Christiana religione*, *Opera*, p. 25. In Tigerstedt, *Neoplatonic*, p. 25.

<sup>76</sup>*Opera*, p. 386. In *PMF*, p. 26. In his *Commentary* on the *Parmenides*, 38, Ficino mentions Plutarch as another one of the "probatissimi Platonici," *Opera*, p. 1155. In his *Commentary* on the *Timaeus*, 13, Ficino mentions Plutarch, Severus, and Atticus. *Opera*, p. 1443. E.N. Tigerstedt, *The Decline and Fall of the Neoplatonic Interpretation of Plato: An Outline and Some Observations* (Helsinki, 1974), p. 82n41.

<sup>77</sup>*Opera*, pp. 1939ff. Michael Psellus (1018-78), a Byzantine Platonist, provided an important impetus to the *prisca theologia* tradition. He emphasized the compatibility of the *prisca theologia* with Christianity, and he even used the Hermetic Orphic, and Neoplatonic writings to explicate the Scriptures. Schmitt, "Perennial Philosophy," p. 509.

<sup>78</sup>Cf. *Opera*, p. 1171 (not preserved).

<sup>79</sup>*Opera*, p. 899, *Platonem redolent*. Klibansky adds that Ficino quotes Avencebrol (Solomon ibn Gabirol) as a Platonist, and in doing so, imitates the judgment of both Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas. Cf. Albertus Magnus, *Summa Theologica* II tr. I q. 4, *Opera* 6, p. 63; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I q. 115 a. I, *Opera* 5, p. 538; Ficino, *Theologia Platonica* 13.4, *Opera*, p. 302; 17.2, *Opera*, p. 387. Avicenna, "the prince of Arabic theologians," is eulogized by Ficino as a "sage" or even as "divine." He mentions Avicenna as agreeing with Plato in *Theologia Platonica* 12.1, *Opera*, p. 265; 15.2, *Opera*, p. 333; 18.9, *Opera*, p. 416; *Tract. de Deo et anima vulgaris* in *Supplementum Ficinianum* 2:132. Raymond Klibansky, *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition During the Middle Ages* (London, 1939), reissued together with his *Plato's Parmenides in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, and accompanied by a new preface and four supplementary chapters (Millwood, 1981), pp. 42 and n. 3, 43 and n. 1. Other authorities who cite or recognize Hermetic works include Hugh of St. Victor (the *Didascalicon*), Roger Bacon, Daniel of Morley, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, William of Auvergne, and *Picatrix* (translated from Arabic into Spanish in 1256 by order of Alphonso the Wise). John G. Burke, "Hermetism as a Renaissance World View," in *The Darker Vision of the Renaissance*, edited by Robert S. Kinsman (Berkeley, 1974): 95-117 at 98; cf. Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 8 vols. (New York, 1923-1958), 2:813.

<sup>80</sup>*Opera*, pp. 1355f; *Supplementum Ficinianum* 1:184 and 2:257.

<sup>81</sup>*Opera*, pp. 327, 1049. In *PMF*, p. 26.

<sup>82</sup>*Opera*, pp. 616f, 899; cf. *Supplementum Ficinianum* 1:35. Klibansky notes that in a 1489 letter to his friend Martin Prenninger, then Chancellor to the Bishop of Constance, Ficino gave an account of his own works and described the heritage of Latin Platonism as he saw it. Beginning with Pseudo-Dionysius and St. Augustine, Ficino continues through Boethius, Apuleius, Chalcidius, Macrobius and the Latin Proclus, and includes the medieval thinkers Avicenna (Solomon ibn Gabirol), "Alfarabi De causis", Henry of Ghent, Avicenna, and Duns Scotus, and concludes with to Bessarion and Cusanus in his own day. Klibansky, *Platonic Tradition*, p. 26.

<sup>83</sup>The Ancient Theologians either derive successively or were said to have visited Egypt and learned Mosaic doctrine, or more commonly, both. Orpheus, for example, considered the oldest Greek, had been to Egypt and became the source for Pythagoras, Plato, etc., but these each also studied in Egypt and were independently influenced by Zoroaster and Hermes; thus the Tradition had a number of channels which operated simultaneously. Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 20.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 20-1. There was thought to be no problem and no need to illustrate that Orpheus and the Greeks were younger.

<sup>85</sup>Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 18.39.

<sup>86</sup>Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 25.

<sup>87</sup>*Theologia Platonica*, 8.1, *Opera*, p. 400. In *PMF*, p. 26.

<sup>88</sup>*Theologia Platonica*, 8.1, *Opera*, p. 400.

<sup>89</sup>See *Opera*, pp. 25, 156, 268, and 386.

<sup>90</sup>Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 30.1.9; Lactantius, *Div. inst.* 4.2.4; Aeneas Gazaeus, *Theophr.*, ed. Colonna, p. 8 (a text Ficino owned and annotated); Proclus, *In Remp.*; Olympiodorus, *In Alcibiades I* 2.138-141; Anon. *Proleg.* 6.9-22. Hankins, *Plato* 2:464 n. 15.

<sup>91</sup>See esp. Ficino's letter to Johannes Pannonius, *Opera*, p. 871, the Preface to Plotinus, *Opera*, p. 1537, and the letter to Jacobus Rondonus, *Opera*, p. 956. Hankins, *Plato* 2:464 n. 18.

<sup>92</sup>See *De Christiana religione*, *Opera*, p. 4. Hankins, *Plato* 2:464.

<sup>93</sup>Allen, *Philebus*, p. 50.

<sup>94</sup>Although the "facts" of the Hermetic tradition did not always seem consistent, Ficino never appears to have questioned whether the texts were forgeries. It is true that he could not have been aware of the historical and critical problems such as the potential mixture of Jewish and Graeco-Roman influences in the writings, the fact that the writings are composites from different authors writing at different times, and that even the individual treatises had been consolidated under varying authorship. But what is more important is that Ficino never really appeared interested in such possibilities to begin with. Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 21.

<sup>95</sup>*PMF*, p. 25.

<sup>96</sup>Plutarch, *De animae procreatione in Timaeo*, 33.1030A-B. A standard Latin translation reads, "Prisci porro theologi qui erant philosophorum vetustissimi. . ."

<sup>97</sup>Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae*, I, prologue.

<sup>98</sup>Celsus rejects Moses and the Jews as among the wise nations of the past, but he asserts "[Again, when he makes a list of] ancient and wise men who were of service to their contemporaries and to posterity by their writings, Linus, Musaeus, Orpheus, Pherecydes, Zoroaster the Persian and Pythagoras understood these doctrines, and their opinions were put down in books and are preserved to this day." *Alethes Logos*, 1.16b. Translated in John G. Gager, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism* (New York, 1972), p. 96.

<sup>99</sup>Cicero, *Academia*, 7: "quam nos ut scis probamus." In *De Legibus* 1.39, Cicero states more explicitly, "Let us implore the Academy which causes difficulties in all these discussion, I mean the new one founded by Arcesilaus and Carneades, to be silent, for if we were to attack those doctrines which we seem so skilfully to have arranged and constructed, it would wreak too great a destruction. Yet I would like to placate this school, and I do not dare to ignore them." In Stephen Gersh, *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism: The Latin Tradition*, 2 vols (Notre Dame, 1986) 1:67-8. Gersh elaborates more fully on Cicero's Platonic tendencies, pp. 67-71.

<sup>100</sup>Porphyry, *Abst.* 2.47.1. Porphyry associates "the theologians" with "the Egyptian," who is Hermes Trismegistus.

<sup>101</sup>Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, 1-2. Iamblichus opens this work by announcing, "Hermes, the god who presides over learning, has for long been rightly regarded as common to all priests: he who presides over true knowledge about the gods is one and the same, whatever the circumstances. It was to him that our ancestors too dedicated the fruits of their wisdom, by placing all their own writings under his name." *De mysteriis*, 1.1.1-2. Quoted in Fowden, *Hermes*, p. 136.

<sup>102</sup>Numenius apud Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.22, and Eusebius, *Praep. evan.*, 2.10.14. In Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 12. Ficino used this evidence to bolster his conviction that Plato had come into contact with the Pentateuch. See particularly Ficino's letter entitled "Concordia Mosis et Platonis," *Opera*, pp. 866-67. In Schmitt, "Perennial Philosophy," p. 508 and n. 18.

<sup>103</sup>Marinus, *Vita Procli*, 38; cf. Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, ed. E.R. Dodds (Oxford, 1933), xxii-xxiii. Other pagans who mention Hermes as a theologian include Greg. Naz., *or.* 28.4; Amm. Marc. 16.5.5, associating the "teachings of the theologians" with Mercury (Hermes); Ioh. Lyd., *Mens.* 4.53,64, recording various teachings of the "theologian" Hermes concerning the gods; and various later Byzantine writers. Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 95 n. 2.

<sup>104</sup>*On Prescription Against Heretics* 7. In Hugh T. Kerr, *The First Systematic Theologian: Origen of Alexandria* (Princeton, 1958), pp. 11-2.

<sup>105</sup>Klibansky, *Platonic Tradition*, p. 21.

<sup>106</sup>Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 2.

<sup>107</sup>Almost immediately upon its conception, Christianity developed Platonic notions. The main sources of pagan Antiquity which passed on a knowledge of Plato come from brief references to Plato in Cicero's writings, a few passages in Seneca's letters, especially those ideas presented in the 58th and the 65th, and casual remarks in his treatises, evidence in Aulus Gellius' *Noctes Atticae* and Valerius Maximus' collection of famous facts and sayings, Apuleius' *De Platone et eius dogmate* and *De Deo Socratis*, comments in Macrobius' *Saturnalia*, and especially, his *Commentary on the Somnium Scipionis*, in which he compares the philosophies of Plato and Cicero. Klibansky, *Platonic Tradition*, pp. 22-3. The New Testament itself presents proofs of Christian affinities with Platonism, and even Stoicism. The Johannine Logos finds its origins in the Wisdom Books of the Old Testament and Apocrypha, but it possesses clear connections with the Platonic creative mind and the Stoic immanent divine Logos. St. Paul even quoted at Athens from the Stoic poet Aratus: "For in him we live and move and have our being; as certain also of your poets have said, For we are also his offspring." Acts 17:28; Aratus, *Phaenomena* 1.5. Christians often referred to this text to justify the use of pagan literature. Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 4.

<sup>108</sup>John D. Jones, *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite: The Divine Names and Mystical Theology* (Milwaukee, 1980), p. 5. Jones provides fuller treatment in pp. 1-13.

<sup>109</sup>Klibansky, *Platonic Tradition*, p. 25. In his *Divine Names*, Pseudo-Dionysius reveals this theological approach to the Deity's divine unity: "The writings always celebrate the divinely showing divine names not partially but of the whole, all complete, wholly complete and full divinity. Thus all of these are to be attributed indivisibly, absolutely, wholly, and in an unreserved manner to the entire wholeness of the wholly complete and entire divinity." *Divine Names* 2.1.636C. In Jones, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, p. 27. Jones provides additional details in pp. 27-40.

<sup>110</sup>Burke, "Hermetism as a Renaissance World View," p. 107.

<sup>111</sup>Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 5. Even Stoic influences were integrated into Christianity as a result of forged correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul, and Seneca thus became a crypto-Christian from the fourth to the fifteenth century, and only with Erasmus came a sound rejection of this farce, markedly decreasing its reception from the sixteenth century forward. *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup>Pauline Moffit Watts, "Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Three Renaissance Neoplatonists: Cusanus, Ficino and Pico on Mind and Cosmos," p. 293. In *Supplementum Festivum: Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. James Hankins and John Monfasani and Frederick Purnell, Jr. (Binghamton, 1987): 279-99. In one letter, Ficino asserted that he most valued the Dionysian form of Platonism: "I love Plato in Iamblichus, I admire him in Plotinus, I venerate him in Dionysius." In another

passage, Ficino even declares that he prefers Dionysius to Plato himself: "propter novum veritatis lumen," *Opera*, p. 1924. Tigerstedt, *Neoplatonic*, pp. 24 and 86n189.

<sup>113</sup>*De Christiana religione*, 22, *Opera*, p. 25; *Theologia Platonica*, 1.5 and 13.3, *Opera*, pp. 89, 270; *Epistle 12* to Jacopo Rondoni, *Opera*, p. 956; and in the *Commentary on Plotinus*, *Opera*, p. 1689. He adds that he frequently suspects that Platonists earlier than Plotinus, such as Ammonius and Numenius, had also studied Dionysius' teachings, before they "through an unknown calamity" were hidden from the Church. *Epistle 11* to F. Pierleone, *Opera*, p. 925. Tigerstedt, *Neoplatonic*, pp. 24 and 86n188, n190.

<sup>114</sup>E.g. *Epistula ad Germanum Ganaiensem* (*Epistle 12*), *Opera*, p. 960; In *Dionysium Areopagitam Argumentum*, *Opera*, p. 1013; *Epistle 10*, *Opera*, pp. 920f; *De Christiana religione* 30, *Opera*, p. 55; *De Sole*, proem, *Opera*, p. 965. In Klibansky, *Platonic Tradition*, p. 42 and n. 2.

<sup>115</sup>For Philo, cf. *Theologia Platonica* 14.10; *Epistle 8*, *Opera*, p. 325; *Epistle 70*. For Origen, *De voluptate* 4, *Opera*, p. 994. For Plethon, *Theologia Platonica* 15.1; in *Enneads* 2.1.3, *Opera*, pp. 327, 1596. For Varro, Eusebius, and Cyrillus, *Epistle 4*, *Opera*, p. 769. In Klibansky, *Platonic Tradition*, p. 43 and n. 4.

<sup>116</sup>In Kerr, *Systematic Theologian*, p. 13. Origen does emphasize the potential perils involved in this, however. He adds, "I may tell you from my experience, that not many take from Egypt only the useful, and go away and use it for the service of God. . . . These are they who, from their Greek studies, produce heretical notions, and set them up, like the golden calf, in Bethel, which signifies 'God's house.'" *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>117</sup>Klibansky, *Platonic Tradition*, pp. 23-4.

<sup>118</sup>Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 27.

<sup>119</sup>Augustine, *Confessions* 7.9.

<sup>120</sup>Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 8.10. Augustine says this in reference to Romans 1:18-20: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened." Although this passage suggests that pagans are inexcusable, if it is taken in isolation and interpreted liberally, an argument can be made that some pagan philosophers were saved by at least having properly read the Bible, and thus, that we can profit by studying their works. This is exactly how Augustine interpreted it in his *De Civitate Dei*. Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 9.

<sup>121</sup>Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 8.9. He also advocates Platonism in chapter 10.

<sup>122</sup>*Theologia Platonica* 11.6, *Opera*, p. 258. In Klibansky, *Platonic Tradition*, p. 42.

<sup>123</sup>*Theologia Platonica* 1. In Trinkaus, *Image and Likeness* 2:465.

<sup>124</sup>Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 8.29.

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*, 8.23.

<sup>126</sup>Cf. Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 11.

<sup>127</sup>Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* 2.40. In Walker, *Ancient Theology*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>128</sup>Augustine, *Retractiones* 1.1 in reference to his *Contra Academicos*. Augustine retracts nothing in his *Confessions* or *De Doctrina Christiana*. Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 10.

<sup>129</sup>Augustine, *Contra Julianum* 4.3.

<sup>130</sup>Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 8.23-25; quoting from *Asclepius*, 23, 24, 37. Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 9.

<sup>131</sup>Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 8.23; quotation from Romans 1:21. Augustine then goes on to praise a true prophet, Isaiah, who had prophesied that "the idols of Egypt shall be moved at His presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of her." Isaiah 19:1.

<sup>132</sup>Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 5.5. In Kerr, *Systematic Theologian*, p. 12.

- <sup>133</sup>Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 6.4, 35-38. In Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 8.
- <sup>134</sup>Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 12.
- <sup>135</sup>Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 19.
- <sup>136</sup>Lactantius, *De Ira Dei* 11. In Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 7.
- <sup>137</sup>Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 1.6, trans. Sister Mary Francis McDonald as *The Divine Institutes: Books I-VII*. In *The Fathers of the Church Series*, vol. 49 (Washington, 1964): 32. Cf. Isidore, *Origines* 8.11.49; cf. Pseudo-Apuleius, *Asclepius* 20. The "many books" likely includes those Hermetic texts that we now possess today since Lactantius quotes several times from some of the treatises in the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Asclepius*. Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, pp. 6-7.
- <sup>138</sup>Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 1.6.4 ("dominus," "pater"); *Epit.* 4.4. Exact parallels at *Corpus Hermeticum* 5.2, 13.21; *Asclepius* 20, 22, 23, 26, 29. Fowden, *Hermes*, p. 205 and n. 56.
- <sup>139</sup>Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 1.7.2, 4.13.2; 4.8.5; *Epit.* 4.4. This vocabulary is said to be Hermetic only by Lactantius and Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, 8.2.262, who also quotes Hermes to the effect that God is one; but the idea is nonetheless well represented in the *Hermetica*. Fowden, *Hermes*, p. 205 and n. 57.
- <sup>140</sup>Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 1.6.4-5; *Epit.* 4.4. The idea is paralleled at *Corpus Hermeticum* 5.10, *Asclepius* 20. Fowden, *Hermes*, p. 205-06 and n. 58.
- <sup>141</sup>*Asclepius* 26; Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 4.6.9; cf. 7.18.4.
- <sup>142</sup>Lactantius, *Epit.* 37.4-5; *Divine Institutiones* 4.6.4; cf. *Asclepius* 8.
- <sup>143</sup>Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 6.11. In Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 7. I cannot find this passage in the place where Yates locates it.
- <sup>144</sup>Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 1.6; 4.6; 8.18.
- <sup>145</sup>Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 4.6, trans. MacDonald, *Divine Institutions*, p. 256. Lactantius is quoting from *Asclepius* 8. *The Perfect Word*, or *Sermo Perfectus*, is an accurate translation of the original Greek title of the *Asclepius*. The *Asclepius* receives sanctification in this passage since it provides a prophecy concerning the Son of God. Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 8.
- <sup>146</sup>Having been convinced of the authenticity of the *Asclepius*, Ficino undoubtedly believed that the *Asclepius* prophecy that the oldest Egyptian religion would eventually end foreshadowed the New Testament Revelations. Hermes tells his disciple, *Asclepius*: "In that hour, weary of life, men will no longer regard the world as the worthy object of their admiration and reverence. This All, which is a good thing, the best that can be seen in the past, the present, and the future, will be in danger of perishing; men will esteem it a burden; and thenceforward this whole of the universe will be despised and no longer cherished, this incomparable work of God, glorious construction, all-good creation made up of an infinite diversity of forms, instrument of the will of God who, without envy, lavishes his favor upon his work, in which is assembled in one all, in a harmonious diversity, all that can be seen which is worthy of reverence, praise and love." Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, pp. 5-6.
- <sup>147</sup>Impressed by Ficino's conviction, an early Ficinian biographer states that Ficino "held it as a secure and firm opinion that the philosophy of Plato took its origin from that of Mercurius, whose teachings seemed to him closer to the doctrine of Orpheus and in certain ways to our own Theology (that is, to Christianity) than those of Pythagoras." *Vita di Ficino*, published from a manuscript of circa 1591 in Marcel, p. 716. Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, pp. 15-6.
- <sup>148</sup>*Opera*, p. 29; *De Christiana religione* 25. In Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 16.
- <sup>149</sup>Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 16.
- <sup>150</sup>*Opera*, p. 386; cf. *Opera*, p. 871. In *PMF*, p. 26.
- <sup>151</sup>Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 29; cf. *PMF*, p. 25. The *Testament*, or *Palinode*, is one of the most often-quoted Orphic fragment for discussions of monotheism. The *Palinode* is now often thought to be a Jewish forgery and it consists of several versions in Pseudo-Justin, Clement, Eusebius, and Cyril. Eusebius asserts that his version comes from Aristobulus, which would date it to the second century A.D., but these are thought to be third century forgeries. The Greek Fathers,



especially Eusebius, interpret it as a recantation in which Orpheus denounces his earlier polytheism after having traveled to Egypt and read the Mosaic writings. Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* 5.14) illuminates the parallels between the *Palinode* and the Old Testament God of Isaiah 66:1, 64:1 and Deuteronomy 32:39. Also in his *Stromata*, Clement cites two lines (22-4) from Aristobulus' version of the Orphic *Palinode*, "No mortal could ever see the lord, except a single offshoot of the ancient race of the Chaldaeans," and asserts that this refers to Abraham or Isaac. Ficino, too, cites these lines, *Opera*, p. 29, and suggests that they refer to Enoch, Abraham, or Moses.

<sup>152</sup>*Asclepius* 1, trans. Scarborough, "Hermetic and Related Texts," p. 25.

<sup>153</sup>Cf. *Opera*, p. 883. Early on, Ficino ran into opposition in his endeavor to disseminate Platonic thought and all of its trimmings. His enthusiasm for Plato was too great for his scholastic mentor and friend of Lorenzo Pisano, the Florentine cleric Antonio degli Agli. In Agli's *De mystica statera* of about 1455, Agli tells Ficino to adhere to the "mystical balance" of divine law and to "leave Plato and others of his sort" behind. The Ficino created by Agli defends his studies: "At present I am going through certain profane books, not that I may become acquainted with falsehoods but that I may with greater authority and eloquence repel those who are becoming acquainted with them." Naples, Bibl. Naz., cod. VIII F 9, fol. 33. Ficino does not appear to be alluding here to the traditional Christian practice of answering pagan falsehoods with Christian truths. Rather, he appears to mean that he wishes to answer pagan falsehoods with pagan truths. Field, *Platonic Academy*, p. 180.

<sup>154</sup>*Opera*, p. 854. In Schmitt, "Perennial Philosophy," p. 509.

<sup>155</sup>Trinkaus, *Image and Likeness* 2:465. Petrarch and other humanists deliberately or unintentionally followed a largely fourteenth-century nominalist approach in which they supported anti-realist conclusions against the philosophical demonstration of religious truth and supported fideism. Ficino, however, rejected those whose position was to separate the studies of philosophy and religion. They undoubtedly included Averroes and natural philosophers, the former of whom Ficino wrote against at length in his well-known Book 15 of the *Theologia Platonica*. *Ibid.*, 2:466.

<sup>156</sup>*Opera*, pp. 871f. The quoted passage is repeated almost verbatim in Ficino's Preface to his translation of Plotinus, *Opera*, p. 1537. This letter to Pannonius must be dated 1484. *PMF*, pp. 28-9.

<sup>157</sup>While we call it the "Renaissance," we need to understand Ficino's view of his own historical setting and understanding of the "Renaissance of Platonism." *PMF*, p. 20. Ficino's conception of "rebirth" derives from a certain religious medieval notion of a personal and individual regeneration, which only later was applied to the arts and social institutions, and which refers not to the mere imitation of a former way of life, but the recommencing of that life on a higher plane. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-2. Ficino's idea of rebirth deals in part with a personal and individual regeneration, *Opera*, pp. 611, 1525, as well as a civic regeneration, *Opera*, pp. 559, 1031. In *PMF*, p. 22. Although neither the concept of religious rebirth nor civic rebirth are central to his thought, Ficino does appear to have recognized the historical significance of a general regeneration in his contemporary society and even appraises his works based on this understanding. Most revealing, in a letter to Paulus Middleburgensis, is Ficino's indication that the resurrection of Platonic philosophy is an important ingredient in the general revival of the arts: "Our century [he says], like a golden age, restored to light the liberal arts that were nearly extinct: grammar, poetry, rhetoric, painting, sculpture, architecture, music, the ancient performance of songs with the Orphic lyre, and all that in Florence. And accomplishing what had been revered among the ancients, but almost forgotten since, it united wisdom with eloquence and prudence with military arts as exemplified. . . particularly in Frederic, Duke of Urbino. . . . And in you, oh, Paul, it seems to have perfected astronomy. And in Florence it restored the Platonic doctrine from darkness to light." *Opera*, p. 944. In *PMF*, pp. 22-3. Ficino undoubtedly believes he is doing for Platonism what Giotto had done for painting and Dante for poetry. *Ibid.*, p. 23. Indeed, through his translations and commentaries, Ficino did for Plato, Plotinus, and other ancient philosophers what humanist did for other ancient Greek orators, poets, and historians.

<sup>158</sup>*Opera*, p. 493. In *PMF*, p. 22.

<sup>159</sup>*Opera*, pp. 1537, 948, 918.

<sup>160</sup>*Opera*, p. 909.

<sup>161</sup>*Opera*, p. 310; cf. *Opera*, p. 918 for allegorical explanation of the name Eurydice. In *PMF*, p. 22.

<sup>162</sup>Cf. *Opera*, pp. 1320f.

<sup>163</sup>So important for Ficino is the philosophy of Plato and the ancient tradition behind it that "all those who desire to taste of the most delicious waters of wisdom must drink from that perennial fountain (*hunc. . . perennem fontem*)."  
*Opera*, p. 1945. In Schmitt, "Perennial Philosophy," p. 511.

<sup>164</sup>Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 12.

<sup>165</sup>*Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, p. 237.

<sup>166</sup>*Opera*, pp. 871f. The quoted passage is repeated almost verbatim in Ficino's Preface to his translation of Plotinus, *Opera*, p. 1537, and this letter to Pannonius must be dated 1484. Incidentally, the Aristotelian division into Alexandrists and Averroists must belong to this era, which dilutes the argument that Pomponazzi, who was born in 1462, made the division. In *PMF*, pp. 28-9.

<sup>167</sup>Near the end of his career, Ficino drastically altered his position toward the Peripatetics. In a letter to Diacceto in July of 1493 he noted, "Those who think that the Peripatetic discipline is contrary to the Platonic are totally wrong. For a road cannot be contrary to its destination. Now whoever rightly considers it will find that Peripatetic doctrine is the road to Platonic wisdom, that *naturalia* lead us to *divina*; thus it was established that no one ever be admitted to the more hidden mysteries of Plato unless he be first initiated in the Peripatetic disciplines." *Opera*, p. 952. Translated in Frederick Purnell, Jr., "The Theme of Philosophic Concord and the Sources of Ficino's Platonism," in *Marsilio Ficino e il Ritorno di Platone Studi e documenti*, edited by Giancarlo Gargagnini, 2 vols (Florence, 1986) 2:397-415 at 411. The same contrast between natural philosophy and *sapientia*, between *naturalia* and *divina*, occurs in a 1482 note to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, which also emphasizes the harmonious character of Platonism and Aristotelianism: "For the Peripatetics most diligently discuss with how much reason natural objects have been everywhere ordered; while the Platonists beyond this show how much we owe to Him who ordered these with number, weight and measure. Thus the former easily render us learned (*doctos*) while the latter in addition make us wise (*sapientes*) and blessed." *Opera*, p. 858; for the date, December 20, 1482, see Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum* 1:34. See also Ficino's comments in a letter to Ermolao Barbaro, *Opera*, p. 869. Purnell, "Philosophic Concord," p. 412 and n. 36.

<sup>168</sup>*Opera*, p. 78. In *PMF*, p. 204. The unique character of a philosophical system is difficult to understand through its conception of Being but is easier to understand through how it views the nature of man and his place in the universe. Plato first applied the speculative thought of the pre-Socratics to the human condition, something which only poets and theologians had addressed earlier. He defined man ultimately through his soul, which Plato viewed as a substantial entity in a definite relation to intelligible Being. This fundamental approach to psychology persisted until challenged and largely undermined by Kant and Hume. According to Kant, "soul" loses its metaphysical significance since the category "substance" only applies to objects of experience. Kant thus redefined "soul" as a "transcendental idea" and sought to redefine the essence of human nature through concepts such as "spirit," "consciousness," and "existence," which are still debatable definitions. Regardless, the pre-eighteenth-century philosophical conception of Soul remains uniquely defined by two points held in complete unity: the concrete reality on which his experience and contemplation were focused and the conceptual manner through which he interpreted and developed his perceptions. In *PMF*, p. 203.

<sup>169</sup>Trinkaus, *Image and Likeness* 2:464.

<sup>170</sup>*Theologia Platonica* 1. In Trinkaus, *Image and Likeness* 2:464-65.

<sup>171</sup>*Theologia Platonica*. In Trinkaus, *Image and Likeness* 2:465.

<sup>172</sup>Augustine first offered the harmonizing doctrine of a Christian Platonism, and Ficino often cites the authority of Augustine on this matter. *Opera*, pp. 78, 855. In *PMF*, p. 204. A comparison of the sublime dialogue of the Soul with God in Augustine's *Confessions* and *Soliloquia* with Ficino's fundamental position as well as particular works like the theological conversation between the Soul and God, *Opera*, p. 609, and the theological prayer to God, *Opera*, p. 665, shows the great influence Augustine held over Ficino. In *PMF*, p. 204.

### 3. THE ONTOLOGICAL DILEMMA IN FICINO'S PSYCHOLOGY

As Paul Oskar Kristeller emphatically points out, Ficino based his entire philosophy around his psychology.<sup>1</sup> Ficino, in Books 1-5 of the *Theologia Platonica*, discussed the rational soul as 1) a third essence lying between the corporeal and the divine, 2) an entity linking the sensible and intelligible realms, 3) an immortal entity based on general and compelling abstract considerations, 4) life itself, and 5) the mistress and psychic denominator of the corporeal and the physiological. In Books 6-8, he strove to establish the three-fold function of the soul 6) *in* the body, 7) *through* the body, and 8) *independently* of the body *through itself*. The first involved the vegetative functions of human and all other animate existence: generation, nutrition, and metabolic growth; the second involved the five external senses and the internal images created by these senses; the third involved the pure force of the soul, which seeks out incorporeal entities without using sense impressions or internal images. "Thus you have natural action, sensibility and intelligence" as the three qualities of the human soul in the corporeal body.<sup>2</sup> And whereas most humanists used the immortality and divinity of the Soul to prove the dignity of man, in Books 13-14 of the *Theologia Platonica*, Ficino used the dignity of man---through the human rational soul---to prove the divinity and immortality of the soul. Earlier in this work, Ficino had used more rigorous arguments to prove the soul's immortality. But here, he illustrated that man could comprehend the essence of human existence only through a deep conviction of immortality within himself; otherwise, his efforts would be in vain.<sup>3</sup>

The approaches to Ficino's psychology are numerous. Ficino provided at least four speculative rational proofs for the immortality of the soul and he discussed everything from the ethics to the epistemology of the soul.<sup>4</sup> Of concern here, however, is Ficino's

ontology of the soul, for ultimately, this study seeks to discover how Ficino's use of a quasi-incorporeal spirit in his Hermetic talismanic magic affected the ontological make-up of his psychology.

### **Cosmological Setting for Ficino's Psychological Ontology**

At the core of Ficino's metaphysical psychology was his desire to affirm the soul's immortality through its unique ontological position in the universe. Therefore, Ficino placed the rational soul at the ontological center of the hierarchy of Being, between the realms of the perceptible and intelligible. In doing so, he recognized the soul's privileged position in the cosmos since it embodies the ontological difference between the two realms while fusing a continuous relationship between them.<sup>5</sup> In his 1469 Commentary on the *Symposium*, Ficino initially delegated cosmic Love to this central ontological position<sup>6</sup> His interests quickly evolved toward psychology and the soul's ontological nature, however, so that he had completely replaced cosmic Love with Soul by the time he composed his *Theologia Platonica* in 1474. Ficino's transition from the abstract force of love into the more concrete force of soul illustrated his growing fascination with psychology and its ontological components.

Ficino's ontological approach to the Soul must be preceded by an analysis of the cosmology around which his psychology was based. Ficino largely employed an Aristotelian cosmology in which the earth sits at the immobile center of a hierarchy of celestial and elemental spheres.<sup>7</sup> Ficino had already adopted a form of the Aristotelian hierarchy of Being in his early *Tractatus de Deo, natura, et arte*, written in 1454 or 1455. Here, Ficino applied the Aristotelian notions of *actus purus* and *potentia pura* to present God and matter as the extremes of all existent things, with all other entities constituting a hierarchical order between them.<sup>8</sup>

Ficino's growing attraction to Neoplatonism, however, encouraged him to transform the strict categorical divisions of the Aristotelian hierarchy into a fluid continuum of emanation from the One. Ficino likely began with Plato's *Timaeus*, which presented vague notions of a scientific cosmology.<sup>9</sup> The Neoplatonists, in turn, organized the nebulous suggestions of hierarchy in the *Timaeus* into a coherent scheme of emanation. Plotinus took the concept to its logical conclusion by

suggesting that a completely self-sufficient One has a need to create, which He accomplishes through the act of emanation:

The One is perfect because it seeks for nothing, and possesses nothing, and has need of nothing; and being perfect, it overflows, and thus its superabundance produces an Other.<sup>10</sup> . . . Whenever anything reaches its own perfection, we see that it cannot endure to remain in itself, but generates and produces some other thing. Not only beings having the power of choice, but also those which are by nature incapable of choice, and even inanimate things, send forth as much of themselves as they can. . . . How then should the Most Perfect Being and the First Good remain shut up in itself, as though it were jealous or impotent---itself the potency of all things?. . . Something must therefore be begotten of it.<sup>11</sup>

The generation of the Many from the One must continue until all varieties of being in the descending series have been realized. Thus, to the power of the One we

cannot impute any halt, any limit of jealous grudging; it must move for ever outward until the universe stands accomplished to the ultimate possibility. All, thus, is produced by an inexhaustible power giving its gift to the universe, no part of which it can endure to see without some share in its being. There is, besides, no principle that can prevent anything from partaking, to the extent of its own individual receptivity, in the nature of Good.<sup>12</sup>

The One serves, then, as the first Plotinian hypostasis. Five additional hypostases, which represent the fundamental categories of being, emanate from the One. The Mind is created out of the One. The Universal Soul evolves out of the Mind. And Sense, Nature, and Body generate, respectively, from the Universal Soul so that "the world is a sort of Life stretched out to an immense span, in which each of the parts has its own place in the series, all of them different and yet the whole continuous, and that which precedes never wholly absorbed in that which comes after."<sup>13</sup> Plotinus therefore established the foundation for the Neoplatonic view of cosmology.

Macrobius, in turn, provided a Latin abridgment of the Plotinian doctrine of hierarchy in his early fifth-century *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*. Macrobius' concise description of the hierarchy of Being, which introduced the metaphors of the golden chain and the many mirrors, served as a chief vehicle of the transmission of the Plotinian form of this theory to medieval writers:

Accordingly, since Mind emanates from the Supreme God and Soul from Mind, and Mind, indeed, forms and suffuses all below with life, and since this is the one splendor lighting up everything and visible in all, like a countenance reflected in many mirrors arranged in a row, and since all follow on in continuous succession, degenerating step by step

in their downward course, the close observer will find that from the Supreme God even to the bottommost dregs of the universe there is one tie, binding at every link and never broken. This is the golden chain of Homer which, he tells us, God ordered to hang down from the sky to the earth.<sup>14</sup>

Apart from Albert the Great and Duns Scotus, however, Ficino appears to have been the only scholar, medieval or Renaissance, who directly applied the concept of the golden chain.<sup>15</sup> In his *Commentary on Philebus*, Ficino cited Homer and the "golden chain" as part of the hierarchy of Being:

From the one you come to a united and finite many which is very similar to the one. . . . Now things themselves also proceed out of the one into the intelligence, out of the intelligence into the soul, out of the soul into the nature, out of this into quality, out of quality into matter extended into quantity. . . . Nature's progress stops at this, the sixth link of the golden chain introduced by Homer.<sup>16</sup>

Ficino thus appears to have directly read Macrobius, from whom he extracted the Plotinian notion of hierarchy.<sup>17</sup>

Ficino's cosmology also came largely from Proclus, who developed the concept of emanation even more explicitly in his *Elements of Theology*.<sup>18</sup> Proclus expanded the theory to include the full two-fold cosmic cycle of emanation and ascent back to the original source. He stressed the process of emanation in propositions 25-30 of his *Elements of Theology* in a manner that largely reflected Plotinian principles. But he also stressed the process of reversion and the cycle that it completes. For example, in proposition 33, he stated:

All that proceeds from any principle and reverts upon it has a cyclic activity. For if it reverts upon that principle whence it proceeds, it links its end to its beginning, and the movement is one and continuous, originating from the unmoved and to the unmoved again returning. Thus all things proceed in a circuit, from their causes to their causes again.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, in proposition 146, he asserted:

In any divine procession the end is assimilated to the beginning, maintaining by its reversion thither a circle without beginning and without end. . . . This reversion of the end upon the beginning makes the whole order one and determinate, convergent upon itself and by its convergence revealing unity in multiplicity.<sup>20</sup>

Although Proclus thus provided the underpinning for a substantial portion of Ficino's cosmology, Ficino believed that he copied largely from the Pseudo-Dionysius. Ficino therefore relegated him to a lesser role in his Platonic theology.

Instead, Ficino explicitly used the authority of Pseudo-Dionysius in the development of his cosmology. Using the Areopagite was advantageous to Ficino since Pseudo-Dionysius conveniently followed the Neoplatonic conception of emanation and ascent at the same time that he legitimized its adherence to Christianity through his intimate relation to St. Paul. Ficino often cited Pseudo-Dionysius, who developed the concept of the cosmic cycle of emanation and ascent in his *Divine Names*:

Let us say that there is a simple self-moving power directing all things to mingle as one, that it starts out from the Good, reaches down to the lowliest creation, returns then in due order through all the stages back to the Good, and thus turns from itself and through itself and upon itself and toward itself in an everlasting cycle.<sup>21</sup>

In his 1469 Commentary on the *Symposium*, Ficino therefore asserted that "all things first flow from that eternal source when they are born; then they flow back again to it, when they seek their own origin; and finally, they are perfected, after they have returned to their source."<sup>22</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius also advocated the hierarchy of being through his recognition of incorporeal and corporeal hierarchies in his *Celestial Hierarchy* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*.<sup>23</sup>

The notion of *primum in alioque genere* was an auxiliary concept of the hierarchy of Being. It groups related entities in the cosmological hierarchy according to their ontological nature and function. *Primum in alioque genere* gave special support to the Plotinian theory of emanation by helping to explain how entities "precipitate" one they have emanated from the One. The most perfect entity in a genus is the *primum*, which serves as the ontological representative of the genus, and whose quality all other entities in the genus are subordinate to and dependent on.

Ficino appears to have been convinced that this concept originated with Hermes Trismegistus. In his *De voluptate*, Ficino contended:

He [Mercurius Trismegistus] asserts that in all genera of things there is one greatest and highest and that by participating in it the other things are placed in the same genus; as, for instance, all warm things become warm through the nature of fire, to which the greatest warmth is intrinsic, and all good things must be called good because they follow and imitate the highest and first good.<sup>24</sup>

Ficino observed that the concept was treated more tenuously by Plato in his *Ideas*, and he recognized that it was actually Aristotle, and later Anselm and Aquinas, who gave it a more rigorous definition. Scholastics commonly referred to the *primum* as "the perfect thing in its genus."<sup>25</sup>

Nonetheless, Kristeller credits Ficino with having been the first to combine the scattered elements of the theory of *primum in genere* into a systematic form. For example, Ficino closely followed the Scholastic definition when he avowed, "Perfect things are always to be preferred to imperfect ones, for perfect in a genus are those things that have the genus quality by their own nature, while imperfect are those things that do not have it by themselves."<sup>26</sup> But Ficino added that the *primum* is not only the first and highest, but the quintessential representation of the entire genus because of the fullness of its unique essence. The intensified significance of the *primum* thus increased the importance of Ficino's view of natural religion, in which Christianity served as the *primum* for the genus of natural religions unique to man.

Ficino provided a more rigorous explication of the *primum in alioque genere* in his *Theologia Platonica*:

The first in every genus is the cause of the whole genus. The first thing in a genus is lacking in nothing that belongs to that genus. For example, the sun, being the first among the light-bearing things, lacks no degree of light, whereas the other light-bearing things beneath it, such as the stars and the elements, do not receive the whole fullness of light. Since the first form contains all perfections of the forms and cannot be imperfect, we rightly conclude that that form which is called imperfect cannot be the first.<sup>27</sup>

The *primum* itself, however, receives an upper limit in the full sphere of Being. "Anything," Ficino asserted, "that holds the highest place in a genus has, so to speak, a certain limit beyond which the genus does not extend and beneath which all things are not yet the highest."<sup>28</sup>

The notion of *appetitus naturalis* was another auxiliary concept of the hierarchy of Being. It holds that all entities seek to return to their natural state or habit.<sup>29</sup> Thus, just as *primum in genere* supported Plotinian emanation, *appetitus naturalis* supported the corresponding Proclan-Dionysian reversion. This was especially true for the soul and other intelligible entities who wish to return to their originator, and whose eschatological end is the One itself. Unfortunately, Ficino never explicitly connected the theories of *appetitus naturalis* and *primum in alioque genere*, for he did not clarify whether corporeal objects, in particular, seek the *primum* in their genus or some other entity, nor did he clarify what the *primum* itself seeks.<sup>30</sup>



At any rate, Ficino provided a clear exposition of *appetitus naturalis* in Book 14 of his *Theologia Platonica*:

. . . the natural motion which is directed to some end is not directed to one end rather than another on account of any other cause than an affection of its nature, through which it agrees to one end rather than another, and loves that end on account of the agreement, and on that account is able to accomplish what it loves. . . . Therefore human endeavor, intent on God, can sometimes be fulfilled. For who inserted this endeavor in our souls, unless God, whom we seek, who, since He is the sole author of the species, inserts appropriate desire in each one? For all natural appetite is led by the first principle of things, as though by the first good and the first desirable.<sup>31</sup>

Ficino consolidated at least five essential principles in this endeavor. First, natural appetite arises from the lack of some object, and it is the desire to obtain that object to satisfy its lack. This process initiates movement. Ficino stated, "Natural appetite is the necessary inclination of nature, tending from want toward satisfaction."<sup>32</sup> Second, since nothing in the order of existing things can be in vain, natural appetite must possess the ability to eventually obtain that object. This satisfies its desire and transforms movement into rest. Ficino noted in his *Philebus* commentary, "Hence the appetite is not given in vain; hence it will rest at some time; hence it attains its ultimate end."<sup>33</sup> Third, natural appetite receives direction for its movement through a process of reversion in which the object it desires ultimately leads it back to its source. Ficino stated, for example, "Just as the element put outside of its own place retains, along with its nature, its force and natural inclination toward its primal end, through which it may some time regain its own region, so, even after he has left the right trail, the Platonists believe man retains the natural power to regain the trail and the end."<sup>34</sup> Fourth, natural appetite requires an ontological hierarchy as a cosmological medium through which it travels in its quest to ascend to the One, and it propagates by means of affinity between object and object desired. Ficino observed that the interval through which an object passes to reach its end must be finite. "For nothing is moved toward that at which it is impossible to arrive."<sup>35</sup> And finally, once that object reaches the object of its desire, its natural appetite is satiated and it remains with that object permanently. Ficino clearly designed his notion of *appetitus naturalis* to fit this final principle since it encouraged and accommodated the

soul's immortality. "Consequently," he stated, "the souls once adhering to God will never again leave Him, since they have already transcended movement and fulfilled the natural desire. Since this desire is founded in a stable substance and naturally directed toward a stable object, it evidently desires a stable possession as its end also."<sup>36</sup>

In the finalized form of his cosmology, Ficino combined the Plotinian hypostases with the Proclan-Dionysian emanation-reversion cycle. The hypostases formed the skeletal structure of his cosmology while the emanation-reversion cycle provided the connective tissue, including the principles of *primum in genere* and *appetitus naturalis*, necessary to make it work. Ficino's primary interest, however, was to make the soul the ontological center of his cosmology. His focus thus fell predominantly on the Plotinian hypostases. Plotinus actually vacillated between four, five, and six hypostases. The full hexad included the One, Mind, Soul, Sensation, Nature, and Body. The pentad included One, Mind, Soul, Nature, and Matter; it eliminated Sensation and replaced Body with Matter. The tetrad included God, Mind, Soul, and Body; it omitted Sensation and Nature.<sup>37</sup> In his *Commentary on the Symposium*, Ficino himself vacillated between using a hexad, pentad, and tetrad. But in his *Theologia Platonica*, in which he used a hexad from time to time, the final form he developed was a version of the Plotinian pentad. Ficino altered the Plotinian pentad by abolishing the two lower parts of the Soul, Sensation and Nature, and replacing them with Quality to give the One (God), (Angelic) Mind,<sup>38</sup> Soul, Quality, and Body. He thus created a symmetrical set of hypostases in which the Soul becomes the ontological mean of all objects created by God. Through static and dynamic means, the Soul balances the corporeal hypostases of Quality and Body with the intelligible hypostases of the One and Mind and thus reconciles the two opposing spheres of Reality.<sup>39</sup>

#### **Soul as the Ontological Center of the Universe**

But this cosmology was actually quite superficial, for Ficino's interest in placing the Soul at the center of his cosmology was premeditated. Kristeller accurately observes that "Ficino, who had borrowed many elements of his scheme from Neoplatonic tradition, consciously modified it in this decisive point, the central position of the human soul."<sup>40</sup> Ficino developed his unique theory of the five

substances only after he had first conceived of the central unity of the soul. His theory of the five hypostases was thus merely the polished result, or outermost layer, of his speculative thought. The soul in essence has nothing to do with the five substances, but the five substances have everything to do with the soul, and this forced Ficino's metaphysics to be examined from the soul outward.<sup>41</sup> Ficino revealed his deliberate designs in Book 3 of the *Theologia Platonica* to develop a cosmology out of his central concept of the soul:

And finally, to reach what we desire, let us again include all things in five degrees---that is, by placing God and the Angel at the peak of Nature, Body and Quality at the bottom, but the Soul in the middle between those highest things and these lowest things, the Soul which we rightly call, in the Platonic sense, the third and middle essence, because it is the middle with respect to all things and the third from all sides. For if you descend from God, you find it on the third grade of the descent; and also on the third grade of the ascent, if you ascend above the body.<sup>42</sup>

He recognized that his approach was unique in that the soul no longer serves as another mere intermediary that connects two entities, but rather, as the absolute center of the universe that fuses the temporal and eternal and thus represents the unity of the world in itself. Ficino stated again in Book 3 of the *Theologia Platonica*: "Between those things that are only eternal and those that are only temporal there is the soul, like a kind of bond between them."<sup>43</sup> He elaborated on his theory by noting that a work is perfected through the unity of its parts, as exemplified by air mediating between fire and water, and even light between the sun and the elements. "Much more, there must be assumed a connection of the parts in the whole work of God in order that the work of one God may be one." Thus, God and Body cannot be reconciled by either Angel or Quality, but by Soul alone:

Hitherto all things have been extremes, and the higher and lower things, lacking a convenient bond, flee from each other. But that third essence [the Soul] placed between them is such as to keep the higher things without leaving the lower things, so the higher things are connected in it with the lower ones. For it is immobile and also mobile. By the former attribute it agrees with the higher things; by the latter, with the lower things. If it agrees with both, it desires both. Hence, through a natural instinct it ascends to the higher things and descends to the lower things. And while ascending it does not leave the lower things; while descending it does not abandon the higher ones. For if it abandons either of them, it will incline toward the other extreme and will no longer be the true bond of the world.<sup>44</sup>

The soul thus becomes an almost omniscient and all-pervasive entity which reinforces its perception as the uniting link of the universe:

This is the greatest of all miracles in nature. All other things beneath God are always one single being, but the Soul is all things together. It possesses the images of the divine things on which it depends itself and the concepts and originals of the lower things which in a certain sense it produces itself. And since it is the center of all things, it has the forces of all. Hence, it passes into all things. And since it is the true connection of all things, it goes to the one without leaving the others. It goes into an individual thing and always deals with all. Therefore it may be rightly called the center of nature, the middle term of all things, the series of the world, the face of all, the bond and the juncture of the universe.<sup>45</sup>

Ficino further broke down his concept to illustrate that the human rational soul lies at the very center of the hypostasis of Soul. Ficino placed the human rational soul between angels and the souls of Beasts. He asserted, "By Divine Providence the Soul of man was graded so that it immediately follows the minds and comes just before the bodies."<sup>46</sup> The angels are pure intellects and not tied to any bodies.<sup>47</sup> Their activity includes only the pure contemplation of God, which they achieve changelessly and instantaneously.<sup>48</sup> They have no lower functions analogous to the middle and lower parts of the Soul. Beasts possess sensation and phantasy in addition to the body and its vital functions, but neither rational thought nor contemplation.<sup>49</sup> They possess only an irrational soul analogous to the human *natura* and lower soul, or *idolum*, which carries sensation and imagination. But the irrational soul of the beasts does not extend beyond the corporeal. It is occasionally qualified, like the irrational part of man, as the shadow of the rational soul, and its essence is associated with the Neoplatonic World Soul and the Soul of its own element, but it is not immortal like the human soul.<sup>50</sup> The human soul is thus exactly centered: As *anima rationalis*, it resembles the angels in the contemplation of its highest part, or *mens*.<sup>51</sup> It resembles the beasts in its lower functions, the "nature of nutrition and sensation and corporeal complexion." But its middle function, the *ratio*, characterizes the rational soul as the exact ontological fulcrum of the universe.<sup>52</sup> Ficino initially believed he had resolved the key cosmological problem of the corporeal-incorporeal duality, which Plato and his successors had only partially remedied by modifying and adding ontological entities in the hierarchy of Being.<sup>53</sup>

#### **Ficino's Ontological Dilemma**

Ficino's conception of the human rational soul as the fulcrum of the universe and the balance between all that is material and temporal,

immaterial and eternal, held a powerful metaphorical appeal in Renaissance Florence, for it closely paralleled humanistic efforts to establish man's dignity through his central role in the universe.<sup>54</sup> But it also served, in a sense, as the "tragic flaw" in Ficino's psychology. For, despite its rational appearance and *prima facie* appeal, Ficino's conception of the soul was fraught with ontological conflict. Ficino had never actually pinpointed the exact ontological nature of the Soul that transforms the corporeal-incorporeal duality into a unity. He thus could not assert that the human rational soul lies at the absolute center of his cosmology without also asserting its co-substantiality as a corporeal and incorporeal entity. Aware of this dilemma, Ficino accepted the rational soul as a purely incorporeal entity. He noted:

Thus it is well that the immortal soul is joined to mortal bodies through that immortal ethereal body. It dwells in it eternally but in this earthly one for a short time only, so that the soul deservedly ought to be called a god or a star surrounded with a cloud or a daemon, not an inhabitant of the earth but a guest.<sup>55</sup>

But he often veiled the resulting metaphorical imbalance by emphasizing the unique ability of the human body to accommodate such an entity:

Let us conclude therefore that man is born for contemplation, as Anaxagoras said, since his brain and the rest of his body is so constituted that it continually serves the office of contemplation which requires a supple brain and a harmonious complexion of the body. . . . But since the balance of our body is so great and so sublime that it seems to imitate the harmony of the heavens, it is no wonder that a celestial soul for a time inhabits this building so similar to heaven.<sup>56</sup>

Ficino could not conceal the problem by this means alone, however, for other cosmological problems arose to cripple his metaphorical harmony. With regard to *primum in genere*, for example, the human rational soul faces the indignity of having to reside in the lowest category of the genus of intelligibles, for which Mind is the *primum*.<sup>57</sup> At one point, Ficino admitted:

Such are the souls of men, which because they are the lowest of all minds have not that force through which they can accomplish perfectly two different things at the same time---that is, contemplate divine things through human reason and govern the earthly bodies. But they must do both, for they are born for both. Therefore, they do successively what they cannot do simultaneously.<sup>58</sup>

Even more critical, however, is the dilemma created by *appetitus naturalis*. Although the rational soul illustrates a natural desire to return to its eschatological end, the One, it alone among ontological

entities must at the same time illustrate an opposing desire for the corporeal body.<sup>59</sup> This problem is addressed in more detail below.

Ficino avoided facing his dilemma head-on and instead perpetuated his superficial metaphor by veiling his nebulous soul in the very kinds of dualistic paradigms he believed he was eliminating. He ignored the exact ontological nature of the soul, and instead, discussed its affinity between the corporeal and incorporeal spheres of Reality. Thus, even Kristeller fails to make complete sense of Ficino's ontology. He awkwardly notes that

in the gradual ascent in the hierarchy of corporeal forms we can consider [the soul] the highest and last form of the bodies. Thus, in spite of its purely intellectual substance the human soul is placed in a *special way* on the borderline between the corporeal and the incorporeal and constitutes a kind of link between these two halves of reality.<sup>60</sup>

But Kristeller never attempts to define this "special way."

#### **Paradigmatic Attempts to Resolve the Dilemma**

The most critical problem facing Ficino's ontology is how to prove the existence of a soul that resides at the center of the universe and is attracted equally to the corporeal body and the incorporeal intelligibles. Ficino attempted to resolve the dilemma by illustrating that the unique ontological position of the soul allows it to possess opposing forces within itself that simultaneously seek the corporeal and incorporeal spheres of Reality without disturbing its substantive unity. In doing so, however, Ficino neither accounted for the soul's pure incorporeality, nor the internal function that allows for the unique duality of its natural affections.

Ficino appears to have fully developed his theory of the dual affections of the soul at the same time that he affirmed the cosmological centrality of the soul in his *Theologia Platonica*. He contended that the human soul possesses in its essence two opposite but natural affections or tendencies, one directed toward the corporeal realm, the other toward the intelligible realm. Thus, the empirical desire for the body and the contemplative desire for God fuse into one force of *appetitus naturalis* within the Soul.<sup>61</sup> "[The Soul] ascends, because of a natural instinct, to the higher things and descends to the lower things. While it is ascending, it does not leave the lower things; and while it is descending, it does not abandon the higher

ones."<sup>62</sup> "[We see] that our souls have affection for the eternal things and affection for the temporal ones."<sup>63</sup> Ficino often compared the soul metaphorically to the two-faced Janus, who looks in opposite directions simultaneously. "Although the soul looks at both the corporeal and the incorporeal, through the nature of the third essence, just as the double-faced Janus . . . "<sup>64</sup>

Although Ficino thus sought to preserve the substantive unity of the soul, he realized that he could not promote a soul that seeks the divine and the corporeal at the same time. Consequently, he devised differentiated forces within the soul which can simultaneously pursue opposing desires without disturbing the substantive unity of the soul. "There is in the soul a force drawing downward toward sensible things, that is, imaginative and vegetative power, and there is a force higher than the former one, lifting it toward divine things."<sup>65</sup> He believed these forces to be legitimate because they are merely aspects of the soul's oneness rather than individual substantive entities. He thus went on to discuss the soul's *appetitus naturalis* toward the human body. "Out of the Soul and the human body," Ficino avowed, "one natural compound results, and the Soul is endowed with a natural instinct toward the body."<sup>66</sup> And again, "The individual souls have a natural inclination to animate and to guide the individual bodies."<sup>67</sup> Ficino further supplied the analogy of a mother's love for a child<sup>68</sup> or, more prominently, the gravity which acts on a stone, to assert that the soul actually spends the majority of its time attending to the body. He said that the soul, inwardly divided, "remains [in an enlightened state] only for a while, because the natural affection of its lower force draws it again to the care of the body, as a stone thrown upward is said to stay for a short while in the air between ascent and descent."<sup>69</sup>

Ficino further asserted that *appetitus naturalis* exists between the different parts of the soul itself, which allows the higher parts of the Soul to link with the body. In one passage, for example, he first discussed the love of the entire Soul for the body, and then stated that the higher part of the soul is attracted to the middle part, the middle to the lower part, the lower to the vital complexion, and the vital complexion the body itself.<sup>70</sup> In a similar vein, he said elsewhere that the *ratio* is attracted to the body through the three lower forces of the

soul,<sup>71</sup> or that the soul has deep love for its vital shadow in the body, the *natura*.<sup>72</sup> Ficino thus suggested a successive chain of natural forces in which the higher part of the soul can show an inclination toward the body through the mediation of its counterparts in the lower soul. "[The Platonists] believe that consequently the intellectual soul is never inclined toward the body through the part by which it is intellectual, but is directed toward the bodies through that part by which it does not share natural intelligence."<sup>73</sup>

Ficino suggested that the *appetitus naturalis* of the soul for the body is not the result of its optional conscious activity during the period of human life, but rather, an intrinsic force of love. "What binds [the souls] to the bodies?" he asked. "Love, as Plato says, that is, the affection of an exuberant life, inclined to animate its neighboring things."<sup>74</sup> "Through the instinct of love different [souls] adapt themselves to move different bodies."<sup>75</sup> Ficino further asserted that this intrinsic bond of love lasts not just for the period of human life, but for eternity, and this provides an important philosophical explanation for the Christian doctrine of resurrection.<sup>76</sup> Even after death, the soul is unsatisfied and it can only find its necessary desire in its eventual reunion with the resurrected body. Ficino asserted,

The natural inclination remains as long as nature remains. Hence, the souls separated from the bodies will always naturally incline toward them. But a natural inclination and tendency cannot be forever in vain. . . . Hence, the souls will at some time resume their bodies, toward which they are always directed by nature.<sup>77</sup>

He further avowed that souls "remain eternal after the destruction of the body. Anything that is against nature cannot be eternal. Consequently, the souls will resume their bodies at some time."<sup>78</sup>

Ficino went a step farther, however, by deducing from the dualistic affections of the soul's *appetitus naturalis* an actual double nature or quality of the soul.<sup>79</sup> The natural affection of the soul toward the objective spheres of the sensible and the intelligible presupposes an affinity between the soul and its object desired and thus forces the soul to participate ontologically in two different orders of Being. Kristeller explains the ontological problem that results:

This doctrine of the two natures of the soul. . . upon closer examination, is seen to contain a startling inconsistency. For the conclusion which leads from the affections to the natures of the soul



would, in a strict sense, lead to the assumption of a corporeal nature in the soul, which would entirely contradict all Ficino's other statements.<sup>80</sup>

Once again, however, Ficino side-stepped the dilemma. He discussed the two natures of the soul by specifically contrasting the eternal and temporal rather than the intelligible and corporeal. He therefore substituted ontological implications with eschatological ones. Ficino clearly affirmed that the two natures of the soul develop out of their respective affections, and he also revealed the temporal-eternal cloak that veils the adverse ontological implications:

Since natural affections are based upon their own natures and different affections upon different natures, and since we see that our souls have one affection for things eternal and one for things temporal, we rightly state that they [the souls] are composed of two natures---one eternal and one temporal---as if we saw a body being moved by its nature almost evenly upward and downward, we should state that it is composed almost equally of gravity and lightness.<sup>81</sup>

Ficino similarly stated, "Different inclinations or tendencies are the result of different natures. From the very fact that we see the soul inclined toward both eternal things and temporal things, we know that it is composed of both natures."<sup>82</sup> In order to preserve his metaphor, then, Ficino "mixed" it by using this temporal-eternal paradigm to establish the ontological centrality of the soul. Even Kristeller observes that Ficino's approach, "which conceals rather than overcomes the inner vagueness of the concept, is apparently used for the sake of the clear, speculative formula."<sup>83</sup>

Ficino established the soul's centrality by using the eternal-temporal paradigm as follows: The soul is guaranteed a definite and established position in the objective hierarchy of things since its double nature can be deduced from its natural affections. And since the double nature of the soul itself is both eternal and temporal, the soul must reside in a position somewhere between eternal and temporal things. But since it serves specifically as the reconciling synthesis of these antithetical extremes according to general principles of mediation, it must be exactly centered between them. "Between those things which are only eternal and those which are only temporal there is the soul."<sup>84</sup> He also asserted, "According to the Chaldeans [the rational souls] exist on the borderline between eternity and time. Through their substance they exist in eternity; through their actions, in time."<sup>85</sup> He avowed:

The rational soul. . . is placed on the borderline between eternity and time, since it possesses an intermediary nature between eternal things and temporal things; and because it is intermediary, it possesses rational forces and actions ascending toward the eternal Beings and it also possesses other forces and activities descending toward the temporal Beings.<sup>86</sup>

Finally, Ficino said, "Our soul, as is said by the Platonists, occupies an intermediary region between eternal and temporal things. And since it participates in both, it is moved at its will toward both."<sup>87</sup>

#### **Invariability of the Soul's Incorporeality**

The exact balance created by Ficino's metaphor was invariably abolished, however, by Ficino's eventual need to emphasize the immortal soul's ultimate desire to ascend to the One. Ficino had to tip the balance in favor of the incorporeal nature of the soul and portray the natural desire for the body as a necessary evil that the soul must eventually overcome in order to seek its contemplative end. The harmonious duality between the opposing natural desires thus becomes a conflict in which the incorporeal desire must suppress the corporeal desire in order for the soul to achieve complete fulfillment. The soul becomes a "house divided" and is embroiled in its internal conflict.

First, Ficino implicitly conceded that the soul cannot maintain an ontological unity between the corporeal and incorporeal since the soul can only perform one conscious act at a time. The empirical functions of consciousness include both knowledge and corporeal activities. These functions co-exist harmoniously, independently, and continuously as potentialities, but they cannot achieve concurrent actuality since the Soul can only pursue one action at a time. The soul must therefore divide its attention between corporeal and incorporeal functions successively rather than simultaneously:

Our soul often plays with the body in the pleasures of the body. In its diseases it governs and cures it. In both states the sublime consideration of reason is interrupted or abated because it [the soul] is either temporarily at leisure or too anxiously busy about inferior things. But when all is settled, it rises again. So it is arranged by nature that, with regard to human powers, we are not capable of different works at the same time.<sup>88</sup>

Second, Ficino asserted that the needs of the body outweigh those of the mind. Thus, the soul's necessary preoccupation with the body often hinders its contemplative function. Consequently, the soul is able to devote its attention to contemplation only when it has subdued or eliminated all other empirical functions of consciousness as

completely as possible. "When [the body] is sick and heavy, the soul is so much concerned in taking care of it and guiding it that it [the soul] is not directed toward the research of truth. But when the body is quiet, the mind easily speculates, and then especially it is nourished by its peculiar food."<sup>89</sup> This is practically impossible for man to achieve until he is an adult since he can only engage his contemplative faculties when the nutrition and preservation of the growing body no longer require the full attention of the soul:

From the very outset, three such forces---vital force, senses, imagination---begin their work, and with such intensity, because of building a new body, that the Soul can give almost no attention to reason until it abates the intensity of that work when the body is fully evolved and the senses are purified. But when reason awakens, it weakens the realm of imagination, which is entrenched in the Soul as an enduring habit, only with the greatest difficulty.<sup>90</sup>

Indeed, the great demands of the body explain why the soul can only aspire to contemplation for short periods of time during its earthly existence and why it never achieves its ultimate aim of a direct intuition of God before death:

Even if [the intellect] dispels the clouds of imagination temporarily for as long as it can, it is meanwhile drawn to the difficult task of governing the body and distracted at the same time by the continual recurrence of sense images and by the perception of intelligible things, and thus it scarcely perceives the higher influences or almost misses perceiving them . . . or perceives them as through a sudden gleam that vanishes immediately. Hence it must not seem strange to anyone that here on earth we do not perceive the clarity of divine things nor taste even for a while that sweetness which is enjoyed from them.<sup>91</sup>

Finally, Ficino contended that the ultimate objective of the soul is to overcome the pressing needs of the body altogether and pursue the natural desire of the mind. He thus meticulously untied the knot he had earlier formed between body and soul. He stated in Book 5 of the *Theologia Platonica* that the soul cannot be conceived of as a mere part of the body since it possesses the natural ability to withdraw from corporeal externalities and look internally toward intelligible realities. "For [the soul], which would have no proper nature nor would exist by itself, but be inseparably in the underlying body like a corporeal form, could not attempt to turn itself away from that same body to the perception of the intelligible things."<sup>92</sup> The soul's ability to actively turn away from the body thus proves the soul's substantial independence from the same. Ficino avowed:

Consequently, the body is not the origin of the soul; for the farther the soul goes away from it, the more perfect is its state. And if the mind decreases more in perfection the more it merges into this body and increases in perfection the more it goes away from it, the mind will then be most perfect at the time when it flies away entirely from this body.<sup>93</sup>

In this manner, Ficino clearly affirmed the soul's incorporeal origin, its superiority to the body, and its greater natural desire to pursue contemplative realities.

Ficino further accentuated the superiority of the soul's intelligible desires over its bodily desires by affirming the moral obligation of the soul to reject its corporeal affections and fully pursue its incorporeal ends. Thus, the objective *appetitus naturalis* for the body now gave way to an Augustinian condemnation of bodily desires. "Just as all tranquillity and virtue result from the love of divine things," Ficino warned, "so from the love of mortal things come all trouble and wickedness."<sup>94</sup> Ficino often applied the metaphor that just as a mother shows too much love to her badly raised son, so too can the soul show too much love for the body.<sup>95</sup> He defined this over-affection as vice in Book 16 of the *Theologia Platonica*: "[Through the lower forces] the *ratio*. . . descends through love to the body. Because of long inclination it acquires a habit of inclining more readily. This habit. . . we call vice."<sup>96</sup> And again, "The divine soul is not vitiated or forced by the body, but because of love for the animated body, which is its work and instrument, the Soul itself stoops willingly toward it from its own state."<sup>97</sup> Ficino wrote in a letter that the soul focused on the external world finds its unhappiness through this affection. "The cause of all movement is natural, or animal, love; therefore you have all affection and fear for the body when you love it ardently, and you are troubled while having affection and suffer pain while having fear."<sup>98</sup> Ficino explained how the soul can extract itself from the body. "The soul opposes the excitement of the humors while it despises their impulses through the effort of speculation, restrains them through the fatigue of moral behavior, breaks them through the industry of the arts." And he followed with examples of the successful conquering of passions.<sup>99</sup> He further warned that salvation from the evils of the world comes only through fleeing "from the love of the body and from the care of external things to the care of the soul"<sup>100</sup> and that an over-

ardent attraction for the body during life carries the impurity of the soul over into death, where it continues its future life based on decisions made in the present one. Here, the guilty soul is pulled by gravity down to the lower region for punishment and purification.<sup>101</sup>

Ficino now emphasized the substantial separation of the two entities. Following the well-known Neoplatonic notion of the separation of body and soul, Ficino stated, "Through a natural eagerness for truth the mind separates itself continually from the body, and the forms from matter, and thus it desires and tries to live separately, though the body and the senses drive it daily to the contrary."<sup>102</sup> He viewed this not as a metaphorical separation, but as the soul's actual rapture, or *abstractio*, out of the body. He perceived this endeavor as a temporary ecstasy and, in Book 13 of the *Theologia Platonica*, he asserted that only poets, prophets, philosophers, and priests can fully induce this *abstractio*.<sup>103</sup> He noted, for example, that "after Plato had departed far from the body through frequent efforts at contemplation, he finally left the bonds of the body permanently during that ecstasy. His disciple Xenocrates withdrew from the body for a whole hour each day."<sup>104</sup> Ficino went on to delineate the seven forms of *vacatio*, including sleep, swoon, and solitude, which suppress external activities and facilitate the soul's internal desire to induce *abstractio*. Ficino explained that

the soul collects itself in some way and is not occupied either in perceiving corporeal qualities or in guiding and moving the members of its own body or in performing external affairs, which happens easily during sleep. And the more the external act is relaxed, the more the internal one is strengthened.<sup>105</sup>

Ficino added that all lower activities of the soul cease to function when the soul engages in *vacatio*.<sup>106</sup> A complete separation of Soul and body results in the purification of the soul, both morally and substantially. Ficino declared, "Through action and disputation the theologian purifies the soul from the corporeal passions and separates reason from the fallacious opinions of sensible things."<sup>107</sup>

This purification provides the soul with its unique form of perfection and dignity. For the first time, the soul consciously recognizes its own worth and its superiority over corporeal things.<sup>108</sup>

Ficino asserted at length in Book 6 of the *Theologia Platonica* that "petty philosophers":

should at last be made aware that it is their long experience with the body that made them so corporeal that they understandably know nothing except the body or things derived from the body. Let them be purified and they will perceive pure things. May they some day experience within themselves, for they can if they only wish to, what they have long sought in the world. They certainly perceive things that are of a composite nature and many forms within the composite. They further seek some separated forms outside the composite. They themselves are composites of soul and body. They possess life passed from the soul of the body; they also possess a life of the soul itself thriving within itself. They should despise the one but prize the other. They should lead an intellectual life separate from the body, and once separate they will attain immediately to the separate forms, and they will soon prove by fact that Socrates opinion that there are forms in themselves perfect beyond the imperfect forms which adhere to subjects, and these form unformed subjects. And they will learn that the unique way not only of attaining but of possessing the incorporeal is to render themselves incorporeal, that is to withdraw the mind from movement, sense, affect, and corporeal imagination as far as they are able.<sup>109</sup>

The elimination of corporeal impressions opens up a new realm of objective knowledge and allows external objects to be fully viewed in a new light. Furthermore, the soul becomes aware of the knowledge of contemplation or pure reason that links Soul to the Angelic Mind, and eventually to the One itself. Ficino continued in Book 6:

For thus experience itself will establish first how it is to be pure soul, that is reason loving with itself and turning itself avidly about the light itself of truth. Secondly how it is to be an angel, that is pure intellect now enjoying the infused light of truth. Third, [how it is] when the soul itself as though it were an angel enjoys the full light of truth, perceives God at once as the truth lighting and enjoying itself by itself, then light itself enjoying its own truth, and at last joy itself lighting by its own truth.<sup>110</sup>

At this stage in the soul's incorporeal self-recognition, in which *ratio* unites with *mens*, the nebulous distinction between soul and Angelic Mind begins and a rigorous epistemological examination must ensue.<sup>111</sup>

For the purpose of this study, however, the Soul's self-recognition as an incorporeal entity is as far as we need to go. The important point is that Ficino never adequately provided an ontological foundation for the soul. He promoted his unique metaphorical view of the soul as the ontological center of the universe, but he provided no rigorous proof. Instead, he veiled its ambiguousness in a duality of affections for the corporeal and the incorporeal, which he then turned into a duality of natures for the temporal and the eternal. And yet, he was forced finally to concede that the soul is purely incorporeal and

that it must eventually reject the affections of the body altogether in order to acknowledge its incorporeality. Ficino's argument for duality thus failed to adequately define the soul ontologically.

### **Ficino's Ontological Divisions of the Soul**

In his attempt to describe the soul's affinity between corporeal-incorporeal and temporal-eternal dualities, Ficino avoided an ontological examination of the soul. Ficino did address its ontology, however, when he broke down the soul into its respective parts. But in doing so, he actually accentuated the nebulous place of the soul between the corporeal and the incorporeal, for he never pinpointed a single co-substantive part of the soul which equally balances the two spheres of Reality. Instead, he ended up with a Zeno-like paradox in which he added ontological entities without coming any closer to a golden mean between soul and body. Ficino's ontology thus became more obscure the closer he approached this absolute unity.

An ontological psychology requires that all activities of consciousness be interpreted as independent objective functions of the soul. The soul, in turn, must be approached as having distinct forces, potencies, or parts. Plato first conceived of ontology in this manner. His particular schematic divisions were not very popular even in classical antiquity, however, and they were quickly superseded by Aristotle's speculative divisions, which dominated all later speculations on the soul. Nonetheless, Plato's schematic method has survived ever since in the philosophical tradition. Later philosophers have merely added or rearranged the division of forces within this basic scheme.

Ficino's ontological approach to the soul was based on a number of classical theories, including the Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, and especially, the Neoplatonic approach.<sup>112</sup> Ficino sometimes quoted Plato's doctrine of the rational, courageous, and appetitive parts of the soul, but he never gives it any systematic importance. In an early *Tractatus de anima editus per Marsilium* dated either 1454 or 1455, Ficino defined the soul, after Aristotle, as the act of the body, and he discusses the four associated faculties *vegetativa, sensitiva, secundum locum motiva, and intellectiva*.<sup>113</sup> And even as late as the *Theologia Platonica*, in Books 6-8, Ficino repeated a simplified version of

Aristotle's divisions in which he distinguished between the vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual soul,<sup>114</sup> or between natural potency, potency of sense perception, and potency of thought.<sup>115</sup> Ficino occasionally augmented this simplified Aristotelian scheme with a fourth force that is Stoic in origin. Ficino argued that, just as men are epitomized by intellect, beasts by sense perception, and plants by nutrition, so all inanimate objects, the *mixta*, are epitomized by a purely objective unity derived from a comprehensive force. Since all higher entities possess the characteristics of all lower ones, the human soul possesses this peculiar comprehensive force of inanimate objects in addition to intellect, sense perception, and nutrition.<sup>116</sup>

Ficino primarily used a Neoplatonic scheme, however, to develop his ontology of the human soul. Ficino believed such an ontology to be in support of his Christian Platonism since he viewed the Neoplatonists to be an extension of the *prisci theologi* and their philosophy to be the foundation of Platonic thought. At the upper limit of the soul, then, Ficino placed two potencies of knowledge, the *mens* and *ratio*, or "mind" and "reason," which respectively denote the highest and middle divisions of the soul.<sup>117</sup> Ficino often mentioned an even higher entity, however, *unitas* or "unity," as the center of the soul or head of the mind.<sup>118</sup> It is this highest force of contemplation which ultimately unites the soul to God. It is not a distinct force in the soul, however, but a privileged entity within the *mens*.<sup>119</sup> Turning from the cognitive powers of the higher soul to the empirical functions of the lower soul, Ficino usually distinguished three forces: phantasy, sense perception, and nutritive power.<sup>120</sup> Imagination, which corresponds to the Aristotelian *sensus communis*, is epistemologically distinct from phantasy and is not given as a force. The nutritive power, or "vital force," includes generation, growth, and all lower functions needed for the maintenance and preservation of the body.<sup>121</sup> The three lower forces together comprise the lowest form of the soul which Ficino called *idolum*, a Plotinian term. Ficino explains:

The rational souls not only possess that power of thinking. . . but also that animating power governing the body which nourishes the body in the body, perceives corporeal things through the body, moves the body through space, and guides it in space---a power which the Platonists call *idolum*, that is, image of the rational soul.<sup>122</sup>



Ficino thus delineated the three divisions of the human soul: "All rational souls have. . . an intellectual head, a rational center, and an animating lowest part."<sup>123</sup>

Ficino recognized, however, that these faculties cannot become operative without some force of consciousness which has the capacity to turn the potency of each function into an actuality at any given moment. This element of pure consciousness, or actus, Ficino attributed to *ratio*. He interpreted *ratio* as the capacity of the soul to act in an empirical or intellectual manner and to move in perpetual unrest from one activity to another. Unlike the other parts of the soul, the *ratio* is not tied to any established order, and thus it alone is free. This liberty and the potential variety of its possibilities make *ratio* the definitive and essential characteristic of the human soul:

Through those three parts [*mens, idolum, natura*] we are partly bound and partly not bound to the order of things, but by the fourth part we are primarily freed from it and belong entirely to ourselves. This is the *ratio*, which we place in the middle between the mind, head of the soul, and the *idolum*, foot of the soul. . . . *Ratio* is placed in the middle, a force peculiar to the true souls. . . . That rational faculty which is the peculiar nature of the true soul is not limited to one thing. For with a free movement it wanders upward and downward. . . . Consequently, though we are connected in some way with the common order of things through mind, *idolum*, and nature---through the mind with Providence, through the *idolum* with fate, and through the particular nature with universal nature---we belong entirely to ourselves through reason, and, being free, we follow now this and now that part. Sometimes reason is connected with the mind, and then it is lifted up to Providence. Sometimes it obeys the *idolum* and nature, and then, because of love, it is subjected to fate when it trusts the senses and is distracted here and there by the occurrence of sensible things. Sometimes it leaves the other forces and retires into itself, and at such times it either investigates other things by arguing or examining itself. To such a degree is this middle and peculiar force of the soul free and restless.<sup>124</sup>

Thus, the other parts of the soul remain inactive until they obtain actuality through the movement of the *ratio*.

The empirical functions of life proceed continually without respect to consciousness, however. Thus, in support of certain Neoplatonic ideas, Ficino also attributed a continual and substantial thought to the *mens*, but which is only received into consciousness when recognized by the *ratio*. Therefore, even if the *ratio* does not specifically activate the objective functions of the other parts of the soul into actuality, it does at least recognize that they are continual functions, which thus provides them with a subjective and concrete

actuality. The *ratio* thus still performs the task of actuality as the carrier of consciousness.<sup>125</sup>

When something reaches our extreme parts, for example, mind, *idolum*, or nature, it may be that the soul immediately perceives it in some way; but the soul does not become aware that it perceives the object until it passes into the middle force. For it is the middle force through which we are men, or rather through which we are ourselves, and anything pertaining to it evidently pertains to men.<sup>126</sup>

*Mens* and *ratio* are both clearly cognitive powers, but *mens* represents a substantial and unconscious activity of pure and perpetual contemplative thought while *ratio* brings that thought, as well as the empirical functions of the lower soul, into consciousness through actuality. Ficino thus deliberately created a symmetry between *mens*, *ratio*, and *idolum*, in which *ratio* becomes the ontological center of the soul just as the soul is the ontological center of the five hypostases. In order to do so, however, Ficino went beyond tradition by placing the distinct powers of *phantasia*, sense perception, and nutrition within the *idolum*. He thus reduced *natura*, discussed below, from the Plotinian soul to the mere complexion of the body, and whereas Plotinus made nutritive power peculiar to *natura* and essential to the functions of the soul, Ficino detached nutrition from *natura* and relegates it to the *idolum*.<sup>127</sup>

#### **Lower Divisions of the Soul and Ficino's Quagmire**

Although Ficino had a relatively easy time placing *ratio* at the absolute ontological center of the incorporeal soul, and thus, the entire cosmos, he was still faced with the formidable dilemma of connecting the soul ontologically to the corporeal body. Once again, as with the entire hypostasis of soul earlier, Ficino could not claim absolute centrality of the *ratio* here since it still lies entirely within the incorporeal sphere of Reality. Ficino never appears to have been daring enough, however, to actually assert the existence of a co-substantive corporeal and incorporeal ontological entity. Rather, he developed a number of vague ontological entities that allow for a smooth "transition" from the *idolum* of the soul to the corporeal body. These quasi-corporeal, quasi-incorporeal entities not only undermined the centrality of the *ratio* by threatening the corporeal-incorporeal balance, but they also greatly obscured Ficino's ontology and thus weakened the force of his entire psychology.

Ficino first described a nebulous quality called "vital complexion," or *natura*, which is distinct from the three forces of the soul and inherent to the living body itself. This quality is not part of the soul, but is like the shadow of the soul on the body which differentiates a living from an inanimate entity. "In each living body there is a certain effective and vital disposition or complexion of it, which the animating force of its soul grants to the body. The Platonists say that this is the nature of the bodies, like a trace or shadow of the soul in the body."<sup>128</sup> Ficino often mentioned elsewhere that the irrational Soul follows as the image of the rational soul. "The irrational power follows the rational substance of our soul like a shadow."<sup>129</sup> The ontological nature of this irrational soul at first seems indefinite, but other passages clearly indicate that Ficino equated it with the *natura* or complexion of the body. Ficino asserted:

The intellect of the soul belongs to itself, because it possesses its existence in its own essence, and it belongs to something else, because out of its own rational life it pours into the body another life without reason, like an image. The *natura*, that is, the vital complexion which is produced in the body itself like a shadow because of the life poured from the Soul, belongs only to something else, that is, to the body along with which it is extended and divided.<sup>130</sup>

In a similar manner, Ficino claimed, "Nature cannot be the highest reason and cause of things . . . since it is irrational, as is obvious in our nature."<sup>131</sup> The human soul thus contains the *mens*, *ratio*, and *idolum*, but is now linked to a fourth element, the *natura* or the irrational Soul/"complexion of the body."

But Ficino introduced another ontological entity between soul and body in an effort to better reconcile the dichotomy between the two. He affirmed that, in addition to the earthly body, the soul possesses an ethereal body, or vehicle of the soul, which is a subtle covering composed of the substance of heaven, and is sometimes equated with the glorified *corpus* of extinguished souls. Ficino took this directly from the Neoplatonic concept of the "astral body":

Let us return to the body closest to the soul. The Magi call it the vehicle of the soul, that is, the ethereal body received from the ether, the immortal cover of the soul, which is round in its natural figure, because of the region of the ether, but transforms itself into a human figure when it enters the human body and returns into its former figure when it leaves.<sup>132</sup>

Ficino emphasized the subordination of the astral body to the soul itself: "If one of the Platonists says that [the soul] is always in the celestial vehicle, we answer that the soul does not depend on the vehicle, but the vehicle on the soul, and that the eternal soul, according to the Platonists, always animates an eternal vehicle."<sup>133</sup> Ficino derived a peculiar relationship here, for he said that the *idolum* is the image of the rational soul communicated to the ethereal body and that the *idolum* is thus inherent in and related to the ethereal body just as *natura* is to the earthly body:

[The Platonists] believe that the life impressed by the Soul upon the etheric vehicle as upon an eternal mirror always accompanies the impressing Soul, but that the life impressed upon the corporeal and destructible body does not always [follow the Soul]. For they think that the etheric body, being next to the Soul, is perpetually animated by the ever living substance of the Soul, while the elementary body receives life from the Soul through the etheric body only for a certain time.<sup>134</sup>

Ficino also asserted that

[the ancient theologians] do not say that the rational part of the soul is directly inherent in the vehicle, but that the rational soul . . . sends into the vehicle an animating act, which we have often called the *idolum* of the soul. . . For as the light of the moon in a cloud produces paleness out of itself, so the soul produces in the celestial body the *idolum*, as a comet produces its tail.<sup>135</sup>

Ficino associated with the *idolum* a supernatural power of phantasy and perception, which is odd since the *idolum* already contains phantasy and sense perception as natural forces.<sup>136</sup>

And finally, Ficino introduced yet another intermediate entity, the *spiritus*, which he said lies closer to the body than to the soul. *Spiritus* is a concept common to medical discussions and is defined as a thin, air-like body generated in the heart out of blood and thence diffused throughout the entire body. "The soul," Ficino avowed, "is most pure, therefore it cannot be united to this thick earthly body, which is far away from it, except by a most subtle and light-bearing body, which we call 'spirit' and which is generated by the warmth of the heart out of the finest part of the blood and spread from there throughout the whole body."<sup>137</sup> Ficino also stated, "[The bodies] move that warm and vital vapor which is in some way the knot of the body and of the soul and is called by the physicists 'spirit.'"<sup>138</sup> Concentrated in the organs of the senses, the *spiritus* plays a specific role in sense

perception.<sup>139</sup> It represents the passive factor in the process of perception since it is what first receives sense impressions from the objects of sense perception. The soul proper thus must be considered a merely active factor.<sup>140</sup> The *spiritus* also contributes to nearly all other functions of the body.<sup>141</sup>

The ambiguities created by these intermediate ontological entities are readily apparent. For example, since Ficino also called *spiritus* the "vehicle of the Soul," it is difficult to determine whether Ficino considered it distinct from the ethereal body. Evidence does appear to reveal that Ficino distinguished the *spiritus* from both the ethereal and the earthly body, the latter of which is composed of the four elements. He declared, "In like manner the soul of man seems to behave with respect to its three vehicles: the ethereal, the air-like, and the composed body."<sup>142</sup> And, "Many Platonists believe that the soul uses three vehicles---the first, immaterial and simple, that is, celestial; the second, material and simple, that is, air-like; the third, material and composed, that is, made up of the four elements."<sup>143</sup> Since the *idolum* is the inherent life in the ethereal body and the *natura* the inherent life of the composed body, it follows that the *spiritus* must be the inherent life of a third body. Ficino said the Platonists believe that the soul "gives to the first [vehicle] an irrational but immortal life; to the second, an irrational but long-lasting life, which survives for a certain time in the simple body after the dissolution of the composed body; and to the third, a life irrational and to be dissolved with the dissolution of the body."<sup>144</sup> And to each degree of life there is a corresponding degree of perception. Ficino's scheme was purely artificial, however, for in other contexts he addressed *idolum* and *natura* as distinct forces, but he left no room between them for an intermediary force, instead considering *spiritus* to be a mere appendage to the corporeal body. For example, in one passage he ended his series soul, *idolum*, and ethereal vehicle of the *idolum* with the "elementary body, either simple and air-like or composed, which is the vessel of the ethereal body."<sup>145</sup>

Ficino's ontology was further complicated by the manner in which he linked the human soul to the World-soul. He not only relegated the human soul to an unusual place within the hierarchy of souls, but he

also affirmed a number of ambiguous differences between the human soul and its counterparts. To begin with, Ficino's theory of the World-soul is not always consistent, in part because he did not always distinguish his own thoughts from those of his Neoplatonic sources.<sup>146</sup> The World-soul appears to occupy the highest position in Ficino's hierarchy. It is followed, in turn, by twelve souls of the spheres, which correspond to the eight celestial spheres and the four elementary spheres. These, in turn, are followed "by the souls of the individuals distributed among the different spheres and grouped respectively under certain leading souls."<sup>147</sup> These individual souls include first the souls of the stars, then human souls, and finally, the souls of daemons and heroes---whose nature is not always defined clearly. The majority of the daemons and heroes inhabit the elementary spheres, but they also live in the celestial spheres.<sup>148</sup> In this hierarchy, then, the human soul is relegated to one of the lowest positions, a rank which conflicts with Ficino's affirmations elsewhere that the human soul resides in the center of the hypostasis.

The human soul also differs from the celestial souls in various respects with regard to its function. Like human souls, all cosmic souls have three incorporeal divisions, as well as a *natura* subject to the lowest division of the soul, and a body.<sup>149</sup> But the functions of each differ greatly from those of the human soul. The middle division of the celestial souls, the *ratio*, is completely free from bodily cares and turns toward the mind to share in its pure contemplation. And whereas the *ratio* of the human soul is subject to temporal movement, the *ratio* of the World-soul attains knowledge of intelligible things in a sort of eternal movement.<sup>150</sup> Furthermore, the cosmic souls possess either an ethereal body, as do the souls of the celestial spheres and the stars, or an elementary but simple body, as do the souls of the elementary spheres and their daemons. They do not, however, possess a composed body like that of man. Except for the daemons, then, whose *natura* resembles that of man, the cosmic souls all possess circular motion, which is the traditional form of perfect movement. Even the lower division of the cosmic souls, which Ficino did not clearly distinguish in this context from the *natura*, is sufficient in itself to move the celestial bodies.<sup>151</sup> But though man's ethereal body is able to

move in a circular motion, his corporeal body is restricted to irregular movements since it is influenced by gravity and its internal composition, and hence resists the influence of the soul.<sup>152</sup> During the period of earthly existence, then, man's ethereal body is prohibited from moving in a circular motion by the presence of the elementary body. It can only do so following the death of the corporeal body as long as it has not been tainted by earthly vices.<sup>153</sup>

Having failed in his efforts to conceal his ontological dilemma through the "dual nature" of the soul and its "temporal-eternal" paradigm, then, Ficino resorted to the creation of numerous ontological divisions within and peripheral to the human soul. Ficino was just as unsuccessful in this endeavor, however, since he developed ambiguous entities that possessed no clear relationship to one another. In a similar manner, Ficino posited a tenuous macroscopic-microscopic affinity between elements of the World-soul and of the human soul. Ficino was forced to look elsewhere for an adequate resolution to his ontological dilemma of the soul.

<sup>1</sup>Kristeller states that "the speculative assertions of Ficino's metaphysics are determined essentially by his theory of the soul." *PMF*, p. 401. Kristeller also raises the question "Why does the immortality of the soul, a problem recurring frequently in the history of philosophy as one among many metaphysical problems, become for Ficino the central problem, and why does it occupy a more important place in his system than it does in the thought of any other thinker before or after him? This question has never been raised by Ficino's interpreters---at least in this form. But the answer seems basic for any real understanding of his philosophy." *Ibid.*, p. 346. Kristeller attempts an answer in Chapter 15, "Theory of Immortality." James Hillman emphasizes the central place of the soul in Ficino's psychology. "By placing soul in the center," Hillman asserts, "Ficino's philosophy became a psychological philosophy, and he recognized that philosophy is based upon, is modified by, and modifies psychological experience. . . . [Ficino therefore teaches one] to place psychic reality first and to consider all events in terms of their meaning and their value for soul." From "Plotinus, Ficino, and Vico as Precursors of Archetypal Psychology," in *Loose Ends: Primary Papers in Archetypal Psychology* (Irving, Texas, 1978):146-69 at 155.

<sup>2</sup>Trinkaas, *Image and Likeness* 2:468. These three faculties determined by Ficino exactly match the first three of the seven levels in Augustine's *De quantitate animae* 43.70-2. *Ibid.*, 2:779 n. 12.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:475, 476.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. *Ibid.*, 2:341-43 for the rational proofs of the soul's immortality.

<sup>5</sup>*Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, pp. 237-38.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. *Opera*, p. 1330. In *PMF*, p. 399.

<sup>7</sup>*Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, pp. 237-38.

<sup>8</sup>Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters* (Rome, 1956), p. 44.

<sup>9</sup>Along with the commentary of Chalcidius, Klibansky notes that "the *Timaeus* with its attempted synthesis of the religious teleological justification of the world and the rational exposition of creation was, throughout the earlier Middle Ages, the starting point and guide for the first groping efforts toward a scientific cosmology." *Platonic Tradition*, p. 28.

<sup>10</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.2.1, Volkmann ed. (1884), 2:176. In Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (New York, 1936), p. 62.

<sup>11</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.4.1, Volkmann, 2:203. Cf. *Enneads* 5.1.6. In Lovejoy, *Great Chain*, p. 62.

<sup>12</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.8.6, ed. and trans. Stephen McKenna as *Plotinus: The Enneads* (Burdett, 1992), p. 415.

<sup>13</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.2.1-2, Volkmann, 2:176-78. In Lovejoy, *Great Chain*, p. 63.

<sup>14</sup>Macrobius, *Comment. in Somnium Scipionis* I, 14, 15. Translated by William Harris Stahl (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 145.

<sup>15</sup>Edward P. Mahoney, "Metaphysical Foundations of the Hierarchy of Being According to Some Late-Medieval and Renaissance Philosophers," p. 214 n. 1. In *Philosophies of Existence*, ed. Parviz Morewedge (New York, 1982): 165-257. Albertus Magnus attributes the term to Pythagoras. He mentions the "golden chain" in his *De causis et processu universitatis* 2, tr. 5, ch. 19 and *De anima*, *Opera* 7.1, II, tr. 2, ch. 8. Mahoney, "Hierarchy of Being," p. 222 n. 25. Duns Scotus mentions it in relation to hierarchy in his *Ordinatio* 4, d. 12, q. 2, n. 12. Even his contemporary, Meister Eckhart, uses the phrase in one of his sermons. Mahoney, "Hierarchy of Being," p. 236 n. 105.

<sup>16</sup>Ficino, *Commentary on Philebus*, 27 (16E), *Opera*, p. 1234. In Allen, *Philebus*, p. 256.

<sup>17</sup>Mahoney, "Hierarchy of Being," p. 241 n. 128.

<sup>18</sup>Mahoney stresses that it was Proclus' *Elements of Theology* accompanied by its close adherent, the *Liber de causis*, that carried a systematic notion of hierarchy into Medieval and Renaissance thought. Mahoney believes that Lovejoy, who identified Plotinus with the formulation of the hierarchy of being based on his view of plenitude, places too much stress on the influence of Plotinus alone and does not even mention Proclus. Lovejoy, in his *Great Chain of Being*, had stressed the "principle of



plenitude," according to which "no genuine potentiality of being can remain unfulfilled." Lovejoy had thus asserted that the source of being must in turn bring all other possible grades of being into existence. Mahoney, "Hierarchy of Being," p. 212 n. 1. For an English translation of *Liber de Causis*, see *The Book of Causes*, trans. Dennis J. Brand (Milwaukee, 1984).

<sup>19</sup>Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 33, trans. E.R. Dodds as *Proclus: The Elements of Theology* (Oxford, 1963), p. 37.

<sup>20</sup>Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop 146. In Dodds, *Proclus*, p. 129.

<sup>21</sup>Pseudo-Dionysius, *On the Divine Names* 713D, in Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (New York, 1993), p. 151.

<sup>22</sup>Ficino, *In Convivium Platonis, sive de amore* 2.1, trans. Sears Jayne as *Marsilio Ficino: Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love* (Dallas, 1985), p. 45. Ficino presents an even more detailed example in regard to his view of Beauty. He states that "the ray of beauty which is both Plenty and the father of love, has the power to be reflected back to what it came from, and it draws the lover with it. But it descends first from God, and passes through the Angel and the Soul, as if they were made of glass; and from the Soul it easily emanates into the body prepared to receive it. Then from that body of a younger man it shines out, especially through the eyes, the transparent windows of the soul. It flies onward through the air, and penetrating the eyes of an older man, pierces his soul, kindles his appetite, then leads the wounded soul and the kindled appetite to their healing and cooling, respectively, while it carries them with it to the same place from which it had itself descended, step-by-step, indeed, first to the body of the beloved, second to the Soul, third, to the Angel, and finally to God, the first origin of this splendor." *Commentary on the Symposium* 6.10. In Jayne, *Symposium*, p. 126.

<sup>23</sup>Ficino receives further support from Augustine, who indirectly acknowledged a hierarchy of being. Augustine answers the question, "Why, when God made all things, he did not make them all equal?" with "If all things were equal, all things would not be; for the multiplicity of kinds of things of which the universe is constituted---first and second and so on, down to the creatures of the lowest grades---would not exist." Lovejoy, *Great Chain*, p. 67. Lovejoy does not cite the location of Augustine's statement.

<sup>24</sup>*Opera*, p. 991. In *PMF*, p. 146. Ficino includes a similar passage in his *Commentary on Plotinus*: "Whatever is first in a genus has no cause in that genus. Thus, in the genus of mobile things that thing which is mobile by itself because it is the first to be mobile has no higher cause through which it is mobile, but has some other through which it is intellectual. In like manner, the first intellect is not properly intellect through a higher cause, but it owes to a higher cause its being one and good." *Opera*, p. 1673. In *PMF*, p. 146.

<sup>25</sup>Cf. Plato, *Lysis* 219c; Aristotle, *Categories* 5.3b 33ff; Anselm, *Monologium*, chaps. i ff.; Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* 1:18; 1:28; 1:41; 2:15, et passim; Ficino, *Opera*, pp. 247f. Aquinas and other Scholastics used the phrase *perfectum in alioque genere*. In *PMF*, pp. 147, 150, 152 and n. 12, 153.

<sup>26</sup>*Opera*, p. 85. In *PMF*, p. 153. Ficino calls it the first entity in every genus, *primum in quolibet genere*, *Opera*, p. 82, and more often, the highest entity in every genus, *primum in quovis genere*, *Opera*, p. 93; cf. *Opera*, pp. 100, 991, both of which establish the *primum* as the superior genus member in the hierarchy.

<sup>27</sup>*Opera*, p. 82. Ficino makes a similar assertion in his 1479 *Orphica comparatio solis ad Deum* in relation to the first light: "For the very fact that it [the first light] is the simplest, it is the first in its genus and the most common of all. Therefore it necessarily contains in itself all grades of its genus. For in each genus only that form is all-comprehensive which is simplest." *Opera*, p. 825. In *PMF*, pp. 153-54; cf. p. 97.

<sup>28</sup>*Opera*, p. 350. In *PMF*, p. 153.

<sup>29</sup>Ficino states, for example, "It must not seem absurd that after they have left their natural state the Souls should again return to it. For the plants leave and regain their natural habitations. Also elementary particles that are frequently driven out of their proper place and separated from it for a long time, tend continually toward it and finally return to it." *Opera*, p. 417. In *PMF*, p. 181.

<sup>30</sup>For example, Ficino asserts, "That which is moved, as we have seen, is not moved equally toward anything, but toward something peculiar and congruous to itself. For it would not be moved toward it except because of some congruence with it. But whatever is peculiar and congruous to each thing is good for it. . . . Each movement therefore leads to a good." *Opera*, p. 1209. In *PMF*, p. 180. He never explains whether the congruous entity is the *primum* itself.

<sup>31</sup>*Theologia Platonica* 14.10, *Opera*, p. 305, trans. Abigail Young, unpublished paper, pp. 25-6. Similarly, in his commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*, Ficino states, "An innate appetite for the primal cause as the end of all things is inherent in all things; hence, before the appetite is there, so to speak, an occult sense of that cause. . . . Through this admirable sense and appetite all things are converted toward the primal thing, even without knowing the primal thing. In like manner, by a natural sense and tendency, through its own unity derived from that source, the Soul desires unity itself, even before any open knowledge and choice of reason. *Opera*, pp. 1187f. In *PMF*, p. 172.

<sup>32</sup>*Opera*, p. 1208. In *PMF*, p. 176.

<sup>33</sup>*Opera*, p. 1209. Ficino also asserts, "The natural inclination and tendency must not always be in vain. For that would be most foreign to the order of the universe." *Opera*, pp. 416ff; cf. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* 2:33, 55. Ficino may derive this argument from Plato's *Phaedo*. In *PMF*, p. 183 and n. 53. *Parmenides* and his successors had considered rest to be more perfect than movement. Ficino continues this tradition without providing rigorous proofs. He believes there is a common doctrine among Jews, Christians, and Moslems "that rest. . . is more perfect than movement and that the individual things are moved for the sake of rest." *Opera*, p. 416. And in a small tract published among his letters, Ficino adds, "Rest is judged to be much more perfect than movement. For movement necessarily needs rest, but not conversely." *Opera*, p. 686. In *PMF*, p. 173.

<sup>34</sup>*Opera*, p. 681. In *PMF*, p. 177; cf. "Causality," Chapter VIII in same. Ficino notes that "there are two limits of movement according to the philosophers: namely, that from which it emanates and that toward which it proceeds." *Opera*, p. 675. In *PMF*, p. 180. Ficino thus asserts that the movement of natural appetite occurs in a definite direction to a definite end, which is the object desired. In his 1457 *De Voluptate*, Ficino says the Platonists believe the "end is that to which the appetite is referred as to an extreme." *Opera*, p. 990. In *PMF*, p. 177. Ficino continues the syllogism, noting that the Platonists believe "the good and the end are entirely the same," *Opera*, p. 900, and stating that "the good has the function of the end, and the end has the function of the good." *Opera*, p. 1209. In *PMF*, p. 178. To complete the syllogism, Ficino adds that the "Good" and the "object of appetite" are interchangeable, *Opera*, p. 1214, and that the Platonic notion of the Good is synonymous with God.

<sup>35</sup>*Opera*, p. 1208; cf. *Opera*, p. 678; cf. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* 3:2. In *PMF*, p. 182 and n. 52. Affinity is the objective similarity which defines the causality or relationship between one object and the object of its appetite within a hierarchical chain. For the concept of affinity, cf. In *PMF*, pp. 328-331 and Chapter IV, "Being and Thought."

<sup>36</sup>*Opera*, p. 414. Ficino also states, "When the Soul attains the infinite end. . . it attains it without end. For the same infinite force which had attracted it toward itself from afar, retains it within itself from nearby with an indescribably intensity." *Opera*, p. 682. In *PMF*, p. 191. "The natural desire of knowledge is directed toward a definite end. . . . Therefore the ultimate human goal consists in the knowledge or possession of God only, which only ends the natural appetite." *Opera*, p. 307. In *PMF*, p. 177.

<sup>37</sup>Michael J.B. Allen, "The Absent Angel in Ficino's Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 36.2 (1975):219-240. P. 225.

<sup>38</sup>While Plotinus used *Nous* to denote Mind or Intelligence, Pseudo-Dionysius and other Christian theologians altered *Nous* to mean Angel. Ficino attempts to reconcile the two since the Dionysian Angel is the most imaginatively compelling while the Plotinian *Nous* is the most philosophically attractive. Ficino thus arbitrarily uses "Mind" and "Angelic Mind" without ontological distinction. Allen says the result is that "Ficino approaches Plotinus in the light of the Dionysian angel and its scholastic extension. But it is precisely in his attempt to reconcile the two that

the concept of the angel is weakened--ironically, given the angel's eminence in Plotinus and in Dionysius." Allen, "Absent Angel," pp. 224-25.

<sup>39</sup>Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance* (Stanford, 1964), pp. 42-3; cf. *PMF*, p. 397.

<sup>40</sup>Kristeller, *Studies in Renaissance Thought*, p. 268.

<sup>41</sup>Kristeller points out that this perspective was "never wholly understood by Ficino's interpreters." *PMF*, p. 400.

<sup>42</sup>*Opera*, p. 119. In *PMF*, p. 401.

<sup>43</sup>"We have already often declared that the soul of man is the center of things." *Opera*, p. 403; cf. *Opera*, p. 404. "Since the soul is the true center of all things made by God, it is obvious that it is created as much as possible in an intermediate and even manner." *Opera*, p. 388. "If there are only these two things in the world---the intellect on the one hand and the body on the other---but the soul be lacking, then neither will the intellect be drawn toward the body. . . nor the body toward the intellect. . . . But if the soul, which is congruent with both, is placed between them, the attraction from both and toward both will take place easily. . . . Since. . . it [the soul] is the center of things, it contains all things in its own way. . . . For in addition to being congruent with divine things on the one hand and on the other with transitory things, it also inclines toward both through its affection; meanwhile it exits completely and simultaneously everywhere." *Opera*, p. 531. In *PMF*, p. 401.

<sup>44</sup>*PMF*, p. 398. As the third essence, the soul "must adhere at the same time to divine things and fill mortal things. While adhering to divine things. . . it knows them. While filling the bodies. . . it animates them. Hence, it is the mirror of the divine, the life of the mortal, the connection of both." *Opera*, p. 119. In *PMF*, p. 399.

<sup>45</sup>*Opera*, p. 121. In *PMF*, p. 120.

<sup>46</sup>*Opera*, p. 371; cf. *Opera*, pp. 331f. In *PMF*, p. 388.

<sup>47</sup>Cf. *Opera*, pp. 87ff, 227. In *PMF*, pp. 384-85.

<sup>48</sup>*Opera*, pp. 368ff. In *PMF*, p. 385.

<sup>49</sup>Cf. *Opera*, pp. 207f. In *PMF*, p. 385.

<sup>50</sup>*Opera*, p. 401; cf. *Opera*, pp. 122f. In *PMF*, p. 385.

<sup>51</sup>Cf. *Opera*, p. 290. In *PMF*, p. 385.

<sup>52</sup>Cf. *Opera*, pp. 218, 224, 227, 332, *et passim*. In *PMF*, p. 385.

<sup>53</sup>*PMF*, p. 397.

<sup>54</sup>See especially Trinkaus, *Image and Likeness* 2:461-504. Trinkaus believes Ficino purposely steered his psychology toward this end for humanistic reasons.

<sup>55</sup>*Theologia Platonica* 10.2. In Trinkaus, *Image and Likeness* 2:475.

<sup>56</sup>*Theologia Platonica* 10.2. In Trinkaus, *Image and Likeness* 2:475.

<sup>57</sup>*Opera*, p. 221. In *PMF*, p. 163.

<sup>58</sup>*Opera*, p. 390. In *PMF*, p. 163. Ficino asserts the same notion in other passages as well. "Which is that [last intellect]? It is the human intellect. . . . I believe our mind is the last one, as was the opinion of several ancient men, because it does not accomplish its acts simultaneously, but like Proteus changes its forms and thinks them successively, as the moon, being the last of the stars, changes its light successively, while the other stars do not change." *Opera*, p. 222. "The Soul of man, which in that part in which it is mind is the last among the minds and thinks only in a passive way, does not divide the universals into individuals." *Opera*, p. 371.

<sup>59</sup>Ficino believes the Soul has a double tendency and a double appetite. He states, "The rational Soul. . . is placed on the horizon, that is, on the borderline between eternity and time, since it possesses a middle nature between eternal and temporal things, and being middle it has rational forces and actions ascending toward the eternal and other forces and actions declining toward the temporal." *Opera*, pp. 657f. In *PMF*, pp. 196-97.

<sup>60</sup>Cf. *Opera*, pp. 226f. In *PMF*, p. pp. 387-88. Italics mine.

<sup>61</sup>Natural affection directed toward the body is defined by empirical evidence while the desire for God is defined by the contemplative experience. Ficino neither abolishes nor conceals this contradiction, but in order to fully understand human experience, he recognizes the contrast as real and attempts to overcome it.

Kristeller notes that "the attempt to comprehend the essence of the Soul in the contrast between the two natural affections was apparently effective in the interpretation and transformation of the individual facts of consciousness that led successively to the assumption of a desire for God and of an inclination or tendency toward the body." *PMF*, p. 392.

<sup>62</sup>*Opera*, p. 119. In *PMF*, p. 392.

<sup>63</sup>*Opera*, p. 219. In *PMF*, p. 392. "We see that the Soul inclines both toward eternal and temporal things." *Opera*, p. 658. "Since our Soul is commonly and continually inclined toward both temporal and eternal things. . . ." *Opera*, p. 473. In *PMF*, p. 392.

<sup>64</sup>*Opera*, p. 375. In *PMF*, pp. 393-94. "Hence, the soul, like the double-faced Janus, seems to have a double face---that is, one of gold and one of silver. With the former it looks at the realm of Saturn; with the latter, at that of Jupiter [that is, the eternal and the temporal]." *Opera*, p. 658. In *PMF*, p. 394. Ficino thus speaks of the two eyes of the soul in the spirit of the medieval mystics: "We. . . whose soul seems to have two eyes, one looking upward and one downward." *Opera*, p. 430. In *PMF*, p. 394.

<sup>65</sup>*Opera*, p. 1369. In *PMF*, p. 394.

<sup>66</sup>*Opera*, p. 416. In *PMF*, p. 389.

<sup>67</sup>*Opera*, p. 416. In *PMF*, p. 389. "Natural love united the Soul to the body; natural love detains the Soul in the body; the same love daily brings it to the care of the body." *Opera*, p. 381. In *PMF*, pp. 388-89. "The rational Souls are by no means bodies, but through some natural affection they tend downward toward the bodies." *Opera*, p. 688. In *PMF*, p. 389.

<sup>68</sup>*Opera*, p. 206. In *PMF*, p. 389.

<sup>69</sup>*Opera*, p. 304; cf. *Opera*, p. 351. In *PMF*, p. 389.

<sup>70</sup>*Opera*, p. 206. In *PMF*, p. 389.

<sup>71</sup>*Opera*, p. 382. In *PMF*, p. 389.

<sup>72</sup>*Opera*, p. 380. In *PMF*, p. 389.

<sup>73</sup>*Opera*, p. 1570. In *PMF*, p. 393.

<sup>74</sup>*Opera*, p. 299. In *PMF*, p. 390.

<sup>75</sup>*Opera*, p. 299. In *PMF*, p. 390.

<sup>76</sup>Ficino also believes that the soul continues to mediate between the corporeal and incorporeal even after the transitory life of human existence. In its dualistic role, its affection for God is satiated forever through eternal beatitude; at the same time, however, it continues to yearn for the corresponding resurrection of the body. In the final order of things when the movement of the world has ceased, even then the soul will continue to mediate between the corporeal and intelligible realms. Cf. *Opera*, pp. 689f. In *PMF*, p. 399. The absolute centrality of the soul also serves to support the Christian Incarnation. Ficino asserts that Christ was not merely the mediator between God and Man, but between the Creator and Creation as a whole. Consequently, the Word of God had to choose Man for His instrument as the universal bond between all things. Ficino asserts in *De Christiana religione*: "Desiring to communicate itself to all things, infinite goodness did so most adequately at the time when it was united with man, in whom, as the middle species of the world, all things are contained." *Opera*, p. 20. In *PMF*, p. 405. Ficino develops the idea more explicitly when he argues that since God's Creation must be perfect in every way, created Being must at some point unite with the Creator. "The things above the rational soul are only eternal; the things beneath it, only temporal. But the soul is in part eternal and in part temporal; it imitates God through its unity, the Angels through the intellect, its own species through reason, the animals through sense, the plants through nourishment, the inanimate things through essence. Hence, the soul of man is in a certain way all things, a matter we have discussed at length in our *Theologia*. . . . However it is meet that the universal creature be united in some way with God, the common leader of all things---I say not singly, because God is the highest unity, but in common. God, therefore, must be one with the human nature, in which all things exist. For if He were one with the things above man, as the extremes of things created, such a union would not reach to the middle of things or to the other extremes. It would be likewise if He were one with the things beneath us. In reality infinite Oneness united its works with each other and with itself to the

highest degree when it first included all things in man and then united man with itself. . . For that work [of God] is fulfilled in the middle species of all things, which is composed of both orders: eternity and time." *Opera*, pp. 20f. In *PMF*, pp. 405-06.

Pico in his *Oratio* states that the conventional arguments given for the superiority of human nature are insufficient and includes the idea that man is "the intermediary between stable eternity and fluid time and, as the Persians say, the bond of the world." *Ioannis Pici Opera Omnia* (Basileae, 1572), pp. 313ff. In *PMF*, p. 407; cf. pp. 407-10 for a synopsis of Pico's *Oratio* and *Heptaplus* and how his views compare with those of Ficino. A major idea is that man possesses all possibilities within himself and it is up to him to reject the lower forms of life and pursue God with infinite desire. This view of the universal character of man is reflected closely in Book 14 of Ficino's *Theologia Platonica*, and Pico mentions man as the ontological center of the world only incidentally. Pico, *Opera*, p. 314.

<sup>77</sup>*Opera*, p. 416; cf. *Opera*, p. 351. In *PMF*, p. 407. "Even while the intemperate soul was leading the life of man, reason was either fast asleep in him or subject to passion, wherefore it [the soul] carries with it an indestructible habit tending toward corporeal things almost as its own nature." *Opera*, p. 420. In *PMF*, p. 363.

<sup>78</sup>*Opera*, p. 416. In *PMF*, p. 407.

<sup>79</sup>An entire tradition arises from Plato's dualistic notion of the soul. Philo was greatly influenced by Plato's *Timaeus*, in particular, and he implicitly suggests the duality of man's soul through his notion that man was composed equally with clay and the divine breath of God (Genesis 2:7), thus linking the mortal and immortal. For the development of this tradition through Antiquity and the Middle Ages, cf. Trinkaus, *Image and Likeness* 1:184ff.

<sup>80</sup>*PMF*, pp. 394-95.

<sup>81</sup>*Opera*, pp. 219f. In *PMF*, p. 395.

<sup>82</sup>*Opera*, p. 658. In *PMF*, p. 395. "In each natural thing we are accustomed to investigate the propriety of nature through its continual and natural inclination. . . . Our Soul is commonly and continually inclined toward both temporal things and eternal things, and therefore we conjecture that it has both natures, so to speak---an eternal one through the intellect and a temporal one through the sense." *Opera*, p. 473. In *PMF*, p. 395.

<sup>83</sup>*PMF*, p. 395.

<sup>84</sup>*Opera*, p. 119. In *PMF*, pp. 395-96.

<sup>85</sup>*Opera*, p. 227; cf. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* 2:68, 81. In *PMF*, p. 396.

<sup>86</sup>*Opera*, pp. 657f. In *PMF*, p. 396.

<sup>87</sup>*Opera*, p. 824; cf. *Opera*, p. 318. In *PMF*, p. 396. "It seems that nothing proves the intermediary nature of the human mind better than its natural inclination toward both. For when it begins with the bodies through the intellect, it soon passes from there to the incorporeal things; and when it starts with the incorporeal things, it descends, conversely, to the corporeal images. Or when through the will it desires eternal things, it is meanwhile turned away from them by the affection for temporal things; and when it desires temporal things, conversely, it is often held back from them by reverence for the eternal things." *Opera*, p. 346. In *PMF*, p. 397. "The soul was created on the borderline between minds and bodies and therefore not only desires divine things, but also is related to matter by a natural providence and love." *Opera*, p. 381. In *PMF*, p. 397. "Individual souls naturally are inclined to animate and govern individual bodies. For that results from the nature and providence of a life that is placed between eternity and time and has a natural inclination partly toward eternal things, partly toward temporal things." *Opera*, p. 416. In *PMF*, p. 397.

<sup>88</sup>*Opera*, p. 215. In *PMF*, p. 364. "When one nature, containing two dissimilar active forces, is directed too much to the act of one force, it almost stops the act of the other. Hence, the guests of a party cannot listen attentively to a lyre and taste a meal at the same time. . . . The intensified acts of nourishing and sense perception hamper thought, and thought hampers them. That means that the intellect is a force of our same soul to which the forces of nutrition and sense perception belong." *Opera*, p. 345. In *PMF*, p. 364. Furthermore, the power of imagination "is all the more weakened, the more the speculation of the mind is strengthened, and the converse." *Opera*, p. 365. In *PMF*, p. 364.

<sup>89</sup>*Opera*, p. 185. In *PMF*, p. 218. "[When the function of sense perception is interrupted,] then the soul collects itself in some way and is not occupied either in perceiving corporeal qualities or in governing and moving the members of its own body or in treating external affairs, which easily happens in sleep. Yet the more the external act is lessened, the more the inner act is increased. Inner acts are the visions of imagination and the discursive procedures of reason." *Opera*, pp. 292ff. In *PMF*, p. 218.

<sup>90</sup>*Opera*, pp. 381f. In *PMF*, p. 366. "The mind of such a man will have some thoughts, since he is of adult age, when the growth of the body does not hinder thought." *Opera*, p. 159. In *PMF*, p. 366.

<sup>91</sup>*Opera*, p. 408. In *PMF*, p. 366. "In this body the soul has two chief obstacles: one, that it is torn between several actions and troubles, and different actions hamper and weaken each other, for it is very difficult to attend to different things at the same time; the other, that because of the condition of this lowest habitation and because of this corporeal duty which is temporarily assigned to men by God [the soul] exercises the lower actions much earlier, more attentively, and more frequently than the higher actions. Consequently, when we wish to contemplate incorporeal things, we act for the most part very weakly and perceive them blurred as in a fog." *Opera*, p. 627. In *PMF*, pp. 365-66.

<sup>92</sup>*Opera*, p. 153. In *PMF*, p. 214.

<sup>93</sup>*Opera*, pp. 203f. In *PMF*, p. 214. "Under God's guidance we shall arrive at the highest degree of nature if we separate the affection of our soul as much as possible from matter, which is the lowest degree of nature, in order that we may approach God as much as we withdraw from matter." *Opera*, p. 424. In *PMF*, p. 214. In a letter explaining the well-known passage from Plato's *Theaetetus*, Ficino even adds a moral element, "Each soul may retire from the pestilence of the body and collect itself into its mind, for then fortune will exhaust its might in the body and not pass into the soul. . . . Thus Plato commands us to flee there from here, that is, from the love of the body and from the care of external things to the worship of the soul, because evils cannot otherwise be avoided." *Opera*, p. 633; cf. *Theaet.* 176a ff. In *PMF*, p. 215.

<sup>94</sup>*Opera*, p. 441; cf. *Opera*, p. 382. In *PMF*, p. 215.

<sup>95</sup>*Opera*, pp. 206, 630. In *PMF*, p. 390.

<sup>96</sup>*Opera*, p. 382. In *PMF*, p. 391.

<sup>97</sup>*Opera*, p. 382. In *PMF*, p. 391. "The soul is never forced from outside, but by love it plunges into the body and by love it emerges from the body." *Opera*, p. 382. "The soul is not vitiated by the body, but it vitiates itself by loving the body too much." *Opera*, p. 383. In *PMF*, p. 391.

<sup>98</sup>*Opera*, p. 738. In *PMF*, p. 391.

<sup>99</sup>*Opera*, p. 209. In *PMF*, p. 391. In another passage of a similar type, he states, "Therefore no one may object that there have formerly been few persons and are now at present very few who resist the passions of the body; nay, we all resist them every day for the sake of health, honor, peace, justice, contemplation of God, or beatitude. Even if we never did break the impulses of the body, the fight itself which is continual in us would be sufficient to show that the soul resists the body." *Opera*, p. 205. In *PMF*, p. 215.

<sup>100</sup>*Opera*, p. 633. In *PMF*, p. 215.

<sup>101</sup>"While [the soul] descends to one extreme [of life], which it begins to do in the present [life] and finishes when it finally leaves [the body], it attains the middle [status] imperfectly and the opposite extreme not at all." *Opera*, p. 375. In *PMF*, p. 215. "Christians believe that guilty souls precipitate themselves by affinity, as by natural gravity, into the nine degrees of guilty demons to which they made themselves similar during life." *Opera*, p. 410; cf. *Opera*, p. 418. In *PMF*, pp. 391-92.

<sup>102</sup>*Opera*, p. 186. In *PMF*, pp. 215-16. "Since for the mind nothing is more desirable by nature than truth, and since truth is obtained through a separation from mortal things, nothing is more natural and familiar for the mind as such than to be separated from mortal things." *Opera*, p. 186. In *PMF*, p. 215. Another passage suggests that youth must be wary in judging divine things "until age itself will teach it either through the above-mentioned degrees of discipline or through experience or

through a certain separation of the soul from the body, which a moderate old age carries with it, in order that the soul in that age may see things separated from the body as from a shorter distance and so distinguish them more clearly than it was accustomed to." *Opera*, p. 322. In *PMF*, p. 216. In his commentary on St. Paul, Ficino says that "At the very time when [somebody] separates himself in some way from the body, he arrives at a judgment similar to that of the souls which are separated from the body." *Opera*, p. 451. In *PMF*, p. 216.

<sup>103</sup>*Opera*, pp. 286ff. In *PMF*, p. 216. Ficino mentions in Book 13 of the *Theologia Platonica* that the souls which can temporarily free themselves from the body include those of the philosophers, poets, prophets, and priests. Ficino equates this form of divine madness with religious fervor and defines it as "a stronger excitement of the soul in performing those things which belong to the worship of the gods, to religion, expiation, and the sacred ceremonies." *Opera*, p. 615. In *PMF*, p. 317. Following a number of examples of religious rapture, Ficino concludes by citing the source of his idea of divine madness, Plato's *Phaedrus*: ". . . he who rightly uses the divine meditations and is always imbued with perfect mysteries, he alone really becomes perfect. But while cut off from human affairs and adhering steadfastly to God, he is considered by the common people as being out of himself; they do not know that he is full of God." *Opera*, pp. 287f. In *PMF*, p. 317; cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 249c.

<sup>104</sup>*Opera*, p. 266. In *PMF*, p. 317. "Whoever achieved something great in any noble art did it mostly when he withdrew from the body and fled to the citadel of the soul." *Opera*, p. 286. In *PMF*, p. 317.

<sup>105</sup>*Opera*, pp. 292ff; cf. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* 3:47.

<sup>106</sup>This leads him to question how the body itself does not perish in such a situation, but he never provides a satisfactory answer. *Opera*, pp. 303f.

<sup>107</sup>*Opera*, p. 270. In *PMF*, p. 217. "It is the end of moral virtue to purify and to separate the soul from the divisible body." *Opera*, p. 187. In *PMF*, p. 217. "Socrates believes that through a purification of the mind this investigation [of the divine things] will finally attain whatever it desires. Therefore, putting aside for some time the usual unrest of research, he took refuge in moral philosophy so that with its help the mind, dispelling the corporeal clouds, may become serene and at once receive the light of the divine sun that shines at all times and at all places. Socrates himself, first, and Plato, later, through the imitation of Socrates, seem to have achieved that." *Opera*, p. 267. In *PMF*, p. 217. If the mind is consulted when the soul is in a morally and incorporeally pure state, "the mind will immediately reply that the soul is not only incorporeal but divine. O soul, you are something grand if you are not filled with petty things, you are the finest if evil displeases you, the most beautiful if ugly things horrify you, eternal if you disdain the temporal. Since you are of such qualities, if you wish to discover yourself, look for yourself there where those qualities exist. Great things are only there where no spatial limits are imposed; excellence where nothing adverse happens; the most beautiful where there is nothing dissonant; eternal where there is no defect. Therefore seek yourself outside of the material world. But in order to seek and find yourself beyond the world, fly beyond, indeed look beyond; for you are outside the world when you regard the entire world." *Theologia Platonica* 6.1. In Trinkaus, *Image and Likeness* 2:470.

<sup>108</sup>*PMF*, p. 217.

<sup>109</sup>*Theologia Platonica* 6.2, *Opera*, p. 159. In Trinkaus, *Image and Likeness* 2:472-73. "Do emerge, I beg you, oh souls of men, now immersed in the bodies, and at once you will find your nature above the limits of the body." *Opera*, p. 161. In *PMF*, p. 218. "A great thing thou art, oh soul, if small things do not fill thee; the best one if evils do not please thee; the most beautiful if thou dislikest the ugly; eternal if thou despisest the temporal. Since thou art of such a kind, if thou wilt find thyself, seek thyself, I beg thee, there where such things are. . . . Hence, seek thyself outside the world. . . . Hence, leave behind the narrowness of this shadow [that is, of the body] and return to thyself. So thou wilt return to largeness." *Opera*, p.158; cf. *Opera*, pp. 659f. In *PMF*, p. 218.

<sup>110</sup>*Theologia Platonica* 6.2. In Trinkaus, *Image and Likeness* 2:473. "[The soul] acts by itself when it neither reaches the bodies through the external senses nor recollects the images of bodies through the internal sense, but when the pure and incorporeal force of the Soul itself seeks and finds something incorporeal which is

neither a body nor an image of a body; and this action we call pure thought." *Opera*, p. 157. In *PMF*, pp. 218-19.

<sup>111</sup>The *mens* is pure contemplation. "The highest [part of the soul], that is, the mind, excels to such a degree that it never knows anything corporeal, being desirous of the divine things alone and stable, by nature, instantaneous (*subita*) in its thought." The *ratio*, on the other hand, ascends and descends. *Opera*, p. 299. In *PMF*, p. 380. As the human soul separates completely from the body, however, the *ratio* appears to unite with the *mens*, thus creating one incorporeal unity which connects the soul to the next higher hypostasis, the Angelic Mind. Ficino notes that the Platonists "are accustomed to call the intelligence 'unity,' because it takes place through simple intuition. . ." *Opera*, p. 389. In *PMF*, p. 380.

<sup>112</sup>*PMF*, p. 366. This results in a number of inconsistencies and the inability at times to distinguish between Ficino's own creation and those of his ancient predecessors. But his treatment of this is crucial not only to his ontology of the soul, but it serves the basis for other of his speculative theories as well. *Ibid.*, pp. 366-67.

<sup>113</sup>Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought*, p. 44.

<sup>114</sup>*Opera*, p. 404. In *PMF*, p. 367.

<sup>115</sup>*Opera*, p. 162; cf. *Opera*, p. 157. In *PMF*, p. 367. Ficino does not mention here imagination, which plays a crucial role in his epistemology. Nor does he mention the moving force of the soul, which he considers to be not a peculiar potency, but a general quality of the soul. Nor does he mention the soul's natural appetite in his vertical ontological scheme, which he actually sees as a parallel ontological doctrine with analogous divisions to the soul. Nor does Ficino here address the importance Scholastic notion of passive and active intellect. He mentions it occasionally elsewhere, *Opera*, pp. 240f, but gives it no central place in his ontology.

<sup>116</sup>*Opera*, p. 336. In *PMF*, p. 368.

<sup>117</sup>Cf. *Opera*, p. 290. In *PMF*, p. 368.

<sup>118</sup>Cf. *Opera*, pp. 303f. In *PMF*, p. 368.

<sup>119</sup>*Opera*, pp. 132, 249, 271, *et passim*. In *PMF*, pp. 368-69.

<sup>120</sup>*Opera*, pp. 374, 381. In *PMF*, p. 369.

<sup>121</sup>Cf. *Opera*, p. 381. In *PMF*, p. 369.

<sup>122</sup>*Opera*, p. 289. In *PMF*, p. 369.

<sup>123</sup>*Opera*, p. 298; cf. *Opera*, pp. 132, 273, 304. In *PMF*, p. 369. Cf. Trinkaus, *Image and Likeness* 2:476-77.

<sup>124</sup>*Opera*, p. 290. In *PMF*, p. 375. "All rational souls have. . . an intellectual head, a rational center, and an animating lowest part. That middle force is the distinctive characteristic of the soul." *Opera*, p. 298. In *PMF*, p. 374. "The middle [part of the soul] . . . now . . . ascends to the mind. . . and now descends to the animating power." *Opera*, p. 299. In *PMF*, p. 375.

<sup>125</sup>*PMF*, pp. 375-76.

<sup>126</sup>Ficino elaborates: "Colors or sounds often move the eyes or ears, and seeing and hearing at once fulfill their duties; the former sees, the latter hears, but the soul does not yet become aware that it sees and hears if our middle force does not turn its attention to those things. This is obvious in people who fail to recognize a friend while they are thinking attentively of something else. So the higher minds always move our mind which is connected with them, but we do not notice this impulse, because the middle force, being distracted by lower things, turns away from the higher ones. Similarly, the *idola* of the higher souls always move our *idolum*, but we do not recognize this influence when that middle force is speculating more strongly on something else. In like manner, the natures of the larger bodies continually irritate the nature of our body, and for the same reason we frequently do not notice this impulse." *Opera*, pp. 290f. "[The Platonists] believe that the divine act of the mind, which takes place through some intuition and through a kind of touch of divine things, is not interrupted in itself by the inferior activities, although with respect to the awareness of it, it is interrupted in the lower forces, and although the acts of rational intellect or of intellectual reason. . . are usually interrupted by the lower actions, and the converse. But why do we not notice such a wonderful spectacle of our divine mind? Perhaps because we ceased to admire and to notice it because of the continual habit of vision. Or because the middle forces of the soul, *ratio* and



phantasy, being in general more inclined toward the activities of life, do not clearly perceive the works of that mind, as when the eye sees something before it, but the phantasy, being occupied with something else, does not recognize what the eye sees. But when the middle forces are at leisure, the sparks of that intellectual speculation flow down into them as into a mirror. . . . And it is no wonder that something happens in that mind that we do not perceive. For we become aware only of what passes into the middle forces." *Opera*, p. 273. That Ficino includes the *phantasia* with the *ratio* here is uncommon, but not incidental, for it derives from Neoplatonic sources. When Plotinus addresses substantial thought in *Enneads* 1.4, he attributes consciousness or actusivity to phantasy. Ficino, however, credits it fully to *ratio*, and this forces him to identify phantasy with *ratio* at times when he closely adheres to Neoplatonic doctrine. In *PMF*, pp. 376-77.

<sup>127</sup>*PMF*, pp. 377-78. For a more specific epistemological examination of Ficino's *ratio*, actusivity, and discursive thought, and its relation to *mens* as a cognitive power, cf. pp. 378-380. For *ratio* as free will, cf. pp. 380-1.

<sup>128</sup>*Opera*, p. 289. In *PMF*, pp. 369-70. "The corporeal life is an image of the rational soul. . . . Above the corporeal life there is the lowest part of the soul, which is the power of nourishing." *Opera*, p. 273. "The Platonists believe that the irrational life of the body is irradiated as light from the substance of the rational soul as from the sun." *Opera*, p. 206; cf. *Opera*, p. 304. In *PMF*, p. 370.

<sup>129</sup>*Opera*, p. 401; cf. *Opera*, pp. 332f. "The irrational soul accompanies [the rational soul], as the shadow does the body." *Opera*, p. 84b. "The irrational [soul] proceeds from there [that is, from the Idea of life] through the rational one and so lives at some time by itself." *Opera*, p. 149. In *PMF*, p. 370.

<sup>130</sup>*Opera*, p. 334. In *PMF*, p. 370.

<sup>131</sup>*Opera*, p. 250. In *PMF*, p. 370.

<sup>132</sup>*Opera*, p. 404. In *PMF*, p. 371.

<sup>133</sup>*Opera*, p. 206. In *PMF*, p. 371. "According to the Platonists [the souls] always have an ethereal body, but according to the Christians they will eventually have an eternal body." *Opera*, p. 375; cf. *Opera*, pp. 134, 162 *passim*. In *PMF*, p. 371.

<sup>134</sup>*Opera*, pp. 149f. In *PMF*, pp. 371-72.

<sup>135</sup>*Opera*, pp. 404f. In *PMF*, p. 372.

<sup>136</sup>*Opera*, p. 405. In *PMF*, p. 372.

<sup>137</sup>*Opera*, p. 177. In *PMF*, p. 372.

<sup>138</sup>*Opera*, p. 211. In *PMF*, p. 372.

<sup>139</sup>*Opera*, p. 178. In *PMF*, p. 372.

<sup>140</sup>*Opera*, pp. 177f, 211f. In *PMF*, pp. 372-73.

<sup>141</sup>*Opera*, pp. 496ff, 525ff. In *PMF*, p. 373. Kristeller believes this is one reason why Ficino emphasizes its importance in *De vita*.

<sup>142</sup>*Opera*, p. 388. In *PMF*, p. 373.

<sup>143</sup>*Opera*, p. 405. In *PMF*, p. 373.

<sup>144</sup>*Opera*, p. 405. In *PMF*, p. 373.

<sup>145</sup>*Opera*, p. 302. In *PMF*, pp. 373-74.

<sup>146</sup>*PMF*, pp. 373-74.

<sup>147</sup>*Opera*, pp. 122ff, esp. *Opera*, pp. 125f; cf. *Opera*, p. 250. In *PMF*, p. 386.

<sup>148</sup>*Opera*, pp. 223, 390. In *PMF*, p. 386.

<sup>149</sup>Cf. esp. *Opera*, p. 250. In *PMF*, p. 386.

<sup>150</sup>*Opera*, p. 132. In *PMF*, p. 386.

<sup>151</sup>Kristeller ambiguously adds that the lower part of the cosmic souls "produces corporeal movement when it passes through the whole series of forms in temporal succession, and through the forms generated in itself, which partake of the nature of germs, it brings forth successively the forms of corporeal things." *Opera*, pp. 122f, 132f, 250. In *PMF*, p. 386.

<sup>152</sup>*Opera*, pp. 379f. In *PMF*, pp. 386-87.

<sup>153</sup>*Opera*, pp. 134, 380. In *PMF*, p. 387. The soul is the first ascending entity in the hierarchy of Being in which the element of movement occurs, and the movement of *ratio* is thus considered the primary and most excellent movement. Because the soul possesses this capacity within itself, it is the cause of movement for all

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lower entities in the hierarchy of Being. Cf. *Opera*, pp. 290, 117. In *PMF*, p. 382. But, as Ficino states, the soul "must first vigilantly prove its forces in itself before manifesting them in the body, and thus, as the corporeal substance is derived from spiritual substance, so the corporeal movement is produced by the spiritual movement." *Opera*, p. 118. In *PMF*, p. 383. Such movement is not limited to man, however. In Neoplatonic fashion, Ficino applies it to the entire universe as well. The spheres are moved by the activity of their Souls, and since the Souls of man and beast are related to the world Soul, or the Souls of the spheres, their movement also ultimately originates in the spiritual movement of the cosmic souls. *Opera*, p. 401; cf. *Opera*, pp. 122ff. In *PMF*, pp. 383-84.

#### 4. PRISCA THEOLOGIA AND DE VITA IN FICINO'S PSYCHOLOGY

Ficino's inability to develop an ontology that could adequately place the soul in an intermediary position between the corporeal and incorporeal spheres of Reality found possible resolution in the mid-1480's when he pursued an interest in natural magic through the authority of the *prisca theologia*. Ficino had thus far used the sacred reputation of the *prisca theologia* to legitimize his Platonic theology and the pagan, particularly Neoplatonic, elements in his ontology of the soul. But, as shown above, Ficino could only refer to their authority indirectly since their works were not rigorous philosophically. Possessing a new interest in natural magic, however, Ficino once again turned to the *prisca theologia*, whose *prisca theologi* are also *prisca magi*, and whose writings place a greater emphasis on magic than philosophy. Ficino specifically focused on the Hermetic *Asclepius* and its Plotinian counterpart to guide his talismanic magic.

The use of natural magic required Ficino to reverse the direction in which he was developing his psychological ontology. He had thus far been expanding his ontology from the soul outward and thus from the incorporeal to the corporeal.<sup>1</sup> But his need to illustrate that he was practicing a purely natural magic forced him to begin at the corporeal level and push his ontology upward toward the incorporeal soul. Ficino had never before approached the soul from an external point-of-view, and this fresh perspective may have allowed him to develop the quasi-incorporeal entity he was looking for to bridge the ontological gap between body and soul. He devised the "World-spirit" as the ontological agent which not only drives his talismanic magic, but which influences his ontological approach to the soul. Ficino appears to have viewed this World-spirit as the quasi-incorporeal entity that bridges the gap between body and soul. Although such a conclusion is tenuous, Ficino's creation of the World-spirit nonetheless emphasizes his own desire to resolve this dilemma and it reveals the important role Hermetic magic plays in helping to crystallize his psychological ontology.

Ficino did not engage in magic until quite late in his career. The *De vita*, completed in 1489, was his first and only magical treatise. This work was actually a combination of three different treatises combined under the same heading. Only the last of the three, the *De vita coelitus comparanda* (hereafter cited as *De vita 3*), blatantly delves into magic. Indeed, it is considered the prime magical treatise in the Renaissance era, and the springboard from which an entire occultist literature developed under well-known magicians such as Henricus Agrippa and Giordano Bruno. Of concern here is the intermediary agent that Ficino used to drive his talismanic magic. Ficino used spirit as the ontological medium that transmits sympathetic forces between the celestial and worldly spheres. His notion of spirit appears to have gone through an ontological transformation, however, as he turned from mere astrological medicine in *De vita 1* to natural magic in *De vita 3*, in which spirit evolves from a corporeal into a quasi-incorporeal state. But before we can provide a direct analysis of the ontological role of spirit in Ficino's *De vita 3*, we must examine the background of the *De vita* and the origins of his astrological medicine.

#### **Background to *De vita***

The importance of *De vita* in Ficino's philosophy, and thus his ontology of the soul, cannot be overstated. Ernst Cassirer, Michael J.B. Allen, and Paul Kristeller all advocate the independence of Ficino's scholarship, and Carol Kaske adds that *De vita* is the most original of Ficino's works.<sup>2</sup> Eugenio Garin says that *De vita* is one of the "strangest and most complex" works to have been written by Ficino<sup>3</sup> and Charles Schmitt says *De vita* is "central to any attempt to understand Ficino."<sup>4</sup> Ficino's *De vita* was largely a medical treatise in which Ficino applied astrological medicine to balance the four humors of the medical spirit to remedy those patients, usually intellectuals, who are subject to the melancholic forces of Saturn. The three books of *De vita libri tres*<sup>5</sup> were originally three separate treatises: *De vita sana* or *De cura valetudinis eorum qui incumbunt studio litterarum*, *De vita longa*, and *De vita coelitus comparanda*. In his first two treatises, Ficino mixed prescriptions with psychology, and hygiene with pharmacology, while astrology played only a minor role. As Ficino turned to *De vita 3*, however, medical remedies largely gave way to

issues of philosophy and the occult. Ficino now focused on how the spirit could receive direct aid from the "celestial causes" through an astrology which includes talismans and other devices.

Ficino completed *De vita sana* by late 1480 and distributed it in manuscript form. It soon became attached to the beginning of Book 7 of Ficino's *Epistolae*, as the Proem to that book indicates: "The seventh book of our Epistles has at its head an epistle which deals with caring for the health of men of letters."<sup>6</sup> This treatise was later separated from the *Epistolae* and became *De vita* 1. The *Epistolae* preserved the proem and filled the lacuna with the note:

I promised you just now, reader, that at the head of this seventh book there would be an epistle dealing with the health of men of letters. This epistle of ours, however, has grown to such an extent that it no longer wants to be the head of such a small body but rather a whole separate body of its own. And so it has now taken the better course, detached itself, and successfully grown into the book *De vita*.<sup>7</sup>

Ficino completed *De vita longa* in August 1489 after he had read Arnald of Villanova's *De retardanda senectute*.<sup>8</sup> He dedicated *De vita longa* to Filippo Valori in September 1489 and he published *De vita libri tres* soon after.<sup>9</sup> *De vita coelitus comparanda*, which was to become the third book of *De vita* (hereafter cited as *De vita* 3), had been completed before *De vita longa*. It was originally part of Ficino's Commentary on Plotinus, which he was composing between 1484 and 1492, and it is preserved in one manuscript as a *Commentary on Plotinus' Enneads* 4.3.11.<sup>10</sup> Ficino had separated it by 10 July 1489 and dedicated it to Matthias Corvinus, King of Hungary:

Now, among the books of Plotinus destined for the great Lorenzo de' Medici I had recently composed a commentary (numbered among the rest of our commentaries on him) on the book of Plotinus which discusses drawing favor down from the heavens. With all this in mind, I have just decided to extract that one (with the approval of Lorenzo himself) and dedicate it especially to your Majesty.<sup>11</sup>

Ficino may have revised this text slightly since he later claimed that he had finished work on *De vita coelitus comparanda* on 1 August 1489.<sup>12</sup>

Ficino appears to have composed *De vita* following a long career of influential exposure to contemporary physicians. Although we cannot be sure whether he ever received a medical degree, Ficino appears to have had professional contact with the largest hospital in Florence, Santa Maria Nuova, the address of which he provided in his earliest dated composition.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, a number of individual physicians appear to

have aided Ficino along in the direction of medicine. Pierleone Leoni of Spoleto, a physician used by Lorenzo de Medici, had accumulated an extensive library from which Ficino may have read authors such as the Arabic physicians and Ramon Lull. Ficino borrowed a Latin copy of the Arabic *Picatrix* from one Georgio Medico.<sup>14</sup> Matteo Aretino may have had great influence on Ficino, who asked for Aretino's medical evaluation of *De vita* and for a recommendation to other physicians on 29 April 1490. And in a separate letter praising medicine, Ficino specifically lauded a certain Galileo, Lorenzo Martellini, Antonio Benivieni, and Tommaso Valeri the addressee.<sup>15</sup>

Ficino appears to have had a number of motives for writing *De vita*. He wished to write something in memory of his father, Diotifeci Ficino of Figline in Valdarno, also known as Diotifeci di Agnolo di Giusto, who was a doctor and who wanted Ficino to be one as well.<sup>16</sup> Ficino claimed that his father had been "the favorite physician" of Lorenzo's grandfather Cosimo de' Medici.<sup>17</sup> Having been ordained in 1473, Ficino defended his interest in medicine by noting that a priest should serve humanity and that the best gift is *mens sana in corpore sano*; furthermore, Christ commanded his disciples to heal the sick.<sup>18</sup> Such a defense was necessary since most physicians came from the laity ---physicians rarely served in orders after the twelfth century.<sup>19</sup> Ficino also wished to help men of letters like himself to keep their health.<sup>20</sup> And specifically with regard to *De vita 2*, he hoped to prolong the lives of the elderly, whom he considered to be in his own age-group, stating "myself already old."<sup>21</sup> Ficino appears to have had personal motives as well. His biographer, Giovanni Corsi, whose work is largely specious, but who should be able to provide accurate physical descriptions, notes that Ficino was a valetudinarian fraught by melancholy because he was born under the influence of Saturn.<sup>22</sup> By seeking remedies for others through astrological medicine, then, Ficino no doubt sought remedy for ailments of his own.

The inspiration for Ficino's *De Vita* arose out of contemporary events as well. Ficino had just recently published one medical work, the *Consiglio contro la pestilenza* (Florence, 1481), which was brief and practical as suggested by its vernacular language. *De vita* makes references to it and was sometimes published with it. Like *De vita*,

Ficino avows to have composed it out of a contemporary situation in which he was not directly involved, the 1478-1480 plague which devastated Florence.<sup>23</sup> During this period, Ficino wrote on more practical subjects simply because his community was in need of them. The Latin translator of the *Consiglio* adds that Ficino cured a number of people during the pestilence.<sup>24</sup> This undoubtedly stimulated Ficino to compose a second medical work, *De vita sana*, which would later become Book 1 of *De vita*. One Martin Preninger and other readers even urged Ficino to compose a sequel.<sup>25</sup>

#### **Philosophical Exposure to Medicine and the *Prisca Medicina***

Ficino's medical practices were inextricably linked to philosophy, as his ontological manipulations in *De vita* 3 would later attest. Corsi reports that Ficino's father, an eminent physician especially skilled in surgery, wished for Marsilio to follow in his footsteps. Ficino thus found himself enrolled at the University of Bologna in the early 1450s to study the Peripatetics and contemporary writers "in order that he too might soon practice his father's art of medicine."<sup>26</sup> Most professors of philosophy at the universities, such as Bologna, Pavia, and Padua, were propagating a variegated but specific form of Aristotelianism at this time. This peculiar form of Aristotelianism, which had originated in the fourteenth century, had a medical rather than a theological orientation, and it emphasized logic and natural philosophy.<sup>27</sup> More reliable evidence suggests, however, that Ficino actually studied medicine and Aristotelian philosophy under professor Niccolo Tignosi of Foligno at the University of Florence, where Ficino received the majority of his formal education.<sup>28</sup> The medical studies and speculative philosophy Ficino received under Tignosi were very important in developing his conception of the universe. Tignosi advocated a natural philosophy in which any true *scientia* revealed that the categories of thought must be based on the categories of reality. Tignosi thus demonstrated that scientific thought was crucial to medicine since the subject matter of the medical discipline reflected the external world. Ficino integrated this philosophical approach into his practice of medicine.<sup>29</sup>

Ficino's medical practice appears to have been further influenced by his early exposure to Plato's *Timaeus* around 1457. The synthesis of

a Platonic world view with a deterministic, materialistic view which was to prevail in *De vita* appears to have been derived from this work. Ficino and others mentioned in works dated to around 1457 that he had already composed a work on the *Timaeus*. This may have been an early draft to his *Commentary* on the *Timaeus*, although the published edition makes indirect references to works composed as late as *De vita*. At any rate, since the *Timaeus* was more deterministic and materialistic than the other works of Plato, it anticipated Ficino's medical view that one can possess a *mens sana* only *in corpore sano* (86b-87b). Ficino thus developed "a qualified respect for the material world belied by the rest of Plato's oeuvre."<sup>30</sup> In combination with Tignosi's teachings, Ficino's Timaeic influence helped to persuade him of the power of astrological medicine---and later, magic---to empirically link different levels of the cosmos.<sup>31</sup>

Ficino's early exposure to medicine appears to have been consecrated by his early discovery of a *prisca medicina* which paralleled the *prisca theologia* itself. In the mid-1450s, at about the same time he wrote his *De laudibus philosophiae* praising the *prisca theologia*, he wrote a school oration in praise of medicine. Here again, Ficino illustrated his fascination with ancient wisdom. He attempted to reconstruct a *prisca medicina* which, he claimed, derived from one "divinity," but had been handed down through two traditions. One included the Hebrews and "Arabs" (Moslems) who passed down divine medical wisdom given to Adam; the other included the Greek and Egyptian theologians who used the medical wisdom Apollo gave to Asclepius.<sup>32</sup> Ficino thus emphasized the unity between philosophy and medicine, and the unity between the cure of bodies and souls. In support of his argument, he quoted the *Charmides*,<sup>33</sup> mentioned Zoroaster (although he failed to mention the *Chaldaean Oracles* or their attribution to Zoroaster as the first of the Magi), and quoted from the Hymns of Orpheus.<sup>34</sup> Ficino later attested to the influence of the *prisca medicina* in his *Apology* to the *De vita* dated 15 September 1489:

the most ancient priests of long ago were doctors as well as astronomers, as indeed the histories of the Chaldeans, the Persians, and the Egyptians testify. Moreover, to no one more than to the pious priest did the duties of extra-ordinary charity pertain, which indeed shine forth as much as possible in the greatest service of all. The most outstanding duty without a doubt, most necessary and especially



desired by all, is to see to it that men have a sound mind in a sound body. This we can accomplish only if we join medicine to the priesthood.<sup>35</sup>

### **Ficino's Approach to Astrological Medicine**

The *prisci theologi* were important in establishing a medical tradition, but they played an even more important role in validating the astrological components inextricably linked to this medical tradition. As Ficino noted above, the *prisci theologi* were not only physicians, but astronomers as well. This tradition survived through Aristotle, Hippocrates and Galen,<sup>36</sup> and continued unabated through the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, receiving approval in Christian orthodoxy especially through Albertus Magnus and his *Speculum*.

Paracelsus (1493?-1541) clearly defined the symbiotic union between the two as seen by Renaissance physicians. He declared that philosophy is the "first foundation of medicine" and astronomy is its "other foundation." He continued:

First of all, the physician must know that he has to understand man in that other half which concerns the *astronomicam philosophiam*, and that he must transfer man into it and transfer the heavens into man. Otherwise he will be no healer of men, for the heavens contain in their sphere half the body and also half the number of diseases. Who can be a doctor and not be acquainted with the diseases of this other half? . . . What is a doctor who is not expert in cosmography? It is a subject in which he ought to be especially well versed. . . for all knowledge originates in cosmography, and without it nothing happens.<sup>37</sup>

Ficino himself acknowledged this dual tradition consecrated by the *prisci theologi* and closely followed it himself. He avowed, "But since medicine is quite often useless and often harmful without the help of the heavens - a thing which both Hippocrates and Galen admit and I have experienced - astronomy certainly pertains to this priestly charity [*mens sana in corpore sano*] no less than does medicine."<sup>38</sup> Astronomy, of course, is synonymous with astrology, and Ficino used the terms interchangeably. For example, again referring to Galen, Ficino stated, "Finally, let us conclude with Galen that astrology is necessary for the physician."<sup>39</sup>

Although he pointed to the *prisca medicina* and even Albertus Magnus as powerful precedent, Ficino had never been able to fully embrace astrology, and he continually vacillated between verbal support and condemnation of this practice. In his unfinished 1477 *Disputatio contra iudicium astrologorum*, he used a number of arguments to attack

astrology, many of which he inserted almost verbatim into his 1486 Commentary on Plotinus. And yet, in the third book of his 1489 *De Vita*, he applied astrology positively for medical purposes. But then again, following the completion of Pico della Mirandola's enormous work against astrology in 1494, Ficino wrote a letter to Poliziano professing his agreement with Pico and amending his earlier statements in *De Vita* to make them appear consistent with his present position.<sup>40</sup> Poliziano, however, received Ficino's tenuous argument with skepticism,<sup>41</sup> and this fact betrays Ficino's insincerity and vacillation.

But Ficino was not so much negligently inconsistent as he was caught between conflicting intellectual drives that guided him in different directions simultaneously. Ernst Cassirer contends that "there is an instance of unrest and of constant inner tension as a result of his ambiguous intellectual and moral attitude towards astrology."<sup>42</sup> Professional astrologers advocated complete power of the stars over human destiny, a concept which Ficino consistently rejected. For if the human mind transcends the entire corporeal world, it cannot be subjugated by celestial influences. And just as we are more powerful than the play of fortune, we are also superior to the fate dictated by celestial spheres.<sup>43</sup> For this reason, Augustine vehemently asserted in his *Confessions*, "By this time I had also turned my back upon the astrologers with their illusory claims to predict the future and their insane and impious ritual. In this too, my God, let me acknowledge your mercy from the deepest depths of my soul!"<sup>44</sup> It is this view that led Ficino to assault astrology in the *Disputatio* and his Commentary on Plotinus. In his *proemium* to the *Disputatio*, for example, he directed his attack against those who "affirm that particular events are necessarily caused by the stars,"<sup>45</sup> and he contended that such astrological determinism errs in that it eliminates divine providence and man's free will. Later, he affirmed its irrelevance: "Finally, if those things that are fated cannot be avoided, it is useless to foresee and predict them; if they can in any way be avoided, the necessity of fate is falsely defended by the astrologers."<sup>46</sup>

At the same time, however, Ficino never denied that the stars possess a natural power over earthly entities and the human body. He was well aware that higher entities are naturally able to influence

lower ones in the hierarchy of being.<sup>47</sup> Thus, Ficino did not contradict himself, but merely distinguished between body and soul and reflected this in a bold formula he put forward in Book 9 of the *Theologia Platonica* and repeated in the *Disputatio*: "The heavens do not move our will through the instinct of nature, but they do move our body."<sup>48</sup> This justified his view in *De Vita* that astrological medicine could be used for the care of the human body. In this form, astrology pretends to be a definite science based on empirical and experiential evidence that attracts celestial powers naturally. Ficino found further justification for this view through his early exposure to Tignosi and the *Timaeus*.<sup>49</sup>

**The Four Humors and Ficino's Saturnine Disposition:**

The ultimate goal of astrological medicine was to promote sympathetic interaction between the four cosmic elements and their corresponding organic humors of the human body. Deriving their theories ultimately from Pseudo-Aristotle's *Problemata* 30.1, medieval and Renaissance physicians believed the four humors included blood, choler (red or yellow bile), black choler (black bile), and phlegm. Each humor was identified with corresponding physical properties based on its own composition: blood with air (moist and warm), choler with fire (dry and warm), black choler with earth (dry and cold), and phlegm with water (moist and cold). Sometimes each element was also paired with the fundamental quality heavy or light.<sup>50</sup> John of Burgundy explained the theoretical connection between the cosmic humors and the four humors of the human body: "Since the heavenly or firmamental bodies are the first and primitive causes [of disease], it is necessary to have knowledge of them; for if the first or primitive causes be unknown, we may not come to know the causes secondary."<sup>51</sup> The secondary causes were understood through "physic," based on the four humors.<sup>52</sup> This symbiotic relationship between the cosmic and elemental humors could only be understood through astrological medicine.

In turn, the "complexion" or "temperament" of each individual was determined by the proportional blending of the four humors. "Sanguine," "choleric," "melancholic," and "phlegmatic" thus became standard physiological and psychological archetypes of human nature.<sup>53</sup> Although the "prime" temperament was thought to be a balanced combination of all four humors, some physicians believed sanguine to be the most desirable.

The phlegmatic, and especially the melancholic, were commonly considered to be the least desirable. The temperaments were often paired with external phenomena. For example, each archetype was paired, respectively, with spring, summer, autumn, and winter. They were also commonly used symbolically. They were sometimes associated with stages of life, for example, in which youth was considered sanguine and old age was melancholic.<sup>54</sup> The most important development, however, was the ninth-century Arabic innovation of pairing the temperaments with planets and their respective humors. The melancholic archetype was paired with Saturn and black bile, sanguine with Jupiter and blood, choleric with Mars and red bile, and phlegmatic with the moon or Venus and phlegm.<sup>55</sup>

This last development had monumental impact on Ficino's use of astrological medicine since Ficino himself possessed a melancholic Saturnine temperament. Indeed, Ficino's interest in astrology and medicine may have ultimately derived from his personal motive to alleviate the undesirable symptoms of this unfortunate disposition. Although he had been born under the Sun-sign of Scorpio (19 October 1433), Ficino's "Significator" was Saturn since it was the most dignified planet in the heavens at the moment.<sup>56</sup> Ficino deplored this fact and wrote to his great friend, Giovanni Cavalcanti, "I accuse a certain melancholy disposition, a thing which seems to me to be very bitter. . . . Saturn seems to have impressed a seal of melancholy on me from the beginning."<sup>57</sup> For indeed, Ficino was Saturnine and melancholic through and through, not only according to age and nativity, but also according to temperament and profession.

This misfortune forced Ficino to assume an almost fatalistic attitude in life, for the melancholic archetype imposes austere limitations on those whom it affects and it only allows its patients to develop their personalities within the confines of its pre-established boundaries.<sup>58</sup> As Klibansky notes, "Ultimately the Saturnine man can do nothing else. . . than embrace his fate, and resign himself heart and soul to the will of his star."<sup>59</sup> Ficino became "obsessed" with his misfortune, and his friends appealed to him in vain to overcome his self-pity and depression.<sup>60</sup> Ficino recognized that he had recourse to one of two paths: Either he could reject astrology and deny his Saturnine fate altogether, an approach which he followed in his

unfinished *Disputatio contra iudicium astrologorum* and in his letter on astrology to Poliziano,<sup>61</sup> or he could face his Saturnine disposition head-on and attempt to positively manipulate its effects through astrological medicine, an approach which he followed in his *De vita*. As Ficino said to Cavalcanti, "So, what shall I do? I shall seek a shift; either I shall say, if you wish, that a nature of this kind does not issue from Saturn; or, if it should be necessary that it does issue from Saturn, I shall, in agreement with Aristotle, say that this nature itself is a unique and divine gift."<sup>62</sup>

Indeed, Ficino's only hope was manifested in the bittersweet quality of the Saturnine disposition, whose inertia, sterility and melancholy was offset by its quality as the ruling genius of intellectual concentration.<sup>63</sup> Pseudo-Aristotle alluded to this fact in his *Problemata*: "Why is it that all men who have become outstanding in philosophy, statesmanship, poetry or the arts are melancholic, and some to such an extent that they are infected by the diseases arising from black bile?"<sup>64</sup> Cavalcanti and others emphasized this positive side as well. Cavalcanti, for example, mentioned that, as a Saturnine, Ficino had a tenacious memory and had risen above his fellow men, bringing with him the glory of the *prisca theologia*, "by which you have made your way by disused and overgrown paths through the whole of Greece, even penetrating into Egypt, to bring to us those most wise men of old on your shoulders. . . .Will you therefore accuse Saturn, he who purposed that you should rise above other men as far as he himself rises above other planets?"<sup>65</sup> Cavalcanti added the encouraging "fact" that Plato too was Saturnine.<sup>66</sup> And he further asserted that no planet could have an evil influence on someone so much as it served as a mere instrument carrying out the will of God our Father.<sup>67</sup>

Ficino had discussed melancholy with some optimism as early as 1469 when he composed his *Commentary on the Symposium*. This work is almost a prototype of *De vita* 1.2-6. Ficino relied heavily on medical spirits and black bile in this work to explain why the lover is dry, or melancholic. He lauded melancholy by asserting that fixed and profound thought always accompanies melancholic blood,<sup>68</sup> that the melancholic lover, though difficult to catch, is the most constant,<sup>69</sup> and that a naturally melancholic complexion facilitates either carnal or

contemplative love, the latter of which is one of the four divine *furores* that raises the soul to God.<sup>70</sup> Ficino continued this praise in 1474 when he added two more melancholic *furores* in his *Theologia Platonica* facilitating poetry and prophecy.<sup>71</sup> Klibansky claims, however, that Ficino's communication with Cavalcanti sometime in the mid-1470s appears to have marked "the moment at which the views of Proclus and Aristotle" on Saturn, mentioned by Cavalcanti, "began [however intermittently] to prevail in his mind against the [negative] views of the medieval astrologers."<sup>72</sup>

Ficino therefore came down largely on the positive side of melancholy in *De vita*, where he viewed Saturn's malevolence as a necessary evil. Kaske even asserts that *De vita* was "the first treatise to reason medically at any length about the paradoxically positive intellectual value of melancholy."<sup>73</sup> Using Pseudo-Aristotle's *Problem* 30.1 as a starting point, Ficino composed a well-known, original, and lengthy praise of melancholy in *De vita*, especially 1.6. Much of Ficino's *De vita*, especially Book 1, addressed ways in which the intellectual could live with melancholy and the associated fear of Saturn while still preserving his medical health. As a result, Ficino's *De vita* became the first treatise to fully revive the Platonic notion of the four Platonic noble *furores* through melancholy.

But Ficino's interest in melancholy turned sharply from astrological medicine in *De vita* 1 and 2 to talismanic magic in *De vita* 3. Ficino opened *De vita* 1 by defending the melancholic humor black bile as the physical foundation for the *furor* genius. In the more pharmaceutical sections of Book 1, chapters 7-26, and fully in Book 2, however, Ficino treated black bile in its traditional sense as a *pestilentia* with no beneficial effects, and combined it with the symptomatic ailments of intellectuals such as insomnia, headaches, and dimness of vision. But as Ficino turned to *De vita* 3, medical remedies largely give way to issues of the occult. Except for a few minor prescriptions, Ficino neglected black bile altogether and now focused on how the Saturnine patient could receive direct aid from the "celestial causes" through a natural magic that employs talismans and other devices.<sup>74</sup>

**Medical Spirit as Ontological Agent in *De vita* 1 and 2:**

The most important entity in Ficino's astrological medicine and talismanic magic is the ontological agent that drives the processes to begin with, an agent which Ficino defined as spirit. Just as Ficino's approach to melancholy in *De vita* evolved from medicine into magic, however, so too did his agent appear to have evolved from the traditional medical spirit into a quasi-incorporeal spirit. The ontological nature of the spirit will therefore be of primary concern from this point forward.

In *De vita* 1 and 2, the medical spirit served as the ontological agent through which astrological medicine could be used to affect one's Saturnian disposition. Before the composition of *De vita*, Ficino had recognized the medical spirit in its traditional role. He had given it no special attention, except perhaps in his *Commentary* on the *Symposium*, which was shown above to be in some ways a medical prototype for *De vita*. But Ficino drastically increased his emphasis on the role of the medical spirit when he composed *De vita*. Kaske observes that "the most important mediator in the entire work is the medical spirit; the notion is so pervasive as almost to constitute the work's real subject."<sup>75</sup> Ficino greatly accentuated the role of medical spirit in the astrological medicine of *De vita* 1 and 2, and he even appears to have altered its ontological make-up in the talismanic magic of *De vita* 3.

Up to this time, medieval and Renaissance medical writers had applied the medical spirit philosophically as a *tertium quid* to bridge the chasm between man's body and soul. Between *corpus* and *anima* was this third element, *spiritus*, variously described as *medium*, *vinculum*, or *copula*. Historian D.P. Walker observes that this theory derived originally from Aristotle and Galen, and was later systematized by the Arabs (see Appendix II). Despite certain inherent weaknesses and ambiguities associated with the concept, the theory of medical spirits was preserved throughout the Middle Ages in a generally consistent and coherent form.<sup>76</sup> The medical spirit was thought to be purely corporeal and it was broken down into its own ontological hierarchy. It traditionally received three corporeal divisions: natural, vital, and animal. The natural spirit is responsible for growth, reproduction, and nutrition. The vital spirit is responsible for life and the passions. And the highest level, animal spirit, operates the "rational power whose

seat is the brain" and is the first instrument of the soul.<sup>77</sup> The animal spirit contains the ruling power, *mens*, which resides in the brain itself; the power of sensation, which functions by using nerves and sense organs coming to the brain; and the power of motion, which operates using the spinal cord and the nerves branching out from it. The animal spirit is nonetheless still purely corporeal since it is composed of vital spirit and air.<sup>78</sup>

Ficino's treatment of the medical spirit before the writing of *De vita* came largely from his *Commentary* on the *Symposium*, a work which he completed in 1469 and which includes a vast array of his early medical theories. In this work, Ficino employed the traditional notion that this spirit is subtle, but still fully located within the corporeal realm. Ficino provided a clear description of its ontological nature:

Certainly three things seem to be in us: the soul, the spirit, and the body. The soul and the body, which are by nature very different from each other, are joined by means of the spirit, which is a certain very thin and clear vapor produced by the heat of the heart from the thinnest part of the blood. Spread from there through all parts of the body, the spirit receives the powers of the soul and transmits them to the body. It also receives through the organs of the senses images of external bodies, images which cannot be imprinted directly on the soul because incorporeal substance, which is higher than bodies, cannot be formed by them through the receiving of images. . . . on account of their poverty, the eye and the spirit require the presence of the body, and the soul, which is usually dominated by them, is forced to desire the same thing.<sup>79</sup>

Ficino appears to have fully retained this traditional view of spirit when he discussed medical spirit in *De vita* 1. He gave it a similar ontological definition and he broke it down hierarchically into its traditional divisions. Ficino defined the nature of spirit as a vapor or gas, pure, subtle, hot, and clear; its physical basis as the subtler blood; its efficient cause as the heat of the heart; and its destination and purpose as the brain, where "the soul uses it continually for the exercise of the interior as well as the exterior senses. This is why the blood subserves the spirit; the spirit, the senses; and finally, the senses, reason."<sup>80</sup> Ficino added that contemplation is as good as is the sense; the sense is as good as is the spirit; "the spirit is as good as is both the blood and those three forces which we mentioned - i.e., the natural, vital, and animal, by which, through which, and in which the spirits themselves are conceived,



born, and nourished."<sup>81</sup> In this manner, Ficino clearly described the medical spirit as having a corporeal nature in *De vita 1*.

In his final chapter of *De vita 1*, Ficino made an assertion that appears *prima facie* to suggest the existence of an incorporeal spirit. But on closer scrutiny, the passage clearly indicates that Ficino was using spirit in a figurative sense only to accentuate the contrast between body ("corporeal spirit") and soul ("incorporeal spirit"):

If lovers of truth ought to care for the corporeal spirit with such great efforts of doctors lest it either, if entirely neglected, prove a hindrance in their pursuit of truth, or else serve them inadequately, then no doubt they must try still harder to cultivate with the teachings of moral philosophy the incorporeal spirit, i.e., the intellect, by which alone truth, being itself incorporeal, is apprehended. For it is wrong to cherish only the slave of the soul, the body, and to neglect the soul, the lord and ruler of the body, especially since the Magi and Plato assert that the entire body depends upon the soul in such a way that if the soul is not well, the body cannot be well.<sup>82</sup>

Ficino went to say that Apollo, the founder of medicine, believed Socrates to be wiser than Hippocrates since the former healed the soul while the latter healed only the body. Ficino effectively contrasted body and soul in this manner, but he did so at the expense of the spirit's own sanctity. Not only did he taint the true definition of spirit through this symbolism, but he implicitly denied the existence of a real "incorporeal spirit" by referring to it symbolically.

Ficino, then, clearly defined spirit in its traditional medical sense as a corporeal ontological agent in *De vita 1*. That Ficino could have changed his view toward spirit in the eight short years between his completion of *De vita 1* in 1480 and *De vita 3* in 1489 may at first appear to be cause for suspicion. But it was during this interim that Ficino studied the *prisca theologia* as *prisca magi* and translated some Neoplatonic magical texts. By the time he composed *De vita 3*, then, not only had Ficino largely replaced astrological medicine with talismanic magic, but he appears to have transformed the ontological nature of spirit as well.

#### ***Prisca Theologia and Prisca Magi:***

The *prisca theologia* provided authority for Ficino's interest in natural magic.<sup>83</sup> Ficino had been aware that, in addition to religious philosophy and astrological medicine, the *prisca theologia* engaged in a wide variety of occult practices, including good natural magic,

numerology, powerful music, and the belief that important truths must be veiled in allegory and myth.<sup>84</sup> Ficino had thus been aware from the start that the *prisci theologi* were also *prisci magi*. Just as he had used the authority of the *prisci theologi* to develop a Platonic theology paralleling Christianity, then, he now used the authority of the *prisci magi* to develop his own natural talismanic magic.<sup>85</sup> Since the pious views of the *prisci theologi* were in harmony with Christian orthodoxy, it followed that their magical views should not have conceivably extended beyond those practices endorsed by the Christian Church.<sup>86</sup>

Although the *prisci magi* practiced magic, they did not engage in widespread or explicit magic. All of the Hermetic texts do presuppose an astrological pattern in the cosmos which combines gnosticism and magic, and many of them also reveal the hidden power of plants and stones and the sympathetic magic that derives from the knowledge of such virtues.<sup>87</sup> Nonetheless, they were most useful to Ficino in a doxographic and genealogical sense. Hermes Trismegistus, Zoroaster (to whom Ficino usually attributes the invention of magic), Orpheus, and Plato all gave authority to Ficino's magical practices through their reputation as *prisci theologi*.<sup>88</sup> The Hermetic and Orphic texts, in particular, played a vital role in giving authority to the more explicit and powerful magic of the Neoplatonists. Indeed, it is not coincidental that Ficino translated a number of Neoplatonic magical texts at the same time that he revived his interests in the *prisca theologia*. By the time Ficino had completed *De vita* 3 in 1489, he had either translated or paraphrased a large number of Neoplatonic magic treatises, including Proclus' *De Sacrificiis et Magia*, Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis* and *Vita Pythagorae*, and Porphyry's *De Abstinencia*.<sup>89</sup>

The majority of these Neoplatonic treatises addressed theurgical magic. The Neoplatonists largely wrote between the third and fifth centuries A.D. at a time of increasing fascination with and belief in mystical religions, astrology, magic, and especially theurgy.<sup>90</sup> A number of different religions intersected, including the Christian, Gnostic, Manichaeian, Hermetic, Orphic, and neo-Pythagorean, and these groups tended to emphasize theurgy instead of theology, works and ceremonies instead of reason and thought. Porphyry commented on the *Oracula Chaldaica*, those nebulous Greek verses later attributed to

Zoroaster which describe the process for summoning demons and for running a cult of the sun and fire. Iamblichus, too, commented on the *Oracula Chaldaica* and, in his *De Mysteriis*, he asserted the primacy of theurgic practices over all intellectual or rational ways of contacting God.<sup>91</sup> In his *Vita Pythagorae*, he claimed that Pythagoras resembled Orpheus and learned his theurgic practices from the disciples of Orpheus.<sup>92</sup> Proclus was an excellent magician who achieved his forte in rain-making. He wrote an extensive commentary on the *Oracula Chaldaica*. His *De Sacrificiis et Magia* provides a succinct exposition of sympathetic astrological magic using a number of solarian examples.<sup>93</sup> In addition, Marinus' biography of Proclus, which Ficino would have been aware of, recorded that Proclus had earnestly sung and studied Orphic hymns and had applied "methods of purification, both Orphic and Chaldaean" in his theurgy.<sup>94</sup>

The *prisci magi* did not only provide doxographic support for Ficino's Neoplatonic magic, however. In addition to providing a powerful reputation, the *prisci magi* directly aided Ficino by providing the source for his talismanic magic. In the epistolary preface to *De vita*, Ficino cited Pythagoras, Democritus, Plotinus, and Apollonius of Tyana as "ancient philosophers" whose teachings were vital to an understanding of his magic.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, a number of treatises of the *Corpus Hermeticum* employed talismans to attract the influence of celestial bodies. The most important influence on Ficino's talismanic magic, however, came from the statue-animating passages in the Hermetic *Asclepius*.<sup>96</sup> The most important of these appeared as a dialogue between Hermes Trismegistus and his disciple, Asclepius:

(Hermes:) Let us turn again to mankind and reason, that divine gift whereby a human is called a rational animal. What we have said of mankind is wondrous, but less wondrous than this: it exceeds the wonderment of all wonders that humans have been able to discover the divine nature and how to make it. Our ancestors once erred gravely on the theory of divinity; they were unbelieving and inattentive to worship and reverence for god. But then they discovered the art of making gods. To their discovery they added a conformable power arising from the nature of matter. Because they could not make souls, they mixed this power in and called up the souls of demons or angels and implanted them in likenesses through holy and divine mysteries, whence the idols could have the power to do good and evil. . . . (Asclepius:) And the quality of these gods who are considered earthly - what sort of thing is it, Trismegistus? (Hermes:) It comes from a mixture of plants, stones, and spices, Asclepius, that have in them a natural power of divinity. And this is why those gods are entertained with constant sacrifices, with hymns, praises and sweet sounds in tune with heaven's harmony: so that

the heavenly ingredient enticed into the idol by constant communication with heaven may gladly endure its long stay among humankind. Thus does man fashion his gods.<sup>97</sup>

Ficino summarized this passage in the final chapter of *De vita* 3.<sup>98</sup> The Hermetic *Asclepius* not only enabled Ficino to promote a natural magic, but it also offered to him a preliminary conception of spirit as the ontological agent that drove his talismanic magic. Professor Thomas Moore concisely establishes this dependence: "In Ficino's theory [of magic] *spiritus* is the means of magical effect between planetary daimons and the physical world or the life of the individual. The method by which this *spiritus* is conveyed from planets to the individual is described in *The Asclepius* as a matter of image-making."<sup>99</sup>

Unfortunately, we possess no commentary on the *Asclepius* by Ficino, a fact which prohibits us from understanding how he viewed the *Asclepius* and its important statue-animating passages before he wrote *De vita*. The version printed in his *Opera Omnia* was actually written by Lefèvre d'Étaples, who strongly criticized the idolatrous god-making passage. Lefèvre d'Étaples had published Ficino's *Pimander* and the *Asclepius* with his own commentaries in Paris in 1505. Often published together thereafter, the texts eventually found their way back into Ficino's collected works.<sup>100</sup> All we know directly from Ficino's earlier career, then, is the comment he made in the *argumentum* to the *Pimander* that the *Asclepius* is a "divine" work on the Will of God just as the *Pimander* is a "divine" work on the Power and Wisdom of God. Both, he claimed, had been written by Hermes Trismegistus himself.<sup>101</sup>

At any rate, Ficino's composition of *De vita* 3 illustrates not only his renewed interest in the Hermetic *Asclepius* but also his dependence on the above statue-animating passage as the cornerstone of his talismanic magic. That Ficino apparently composed his *De vita* 3 as a commentary on Plotinus' *Enneads* 4.3.11 actually supports this assertion since Plotinus wrote *Enneads* 4.3.11 as a commentary on the above passage from *Asclepius*. Indeed, Plotinus stated in 4.3.11:

I think, therefore, that those ancient sages, who sought to secure the presence of divine beings by the erection of shrines and statues, showed insight into the nature of the All; they perceived that, though this Soul is everywhere tractable, its presence will be secured all the more readily when an appropriate receptacle is elaborated, a place especially capable of receiving some portion or phase of it, something reproducing it, or representing it and serving like a mirror to catch an image of it.<sup>102</sup>

That *Enneads* 4.3.11 represented the lemma and source for *De vita* 3<sup>103</sup> in turn suggests that Ficino was ultimately more concerned with the *Asclepius* than he was with Plotinus. Hermes and the *prisci magi* thus served as the ultimate source of Ficino's talismanic magic.

### **Ficino's Originality in *De vita* 3**

Having shown Ficino's talismanic magic to have originated through Hermes and Plotinus, we must now examine whether Ficino was merely recounting the nature of Hermetic and Plotinian magic or whether he was actually using their precedent as a springboard from which to develop his own talismanic magic. This issue must be resolved before we can posit the existence of an original ontological agent in Ficino's talismanic magic. The problem is that Ficino frequently claimed he was merely recounting the Plotinian approach to magic rather than applying his own. It is difficult to take Ficino at his word, however, since the evidence suggests otherwise.

Ficino's apprehension undoubtedly derived from the potential volatility of practicing any form of magic within the confines of Christian orthodoxy. If Ficino was hesitant to use astrology even though Albertus Magnus and others had largely validated its use in conjunction with medicine, it is easy to understand how much more hesitant Ficino would have been to use magic, for which little, if any, precedent had been established in Christian circles. This fact explains why Ficino relied so heavily on the *prisci magi*, whose magic could theoretically be considered no more heretical than the pre-Christian wisdom asserted by the same *prisci theologi*. In reality, however, whereas disputes around the *prisci theologi* merely involved the danger of platonizing Christianity rather than Christianizing Platonism, the disputes around the *prisci magi* involved the danger of usurping the very supernatural power that gives Christianity its sanctity.<sup>104</sup> This danger explains why Ficino, who knew of the *prisci magi* at the beginning of his career, opted not to acknowledge this side of the *prisca theologia* until so late in his life.

In *De vita* 3, then, Ficino defended his use of astrological medicine,<sup>105</sup> but he only reluctantly admitted that he was also practicing talismanic magic. In the Proem to *De vita* 3, Ficino dedicated his work to King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary (1458-1490), a

well-known patron of the arts. Here, Ficino avoided the mention of magic altogether, and supported his interest in astrological medicine by soliciting the reputation of fellow physicians. He assured King Matthias that:

without a doubt, your own careful attention and the care of doctors and astrologers can so arrange things that the stars both give faithfully what they promise and even extend it further with a fuller increase. All the learned astrologers and doctors now testify that this can be done by science and common sense.<sup>106</sup>

Ficino again advocated the use of astrological medicine in the *Ad Lectorem* to *De vita* 3. He assured his intellectual reader that *De vita* "forms an epitome of Medicine which will assist your life as much as possible, that it may be both healthy and long; and it employs at every point the resources of doctors, aided by the heavens."<sup>107</sup>

At the same time, however, Ficino also made reference in the *Ad Lectorem* to artificial astrological images, a vital factor that transformed his astrological medicine into talismanic magic. Ficino appears to have introduced it as a casual, offhand remark, and he explained to the reader that he was merely reporting and not advocating this practice. He assured his reader:

if you do not approve of astronomical images, albeit invented for the health of mortals - which even I do not so much approve of as report - dismiss them with my complete permission and even, if you will, by my advice. At least do not neglect medicines which have been strengthened by some sort of heavenly aid, unless perhaps you would neglect life itself.<sup>108</sup>

Later, in *De vita* 3.18, Ficino cautiously added that he himself would rather stick to astrological medicine alone:

I think, therefore, that it would be safer to trust oneself to medicines than to images; and that the things we said cause celestial power in images can have their efficacy rather in medicines than in figures. . . . For besides the fact that I suspect the figures to be useless, we ought not rashly to allow even the shadow of idolatry.<sup>109</sup>

And in the same spirit, he warily ended the *Ad Lectorem* by stating, "In all things which I discuss here or elsewhere, I intend to assert only so much as is approved by the Church."<sup>110</sup> Ficino thus professed that his work was purely commentary, and he placed full responsibility for his talismanic magic on the shoulders of Plotinus. Not only did he subtitle *De vita* 3 "Which He [Marsilio] Composed among His Commentaries on Plotinus," but he headed his first chapter "In What, According to Plotinus, the Power of Attracting Favor from the Heavens Consists,

Namely, That Well-adapted Physical Forms Can Easily Allure the World-soul and the Souls of the Stars and the Daemons."<sup>111</sup>

But Ficino's assertion that he was merely interpreting Plotinus is difficult to assess since the line dividing commentaries and original works had often been blurred in Western scholarship. The *Confessions* of Augustine, with whom Ficino was greatly enamored, was undoubtedly an original work. And yet, Augustine had ended his *Confessions* with two commentaries, one on another commentary, Macrobius's *Commentary on the Somnium Scipionis*,<sup>112</sup> and the other on the beginning chapters of Genesis.<sup>113</sup> In the Middle Ages, the commentary had even risen to the level of a literary form. Dante, whom Ficino greatly admired and whose *De monarchia* he had translated into Italian,<sup>114</sup> had composed his original *Vita nuova* as a commentary on his own poems.<sup>115</sup> It had become convention, even before Ficino's time, to write one's own treatise under the guise of a commentary on some other work, and one expert on Ficino states that "it was because of the convention of the commentary as a substitute for the discursive treatise that Ficino wrote his treatise on love [*Commentary on the Symposium*] in the form of a commentary."<sup>116</sup> The fact that his *Symposium* commentary was not only an original treatise, but also quite similar to *De vita* in content suggests that Ficino may very well have written *De vita* as an original treatise in continuation of his earlier views in his *Symposium* commentary.

Furthermore, the fact that Ficino maintained remarkable fidelity in his Plotinian translations is at odds with the fact that he had to defend his "objective" interpretation of Plotinus in *De vita* 3 with an *Apology* dated 15 September 1489. Ficino had been exposed to Plotinus nearly as long as he had been to Plato himself. As early as 1460, Ficino not only had access to a complete Byzantine manuscript of the *Enneads* (the codex Laurentianus 87,3), but he had the entire Greek text transcribed for his personal studies (the codex Parisius graecus 1816). After fully completing his Plato project in 1484, Ficino prepared a first-draft translation of the entire Plotinian corpus between 1484-86. He then revised the translations and added commentaries, completing the project in 1490 and publishing it in 1492.<sup>117</sup> Ficino's extended familiarity with Plotinus accounts for the accuracy and rapidity of his translations. One authority notes at length:

One of the remarkable things about Ficino's Plotinus translation is its accuracy. Leading authorities in the field of Plotinian studies, such as Paul Henry and Hans-Rudolf Schwyzer, have remarked that Ficino maintains an extraordinary high standard of fidelity to the Greek, even in cases where modern translators have failed to capture the sense. This is particularly remarkable if one takes into account the state of Greek studies in the fifteenth century. It is uncanny how often Ficino manages to discern the meaning of the sometimes elliptical Greek of Plotinus. This can only stem from years of intensive and patient struggling with the text, and from the profound philosophical congeniality of the fifteenth-century Florentine with the third-century Greek.<sup>118</sup>

It makes little sense, then, that despite his fidelity to Plotinus, Ficino had to defend *De vita* through the *Apology*. In this work, Ficino claimed that "Marsilio is not approving magic and images but recounting them in the course of an interpretation of Plotinus. And my writings make this quite clear, if they are read impartially."<sup>119</sup> It is unlikely that Ficino would have felt compelled to defend himself unless he had consciously deviated from Plotinus in his commentary. Ficino's assertion that he is merely interpreting Plotinus thus largely appears to be a facade behind which he could safely express his own ideas on talismanic magic.

### **Ficino's Use of Magic in *De vita* 3**

Despite the many approaches to Ficino's magic and the expanding scholarship in this area, we are concerned here with magic only insofar as it affects Ficino's psychological ontology. We wish to examine what ontological agent Ficino used in his talismanic magic as a medium through which sympathetic forces pass between the intelligible realm of the soul and the corporeal realm of the body. An understanding of this agent will, in turn, add clarity to Ficino's psychology by better defining the nebulous ontological region between the corporeal body and incorporeal soul.

In *De vita* 3, Ficino largely turned from astrological medicine to talismanic magic.<sup>120</sup> The title of *De vita* 3, "On Obtaining Life from the Heavens," and his first chapter, "In What, According to Plotinus, the Power of Attracting Favor from the Heavens Consists, Namely, That Well-adapted Physical Forms Can Easily Allure the World-soul and the Souls of the Stars and the Daemons," clearly indicate the talismanic nature of Ficino's magic. Ficino defined his talismanic magic as the



natural attraction of sympathetic cosmic forces into an object that has been prepared in an appropriate way.<sup>121</sup> He said the Magus:

when he knows what or what sort of materials. . . can receive what or what sort of influence from the heavens - assembles these materials when that influence is most dominant, he prepares them, he brings them to bear, and he wins through them celestial gifts. For whenever a material is thus exposed to the celestials, as a glass mirror to your face and as an opposite wall to your voice, immediately it experiences something from above from a most powerful agent, namely, the wonderful power and life everywhere present; and it gains power from the experience, just as from the face the mirror reproduces an image and from the voice the wall reproduces an echo.<sup>122</sup>

Although astrological medicine does much the same thing, Ficino here considered it to be only one of many forms of talismanic magic. Indeed, he even ranked it as one of the lowest types. In ascending order, he divided

the harmony capable of receiving things above into seven steps: through images (as they believe) put together harmonically, through medicines tempered with a certain proper consonance, through vapors and odors completed with a similar consonance, through musical songs and sounds (with which rank and power we wish to associate gestures of the body, dancing, and ritual movements), through well-accorded concepts and motions of the imagination, through fitting discourses of reason, through tranquil contemplations of the mind.<sup>123</sup>

Ficino at all times contended that his talismanic magic was purely natural since the sympathetic forces of cosmic entities are passively attracted into corporeal entities when the corporeal entity is made to be more similar to its cosmic counterpart. He thus claimed that his magic was not theurgic, in which the appeal to intelligible entities results in an active and intelligible response that affects the patient in a manner outside the bounds of natural processes.<sup>124</sup> Ficino defended himself at length in his *Apology*. He noted:

Nor do I affirm here a single word about profane magic which depends upon the worship of daemons, but I mention natural magic, which, by natural things, seeks to obtain the services of the celestials for the prosperous health of our bodies. This power, it seems, must be granted to minds which use it legitimately, as medicine and agriculture are justly granted, and all the more so as that activity which joins heavenly things to earthly is more perfect.<sup>125</sup>

Ficino went on to delineate more specifically the forms of magic in order to prove that his magic was not only natural, but philanthropic and necessary:

Lastly, there are two kinds of magic. The first is practiced by those who unite themselves to daemons by a specific religious rite, and relying on their help, often contrive portents. . . . But the other kind of magic is practiced by those who seasonably subject natural materials

to natural causes to be formed in a wondrous way. Of this profession there are also two types: the first is inquisitive, the second, necessary. The former does indeed feign useless portents for ostentation. . . . This type, however, must be avoided as vain and harmless to health. Nevertheless the necessary type which joins medicine with astrology must be kept.<sup>126</sup>

Ficino even searched out reputable authorities who had previously promoted talismanic magic. He turned to a number of sources, but he relied most heavily on Albertus Magus, who had composed some important works on astrology and magic. Ficino perceived Albert the Great, as:

an orthodox theologian, [who] detests the prayers and fumigations which certain impious people have offered to daemons when they are making images. Nevertheless, he does not disapprove of figures, letters, and sayings impressed upon images for the precise purpose of receiving some gift from a celestial figure, which Pietro d'Abano has confirmed can be obtained through images.<sup>127</sup>

Ficino provided further precedent a short time later "Also Albertus Magnus, professor both of theology and of magic, says in his *Speculum*, a work where he claims to be distinguishing what is permitted from what is forbidden, that images rightly constituted by astrologers acquire power and effect from a celestial figure."<sup>128</sup> Ficino also turned to Thomas Aquinas to confirm the distinction between natural and theurgical magic:

But I think, in the first place, in accordance with the opinion of the blessed Thomas [Aquinas] that if they made speaking statues at all [Asclepius 8.24a, 13.37], it was not the mere influence of the stars itself that formed the words within, but daemons. Secondly, if by chance it happened that these daemons did enter into statues of this kind, I think they were not bound there by celestial influence but rather deliberately indulged their worshippers, intending to deceive them in the end. To be sure, a superior nature of this kind is sometimes won over by an inferior, but it cannot be constrained.<sup>129</sup>

Thomas Aquinas, our leader in theology, is more fearful of these practices and attributes less to images. For he thinks only so much power is acquired from the heavens through figures as conduces to those effects which the heavens ordinarily bring about through herbs and other natural things. . . . But if anything wonderful happens to us through them outside the accustomed effects of nature, he rejects it as the work of daemons out to seduce people. This is clear in the book *Contra Gentiles*, but especially clear in his letter *On the Occult Works of Nature*, where he seems to give little credit even to the images themselves, however they are made; and insofar as he requires it, I give them no credit at all. Even the Platonists attribute certain wonderful effects of images to the deception of daemons. For Iamblichus too says that those who place their trust in images alone, caring less about the highest religion and holiness, and who hope for divine gifts from them, are very often deceived in this matter by evil daemons encountering them under the pretense of being good divinities.<sup>130</sup>

Ficino thus discounted the theurgical manipulation of human intelligence or divine election to promote change through human solicitation.

Instead, he promoted a fully passive process in which a mundane entity

is doctored so as to become more harmonious with its celestial counterpart, at which time the forces of the celestial entity are attracted naturally to the mundane entity through a sympathetic affinity. Man can receive intelligible gifts, but only through affinity, not election: "be warned beforehand not to think we are speaking here of worshipping the stars, but rather of imitating them and thereby trying to capture them. And do not believe that we are dealing with gifts which the stars are going to give by their own election but rather by a natural influence."<sup>131</sup> It appears that Ficino sincerely attempted to remain within the boundaries of natural magic.<sup>132</sup> At the same time, however, his apologetic emphasis on the natural form of his talismanic magic and his search for the approval of Church theologians betray his personal interest in magic and further discredit his claim to be objectively commenting on Plotinus.

#### **Seminal Reasons as Ontological Agents**

Ficino opened his *De vita coelitus comparanda* with his typical praise of the soul as the ontological center of the universe:

If there were only these two things in the universe - on one side the Intellect, on the other the Body - but no Soul, then neither would the Intellect be attracted to the Body (for Intellect is absolutely motionless, without affect, which is the principle of motion, and very far away from the Body), nor would the Body be drawn to the Intellect (for Body is in itself powerless, unsuited for motion, and far removed from the Intellect). But if a Soul which conforms to both were placed between them, an attraction will easily occur to each one on either side. In the first place, Soul is led most easily of all, since she is the Primum Mobile and movable of herself, of her own accord. Moreover, since, as I have said,<sup>133</sup> she is the mean of things, in her own fashion she contains all things and is proportionally near to both. Therefore she is equally connected with everything, even with those things which are at a distance from one other, because they are not at a distance from her. For besides the fact that on the one side she conforms to the divine and on the other side to the transient, and even turns to each by desire, at the same time she is wholly and simultaneously everywhere.<sup>134</sup>

Ficino appears to have asserted this position up front in order to preempt discussion concerning the ontological discrepancies hidden within the pleasant symmetry of his psychology. This assertion appears misplaced, however, for in the remainder of *De vita 3*, Ficino concerned himself not with the soul, but with the ontological agent that affects the soul through talismanic magic. Before *De vita 3*, Ficino had always pursued his philosophy from his central focus on the soul outward. But now, for the first time, Ficino was forced to examine his soul from the

outside, and specifically, from the corporeal realm upward. That Ficino never again returned to this central conception of the soul in *De vita 3* may be indicative of the ontological changes he made in his treatise based on this new approach and perspective.

Ficino distinguished between natural and theurgic magic in method only rather than instrument used. Therefore, although Ficino clearly discounted the theurgical manipulation of human intelligence or divine election to promote change in his talismanic magic, he did not assert that the agent which transmits cosmic forces must necessarily be corporeal. It could theoretically be intelligible as long as it serves in a passive and natural role. Thus, Ficino could ultimately have chosen from one of three ontological agents with which to drive his magic: 1) A purely corporeal agent; 2) An intelligible agent, e.g. *mens* or *ratio*; 3) An intermediary agent, e.g. *spiritus*, which may be subtle, but corporeal, or even quasi-incorporeal. Ficino rejected a purely intelligible agent, undoubtedly because it is too closely associated with the dangers of theurgic magic. Instead, Ficino opted to use spirit as the agent for his magic. He posited a unique conception of a World-spirit which resides between the World-soul and the World-body and which transmits celestial forces to the analogous human spirit, which are then passed on to the human body or soul. This World-spirit appears to be a quasi-incorporeal entity. It is more difficult to determine, however, whether Ficino also considered the human spirit to be quasi-incorporeal, or merely the traditional medical spirit. At any rate, Ficino's new ontology made overtures toward positively establishing a quasi-incorporeal entity between body and soul.

At the very beginning and end of *De vita 3*, Ficino turned to seminal reasons as the intermediary ontological agent that drove his magic, a concept which closely follows Plotinus. Ficino's rare adherence to Plotinus at each extreme suggests that Ficino wrote the ends of his treatise as part of an objective commentary on Plotinus and sandwiched his own ideas in between. Ficino thus appears to have been explaining the nature of the Plotinian ontological agent rather than suggesting his own. Directly following his introductory comments on the soul, Ficino attributed the intermediary agent to the Plotinian seminal reasons. Ficino reported that divine power provides the World-soul with

the same number of seminal reasons of things as there are Ideas in the Divine Mind. The World-soul, in turn, creates the same number of species in matter. Thus, each species corresponds to its particular Idea through its own seminal reason and can even receive something from the Idea since it was created through the reason of that Idea. If one brings to bear on a species or a particular individual in the species numerous things which conform to the same Idea, "into this material suitably adapted you will soon draw a particular gift from the Idea, through the seminal reason of the Soul: for properly speaking, it is not Intellect itself which is led, but Soul."<sup>135</sup> Plotinus defined the seminal reasons collectively as the lowest agent of the Ideas that reside in the World-soul and inhere in the individual beings which they are tasked with forming.<sup>136</sup> Ficino continued at length:

Hermes says that the priest received an appropriate power from the nature of the cosmos and mixed it. Plotinus follows him and thinks that everything can be easily accomplished by the intermediation of the Anima Mundi, since the Anima Mundi generates and moves the forms of natural things through certain seminal reasons implanted in her from the divine. These reasons he even calls gods, since they are never cut off from the Ideas of the Supreme Mind. He thinks, therefore, that through such seminal reasons the Anima Mundi can easily apply herself to materials since she has formed them to begin with through these same seminal reasons, when a Magus or a priest brings to bear at the right time rightly grouped forms of things - forms which properly aim toward one reason or another. . . . Sometimes it can happen that when you bring seminal reasons to bear on forms, higher gifts too may descend, since reasons in the Anima Mundi are conjoined to the intellectual forms in her and through these to the Ideas of the Divine Mind.<sup>137</sup>

Ficino saw the reasons as a mediating force between the World-soul and the World-body in that they have both upward and downward functions. As an upward force, they become exemplary reasons, which correspond in the mind of the World-soul to the Ideas in the Intellect itself. As a downward force, they are seminal reasons which serve as agents of the World-soul's generative force in matter, in which they also reside and create the species.<sup>138</sup> Ficino here differed from Plotinus, however, in that Plotinus said the seminal reasons agree in number and respectively inhere in the individual entities they create while Ficino only associated the seminal reasons with the species and its characteristics, but did not believe they serve alone as agents on individuals.<sup>139</sup> In addition, Plotinus suggested that the seminal reasons are purely incorporeal. Although this assertion is not inherently wrong, Ficino considered it to be dangerously close to theurgy.

### Daemons as Ontological Agents

A short time later in the opening chapter, therefore, Ficino turned to daemons as the intermediary ontological agent that drove his talismanic magic. Not only did Ficino believe that daemons serve as agents on individuals,<sup>140</sup> but he clearly explained that he did not employ intelligible daemons in his magic. Rather, he advocated intermediary daemons which carry the gifts of incorporeal entities to their corporeal counterparts:

And so let no one think that any divinities wholly separate from matter are being attracted by any given mundane materials, but that daemons rather are being attracted and gifts from the ensouled world and from the living stars. Again, let no man wonder that the Soul can be allured as it were by material forms, since indeed she herself has created baits of this kind suitable to herself, to be allured thereby, and she always and willingly dwells in them.<sup>141</sup>

Although Ficino clearly rejected intelligible agents altogether, he did not automatically relegate his daemonic agents to corporeal status either. Rather, Ficino just indicated that his daemons are not "wholly separate from matter." This leaves the ontological nature of these agents open to question.

But the major test of Ficino's use of daemonic agents arises with regard to his Plotinian treatment of the statue-animating passages of the Hermetic *Asclepius*. Following his reference to talismanic magic in his opening chapter, Ficino did not again blatantly mention artificial images until chapter 13, entitled "On the power acquired from the heavens both in images, according to the ancients, and in medicines." Here Ficino first mentioned Hermetic statue-animation: "Trismegistus says the Egyptians also used to make such images of specific cosmic materials and used to insert into them at the right time the souls of daemons and the soul of his ancestor Mercury."<sup>142</sup> Ficino did not again elaborate on this passage until the final chapter of *De vita* 3. In this crucial passage, Ficino asserted that Hermes and Plotinus both advocate daemonic agents:

Plotinus uses almost the same examples in that place where, paraphrasing Hermes Trismegistus, he says that the ancient priests or Magi used to capture in statues and material sacrifices something divine and wonderful. He holds, moreover, with Hermes Trismegistus that through these materials they did not, properly speaking, capture divinities wholly separate from matter but deities who are merely cosmic, as I said from the beginning and as Synesius demonstrates<sup>143</sup>---cosmic, I say, that is, a life or something vital from the Anima Mundi and the souls of the

spheres and of the stars or even a motion and, as it were, a vital presence from the daemons. Indeed, the same Hermes, whom Plotinus follows, holds that daemons of this kind---airy ones, not celestial, let alone any higher---are themselves present all along in the materials and that Hermes himself put together statues from herbs, trees, stones, and spices, which had within themselves, as he says, a natural force of divinity.<sup>144</sup>

Here again, Ficino posited daemonic agents "not wholly separate from matter" and he credited Hermes and Plotinus for having conceived this notion. But Ficino revealed his originality in this passage, for he distorted the ontological nature of the agent that both Hermes and Plotinus originally had asserted.<sup>145</sup> Hermes had explicitly referred to terrestrial daemons in the *Asclepius*: "To their discovery they added a conformable power arising *from the nature of matter*. Because they could not make souls, they mixed *this power in* and called up the souls of demons or angels and implanted them in likenesses through holy and divine mysteries. . ."<sup>146</sup> Plotinus had stated with unusual boldness that it was the World-soul itself that was captured: ". . . though this Soul is everywhere tractable, its presence will be secured all the more readily when an appropriate receptacle is elaborated, a place especially capable of receiving some portion or phase of it. . ."<sup>147</sup> Ficino, however, asserted here that both Hermes and Plotinus had considered the daemonic agent to be neither terrestrial nor celestial, but airy and cosmic, "a life or something vital from the Anima Mundi and the souls of the spheres and of the stars or even a motion and, as it were, a vital presence from the daemons." That Ficino was presenting his own view is undeniable, for he would never have so grossly misunderstood the position of Plotinus. Unfortunately, however, Ficino elaborated no further. We are therefore left with a nebulous, possibly quasi-incorporeal entity. Although he never identified it as such, Ficino appears to have been referring to World-spirit, discussed below.

Daemons are little better than seminal reasons, then, as an ontological agent in Ficino's magic. Just as Ficino confined seminal reasons to species, he confined daemons largely to individuals, although he used the term inconsistently to begin with.<sup>148</sup> Consequently, he had no means with which to bridge the macrocosmic-microcosmic gap between analogous entities, celestial and mundane. He could hardly have established an affinity between seminal reasons and daemons. In addition, there is the problem of semantics. "Daemon" was a loaded term

invariably associated with theurgic magic, regardless of whether the daemonic agent was a purely passive intelligible entity acting in a natural manner. Ficino appears to have solved both problems above through the single concept of spirit. "Spirit" was a less threatening term than "daemon" and it allowed for a more appropriate macrocosmic-microcosmic affinity to be established between a so-called World-spirit and the human spirit. Ficino thus often appears to have used the notion of cosmic daemons and World-spirit interchangeably, with the exception that World-spirit evolves into its own distinct ontological entity.

#### **World-spirit and Human Spirit as Ontological Agents**

Ficino thus established the World-spirit as a new ontological entity which parallels the human spirit and which he used consistently and with great frequency in *De vita* 3. This concept did not arise anywhere in Plotinus' *Enneads*. Instead, Ficino likely derived this notion in part from Julian the Apostate or, more importantly, from the Arabic *Picatrix*.<sup>149</sup> Some research has been conducted on the possible connection between *De vita* 3 and *Picatrix*, but no definitive assessment has been reached.<sup>150</sup> Ficino's devotion to the *prisca theologia* makes a connection seem highly likely, however, since Ficino is thought to have learned of *Picatrix* through the Hermetic tradition. *Picatrix* itself is linked to Hermetic literature and it contains many passages which recognize and venerate the great Hermes Trismegistus. Historian Eugenio Garin notes that the compilation of ancient and medieval magic and astrology in the *Picatrix* resembles speculative Neoplatonic philosophy at the same time that it supports a Hermetic world view "in terms which are surprisingly close to the work of the fifteenth-century Platonic movement, a closeness which is in fact so marked that it cannot be pure coincidence."<sup>151</sup> That Ficino consciously advocated the talismanic magic of the *Asclepius* and drove it using a World-spirit derived in part from *Picatrix* may thus be more than mere conjecture.

Ficino was likely attracted to *Picatrix* for a number of reasons beyond its vital connection with the Hermetic tradition. *Picatrix* addresses the unity of a universal life, a unity which permeates everywhere, gives life to all things, and promotes a universal sympathy. *Picatrix* also addresses a unity of reality that is divided into symmetrical and corresponding degrees, planes or worlds. And it



stresses man's link between these various levels of reality through the analogy of a macrocosmic-microcosmic affinity.<sup>152</sup> At the same time, however, Ficino did not endorse the direct interaction between celestial and mundane entities described in the talismanic magic of *Picatrix*. Attempts by the author(s) of *Picatrix* to avoid the use of daemons in his magic had led him to "draw the power of the stellar spirits directly into the talismans along rays linking the celestial with the terrestrial."<sup>153</sup> Ficino employed these stellar rays,<sup>154</sup> but he preferred a more Neoplatonic course of action through "demons who are subordinate beings in the chains descended from the planets."<sup>155</sup> In other words, although the Arabs had devised stellar rays as an intermediary agent, these spiritual rays passed directly from intelligible entities to terrestrial bodies. Ficino was not comfortable with this direct link between the high-ranking celestial souls and the human spirit. He revealed his apprehension when he denied the existence of spirits "celestial, let alone any higher" in his comments on *Asclepius*,<sup>156</sup> and he purposely forced the stellar spirits down to a lower ontological level.<sup>157</sup> As Kaske notes, "Ficino knew that bodily ills are unworthy of the direct ministrations of the World-soul and therefore tended to confine his magic to the world-spirit."<sup>158</sup>

Ficino did not rely on *Picatrix* directly, then, but instead used Arabic sources as raw materials from which he developed his own idea of a World-spirit to drive his talismanic magic. He generously attributed to Al-Kindi (meaning his *De radiis*) and the author(s) of *Picatrix* the idea of the fusion between the cosmic and human spirits. And he borrowed the Arab and Egyptian idea that only spirits can enter images, rather than daemons:

They think the spirits of the stars - whatever they may be - are introduced into statues and talismans in the same way that daemons customarily use on the occasions when they take possession of human bodies and speak, move themselves or other things, and work wonders through them. They think the spirits of the stars do similar things through images.<sup>159</sup>

At the same time, however, as Kaske notes, "Although Ficino fathers [the World-spirit] upon Platonists and Arabic writers, it is really one of his more original ideas."<sup>160</sup>

The evolution of this World-spirit can be traced in *De vita* 3 from Ficino's fruitless search through earlier theories to the conception of

his own. Following the inadequate notion of the Soul's central ontological role in the universe, Ficino immediately turned to the intermediary agent between soul and body and recounted the Plotinian agent of seminal reasons. The limitations inherent within this notion led him next to posit the intermediary role of daemons. But again his daemons created too many complications. By chapter 3, Ficino had steered away from a strict fidelity to Plotinus and now sought his own agent. He put forth the notion of a World-spirit as a mix between corporeal and intelligible, "the mean between body and soul."<sup>161</sup> And he followed this notion quite consistently throughout the remaining twenty-three chapters of *De vita* 3. But whether this ontological entity is corporeal or quasi-incorporeal is what must now be determined.

Ficino established the necessary, but completely original, ontological entity called the World-spirit in *De vita* 3.3:

Assuredly, the world's body is living in every part, as is evident from motion and generation. . . . It lives, therefore, through a soul which everywhere attends it and which is entirely accommodated to it. Therefore, between the tangible and partly transient body of the world and its very soul, whose nature is very far from its body, there exists everywhere a spirit, just as there is between the soul and the body in us, assuming that life everywhere is always communicated by a soul to a grosser body. For such a spirit is necessarily required as a medium by which the divine soul may both be present to the grosser body and bestow life throughout it. But every body easily perceivable by you, being accommodated to your senses, is grosser than and far degenerated from the completely divine soul. Therefore the aid of a more excellent body - a body not a body, as it were - is needed.<sup>162</sup>

Ficino provided a tantalizing but nebulous description of the ontological nature of the World-spirit here, defining it as "a body not a body." He went on to describe its ontological make-up in greater detail, at which time he appears have described this spirit as subtle, but fully corporeal:

Spirit is a very tenuous body, as if now it were soul and not body, and now body and not soul. In its power there is very little of the earthy nature, but more of the watery, more likewise of the airy, and again the greatest proportion of the stellar fire. The very quantities of the stars and elements have come into being according to the measures of these degrees. This spirit assuredly lives in all as the proximate cause of all generation and motion, concerning which the poet said, "A Spirit nourishes within."<sup>163</sup> It is wholly clear and hot by its own nature, moist, and life-giving, having acquired these gifts from the higher gifts of Soul.<sup>164</sup>

Much later in his treatise, Ficino again described the ontological nature of this World-spirit in similar terms. But this time he was more

vague. He first said that the body of the world is corporeal and participates in life and intelligence. He went on to say:

Accordingly, besides this body of the world, manifest habitually to our senses, a body that is spirit hides within it which escapes the capacity of our weak senses. In this spirit flourishes a soul; and in this soul shines an intelligence. And just as in this sublunary realm air is not mixed with earth except through water, nor fire with water except through air, so in the universe a sort of bait or kindling for linking soul to body is that very thing which we call spirit.<sup>165</sup>

Ficino never explained whether the "soul" and "intelligence" which flourish in this World-spirit are equivalent to World-soul and the Ideas or are entities unique to the World-spirit and truly *within* the World-spirit itself as part of its essential composition. Nor did he say how its nature makes it conducive to receiving higher gifts of Soul.

Furthermore, Ficino did not explain the origin of the World-spirit. He clearly affirmed that the World-soul emanates directly from God, but he was not certain whether the World-body also emanates directly from God or from the World-soul. In consequence, he posited no origin of the World-spirit:

For whether the world's body and mundane things have their being directly from the World-soul (as Plotinus and Porphyry think) or whether the world's body just like its soul has its being directly from God, as is the opinion of our theologians and perhaps Timaeus the Pythagorean, the world does wholly live and breathe, and we are permitted to absorb its spirit.<sup>166</sup>

Although Ficino thus appeared to have defined the World-spirit as subtle but corporeal, the absence of its origin and a more concrete ontological description leaves open the question whether it might actually be quasi-incorporeal.

Ficino next defined the crucial ontological affinity between this newly-conceived World-spirit and the human spirit, and he accomplished this in part through his notion of sympathetic magic. Just as he had placed the World-soul on a horizontal plane paralleling the human spirit rather than on a vertical plane, so too, Ficino here seemed to place the human spirit on a horizontal plane in parallel with the World-spirit. He first established a general concept of affinity:

. . . The cosmos is itself an animal more unified than any other animal, the most perfect animal, provided that it is an animal. Therefore, just as in us the quality and motion of any member, in particular a principal member, extend to our other members, so in the cosmos the acts of the principal members move all the rest, and the inferior members easily

receive from the highest, which are ready of their own accord to give.<sup>167</sup>

Ficino thus illustrated how the affinity works specifically between cosmic and human operators through a principle of sympathetic magic:

No one should doubt that we ourselves and all things which are around us can, by way of certain preparations, lay claim to celestial things. For these lower things were made by the heavens, are ruled continually by them, and were prepared from up there for celestial things in the first place. . . . Always remember that through a given affect and pursuit of our mind and through the very quality of our spirit we are easily and quickly exposed to those planets which signify the same affect, quality, and pursuit.<sup>168</sup>

Ficino was then able to establish an affinity between the World-spirit and the human spirit:

Arabic writers also prove that by an application of our spirit to the spirit of the cosmos, achieved by physical science and our affect, celestial goods pass to our soul and body. This happens from down here through our spirit within us which is a mediator, strengthened then by the spirit of the cosmos, and from above by way of the rays of the stars acting favorably on our spirit, which not only is similar to the rays by nature but also then makes itself more like celestial things.<sup>169</sup>

The Arabs say that when we fashion images rightly, our spirit, if it has been intent upon the work and upon the stars through imagination and emotion, is joined together with the very spirit of the world and with the rays of the stars through which the world-spirit acts. And when our spirit has been joined, it too becomes a cause why (from the world-spirit by way of the rays) a particular spirit of any given star, that is, a certain vital power, is poured into the image - especially a power which is consistent with the spirit of the operator.<sup>170</sup>

The above two passages thus illustrate that, under proper conditions, the World-spirit and human spirit fuse into a single medium through affinity and serves as Ficino's official agent for talismanic magic. This affinity between the two spirits affirms that they reside on parallel ontological planes and function in a similar manner.

At the same time, however, Ficino did not suggest that the World-spirit and human spirit are ontologically identical simply because they possess affinity. He first distinguished them through analogy:

This quintessence [World-spirit] can be ingested by us more and more if a person knows how best to separate it, mixed in as it is with other elements, or at least how to use those things often which are filled with it, especially in its purer form. . . . just as foods we eat in the right way, although not themselves alive, are converted through our spirit to the form of our life, so also our bodies rightly accommodated to the body and spirit of the world (that is through cosmic things and through our spirit) drink in as much as possible from the life of the world.<sup>171</sup>

Later, Ficino provided a more rigorous account of their differences:

But let us return to the spirit of the world. The world generates everything through it (since, indeed, all things generate through their own spirit); and we can call it both "the heavens" and "quintessence." It is practically the same thing in the world's body as in our body, with this primary exception, that the World-soul does not draw this spirit out of the four elements serving as her humors the way our soul does from our humors, but she procreates this spirit in the first instance (to speak Platonically, or rather Plotinically) as if pregnant by her own generative power, and the stars along with it. Immediately through the spirit the World-soul gives birth to the four elements, as though everything were contained in the power of that spirit.<sup>172</sup>

Ficino nebulously suggested here that the World-spirit is born of the World-soul "in the first instance" and that the four elements are generated almost instantaneously following the procreation of the World-spirit. Thus, whereas the human spirit is created out of the four humors, the World-spirit is created first and then used to create those same four humors. Ficino appears to have resolved the above dilemma regarding the origin of the World-spirit by positing its procreation through the World-soul. At the same time, however, he complicated the World-spirit's ontology, for if all matter is ultimately composed of the four humors, out of what, then, is the World-spirit created? Must it be quasi-incorporeal? Indeed, Ficino provided no satisfactory answer. And yet, he was solely responsible for this scheme, for though Plotinus advocated procreation through emanation, he never mentioned the World-soul procreating the World-spirit and using it to create the stars.<sup>173</sup>

Ficino did confirm above, however, that the human spirit is to be viewed in its traditional medical sense. He mentioned that it is composed of the four humors, a fact which, in turn, proves that it is subtle, but corporeal. I could find only one other passage in *De vita* 3 that directly addressed the ontological nature of the human spirit, a fact which suggests that Ficino expected the reader to be aware of its traditional medical definition. In the following passage, Ficino suggested that one must physically purify the human spirit in certain ways to make it more harmonious with its celestial counterpart, the World-spirit:

This [World-spirit] is absorbed by man in particular through his own spirit which is by its own nature similar to it, especially if it is made more akin to it by art, that is, if it becomes in the highest degree celestial. Now it becomes celestial if it is purged of filth, and anything at all inhering in it which is unlike the heavens. If there are impurities, not only in the bowels but in the mind, if on the skin, if on the clothing, if in the dwelling and the air, they frequently infect the spirit. The spirit will be made celestial, finally, if according to the circular motion of the soul and body of the

world it too makes circles, if when you frequently behold and think about light it too glows a little; and if things similar to the heavens are frequently brought to bear on it with that care which Avicenna in his book *On the Powers of the Heart* prescribes for the spirit and which we attempt in our book *On Caring for the Health of Learned People* [*De vita* 1].<sup>174</sup> In our book, first, the beclouding vapors are separated from the spirit by medicines that purge them. Second, the spirit is made luminous by luminous things. Third, it is so cared for that it may be at the same time rarefied and strengthened.<sup>175</sup>

That Ficino referred back to *De vita* 1 and explained that the spirit must be purged of corporeal filth established beyond a doubt that Ficino regarded this human spirit as the corporeal medical spirit. He confirmed this belief through a peripheral statement in which he claimed that the spirit is universal to all corporeal entities: "We know that just as all living things, plants as well as animals, live and generate through a spirit like this, so among the elements, those which are most full of spirit generate very quickly and move perpetually as if alive."<sup>176</sup> Incidentally, Ficino further confused the ontology of the World-spirit here by implicitly asserting that, if the corporeal human spirit can eventually attain the same form as the World-spirit, the World-spirit must ultimately be corporeal as well.

And yet, just as with the World-spirit, Ficino's ontological conception of the human spirit was not without enigmatic inconsistency. For example, in the above passage, Ficino mentioned that the human spirit can become celestial like its World-spirit counterpart if it travels in a circular manner. In his earlier writings, Ficino had asserted that circular motion was possible only to the human *soul*, and even then, only when it had been purified.<sup>177</sup> Ficino also emphasized the connection between a purified mind and a purified spirit, which suggests, perhaps, that the purified mind liberates an intelligible division of the human spirit. This suggestion of a quasi-incorporeal nature appears less far-fetched if one examines another passage in which the human spirit is compared to the rays which unite it to the cosmic spirit:

And so the rays can (as they say) imprint in images forces occult and wonderful beyond those we know, just as they introduce them into all things. For they are not inanimate like the rays of a lamp, but living and perceiving, since they shine forth through the eyes of a living body, and they bring with them marvelous gifts from the imagination and the minds of the celestials, also a very intense force from their strong mental disposition and from the very rapid motion of their bodies; and they act in particular and to the greatest extent on the spirit, which is most similar to the celestial rays.<sup>178</sup>

Ficino had mentioned once before as well that the human spirit is "most similar to the celestial rays." If these rays transmit gifts from the imagination and minds of the celestials and also possess their own "strong mental disposition," it follows that they and their counterpart, the human spirit, must possess an intelligible capacity. Indeed, the final three of the seven forms of Ficino's talismanic magic include imagination, reason, and understanding, respectively, and they sometimes require the spirit for their transmission. Ficino specifically stated that imagination becomes properly prepared "either on account of the quality and motion of our spirit or through our election or through both." Similarly, reason becomes prepared "either through the imagination and the spirit together, or through deliberation, or through both." Only the contemplating intellect appears to be completely detached.<sup>179</sup>

That the human spirit and the World-spirit must possess an intellectual capacity is illustrated most emphatically by the fact that, as ontological agents, they serve a dual role. Not only do they serve as an ontological entities which conveniently breach the hierarchical gap between the cosmic and the mundane, but they also carry both corporeal and incorporeal forces *simultaneously* from one level to another; e.g., not only is World-spirit the obvious medium between World-body and World-soul, but it transmits both forces *at the same time* down to the human spirit. The human spirit, in turn, receives them *at the same time* and sends them respectively to the human body or soul. The ontological ramification is critical. In order for these agents to transmit both corporeal and incorporeal forces at the same time, either they must be quasi-incorporeal or they must at least possess an intellectual capacity. Ficino seems to have made this distinction. On the one hand, he made the claim that the human spirit and World-spirit are merely ontological mediums that bridge the gap between the body and soul:

Always remember, though, that just as the power of our soul is brought to bear on our members through the spirit, so the force of the World-soul is spread under the World-soul through all things through the quintessence, which is active everywhere, as the spirit inside the World's Body, but that this power is instilled especially into those things which have absorbed the most of this kind of spirit.<sup>180</sup>

On the other hand, when Ficino mentioned spirit as an agent transmitting forces in his talismanic magic, he emphasized that each agent is transmitting both corporeal and incorporeal forces. Ficino first addressed the World-spirit:

You will bend your efforts to insinuate into yourself this spirit of the world above all, for by this as an intermediary you will gain certain natural benefits *not only from the world's body but from its soul*, and even from the stars and the daemons. For this spirit is an intermediary between the gross body of the world and its soul; and the stars and daemons exist in it and by means of it.<sup>181</sup>

He extended this concept to the human spirit as well: "And so from this spirit, acting as a mediator in us, the celestial gifts located mainly in it will overflow *not only to our body but also to our soul*."<sup>182</sup> But Ficino, unfortunately, never addressed the nature of this intelligible capacity which allows the World-spirit and human spirit to simultaneously transmit corporeal and incorporeal forces.

Ficino presented one final passage of ontological importance. He traced the path through which celestial gifts of the World-soul descend to the human soul through the World-spirit, celestial rays, and human spirit, respectively:

Finally, whenever we say "celestial goods descend to us," understand: (1) that gifts from the celestial bodies come into our bodies through our rightly-prepared spirit, (2) that even before that, through their rays the same gifts flow into a spirit exposed to them either naturally or by whatever means, and (3) that the goods of the celestial souls partly leap forth into this our spirit through rays, and from there overflow into our souls and partly come straight from their souls or from angels into human souls which have been exposed to them - exposed, I say, not so much by some natural means as by the election of free will or by affection.<sup>183</sup>

Ficino made the peculiar statement that the human soul can opt to use free will or talismanic magic to receive gifts from celestial souls either directly or indirectly. If the human soul can receive material straight from the World-soul, why would it opt for a roundabout path through the human spirit? The only plausible answer seems to be that the soul would only opt to receive celestial gifts through the human spirit if it required no more effort than it would to receive the gifts directly. It follows that the human spirit would have to be at least quasi-incorporeal for Ficino's assertion to hold true.

#### **Assessing Ficino's Spirit-Based Psychological Ontology**



Whether Ficino resolved in his own mind that the World-spirit and human spirit are quasi-incorporeal or fully corporeal is impossible to know for sure. Kaske believes Ficino was dealing explicitly with corporeal entities, and she asserts that Ficino's synthesis "remains unprecedented in its explicit and direct contact between the two corporeal spirits - the human and the general but impersonal cosmic spirit."<sup>184</sup> But we possess little evidence in Ficino's works after 1489 to suggest what noticeable influence *De vita 3* had on Ficino's ontological approach to psychology. Ficino's own commentary on Plotinus' *Enneads* 4.4.26-44, published in 1492, contained a prolific and largely independent exposition on the medical spirits and their cosmic analogue.<sup>185</sup> And in one other later work, his *Commentary on the Laws*, Ficino largely reiterated his position in *De vita 3*, but he himself seemed uncertain about the ontological nature of spirit:

That the powers of the higher spirits, however it may be done, influence our spirits we cannot deny, since we clearly see that our bodies are moved by the higher bodies. . . . But if these spirits act on our spirits, they also act on our bodies. Indeed passions of the human body, whether induced by these higher spirits or higher bodies, overflow into the soul in so far as the soul, by acquired or natural affects, has sunk itself in the body. But there is this difference: that those [celestial] bodies move our souls through our bodies; the [celestial] spirits, on the other hand, both move the soul through the body, and directly move the soul, and move it through that [human] spirit which the Physicians often call the bond of the soul and body.<sup>186</sup>

Despite his admitted uncertainty toward the nature of the spirits, Ficino carefully pointed out that the celestial spirits, which I am assuming refer collectively to the World-spirit, either move the soul through the body or move it by itself. This dual role undoubtedly suggests the quasi-incorporeal nature or intellectual capacity of the World-spirit. On the other hand, Ficino's reference to the Physicians who define the human spirit as "the bond of the soul and body" suggests just as clearly that he once again viewed the human spirit as the corporeal medical spirit. Whether an affinity could be maintained between these tenuous entities is uncertain, and Ficino himself appears to have avoided an answer.

What is more important, however, is that Ficino appears to have permanently replaced his soul-based psychological ontology with his new spirit-based ontology. Ficino no longer boldly asserted the ontological centrality of the soul, but rather, he now focused on the enigmatic area

between the soul and the body, and the place of the human spirit and World-spirit in this enigmatic gap. He no longer developed his psychology prejudicially from the soul outward, but rather, he stepped outside the soul and viewed it in its proper place with respect to the mundane and intelligible entities surrounding it. That Ficino never appears to have developed his spirit-based ontology with any systematic precision can be explained by the fact that Ficino devised the World-spirit as a unique notion in Western thought and by the fact that he devised it so late in his career.

Undoubtedly as a result of his late involvement with a spirit-based ontology, we have no evidence of significant revisions in Ficino's psychology besides meager passages like that in his *Commentary on the Laws*. We can conjecture, however, that Ficino no longer advocated parts of his earlier soul-based ontology, or at least that he created a situation which made such a view tenable. On the macroscopic level, Ficino undoubtedly did away with the enigmatic *natura* of the celestial spheres and stars and replaced it fully with the World-spirit. On the microscopic level, where the alterations would have been more numerous and tenuous, but possible nonetheless, Ficino likely rejected the ambiguous relationship between *idolum, natura* (the "natural complexion" or irrational Soul), and *spiritus*. He also likely rejected the three nebulous "vehicles" of the soul for which the *idolum, natura*, and *spiritus* each serve as the inherent life.

Instead, Ficino undoubtedly consolidated these earlier ontological forms into the single entities represented by World-spirit and human spirit. For example, if the human spirit conveys forces of the World-soul to the human soul through the World-spirit at the same time that it preserves the body, there is no reason why it should not incorporate the ethereal bodies of the *idolum* and *natura* into one quasi-incorporeal vehicle of the soul. Ficino could very well have even diverted some of the functions of the *idolum* itself to the human spirit. Indeed, if the human spirit requires intellectual capacity at a minimum, it should at least be capable of adopting the function of sense perception. If Ficino were then to delegate *phantasia* to a power of *ratio*, he could effectively have eliminated the need for *idolum* altogether. But these

transformations remain mere postulations since Ficino never clearly defined his spirit-based ontology to begin with.

In attempting to resolve the dilemma of the soul's illusory centrality, then, Ficino appears to have actually accentuated it by creating an enigmatic World-spirit that further obscures the nature of the human spirit. At the same time, however, Ficino made a noble effort to resolve the ontological dilemma. Rather than leaving it concealed beneath a superficial metaphor, Ficino engaged his problem directly through a rigorous ontological speculation and the aid of the *prisca theologia* and his talismanic magic.

<sup>1</sup>Eugenio Garin comments on Ficino's philosophical tendency to view truth and reality as a function of man's soul and his external perceptions as they are seen from his internal soul: "The fascination of Ficino's work lies precisely here: in the invitation to look beyond the opaque surfaces of reality in order to understand everywhere the sign of a hidden harmony which animates and unifies all---in seeing not the body but the soul of the universe. As true man is not his mortal raiment, but his immortal soul, and as only the one who sees this soul sees man, so all things have their truth this is their soul, whether they be plants or stones or stars in heaven." *Portraits From the Quattrocento*, p. 151. Garin later adds, "Ficinian philosophizing is in essence only an invitation to see with the eyes of the soul, the soul of things . . . an incentive to plumb the depths of one's own soul so that the whole world may become clearer in the inner light." *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>2</sup>Ernst Cassirer stresses the genuine independence of Ficino's thought and its essential, even systematic, unity. He tells us not to confuse "speculative thought with discursive thought" (p. 492) and asserts that Ficino "poses his own questions and gives his own answers" (p. 483). In "Ficino's Place in Intellectual History," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 6.4 (1945): 483-501. Carol Kaske asserts that what Michael J.B. Allen claims to be true of Ficino's work as a whole is true of *De vita* in particular. In *De Vita Libri Tres*, trans. Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark as *Three Books on Life* (Binghamton, 1989), p. 3. Allen states at length: "Some, who have narrow criteria for defining a thinker, or who deem all Neoplatonists essentially the same, dispute Ficino's claim to originality, though prepared perhaps to grant him special skills as a translator and academician. In this they fail, I believe, to appreciate his remarkable accomplishments as a builder of myth and symbol rather than of language and logic - his ability to deploy abstract ideas culled from a variety of sources, many of them arcane, as if they were metaphors, and to deploy them for paraphilosophical ends: apology, conversion, intellectual sublimity, and spiritual ecstasy. . . . his originality is impossible to define in terms of a single intellectual discipline. It depends not so much on achieving advances internal to that discipline as on articulating a profoundly compelling orientation. . . towards both the objective and the subjective worlds. . . . Specifically it derived from the thoroughgoing syncretism of pagan and Christian elements he effected under the impulse of Plato, Plotinus, Proclus, the *Hermetica*, the Areopagite, Augustine, and Aquinas, to name only his primary wells of inspiration. But this was allied with scholarly energy, acumen, and subtlety, an unusual breadth and profundity of learning, an abiding interest in magic, music, medicine, poetry, and mythology, as well as in philosophy and theology, and a continual inwardness, contemplativeness, and spirituality of gaze that make much of what he wrote peculiarly his own, imaginatively and aesthetically so if not always philosophically." *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino: A Study of His Phaedrus Commentary, Its Sources and Genesis*. (Berkeley, 1984), pp. x-xii. And Kristeller notes, with respect to the misnomer that all Neoplatonists are the same, that "The history of Platonism. . . must not be conceived as an endless repetition of identical doctrines, but rather as a continual adaptation and transformation of certain basic ideas. 'Platonism' is not a label. . . but a kind of general orientation." In "The Scholastic Background of Marsilio Ficino: With an Edition of Unpublished Texts," *Traditio* 2 (1944): 257-318 at 257-58. Reprinted as Chapter 4 in Kristeller, *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters* (Rome, 1956; repr. 1969):35-97; the quotation appears on p. 35.

<sup>3</sup>Eugenio Garin, *Medioevo e Rinascimento* (Bari, 1954), "Immagini e simboli in Marsilio Ficino," p. 294. Quoted in Kaske, *Books on Life*, pp. 3, 71 n. 2.

<sup>4</sup>Charles Schmitt, Review of Ficino, *Letters 2* (London, 1978), *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 July 1978, p. 864d. Quoted in Kaske, *Books on Life*, pp. 3, 71 n. 7.

<sup>5</sup>Not to be confused with one of Ficino's earlier works entitled *De triplici vita et fine triplici*, which appears to have been part of an appendix to Ficino's *Philebus* Commentary. See Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum* 1:80-1 and Michael J.B. Allen, ed., *Marsilio Ficino: The Philebus Commentary* (Berkeley, 1975), p. 446-50.

<sup>6</sup>*Opera*, p. 841,1. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 6. "Liber Epistolarum nostrarum septimus caput habet epistolam De curanda litteratorum valetudine disputantem. . ." *Ibid.*, p. 73 n. 5. The source for most, if not all, Latin translations from Ficino's *De vita* will be Kaske, *Books on Life*. This work provides the Latin text on the left-hand side of the page and an English translation on the right. The only other English translation of *De vita* is Charles Boer, trans., *Marsilio Ficino: The Book of Life*

(Irving, Texas, 1980) and this work is inadequate for the task. It provides no Latin text or textual apparatus. Michael J.B. Allen notes in his review of Boer's work that it "makes the production of a good scholarly edition and translation even more imperative." In *Renaissance Quarterly* 35 (1982): 72.

<sup>7</sup>*Opera*, p. 841,2. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 6. "Promittebam modo, lector, huic libro septimo caput epistolam de valetudine litteratorum disputaturam, haec vero deinceps adeo nobis excrevit, ut non iam caput tam exigui corporis, sed ipsa seorsum totum aliquod corpus fore velit. Itaque secessit iam consilio meliore et in librum De vita feliciter adolevit." *Ibid.*, p. 73 n. 6.

<sup>8</sup>See Ficino's two letters to Pico della Mirandola, *Opera*, pp. 900,3 and 901,1, dated 3 and 23 August 1489, respectively. See also Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum* 1:LXXXIV. In "Roger Bacon and the Composition of Marsilio Ficino's *De vita longa*," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 49 (1986): 230-33, Kaske argues that Ficino had actually read Bacon's *De retardatione acidentium senectutis* and had mistaken it for the work of Arnald of Villanova.

<sup>9</sup>Ficino's dedication to Filippo Valori, *Opera*, p. 903,2.

<sup>10</sup>D.P. Walker, in his *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, p. 3, n. 2, asserts in response to Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum* 1:LXXXIV, that *De vita* 3 may have been a commentary on *Enneads* 4.4., especially chapters 30-42, which "deal with astral influence in much greater detail."

<sup>11</sup>Proem to Book 3.24-28, dated 10 July 1489. Kaske, *Books on Life*, pp. 237, 239. "Cum igitur inter Plotini libros magno Laurentio Medici destinatos in librum Plotini de favore coelitus hauriendo tractantem nuper commentarium composuissem, inter cetera in eum nostra commentaria numeratum, id quidem seligere nunc, Laurentio quidem ipso probante, atque maiestati tuae potissimum dedicare decrevi." *Ibid.*, pp. 236, 238.

<sup>12</sup>See Ficino's epistle to Pico della Mirandola, dated 8 August 1489, "quo die hinc abisti [i.e., 1 August 1489] libellum de vita coelitus comparanda peregi," *Opera*, p. 900,3. See Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum* 1:LXXXIV.

<sup>13</sup>See Kristeller, "Il Ficino studente a Bologna," pp. 195-96, in "Per la biografia di Marsilio Ficino," in *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*.

<sup>14</sup>Delcorno Branca conjectures that Georgio Medico is actually Dr. George the Cyprian to whom Ficino wrote a number of letters and whom Ficino mentions in his *Commentary on the Timaeus*. Cf. *Opera*, pp. 794, 812, 821, 829, 865, 951, 1465.

<sup>15</sup>Ficino to Aretino, *Opera*, p. 909,2; Ficino to Benivieni, *Opera*, p. 646.

<sup>16</sup>*Opera*, p. 493.

<sup>17</sup>Proem to *Commentary on Plotinus*, addressing Lorenzo de' Medici, *Opera*, p. 1537. Kaske, *Books on Life*, pp. 18, 75 n. 1.

<sup>18</sup>*Apology to De vita*, *Opera*, p. 573; Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 18.

<sup>19</sup>See Kristeller, "Philosophy and Medicine in Medieval and Renaissance Italy," in Stuart F. Spicker, ed., *Organism, Medicine, and Metaphysics: Essays in Honor of Hans Jonas* (Dordrecht, 1978), p. 34.

<sup>20</sup>Proem to *De vita* 1 and *De vita* 1.1.

<sup>21</sup>*De vita* 2.14.4, *Opera*, p. 520.

<sup>22</sup>Giovanni Corsi, "The Life of Marsilio Ficino" 15, in *London School of Economic Science, Letters* 3:143. Corsi states at length that Ficino's "health was not at all settled, for he suffered very much from a weakness of the stomach, and although he always appeared cheerful and festive in company, yet it was thought that he sat long in solitude and became as if numb with melancholy. This came about either from black bile produced by the excessive burning of bile through continual night study, or as he himself said, from Saturn, which at his birth was in the ascendant in Aquarius and nearly square to Mars in Scorpio." *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup>*De vita* 3.2, *Opera*, p. 577; 3.3, *Opera*, p. 578.

<sup>24</sup>*Opera*, p. 473, misnumbered as p. 576. Incidentally, the Latin version of the *Consiglio* is the only form in which it has survived.

<sup>25</sup>Letter included in those of 1480 to Bernardo Rucellai, p. 836.2; Letter of 29 August 1489, p. 901.2; and Proem dedicating the entire work to Lorenzo de' Medici, p. 493, although the chronology of composition claimed therein for Book 2 is wrong. Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 78 n. 1.

<sup>26</sup>Giovanni Corsi, "The Life of Marsilio Ficino" 2 and 5, in *London School of Economic Science, Letters* 3:136.

<sup>27</sup>PMF, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup>Arthur Field, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy of Florence* (Princeton, 1988), p. 178. That Tignosi would teach both medicine and Aristotelian philosophy reinforces Kristeller's above assertion

<sup>29</sup>Arthur Field, *The Beginning of the Philosophical Renaissance in Florence, 1454-1469*, Ph.D. thesis (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1980), p. 173; Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 18.

<sup>30</sup>Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 30.

<sup>31</sup>For a discussion on Ficino's empirical magic, see Brian P. Copenhaver, "Natural Magic, Hermetism, and Occultism in Early Modern Science," p. 275. In *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution*, edited by David C. Lindberg and Robert S. Westman (Cambridge, 1990): 261-301.

<sup>32</sup>*Opera*, p. 759. In Hankins, *Plato* 2:461.

<sup>33</sup>*Opera*, p. 760. Cf. Plato, *Charmides*, 156B-E. The same passage is also quoted in Strobæus and is alluded to in Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* 11.3.7. Ficino appears to have translated the passage himself or had a friend translate it for him. Cf. Hankins, *Plato* 2:461 n. 7.

<sup>34</sup>*Opera*, p. 760. But just as his early interest in the *prisci theologi* was not mature, neither was his interest in the *prisca medicina*. Ficino had linked Christianity to the pagan wisdom, but he failed to explain how or why Christianity was different from or superior to this pagan tradition. Indeed, having paved the way for Christianity, either of the ancient teaching traditions would appear *prima facie* more valuable. Hankins, *Plato* 2:461-62.

<sup>35</sup>*Apology to De vita, Opera*, p. 573. In Kaske, *Book of Life*, p. 397. ". . . antiquissimos quondam sacerdotes fuisse medicos pariter et astronomos. Quod sane Chaldaeorum, Persarum, Aegyptiorum testificantur historiae. Ad nullum praeterea magis quam ad pium sacerdotem pertinere singularis caritatis officia, quae quidem in maximo omnium beneficio quam maxime lucent. Officium vero praestantissimum est proculdubio, quod et maxime necessarium et imprimis ab omnibus exoptatum, efficere videlicet, ut hominibus sit mens sana in corpore sano. Id autem ita demum praestare possumus, si coniungimus sacerdotio medicinam." *Ibid.*, p. 396.

<sup>36</sup>Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 12.6-8, 1071b-1074b; for two treatises on Galen's astrological medicine, see Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 8 vols (New York, 1923-58; repr. 1964-1966) 1:178-80.

<sup>37</sup>Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, trans. Mario Domandi (Oxford, 1963), p. 111.

<sup>38</sup>*Apology to De vita, Opera*, p. 573. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 397. Cf. Hippocrates, *De decoro*. Cf. Galen, *Quod optimus medicus sit quoque philosophus; De diebus decretoriis* on astrology; *De Hippocratis et Platonis placitis* 9.8. *Ibid.*, p. 459 n. 5.

<sup>39</sup>*De vita* 3.10, *Opera*, p. 544. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 289. "Denique concludamus cum Galieno astrologiam esse medico necessariam. . ." *Ibid.*, p. 288.

<sup>40</sup>*Opera*, p. 958. Cf. Pico, *Opera* (Basileae, 1572), p. 418; cf. Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum* 2:274, which cites Ficino as among those authorities who refute astrology.

<sup>41</sup>Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum* 2:278f; Angelo Poliziano, *Opera*, 1:323. Carol Kaske contends that Poliziano regarded Ficino's letter as a palinode as shown by his reply to it. Poliziano feigns forgetfulness of what Ficino had said earlier about astrology, and said that, even if he had once advocated it, it did not matter: "Nam nec mutare sententiam turpe philosopho, qui cotidie plus videt." Poliziano, *Opera*, 1:323. Kaske, "Ficino's Shifting Attitude Towards Astrology," in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno de Platone*, edited by Giancarlo Garfagnini, 2 vols (Florence, 1986) 2:371-381 at 373-74. Kaske discusses the controversy at length, and concludes, "The vacillations of Ficino with regard to astrology between *De vita*, the letter to Poliziano, and the *Apology* to the Cardinals, while puzzling, are less radical and more personally motivated than may at first appear," p. 381.

<sup>42</sup>Cassirer, *Individual and the Cosmos*, p. 100.

<sup>43</sup>Cf. *Opera*, p. 209f; cf. Cassirer, *Individual and the Cosmos*, pp. 119f.

<sup>44</sup>Augustine, *Confessions* 7.6.

<sup>45</sup>"qui singula necessario fieri a stellis affirmant"

<sup>46</sup>*Opera*, p. 781. "Denique si fata vitari non possunt, frustra praevidentur & praedicuntur, si possunt aliqua ratione vitari, false ab Astrologis necessitas fati defenditur." Translated in D.P. Walker, "Ficino and Astrology," in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone: Studi e documenti*, edited by Giancarlo Garfagnini, 2 vols (Florence, 1986) 2:341-349 at 346. Elsewhere, in a letter to Bembo in 1477, Ficino uses a pun to ridicule astrologers: "As diligently as astronomers measure the heavens [metiuntur], astrologers fabricate empty lies [mentiuntur] about human life." *Opera*, p. 771. Quoted in Thomas Moore, *The Planets Within: Marsilio Ficino's Astrological Psychology* (London, 1982), p. 122.

<sup>47</sup>*Opera*, p. 221.

<sup>48</sup>*Opera*, p. 209.

<sup>49</sup>Cf. *PMF* p. 312.

<sup>50</sup>C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge, 1964), p. 94.

<sup>51</sup>*De pestilentia liber*, quoted by Walter Clyde Curry, *Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1960), pp. 7, n. 5, and 9. This connection spurred the use of Aristotle's *De caelo*, for example, as a required text in Bologna's medical curriculum.

<sup>52</sup>Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 81 n. 1.

<sup>53</sup>Cf. Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy* (London, 1964), p. 12.

<sup>54</sup>Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 127-28.

<sup>56</sup>Cf. Letter of 7 November 1492, to Filippo Valori, *Opera*, p. 948; Letter to Pico della Mirandola, *Opera*, p. 888; Kaske explains in detail why Ficino considered himself to be born under Saturn. *Books on Life*, pp. 20-1.

<sup>57</sup>Letter to Cavalcanti, *Opera*, p. 733. In London School of Economic Science, *Letters of Marsilio Ficino* (London: Shephard-Walwyn Ltd., 1978), 2:33-4.

<sup>58</sup>Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*, trans. Barbara Sessions (New York: Pantheon Books, Inc., 1953), p. 61.

<sup>59</sup>Klibansky, et. al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 271, citing *De vita* 2.15, *Opera*, p. 522; and 3.22, *Opera*, pp. 564 ff.

<sup>60</sup>Seznec, *Pagan Gods*, p. 61. Hillman adds, ironically, that "Ficino never ceased complaining of pain and melancholy, yet this 'bitter desperation' was the source of his psychological philosophy." *Re-visioning Psychology*, p. 206; cf. Garin, *Portraits of the Quattrocento*, p. 146.

<sup>61</sup>Ficino's *Disputatio contra iudicium astrologorum* is in Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum* 2:11-76, and his letter on astrology to Poliziano is in his *Opera*, p. 958.

<sup>62</sup>Letter to Giovanni Cavalcanti, *Opera*, p. 733. London School of Economic Science, *Letters*, 2:34. Ficino is referring to Aristotle, *Problemata*, 30.1.

<sup>63</sup>Seznec, *Pagan Gods*, p. 61.

<sup>64</sup>Aristotle, *Problemata* 30.1, Loeb Classical Library, trans. W.S. Hett as *Aristotle: Problems*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1965), 2:155.

<sup>65</sup>Letter from Giovanni Cavalcanti to Ficino, *Opera*, p. 732; Ficino's letters to John of Hungary, p. 872; and to Filippo Valori, 7 November 1492, p. 948; *De vita* 1.6.23, *Opera*, p. 498; 3.22.65, *Opera*, p. 565.

<sup>66</sup>*Opera*, p. 732; cf. *Opera*, pp. 88, 928. Ficino elsewhere asserts that he had recently learned this from Firmicus Maternus, *Opera*, p. 763.

<sup>67</sup>Letter from Cavalcanti to Ficino, *Opera*, p. 732; with regards to *Enneads* 3.1, Ficino tenuously supports this assertion in *De vita* 3.3, *Opera*, p. 534 and in his *Commentary on Plotinus*, *Opera*, p. 1609.

<sup>68</sup>*Commentary on the Symposium*, 7.7.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.9.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.3.

<sup>71</sup>*Theologia Platonica*, 13.2, *Opera*, pp. 287, 294.

<sup>72</sup>Klibansky, et. al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 256. Quoted in Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 22.

<sup>73</sup>Kaske, *Books on Life*, pp. 22-3.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 4. Ficino first mentions these "celestial causes" in *De vita* 1.4.

<sup>75</sup>Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 42.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., pp. 42-3. Kaske does not cite which of D.P. Walker's works this assertion comes from.

<sup>77</sup>D.P. Walker says animal spirits "are contained in the ventricles of the brain, whence through the nervous system they are transmitted to sense-organs and muscles; their functions are motor-activity, sense-perception, and, usually, such lower psychological activities as appetite, *sensus communis*, and imagination. They are the first direct instrument of the soul." "The Astral Body in Renaissance Medicine," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 21, 1-2 (1958): 120.

<sup>78</sup>*Mens*, in turn, includes *phantasia*, *cogitatio*, and *memoria*. The action of *phantasia* is "to form things and to represent them, and to pass them on to *cogitatio*." *Cogitatio* is the greatest of the three, and "it looks into things imagined by *phantasia*, actions, that is, arts, sciences and other matters, and their rule and disposition." Finally, *memoria* "is the guardian, who preserves those things which the cogitation of the intellect has ordered and formed, and impressed in its places. Therefore they remain firm and stable until the time when there is need for them to be brought from potential to act." E. Ruth Harvey, *The Inward Wits: Psychological Theory in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (London, 1975), pp. 16-18, based on the work *The Royal Book* by Haly Abbas (d.994/5). Constantinus Africanus (d.1087) translated a portion of the work into Latin under the title *Pantegni*, and the work is often accredited to him. Stephen the Philosopher completed a full Latin version in 1127 and called it *Regalis dispositio*. This is the text published at Venice in 1492. Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>79</sup>Commentary on the *Symposium* 6.6. In Jayne, *Love*, p. 115.

<sup>80</sup>*De vita* 1.2, *Opera*, p. 496. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 111. The full passage reads: "Instrumentum eiusmodi spiritus ipse est, qui apud medicos vapor quidam sanguinis purus, subtilis, calidus et lucidus definitur. Atque ab ipso cordis calore ex subtiliori sanguine procreatus volat ad cerebrum; ibique animus ipso ad sensus tam interiores quam exteriores exercendos assidue utitur. Quamobrem sanguis spiritui servit, spiritus sensibus, sensus denique rationi." Ibid., p. 110. Cf. Ficino, *De vita* 3.2, *Opera*, p. 544; 1.2, *Opera*, p. 496; 3.22, *Opera*, pp. 565 sqq. See also Klibansky, et. al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, pp. 264-65.

<sup>81</sup>*De vita* 1.2, *Opera*, p. 496. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 111. ". . . spiritus vero talis, qualis et sanguis et tres illae vires quas diximus: naturalis scilicet, vitalis et animalis, a quibus, per quas, in quibus spiritus ipsi cocipiuntur, nascuntur atque foventur." Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>82</sup>*De vita* 1.26, *Opera*, p. 509. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 161. "Si homines veritatis cupidi tanta medicorum diligentia corporeum spiritum curare debent, ne forte omnino neglectus vel impedimento sit, vel inepte serviat quaerentibus veritatem, multo proculdubio diligentius incorporeum spiritum, id est intellectum ipsum, disciplinae moralis institutis colere decet, quo solo veritas ipsa, cum sit incorporea, capitur. Nefas enim est solum animi servum, id est corpus, colere, animorum vero, corporis dominum regemque, negligere, praesertim cum Magorum Platonisque sententia sit, corpus totum ab animo ita pendere ut, nisi animus bene valuerit, corpus bene valere non possit." Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>83</sup>Walker suggests that another possible and very real source of Ficino's magic may have come from the Catholic mass. Walker suggests that the Church may have condemned all other medieval and Renaissance forms of magic in order to preserve its own form through this medium. Indeed, the mass combined, and thus justified, the use of liturgical words of consecration, music, lights, wine, incense and the truly mystical act of transubstantiation. The overt equalization of magic with the eucharist is rare, but Peter of Abano did just that in his *Liber Conciliator*, Venetiis, 1521, fo 201 vo (*Differentia* 156), which Ficino quotes numerous times in the *De vita* 3, e.g. *Opera*, pp. 552, 557, 558. Ficino even cites the formula of consecration, *si fas est*, as an example of the magical power in words. *Opera*, p. 1218; *Comm. in Tim.* Walker adds, incidentally, that Ficino's use of talismans and the



invocation to planets likely derives from Peter of Abano and other medieval writers like Roger Bacon, Alkindi, Avicenna, and Picatrix. In *Demonic Magic*, p. 36.

<sup>84</sup>Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 2.

<sup>85</sup>Historian Brian Copenhaver downplays this dependence: "As part of the venerable heritage of antiquity, magic was also to be salvaged by this humanist undertaking, but insofar as the saving of magic required physical and philosophical arguments, it was not to be accomplished on the basis of the Hermetica. Ficino and others formulated theories of magical action that were altogether credible and respectable in terms of their physical and philosophical underpinnings, but the ingredients of such formulations were rarely to be found in what Hermes said to his disciples. . . . From the Hermetica one cannot really learn why belief in magic is justified by philosophical reasoning or in terms of physical understanding, though one can discover in these and other passages that magic was part of what Hermes taught and so must be very old and hallowed by association with his name," Brian P. Copenhaver, "Hermes Trismegistus, Proclus and the Question of a Philosophy of Magic in the Renaissance," in *Hermeticism and the Renaissance: Intellectual History and the Occult in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Ingrid Merkel and Allen G. Debus (London and Toronto, 1988): 79-110 at 82-3.

<sup>86</sup>Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 18.

<sup>87</sup>The pessimistic gnostic must rid himself of the powerful influences of the stars as he ascends upward through the spheres. The optimistic gnostic taps these same powerful influences through sympathetic magic, talismans, and invocations. Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, pp. 2, 44-5 and Walker, *Ancient Theology*, p. 17. Each of the Hermetic works emphasizes one of two gnostic systems, pessimistic or optimistic. Pessimistic, or dualistic, gnosticism advocates that the material world is heavily and fatally influenced by the stars and is in itself evil. The gnostic initiate thus must lead as ascetic a life as possible (ethical), avoiding all contact with matter, thus allowing the enlightened soul to elevate through the planetary spheres and cast off evil influences as it ascends into the world of immaterial divine influences. Optimistic, or pantheistic, gnosticism advocates that matter is infused with the divine, so that the earth, stars, sun, and all natural entities are good since they are all elements of God. The fact that both types of gnosis show up in the *Corpus Hermeticum* would probably have been blurred since they were thought to have come from one man, Hermes alone. Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, pp. 22, 33.

<sup>88</sup>*Cambridge History of Philosophy*, pp. 280-81. Copenhaver claims that Ficino's magic contains little in the way of Hermetic magic, whose few explicit astrological and magical references could be of little theoretical value to Ficino. Copenhaver therefore asserts that Ficino uses the *prisci theologi* almost entirely in a doxographic and genealogical manner. Copenhaver puts forth a powerful argument backed by extensive research. He states, "Despite the appearance of Hermes in the concluding chapter of *De vita* and despite the relevance of the *Asclepius* to Ficino's interest in talismans, Ficino's treatment of Hermes is not consistently positive nor is his presence indispensable for Ficino's overall argument." In "Philosophy of Magic," pp. 80-1. See also Copenhaver's "Iamblichus, Synesius and the Chaldean Oracles in Marsilio Ficino's *De Vita Libri Tres*: Hermetic Magic or Neoplatonic Magic," in *Supplementum Festivum: Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, edited by James Hankins, John Monfasani, and Frederick Purnell, Jr. (Binghamton, N.Y., 1987), pp. 441-455; "Natural Magic, Hermetism and Occultism in Early Modern Science," in D.C. Lindberg and R.S. Westman, eds., *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 261-301; "Renaissance Magic and Neoplatonic Philosophy: *Ennead* 4.3-5 in Ficino's *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda*," in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone: Studi e documenti*, edited by Giancarlo Garfagnini, 2 vols. (Florence, 1986), pp. 351-369; "Scholastic Philosophy and Renaissance Magic in the *De vita* of Marsilio Ficino," *Renaissance Quarterly* 37 (1984): 523-554. For the purpose of this study, however, we are concerned only with how talismanic magic influenced Ficino's use of an ontological agent, for which the Hermetic *Asclepius* and its Plotinian backing are vital.

<sup>89</sup>Proclus, *Opera*, pp. 1928-9; Iamblichus, *Opera*, p. 1873; Porphyry, *Opera*, p. 1932. See Copenhaver, "Philosophy of Magic," p. 80.

<sup>90</sup>Roughly during the epoch of the second century A.D., speculative Greek philosophical thought appeared to have run its course, failing to experimentally verify its hypotheses, an endeavor only attempted with the birth of seventeenth

century modern scientific thought. Greek dialectics remained unsolveable and left no certain answers, and Platonists, Stoics, and Epicureans merely embellished the fundamental tenets of their respective philosophies without breaking ground on new ways of thinking. In so far as the Hermetic writings are of Greek origin, they too, followed this stagnant pattern, eclectically borrowing material from Platonism, Neoplatonism, Stoicism, and other Greek philosophical schools. Thus, the intensive search for knowledge of reality turned from traditional rational philosophies to the intuitive, mystical, and magical. Since reason appeared to have failed, the intuitive faculty in man, *Nous*, was sought. Philosophy was thus altered from being used as a dialectical tool to being used as a form of gnosis which allowed man to seek meaning of the world and divine truth intuitively through ascetic discipline and a religious form of life. Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 4.

<sup>91</sup>Walker, *Ancient Theology*, pp. 3, 11-2.

<sup>92</sup>Iamblichus, *De Vita Pythagorae*, ed. I. A. Theodoretus, Franckerae, 1598, c. xxxviii. In Walker, *Demonic Magic*, p. 37. Pythagoras clearly engaged in theurgic magic. Iamblichus reports that Pythagoras "spent twenty-two years in the sanctuaries of Egypt, studying astronomy and geometry and being initiated in all the mystic rites of the gods, not superficially nor haphazardly, until, taken prisoner by Cambyses' soldiers, he was brought to Babylon. There he spent a mutually gratifying time with the magi. Educated thoroughly in their solemn rites, he learned perfect worship of the gods with them. . ." *De vita Pythagorae* 19, trans. John Dillon and Jackson Hershbell as *Iamblichus: On the Pythagorean Way of Life* (Atlanta, 1991), p. 45. Walker emphasizes that Iamblichus' *Vita Pythagorae* presents musical aspects of Orphic theurgy. Cf. Ficino, *De vita* 3.21, *Opera*, p. 562. Pythagoras, like Orpheus, had studied in Egypt (c. iii), established a religious sect, and created musical effects (c. xxv), even on animals (c. xiii). With respect to music, then, he was another *priscus theologus*. He emphasized music in the training he gave his disciples (c. xv, xxv). He used it to cure diseases of body and soul. He lulled his disciples to sleep and awoke them through special songs. Pythagoras believed that he alone could hear the harmony of the spheres (c. xv), so he produced vocal and instrumental imitations of this harmony so that his disciples might themselves indirectly attract the celestial influences. But primarily, he used music to eliminate evil passions and thus elevate the soul into a state of virtuous bliss. Finally, Pythagoras, along with many of his contemporaries, worshipped the rising sun (c. xxxv). *Demonic Magic*, pp. 37-8.

<sup>93</sup>Proclus' blatant practice of theurgic magic is revealed in the concluding passage of his *De sacrificiis et magia* 88-96: "For consecrations and other divine services they search out appropriate animals as well as other things. Beginning with these things and others like them, they gained knowledge of the demonic powers, how closely connected they are in substance to natural and corporeal energy, and through these very substances they achieved association with the [demons], from whom they returned forthwith to actual works of the gods, leaving some things from the [gods], for other things being moved by themselves toward accurate consideration of the appropriate symbols. Thence, leaving nature and natural energies below, they had dealings with the primary and divine powers," Copenhaver, "Philosophy of Magic," p. 105.

<sup>94</sup>Walker, *Ancient Theology*, pp. 3, 11-2. The emperor Julian the Apostate, who embraced Neoplatonism and re-established pagan religion, also grew into a powerful student of theurgy and gave prime worship to the sun.

<sup>95</sup>Copenhaver, "Natural Magic," p. 267. John Gager even provides evidence to suggest that Moses himself "authored" a number of magical and alchemical texts. See his *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism*, pp. 140-61. Whether Ficino was familiar with any of these apocryphal papyri has not yet been established.

<sup>96</sup>*Asclepius* 23, 24, 32. Yates believes the emphasis on the *Asclepius* was a chief factor in the Renaissance revival of magic, and could only be understood by reading the *Asclepius* in the context of Ficino's *Pimander* and the pious interpretations he wrote in his commentary. *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 41. Yates states, "As is now well known, it was upon the magical passages in the *Asclepius* that Ficino based the magical practices which he describes in his *De vita coelitus comparanda*." From "The Hermetic Tradition in Renaissance Science," in Charles S. Singleton, ed., *Art, Science, and History in the Renaissance* (Baltimore, 1967):255-274 at 257.

<sup>97</sup>*Asclepius* 37-8. In Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, pp. 89-90. The *Asclepius* possesses one other statue-animating passage. "(Hermes:) Mankind certainly deserves admiration, as the greatest of all beings. All plainly admit that the race of gods sprang from the cleanest part of nature and that their signs are like heads that stand for the whole being. But the figures of gods that humans form have been formed of both natures---from the divine, which is purer and more divine by far, and from the material of which they are built, whose nature falls short of the human---and they represent not only the heads but all the limbs and the whole body. Always mindful of its nature and origin, humanity persists in imitating divinity, representing its gods in semblance of its own features, just as the father and master made his gods eternal to resemble him. (Asclepius:) Are you talking about statues, Trismegistus? (Hermes:) Statues, Asclepius, yes. See how little trust you have! I mean statues ensouled and conscious, filled with spirit and doing great deeds; statues that foreknow the future and predict it by lots, by prophecy, by dreams and by many other means; statues that make people ill and cure them, bringing them pain and pleasure as each deserves." *Asclepius* 23-4. In Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, pp. 80-1.

<sup>98</sup>Ficino also cites the *Asclepius* in *De vita* 3.13, *Opera*, p. 548, and 3.20, *Opera*, p. 561.

<sup>99</sup>Moore, *Planets Within*, p. 38.

<sup>100</sup>Kristeller first noticed this error in *Suppl. I:cxxx ff.* Ficino's *Opera Omnia* includes the *Pimander* translation and his commentaries, *Opera*, pp. 1836-57, followed by the *Asclepius* and commentaries naturally thought to be his as well, *Opera*, pp. 1858-72. Cf. Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 40 n. 1.

<sup>101</sup>Yates, *Hermetic Tradition*, p. 40.

<sup>102</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.3.11, trans. McKenna, *Enneads*, p. 308.

<sup>103</sup>A great controversy has developed around which passage from Plotinus' *Enneads* actually serves as the lemma and source for Ficino's *De vita* 3 since the origin of *De vita* 3 is controversial in itself. *De vita* 3 appears neither in Ficino's translation nor in his commentary on Plotinus. Kristeller, Garin, Kaske and Clark have concluded that it is a commentary on *Enneads* 4.3.11. Kristeller and Clark have illustrated through textual research that, in one MS of Ficino's commentary on Plotinus, *De vita* 3 shows up as a commentary on *Enneads* 4.3.11, although the first six chapters had actually been written at an earlier date. Furthermore, chapter 26 says that the statue-animating passage in the *Asclepius* formed the lemma Ficino discussed in *De favore coelitus hauriendo*, and Plotinus discusses the animation of statues in *Enneads* 4.3.11. Nowhere else does Plotinus so clearly support the magic of artificial signs or representation; only in 4.4.40 does he vaguely mention two "figures." Ficino elaborates on these animated statues in chapters 13 and 26, with scattered echoes in chapters 10 and 12, and develops a mirror analogy in chapter 17.

At the same time, however, Ficino does not directly address this lemma for 25 chapters. He implicitly concedes this point when he opens chapter 26 with "But lest we digress too long from interpreting Plotinus, which is what we started to do in the beginning . . ." *Opera*, p. 570. Walker thus suggests, with much justification, that both the lemma and source of *De vita* 3 is *Enneads* 4.4.30-42. (See especially *De vita* 3.1 ad init. and *Enn.* 4.4.42 ad fin.; 3.1 and 4.4.35; 3.2 and 4.4.32; 3.26 and 4.4.40.) Klibansky, Saxl, and Panofsky suggest 4.4.30-44, 2.3 as the lemma. But since 2.3 contains Plotinus's attack on astrology, *De vita* 3 would be forced to take a side rather than merely comment on this passage. Other scholars even place the lemma as late as chapter 26 or even chapter 45, the last chapter.

At the same time, however, Ficino seldom sticks to his lemma anyway, as is illustrated by his *Commentary* on the *Philebus*. It appears, then, that the most conciliatory approach is to view Ficino's lemma as *Enneads* 4.3.11, with *Enneads* 4.4.26-44 as supporting source material. Kaske addresses this controversy at length. *Books on Life*, pp. 25-7.

<sup>104</sup>Cf. Copenhaver, "Natural Magic," p. 273.

<sup>105</sup>See Appendix I for an overview of Ficino's astrology.

<sup>106</sup>Ad Lectorem to *De vita* 3, *Opera*, p. 530. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 237. "Ut autem quod pollicentur, id et praestent firmissima fide et cumulo insuper prorogent pleniore, diligentia tua et medicorum astrologorumque cura efficere proculdubio potest. Iam vero id posse scientia et prudentia fieri doctissimi quique astrologi ac medici confitentur." *Ibid.*, p. 236.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., p. 239.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., pp. 239, 241. Cf. *Opera*, pp. 552, 555, 558, 561. Walker, *Demonic Magic*, p. 42.

<sup>109</sup>*De vita* 3.18, *Opera*, p. 559. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 343. "Denique tutius fore arbitrator medicinis quam imaginibus se committere; rationesque a nobis de potestate coelesti pro imaginibus assignatas in medicinis potius quam in figuris efficaciam habere posse. . . . Praeter enim id quod inanes esse figuras suspicor, haud temere vel umbram idolatriae debemus admittere." Ibid., p. 342.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>111</sup>"compositus ab eo inter Commentaria eiusdem in Plotinum" and "In quo consistat secundum Plotinum virtus favorem coelitus attrahens, scilicet in eo quod anima mundi et stellarum daemonumque animae facile alliciuntur corporum formis accommodatis" respectively.

<sup>112</sup>Augustine, *Confessions*, 10-11.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>114</sup>Ficino dedicated his vernacular translation of *De monarchia* to Bernardo del Nero and Antonio di Tuccio Manetti. Ficino also transcribed in his own hand Dante's two Latin eclogues addressed to Giovanni del Virgilio, and he included some lines in an early treatise which clearly reveal Dante's influence. Kristeller emphasizes that Ficino had "a special admiration for Dante." In the preface to his vernacular translation of Dante's *De monarchia*, Ficino says that he made the translation at the encouragement of his friends "so that it may be common to more readers," and he lauds Dante the Florentine as "the philosophical poet" who "embellished his books with many Platonic thoughts," "drinking from the Platonic fountains with the vessel of Vergil, and hence treated very elegantly in his Comedies of the realm of the blessed, of the unhappy and of the pilgrims who have left this life." Kristeller, "Marsilio Ficino as a Man of Letters and the Glosses Attributed to him in the Caetani Codex of Dante," *Renaissance Quarterly* 36 (1983): 8-10.

<sup>115</sup>Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 27.

<sup>116</sup>Jayne, *Plato's Symposium*, p. 11; cf. Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 27. Dante and Guido Cavalcanti were two models for Ficino's approach. For the history of the discursive treatise in the form of a commentary, see John Charles Nelson, *Renaissance Theory of Love: The Context of Giordano Bruno's Eroici Furori* (New York, 1958), chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>117</sup>Albert M. Wolters, "The First Draft of Ficino's Translation of Plotinus," in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone: Studi e documenti*, edited by Giancarlo Garfagnini, 2 vols (Florence, 1986) 1:305-329 at 306.

<sup>118</sup>Albert M. Wolters, "Ficino and Plotinus' Treatise 'On Eros,'" in *Ficino and Renaissance Neoplatonism*, edited by Konrad Eisenbichler and Olga Zorzi Pugliese (Ottawa, 1986), pp. 192-3. In a similar manner, Wolters states, "But what is nothing short of astounding is that [Ficino] succeeded in translating the entire oeuvre of Plotinus, one of the most difficult of ancient Greek authors, in less than two years. This is an unrivaled feat in the history of Plotinus scholarship, and all the more impressive because Ficino's translation stands to this day as one of the most successful renderings ever made of the *Enneads*." In his "Translation of Plotinus," p. 306. James Hankins says much the same in relation to Ficino's translation of the Platonic corpus, and he adds the important notion that Ficino's accuracy was improved by his philosophical acuity. "Ficino, we may say, was yet the most competent translator of philosophical Greek since Cicero. . . . His translation represents a clear advance upon the humanistic versions of the early and mid-fifteenth century. Like them, Ficino has a good grasp of Greek vocabulary, idiom and syntax; like them, he writes a clear and correct (however inelegant) Latin prose. But unlike them, he does not bowdlerize, and his unacknowledged glosses are few and relatively innocuous. More important from the point of view of the philosopher, he is careful to maintain a consistent technical vocabulary, a practice which was generally neglected by the humanist translators of Plato. Most important of all, he came to his task of translating with a trained and perspicacious philosophical intelligence, which, combined with the philological learning of a century of humanism, enabled him to produce the most accurate and influential translation of Plato in modern history." From "Remarks on Ficino's Translation of Plato" in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone: Studi e documenti*, edited by Giancarlo Garfagnini, 2 vols (Florence, 1986)

1:287-297 at 296-97. Even Kristeller affirms, "We may assert without exaggeration that even when we ignore all his other works and consider Ficino merely as a translator and commentator of Plato, of Plotinus and of other Greek philosophical writers, he would occupy a place of the first order in the history of classical and philological scholarship." From "Ficino and His Work," p. 20.

<sup>119</sup>Apology to *De vita, Opera*, p. 573. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 397. ". . . magiam vel imagines non probari quidem a Marsilio, sed narrari, Plotinum ipsum interpretante. Quod et scripta plane declarant, si aequa mente legantur." *Ibid.*, p. 396.

<sup>120</sup>Shumaker provides an excellent synopsis of *De vita 3* in his *Occult Sciences*, pp. 120-33.

<sup>121</sup>Ficino often discusses the use of talismanic magic, in which a magus can affect results by capturing stellar influences in images and using these images to manipulate the heavens. The talisman, which was usually an engraved disc made of a precious metal, *De vita 3.16, Opera*, p. 554, received stellar influences through: 1) the sympathetic properties of its composition, such as gold for the Sun; 2) its construction at a time in which that star is favorable, thus giving the operator a "second" horoscope (e.g. Ficino says in *De vita 3.25* that clothing has a horoscope); and 3) the addition of representational symbols or figures on its face, such as the sign of the planet.

<sup>122</sup>*De vita 3.26, Opera*, p. 571. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 389. ". . . sic et ille sapiens ubi cognovit quae materiae. . . qualem coelitus influxum suscipere possint, has eo regnante potissimum colligit, praeparat, adhibet sibique per eas coelestia vindicat. Ubicunque enim materia quaedam sic superis exposita est, sicut speculari vitrum vultui tuo pariesque oppositus voci, subito superne patitur ab agente videlicet potentissimo a potestate vitaeque mirabili ubique praesente, virtutemque passione reportat, non aliter quam et speculum imaginem repraesentat ex vultu et ex voce paries echo." *Ibid.*, p. 388.

<sup>123</sup>*De vita 3.22, Opera*, pp. 564-65. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, pp. 363, 365. "Harmoniam vero capacem superiorum per septem rerum gradus in superioribus distribuimus: per imagines videlicet (ut putant) harmonice constitutas, per medicinas sua quadam consonantia temperatas, per vapores odoresque simili concinnitate confectos, per cantus musicos atque sonos, ad quorum ordinem vimque referri gestus corporis saltusque et tripudia volumus; per imaginationis conceptus motusque concinnos, per congruas rationis discursiones, per tranquillas mentis contemplationes." *Ibid.*, p. 362. Ficino provides greater detail in *De vita 3.21*, "Now since the planets are seven in number, there are also seven steps through which something from on high can be attracted to the lower things. Sounds occupy the middle position and are dedicated to Apollo. Harder materials, stones and metals, hold the lowest rank and thus seem to resemble the Moon. Second in ascending order are things composed of plants, fruits of trees, their gums, and the members of animals, and all these correspond to Mercury - if we follow in the heavens the order of the Chaldeans. Third are very fine powders and their vapors selected from among the materials I have already mentioned and the odors of plants and flowers used as simples, and of ointments; they pertain to Venus. Fourth are words, song, and sounds, all of which are rightly dedicated to Apollo whose greatest invention is music. Fifth are the strong concepts of the imagination - forms, motions, passions - which suggest the force of Mars. Sixth are the sequential arguments and deliberations of the human reason which pertains designedly to Jupiter. Seventh are the more remote and simple operations of the understanding, almost now disjoined from motion and conjoined to the divine; they are meant for Saturn, whom deservedly the Hebrews call 'Sabbath' from the word for 'rest.'" *Opera*, p. 562. *Ibid.*, pp. 355, 357.

<sup>124</sup>As Professor Stephen McKnight succinctly observes, "Realizing, however, that his move from conventional medicine to spiritual magic carries him into controversial areas, Ficino prudently notes that his own interest in and use of these celestial powers are restricted to things within the realm of natural philosophy and, therefore, consistent with theology." *Sacralizing the Secular: The Renaissance Origins of Modernity* (Baton Rouge, 1989), p. 60.

<sup>125</sup>Apology to *De vita, Opera*, p. 573. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 397. "Neque de magia hic prophana, quae cultu daemonum nititur, verbum quidem ullum asseverari, sed de magia naturali, quae rebus naturalibus ad prosperam corporum valetudinem coelestium beneficia captat, effici mentionem. Quae sane facultas tam concedenda

videtur ingeniis legitime utentibus, quam medicina et agricultura iure conceditur; tantoque etiam magis, quanto perfectior est industria, terrenis coelestia copulans." Ibid., p. 396.

<sup>126</sup>Apology to *De vita, Opera*, p. 574. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 399.

"Denique duo sunt magiae genere. Unum quidem eorum, qui certo quodam cultu daemones sibi conciliant, quorum opera freti fabricant saepe portenta. . . . Alterum vero eorum qui naturales materias opportune causis subiciunt naturalibus mira quadam ratione formandas. Huius quoque artificii species duae sunt: altera quidem curiosa, altera necessaria. Illa sane ad ostentationem supervacua fingit prodigia. . . . Hoc autem tanquam vanum et saluti noxium procul effugiendum. Tenenda tamen species necessaria, cum astrologia copulans medicinam." Ibid., p. 398.

<sup>127</sup>*De vita* 3.18, *Opera*, p. 559. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, pp. 341, 343.

<sup>128</sup>*De vita* 3.18, *Opera*, p. 558. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 341. "Albertus quoque Magnus, astrologiae pariter atque theologiae professor, ait in Speculo, ubi a licitis discernere se inquit illicita, imagines rite ab astrologis constitutas virtutem effectumque acquirere a figura coelesti." Ibid., p. 340. Ficino is referring to Albertus, *Liber dictus Speculum astronomicum Alberti Magni de libris licitis et illicitis*, 11, 16. All astrological material down to "Pietro d'Abano" comes directly from Albertus Magnus. Ibid., p. 449n28.

<sup>129</sup>*De vita* 3.26, *Opera*, p. 572. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 391.

<sup>130</sup>*De vita* 3.18, *Opera*, p. 559. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, pp. 341, 343. Ficino says in *De vita* 3.15, "I learned from the theologians and Iamblichus that makers of images are often possessed by evil daemons and deceived." *Opera*, p. 552. Ibid., p. 317. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3.104-107; Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* 2.10, in Ficino's epitome, *Opera*, p. 1881; 3.13, *Opera*, p. 1886; 4.7, *Opera*, p. 1891.

<sup>131</sup>*De vita* 3.21, *Opera*, p. 562. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 357. ". . . si prius admonuerimus, ne putes nos impraesentia de stellis adorandis loqui, sed potius imitandis et imitatione captandis. Neque rursum de donis agere credas, quae stellae sint electione daturae, sed influxu potius naturali." Ibid., p. 356.

<sup>132</sup>Shumaker asserts that "we must do Ficino the justice of recognizing that his intentions were innocent of malice and that his 'magic'---for magic it certainly was---was guarded anxiously against idolatry and. . . was conceived as 'natural.'" *Occult Sciences*, p. 133.

<sup>133</sup>In addition to the many passages cited above, Ficino mentions the soul as the *media rerum* in his Commentary on the *Timaeus* 28, *Opera*, p. 1453, and in the Preface to his translation of Theophrastus's *De anima* and Priscian's commentary thereon, *Opera*, p. 1801. Plotinus stresses the mediatorial function of the World-soul in his *Enneads* 4.3.11.

<sup>134</sup>*De vita* 3.1, *Opera*, p. 531. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 243. "Si tantum haec duo sint in mundo, hinc quidem intellectus, inde vero corpus, sed absit anima, tunc neque intellectus trahetur ad corpus - immobilis enim est omnino caretque affectu, motionis principio, tanquam a corpore longissime distans - neque corpus trahetur ad intellectum, velut ad motum per se inefficax et ineptum longeque ab intellectu remotum. Verum si interponatur anima utrique conformis, facile utrinque et ad utraque fiet attractus. Primo quidem ipsa omnium facillime ducitur, quoniam primum mobile est et ex se et sponte mobile. Praeterea cum sit (ut dixi) media rerum, omnia suo in se modo continet et utrinque ratione propinqua; ideoque conciliature et omnibus, etiam aequaliter illis quae inter se distant, ab ea videlicet non distantibus. Praeter enim id quod hinc quidem conformis est divinis, inde vero caducis, et ad utraque vergit affectu, tota interim est simul ubique." Ibid., p. 242. Plotinus frequently asserts that the universe is one animal united by the World-soul, e.g. *Enneads* 3.2.2, ad fin., 4.4.40. He does not mention this concept in 4.3.11. This passage also includes a number of ideas put forth by the Neoplatonist Synesius of Cyrene (c. 370-413), *De insomniis*, translated into Latin by Ficino in *Opera*, pp. 1968ff. From this point forward, Ficino sticks more closely to *Enneads* 4.3.11. Ibid., p. 427 n. 3.

<sup>135</sup>*De vita* 3.1, *Opera*, p. 531. Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>136</sup>This concept does not come from *Enneads* 4.3.11. Rather, *Enneads* 2.3.14 and 4.3.10 illustrate how the seminal reasons reside within the World-soul. *Enneads* 5.9.12, 4.3.10, 4.9.15, 4.4.39 illustrate how they are responsible for inhering in and forming individual beings. Ibid., pp. 427-28n4.

<sup>137</sup>*De vita* 3.26, *Opera*, p. 572. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 391. "Mercurius sacerdotes ait accepisse virtutem a mundi natura convenientem, eamque miscuisse. Secutus hunc Plotinus putat totum id anima mundi conciliante confici posse, quatenus illa naturalium rerum formas per seminales quasdam rationes sibi divinitus insitas generat atque movet. Quas quidem rationes appellat etiam deos, quoniam ab ideis supremae mentis nunquam destituuntur. Itaque per rationes eiusmodi animam mundi facile se applicare materiis, quas formavit ab initio per easdem, quando Magus vel sacerdos opportunis temporibus adhibuerit formas rerum rite collectas, quae rationem hanc aut illam proprie spectant. . . . Fieri vero posse quandoque, ut rationibus ad formas sic adhibitibus sublimiora quoque dona descendant, quatenus rationes in anima mundi coniunctae sunt intellectualibus eiusdem animae formis, atque per illas divinae mentis ideis." *Ibid.*, p. 390. Ficino then asserts that "Iamblichus too confirms this when he deals with sacrifices. . .", but Iamblichus does not say about them what Ficino does. Cf. Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* 5.1-26, in Ficino's epitome, *Opera*, pp. 1894-1900. *Ibid.*, p. 458n17.

<sup>138</sup>The Stoics originally conceived of the seminal reasons as analogous with the sperm and seeds of organic life. Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 42. See F.E. Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon* (New York, 1967), s.v. "logoi spermatikoi."

<sup>139</sup>Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.3.10, 4.3.15, 4.9.15, 6.3.16; Ficino, Commentary on Plotinus, "De fato" = *Enneads* 2, *Opera*, p. 1676. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 83 n.13.

<sup>140</sup>Ficino takes this notion, in part at least, from Proclus' *De sacrificio et magia*, *Opera*, p. 1929.

<sup>141</sup>*De vita* 3.1, *Opera*, p. 532. *Ibid.*, pp. 243, 245. "Nemo itaque putet certis mundi materiis trahi numina quaedam a materiis penitus segregata, sed daemones potius animatique mundi munera stellarumque viventium. Nemo rursum miretur per materiales formas animam quasi allici posse, siquidem escas eiusmodi sibi congruas ipsamet, quibus alliceretur, effecit, et semper libenterque habitat in eisdem." *Ibid.*, pp. 240, 242.

<sup>142</sup>*De vita* 3.13, *Opera*, p. 548. *Ibid.*, p. 307.

<sup>143</sup>Synesius, *De insomniis*, 133A6-C2, section 4 in Ficino's translation, *Opera*, p. 1969.

<sup>144</sup>*De vita* 3.26, *Opera*, pp. 570-72. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 389. "His ferme exemplis ipse Plotinus utitur, ubi Mercurium imitatus ait, veteres sacerdotes sive Magos in status sacrificiisque sensibilibus divinum aliquid et mirandum suscipere solitos. Vult autem una cum Trismegisto per materialia haec non proprie suscipi numina penitus a materia segregata, sed mundana tantum, ut ab initio dixi et Synesius approbat - mundana, inquam, id est, vitam quandam vel vitale aliquid ex anima mundi et sphaerarum animis atque stellarum, vel etiam motum quandam et vitalem quasi praesentiam ex daemonibus. Immo interdum ipsos daemones eiusmodi adesse materiis Mercurius ipse, quem Plotinus sequitur, inquit - daemones aërios, non coelestes, nedum sublimiores - statusque Mercurius ipse componit ex herbis, arboribus, lapidibus, aromatis naturalium vim divinitatis (ut ipse ait) in se habentibus." *Ibid.*, p. 388.

<sup>145</sup>Cf. Kaske, *Books on Life*, pp. 457-58 n. 8.

<sup>146</sup>*Asclepius* 37. In Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, pp. 89-90. Italics mine.

<sup>147</sup>Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.3.11, trans. McKenna, *Enneads*, p. 308.

<sup>148</sup>Ficino's position on daemons is quite inconsistent, due in part to the wide variety of sources Ficino used in his syncretic approach. His exposition on the daemonic body in *Theologia Platonica* 18.4 is difficult to reconcile with that in his later commentary on *Enneads* 3.5.5-6, *Opera*, pp. 1715-1717. We cannot be certain what debt Ficino's owes to the complex demonology of the well-known eleventh-century Byzantine Neoplatonist Michael Psellus (1018-c.1098), for which we possess brief extracts which Ficino either translated or paraphrased from Psellus's major treatise, *De Operatione Daemonum*, *Opera*, pp. 1939-45 in Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum* 1:cxxxv. Allen, *Platonism*, p. 9 n. 19.

<sup>149</sup>Julian the Apostate does not explicitly stress the World-soul or the World-spirit in his "Hymn to the Sun," but he did provide Ficino with the notion of an aetherial quintessence pervading all things and "culminating" in the Sun. Cf. *Works of the Emperor Julian*, ed. W.C. Wright, vol. 1 (London, 1913), Oratio 4, "Hymn to the Sun," 132c, p. 358. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 431n12. *Picatrix* 3.5 suggests that some kind of planetary spirit pervades all things but concentrates itself in certain ones. *Ibid.*, p. 431 n. 13. For a Latin translation of the Arabic original, cf. David

Pingree, ed., *Picatrix: The Latin Version of the Ghayat Al-Hakim* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1986), pp. 103-108. I have not been able to locate an English translation.

<sup>150</sup>Kaske states, "A definitive assessment of Ficino's debt to *Picatrix* must wait until we can all read the Latin *Picatrix* in the forthcoming critical edition by David Pingree, soon to be published by the Warburg Institute." *Books on Life*, p. 46. She is referring to David Pingree, ed., *Picatrix: The Latin Version of the Ghayat Al-Hakim* (London, 1986). I have not yet discovered any studies written on Ficino and *Picatrix* following this publication besides Kaske's own observations in *Books on Life*.

<sup>151</sup>Eugenio Garin, *Astrology in the Renaissance: The Zodiac of Life*, trans. Carolyn Jackson and June Allen (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), pp. 47, 48.

<sup>152</sup>Garin, *Astrology*, pp. 49, 54; cf. Cassirer, *Individual and the Cosmos*, p. 110. The *Asclepius* also reveals a fascination with the relation of macrocosm to microcosm, and thus, with a syncretic fusion between Platonic and Stoic philosophical doctrines. Gersh, *Middle Platonism*, 1:338.

<sup>153</sup>David Pingree, "Some of the Sources of the Ghayat Al-Hakim." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 43 (1980): 14.

<sup>154</sup>E.g. *De vita* 3.18, 3.22-3, 3.25-6.

<sup>155</sup>Pingree, "Ghayat Al-Hakim," p. 14.

<sup>156</sup>*De vita* 3.26

<sup>157</sup>Ficino glosses the "spiritus stellarum" which the *Picatrix magi* enclose in their statues and images as either "mirabiles coelestium vires" or "daemonas etiam stellae huius illiusve pedissequos." *De vita* 3.20.21-24, *Opera*, p. 561. This forces the stellar spirits down to a lower ontological level. Plotinus, in *Enneads* 2.9.14, also castigates magi who invoke the highest gods and thus denigrate them. Kaske, *Books on Life*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>158</sup>Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 51.

<sup>159</sup>*De vita* 3.20, *Opera*, p. 561. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 351. "Spiritus igitur stellarum qualescunque sint, inseri statuis et imaginibus arbitrantur, non aliter ac daemones soleant humana nonnunquam corpora occupare, perque illa loqui, moveri, movere, mirabilia perpetrare. Similia quaedam per imagines facere stellarum spiritus arbitrantur." *Ibid.*, p. 350.

<sup>160</sup>Kaske, *Books on Life*, pp. 434 n. 10, 452 n. 5.

<sup>161</sup>*De vita* 3.21, *Opera*, p. 564. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 361. ". . . spiritum inter corpus animamque medium. . ." *Ibid.*, p. 360.

<sup>162</sup>*De vita* 3.3, *Opera*, pp. 534-35. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, pp. 255, 257. "Profecto mundanum corpus, quantum ex motu generationeque apparet, est ubique vivum. . . Ergo per animam vivit ubique sibi praesentem ac prorsus accommodatam. Igitur inter mundi corpus tractabile et ex parte caducum atque ipsam eius animam, cuius natura nimium ab eiusmodi corpore distat, inest ubique spiritus, sicut inter animam et corpus in nobis, si modo ubique vita est communicata semper ab anima corpori crasiori. Talis namque spiritus necessario requiritur tanquam medium, quo anima divina et adsit corpori crasiori et vitam eidem penitus largiatur. Corpus autem omne facile tibi sensibile, tanquam sensibus tuis accommodatum, crassius est et ab anima divinissima longe degenerans. Opus est igitur excellentioris corporis adminiculo, quasi non corporis." *Ibid.*, pp. 254, 256.

<sup>163</sup>Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.726.

<sup>164</sup>*De vita* 3.3, *Opera*, p. 535. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 257. "Ipse vero est corpus tenuissimum, quasi non corpus et quasi iam anima, item quasi non anima et quasi iam corpus. In eius virtute minimum est naturae terrenae, plus autem aquae, plus item aerae, rursus igneae stellarisque quam plurimum. Ad horum graduum mensuras ipsae quantitates stellarum elementorumque prodierunt. Ipse vero ubique viget in omnibus generationis omnis proximus auctor atque motus, de quo ille: "Spiritus itus alit." Totus est suapte natura lucidus calidusque et humidus atque vivificus, ex dotibus animae superioribus dotes eiusmodi nactus." *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>165</sup>*De vita* 3.26, *Opera*, p. 570. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 385. "Quamobrem praeter corpus hoc mundi sensibus familiariter manifestum latet in eo spiritus corpus quoddam excedens caduci sensus capacitatem. In spiritu viget anima; in anima fulget intelligentia. Atque sicut sub Luna nec miscetur aer cum terra, nisi per aquam, nec ignis cum aqua, nisi per aerem, sic in universo esca quaedam sive fomes ad animam corpori copulanda est ille ipse quem spiritum apellamus." *Ibid.*, p. 384.



<sup>166</sup>*De vita* 3.4, *Opera*, p. 536. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 259. "Sive enim mundi corpus atque mundana sint ab anima mundi proxime, sicut Plotino placet atque Porphyrio, sive mundanum corpus, sicut et anima, proxime sit a deo, ut nostris placet et forte Timaeo Pythagorico, omnino vivit mundus atque spirat, spiritum eius nobis haurire licet." *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>167</sup>*De vita* 3.2, *Opera*, p. 533. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 251. ". . . mundus animal in se magis unum est quam quodvis aliud animal, si modo est animal perfectissimum. Ergo sicut in nobis membri cuiuslibet, praesertim principalis, qualitas motusque ad alia pertinet, ita membrorum principalium actus in mundo commovent omnia, et membra inferiora facile capiunt a supremis ultro dare paratis." *Ibid.*, p. 250. He says shortly afterward, "That the cosmos is animate just like any animate thing, and more effectively so, not only Platonic arguments but also the testimony of Arabic astrologers thoroughly proves." *Opera*, p. 534. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 255. "Quem sicut et quodvis animal multoque efficacius animatum esse, non solum Platonicae rationes, sed etiam astrologorum Arabum testimonia comprobant." *Ibid.*, p. 254. Cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 30b, 30c-31a; cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 2.9.5, 3.2.3, 4.3.7, 4.4.32. By "Arabic astrologers," Ficino usually means *Picatrix*. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, pp. 433-34 nn. 1, 9, 10.

<sup>168</sup>*De vita* 3.2, *Opera*, pp. 533, 534. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, pp. 251, 253. "Neque vero diffidere debet quisquam nos atque omnia quae circa nos sunt praeparamentis quibusdam posse sibi vendicare coelestia. Nam coelitus haec facta sunt assidueque reguntur et illinc imprimis praeparata sunt ad illa." *Ibid.*, pp. 248, 250. Ficino adds in *De vita* 3.22, "Since the heavens have been constructed according to a harmonic plan and move harmonically and bring everything about by harmonic sounds and motions, it is logical that through harmony alone not only human beings but all things below are prepared to receive, according to their abilities, celestial things." *Opera*, p. 564. *Ibid.*, p. 363. "Quoniam vero coelum est harmonica ratione compositum moveturque harmonice, et harmonicis motibus atque sonis efficit omnia, merito per harmoniam solam non solum homines, sed inferiora haec omnia pro viribus ad capienda coelestia praeparantur." *Ibid.*, p. 362.

<sup>169</sup>*De vita* 3.2, *Opera*, p. 534. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 255. "Ubi etiam probant ex applicatione quadam spiritus nostri ad spiritum mundi per artem physicam affectumque facta, traici ad animam corpusque nostrum bona coelestia. Hinc quidem per spiritum nostrum in nobis medium et tunc a mundi spiritu roboratum, inde vero per radios stellarum feliciter agentes in spiritum nostrum, et radiis natura similem et tunc se ipsum coelestibus coaptantem." *Ibid.*, p. 254.

<sup>170</sup>*De vita* 3.20, *Opera*, p. 561. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, pp. 351, 353. "Tradunt Arabes spiritum nostrum quando rite fabricamus imagines, si per imaginationem et affectum ad opus attentissimus fuerit et ad stellas, coniungi cum ipso mundi spiritu atque cum stellarum radiis, per quos mundi spiritus agit; atque ita coniunctum esse ipsum quoque in causa, ut a spiritu mundi per radios quidam stellae alicuius spiritus, id est vivida quaedam virtus, infundatur imagini, potissimum hominis tunc operantis spiritui consentanea." *Ibid.*, pp. 350, 352.

<sup>171</sup>*De vita* 3.1, *Opera*, p. 532. Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 247. "Potest autem quinta haec essentia nobis intus magis magisque assumi, si quis sciverit eam aliis elementis immixtam plurimum segregare, vel saltem his rebus frequenter uti, quae hac abundant puriore praesertim. . . . Praeterea sicut alimenta rite in nobis assumpta per se non viva rediguntur per spiritum nostrum ad vitae nostrae formam, sic et corpora nostra rite accommodata corpori spirituique mundano, videlicet per res mundanas et per nostrum spiritum, hauriunt ex vita mundana quam plurimum." *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>172</sup>*De vita* 3.3, *Opera*, p. 535. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 257. "Sed ad mundi spiritum redeamus, per quem mundus generat omnia, quandoquidem et per spiritum proprium omnia generant, quem tum coelum, tum quintam essentiam possumus appellare. Qui talis ferme est in corpore mundi, qualis in nostro noster, hoc imprimis excepto, quod anima mundi hunc non trahit ex quattuor elementis, tanquam humoribus suis, sicut ex nostris nostra, immo hunc proxime (ut Platonice sive Plotinice loquar) ex virtute sua procreat genitalem, quasi tumens, et simul cum eo stellas, statimque per eum parit quattuor elementa, quasi in illius spiritus virtute sint omnia." *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>173</sup>E.g. Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.3.6; cf. 2.9.4; 4.8.6. Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 434vn.v4.

<sup>174</sup>Avicenna, *De viribus cordis* 1.1-2; *De vita* 1.6, 1.23. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 435 n. 3.

<sup>175</sup>*De vita* 3.4, *Opera*, p. 536. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 259. "Hauritur autem proprie ab homine per suum spiritum illi suapte natura conformem, maxime si reddatur etiam arte cognatior, id est, si maxime coelestis evadat. Evadit vero coelestis, si expurgetur a sordibus et omnino ab eis quae inhaerent sibi dissimilia coelo. Quae quidem sordes non solum intra viscera si fuerint, verum etiam si in animo, si in cute, si in vestibus, si in habitatione et aere, spiritum frequenter inficiunt. Efficietur tandem coelestis, si ad orbicularem animi corporisque motum ipse quoque orbis efficiat; si ad aspectum cogitationemque lucis frequentiore etiam ipse subrutillet; si adhibeantur ei similia coelo ea communiter diligentia qua Avicenna in libro *De viribus cordis* spiritum curat, et nos in libro *De curanda litteratorum valetudine* curare contendimus. Ubi primum segregantur ab eo vapores obnubilantes medicinis ita purgantibus, secundo rebus lucentibus illustratur, tertio ita colitur ut et tenuetur simul et confirmetur." *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>176</sup>*De vita* 3.3, *Opera*, p. 535. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 257. "Proinde scimus vivencia omnia, tam plantas quam animalia, per quendam spiritum huic similem vivere atque generare, atque inter elementa, quod maxime spiritale est, velocissime generare perpetuoque moveri quasi vivens." *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>177</sup>*Cf. Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, p. 239.

<sup>178</sup>*De vita* 3.16, *Opera*, p. 553. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 323. "Possunt itaque (ut aiunt) radii occultas et mirabiles ultra notas imaginibus imprimere vires, sicut et ceteris inserunt. Non enim inanimati sunt sicut lucernae radii, sed vivi sensualesque tanquam per oculos viventium corporum emicantes, dotesque mirificas secum ferunt ab imaginationibus mentibusque coelestium, vim quoque vehementissimam ex affectu illorum valido motuque corporum rapidissimo; ac proprie maximeque in spiritum agunt coelestibus radiis simillimum." *Ibid.*, p. 322. Ficino adds in *De vita* 3.4, "Finally, [the human soul] will be made celestial to the highest degree, so far as that system dictates which we are now outlining, if the rays and influences chiefly of the Sun, when he is dominant among the celestial bodies, are applied to it." *Opera*, p. 536. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 259. "Fiet denique coelestis maxime, quantum dictat ratio praesens, si applicentur ei potissimum radii influxusque Solis inter coelestia dominantis." *Ibid.*, p. 258. And again, Ficino asserts in *De vita* 3.11, "For thus the rays of the Sun and the stars touch you more readily and purely on all sides; and they fill your spirit with the spirit of the world shining forth more richly through their rays." *Opera*, p. 544. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 291. "Sic enim Solis stellarumque radii expeditius puriusque undique te contingunt, spiritumque tuum complent mundi spiritu per radios uberius emicante." *Ibid.*, p. 290.

<sup>179</sup>*De vita* 3.22, *Opera*, p. 565. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 365. Ficino provides an ambiguous explanation for understanding: "insofar as it separates itself not only from things we perceive but even from those things which we commonly imagine and which we prove about human behavior and insofar as it recollects itself in emotion, in intention, and in life to supra-physical things. . ." *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup>*De vita* 3.1, *Opera*, p. 532. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 247. "Semper vero memento sicut animae nostrae virtus per spiritum adhibetur membris, sic virtutem animae mundi per quintam essentiam, quae ubique viget tanquam spiritus intra corpus mundanum, sub anima mundi dilatari per omnia, maxime vero illis virtutem hanc infundi, quae eiusmodi spiritus plurimum hauserunt." *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>181</sup>*De vita* 3.4, *Opera*, p. 536. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 259. *Italics mine.* "Hunc tu igitur studebis tibi imprimis insinuare, hoc enim medio naturalia quaedam beneficia reportabis, tum corporis mundani, tum animae, tum etiam stellarum atque daemonum. Nam ipse inter crassum mundi corpus et animam medius est, et in ipso stellae sunt et daemones atque per ipsum." *Ibid.*, p. 258. On a similar note, Ficino states in *De vita* 3.1, If a person "employs things which pertain to such and such a star and daemon, he undergoes the peculiar influence of this star and daemon. . . . And he undergoes this influence not only through the rays of the star and the daemon themselves, but also through the very Soul of the World everywhere present. For the reason of any star and daemon flourishes in her." *Opera*, p. 532. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 245.

<sup>182</sup>*De vita* 3.4, *Opera*, p. 536. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 259. *Italics mine.* Kaske translates *anima* here as "mind," but for the sake of my argument, I prefer to

translate it as "soul" and I have amended the translation as such. "Atque ita ex hoc spiritu tanquam in nobis medio coelestia bona imprimis insita sibi in nostrum tum corpus, tum animum exundabunt. . ." Ibid., p. 258. Ficino later adds in *De vita* 3.22 that "we expose our spirit in order to obtain the occult forces of the stars through a similar harmony of its own. . . . Finally, we expose our soul and our body to such occult forces through the spirit so prepared for things above (as I have often said) - yes, our soul, insofar as it is inclined by its affection to the spirit and body." *Opera*, pp. 564-65. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, pp. 363, 365.

<sup>183</sup>*De vita* 3.22, *Opera*, p. 566. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 369. "Denique ubicunque dicimus coelestium ad nos dona descendere, intellige tum corporum coelestium dotes in corpora nostra venire per spiritum nostrum rite paratum, tum eadem prius etiam per radios suos influere in spiritum naturaliter vel quomodocunque illis expositum, tum etiam animarum coelestium bona partim in eundem spiritum per radios prosilire atque hinc in nostros animos redundare, partim ab animis eorum vel ab angelis in animos hominum illis espositos pervenire - expositos, inquam, non tam naturali quodam pacto quam electione arbitrii liberi vel affectu." Ibid., p. 368. Shortly before, in the same chapter, Ficino asserts, "For since [the Chaldeans, Egyptians, and Platonists] believe the celestials are not empty bodies, but bodies divinely animated and ruled moreover by divine Intelligences, no wonder they believe that as many good things as possible come forth from thence for men, what into our soul, and not into our soul from their bodies but from their souls. And they believe too that the same sort of things and more of them flow out from those Intelligences which are above the heavens." *Opera*, p. 565. In Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 367.

<sup>184</sup>Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 452 n. 5.

<sup>185</sup>*Opera*, p. 1744.

<sup>186</sup>*Opera*, p. 1503. In Walker, *Demonic Magic*, pp. 47-8. "Mitto in praesentia quantum ingeniorum discrimen afferat familiarum cuiusque hominis varietas daemonum. Quod autem spirituum superiorum vires, nostris quomodocunque ita fiat, spiritibus influant, negare non possumus, quando manifeste videmus corpora nostra corporibus superioribus agitari. . . . Quod si spiritus illi in nostros agunt spiritus, agunt insuper & in corpora. Passio vero corporum humanorum, sive a spiritibus illis, sive a corporibus superioribus inferatur, eatenus redundat in anima, quatenus tam comparato, quam naturali affectu animus sese mergit in corpus. Verum hoc interest, quod corpora illa per corpora nostra movent animas: spiritus autem tum animas per corpora movent, tum per animas, tum etiam per illum spiritum, quem Physici saepe nodum animae invicem, corporisque cognominant." Ibid., pp. 47-9 n. 5.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Ficino's philosophy derived almost exclusively from his central concern with the immortality of the soul. Following the completion of his *Commentary* on the *Symposium* in 1469, Ficino replaced Love with Soul as the "bond and juncture of the universe."<sup>1</sup> He solidified this notion in his *Theologia Platonica* and he continued to advocate this fundamental principle throughout most of his career. But Ficino's psychology was faced with a "tragic flaw" from the outset. For at the same time that Ficino struggled to establish the soul as the center most entity in the universe, he understood that the ontological inconsistencies implicit within this theory gave it no more than metaphorical appeal. The soul could never serve as the ontological fulcrum of the cosmos as long as there remained an undefined *tertium quid* between the body and soul, the corporeal and incorporeal levels of reality. Ficino understood that whatever entity resided in this enigmatic chasm was the true center of all things. Only late in his career did he face this ontological challenge head-on, at which time he tenuously designated spirit as this intermediate quasi-incorporeal entity.

The *prisca theologia* played a crucial role in the development of Ficino's psychology in that it both "created" and "resurrected" his theory of the soul. As a doxographic source of authority, the *prisca theologia* provided a safe haven within which Ficino could develop the Platonic components of his theory of the soul without fear of being accused of heresy by orthodox Christians. Without this authority, Ficino could never have pursued a "Platonic theology" in his psychology. In this sense, the *prisca theologia* helped to "create" Ficino's theory of the soul. The *prisca theologia* returned to the forefront later in Ficino's career when Ficino had no other recourse with which to resolve his ontological dilemma. Ficino shifted his approach completely from the central position of the soul to the quasi-incorporeal entity theoretically linking body and soul. Ficino turned to talismanic magic and a spirit-based ontology in this endeavor. Once again, the *prisca*

*theologia* served as a doxographic source of authority that legitimized his practice of talismanic magic. Even more, it provided the Hermetic *Asclepius* as a principle source through which Ficino conceived of the World-spirit. In this sense, the *prisca theologia* "resurrected" Ficino's psychology. And that Ficino appears to have failed in his efforts to establish a conclusive ontology is less important than the fact that he recognized the ontological dilemma, that he attempted to resolve it, and that he used the authority and example of the *prisca theologia* in this endeavor.

This study began by tracing the authority for Ficino's psychology back to the *prisca theologia*. Rejecting the traditional idea of reason, Ficino viewed natural religion as the vital factor that distinguishes man from animal. Consequently, he believed that the study of man's soul stemmed ultimately from his concept of natural religion. Ficino illustrated that, in its purest and most ancient form, denoted by the *prisca theologia*, natural religion was composed equally and inseparably of both philosophy and theology. Only when man was corrupted did the two separate and follow different routes. Ficino therefore traced the Platonic tradition back to its origins in the *prisca theologia* to prove that it descended from a source of unity. Ficino then demonstrated the natural affinity between Platonism and Christianity and asserted that they could be rejoined into their proper philosophico-religious unity. Ficino thus posited "Platonic theology" as the central ingredient in his conception of the immortal soul. With it, he attempted to develop a theological (Christian) notion of immortality that was properly grounded in a metaphysical (Platonic) framework. The *prisca theologia* did not provide constructive principles central to the workings of Ficino's psychology, but it did provide the cohesive "glue" that binded together the Christian and Platonic components of Ficino's theory.

For most of his career, as he developed the specific ontological divisions of the soul, Ficino did not require the aid of the *prisca theologia*. In his evolving theory of the soul's immortality, Ficino placed the human soul at the exact ontological center of the universe. In doing so, he employed a cosmology which was based hierarchically on the *primum in alioque genere* and a modified form of the Plotinian hypostases. This cosmology was fueled by the *appetitus naturalis* and

the Proclan-Dionysian emanation-ascent cycle. Within this cosmology, Ficino asserted that the human soul is the ontological medium between the realm of the corporeal and the incorporeal, the body and the mind. He believed the human soul desires to live equally in the mundane and the celestial realms. Ficino's theory was, *prima facie*, quite palatable. On further inspection, however, Ficino himself even realized that this approach could be only metaphorical at best.

Ficino's most significant problem was that, despite the soul's position as the lowest entity in the intelligible realm, it was still entirely incorporeal. Consequently, it could not be the exact ontological center of the universe. Ficino unsuccessfully attempted to veil this paradox in semantics. He often referred to "temporal" and "eternal," rather than "corporeal" and "incorporeal," but his paradigm shift proved to be unsuccessful. Ficino also attempted to break the soul down into its ontological components, but he only succeeded in creating additional ambiguities. For example, he asserted that the *idolum*, which is still fully incorporeal, includes the distinct powers of *phantasia*, sense perception, and nutrition. On the other hand, he said that the *natura* (synonymous with the irrational soul and the "vital complexion") is fully corporeal but that it is not directly part of the body. And between these two division, he added a number of other entities, including the traditional medical spirit and at least three ethereal vehicles derived from the Neoplatonic astral body. These entities were all subtle, but apparently corporeal. Ficino only succeeded, then, in creating a number of ambiguous entities without pinpointing the one quasi-incorporeal entity that serves as the true fulcrum of the cosmos.

The *prisca theologia* again entered the picture near the end of Ficino's career as an aid to Ficino in his attempt to sort out this ontological quagmire. Ficino's early medical interests and Saturnine disposition led him to practice astrological medicine, which, in turn, led to practice the more powerful talismanic magic. The influence of the *prisca theologia* in Ficino's composition of *De vita* is readily apparent. *De vita* brought together two auxiliary strains of the *prisca theologia*, that of the *prisca medicina* and the *prisca magi*. The *prisca medicina* revealed that the *prisca theologi* were simultaneously

physicians and astrologers/astronomers, a fact which validated Ficino's practice of astrological medicine in the first two books of *De vita*. The *prisci theologi* had also been *prisci magi*, a fact which validated Ficino's practice of talismanic natural magic in the third and final book of *De vita*. In the first two books of *De vita*, Ficino established the traditional medical spirit as the subtle, but corporeal entity, that comes hierarchically between body and soul, but he did not attempt to fashion it into a quasi-incorporeal entity. In *De vita* 3, however, Ficino used spirit as the intermediary agent that transmits forces between celestial spheres and human patients through talismanic magic. Ficino relied on the authority of the Hermetic *Asclepius* (and Plotinus' support of the *Asclepius*) to legitimize this talismanic magic. But the *Asclepius* and its influence on the Arabic *Picatrix* also appears to have been what originally inspired Ficino to seek out the unprecedented notion of a quasi-incorporeal World-spirit. To what degree Ficino viewed this World-spirit to be analogous to the human spirit is difficult to determine, and this enigma in turn sheds doubt on how Ficino viewed the corresponding ontological nature of the human spirit.

That Ficino eventually sought spirit as the *tertium quid* to bridge the gap between body and soul was not unusual in the sense that even Galen had employed this intermediary. What was different, however, was the fact that Ficino had combined this endeavor with the practice of magic. D.P. Walker asserts the separate uses of medical spirit by stating that there "are the many cases where medical spirits play a part in a real attempt to bridge the gap, to overcome the dualism of mind and matter. . . . Another source of unorthodox conceptions of the human soul was the close connexion of medical spirits with astrology and magic."<sup>2</sup> Ficino's attempt to consolidate both traditions may have ultimately been what allowed him to make such novel advances into the notion of a quasi-incorporeal World-spirit (and possibly a human counterpart). Ficino's philosophical interest in establishing a quasi-incorporeal spirit is clear enough, but the importance magic played in his endeavor should not be underestimated. Ficino's use of magic did not merely entertain a possible fetish for the occult. Rather, it was an integral part of his speculative thought. Even Copenhaver emphasizes the vital role magic played in Ficino's philosophy. He states that Ficino's magic "was part

and parcel of his philosophical, theological, and medical erudition, not a throwback to some 'primitive' way of thinking."<sup>3</sup>

That Ficino failed to establish a coherent psychological ontology which accommodated a quasi-incorporeal entity between body and soul leaves this study without a constructive conclusion. At the same time, however, this study implicitly alludes to a constructive conclusion that transcends Ficino's pedantic and seemingly fruitless efforts to manipulate the ontological divisions of the soul. Whether it was deliberate or incidental on his own part, Ficino's shift from an incorporeal to a corporeal paradigm in *De vita* 3 appears to have "consummated" the birth of natural philosophy and science based on empiricism rather than philosophical speculation. Professor Stephen McKnight asserts: "the important point is that Ficino's reformulation of magic provides the epistemological foundation for a new image of man as the master of the natural world and the shaper of his own destiny."<sup>4</sup> Ficino's inseparable link to the Hermetic tradition and his attempt to solve the ontological dilemma of his psychology by natural and empirical means through talismanic magic molded him into a harbinger of the seventeenth-century scientific revolution. Francis Yates explains:

Though the importance of Ficino's propagation of the Hermetic writings and his adoption of Hermetic philosophy and practice must not be exaggerated to the exclusion of the many other influences fostering the movement, yet it was basic, and the Hermetic attitude toward the cosmos and toward man's relation to the cosmos which Ficino. . . adopted was, I believe, the chief stimulus of that new turning toward the world and operating on the world which, appearing first as Renaissance magic, was to turn into seventeenth-century science.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, Ficino's *De vita* became one of the most widely published books in the sixteenth century, and it was used for its treatment of astrological medicine, magic, and early stages of natural philosophy.<sup>6</sup> The scientific revolution effectively closed the door to the ontological speculations on the soul of the type Ficino had engaged in throughout his career. At the same time, however, it opened up a new and empirical approach to the soul. That Ficino's psychology remained largely inconclusive is unfortunate, but the direction in which it led future thinkers more than compensates for its shortcomings.



<sup>1</sup>Opera, p. 121; cf. Opera, p. 1330.

<sup>2</sup>Walker, "Medical Spirits," p. 288.

<sup>3</sup>Copenhaver, "Philosophy of Magic, p. 93. Elsewhere, Copenhaver adds, "The magic of the third book of *De vita libri tres* can only be understood in the context of Ficino's subtly reasoned philosophy; it is as far from being primitive or irrational as one can imagine." From "Renaissance Magic and Neoplatonic Philosophy: *Ennead* 4.3-5 in Ficino's *De vita coelitus comparanda*," in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone: Studi e documenti*, edited by Giancarlo Garfagnini, 2 vols (Florence, 1986) 2:351-369 351.

<sup>4</sup>McKnight, *Sacralizing the Secular*, p. 64. McKnight refers to the analogy between the magus and the farmer in *De vita* 3.22, in which each is "capable of improving existing species and creating new ones," to support his assertion that Ficino "provides a further explanation of magic as basic to science and technology," pp. 62-3. Here Ficino asserts, "If we turn to agriculture, one prepares a field and seeds for heavenly gifts, and with certain graftings one propagates the life of a plant, leading to another and a better species. Doctors, physicians, and surgeons do similar things in our own bodies to nourish them and to make them acquire more richly the nature of the universe. A philosopher learned in natural and astral matters, whom we call therefore a Magus, does the same thing, with certain earthly enticements drawing the heavenly things when he does it properly, sowing no differently than a farmer who is knowledgeable in grafting, who starts a new shoot off old stock." *De vita* 3.22, Opera, p. 595, trans. Charles Boer, *Book of Life*, p. 166f.

<sup>5</sup>Francis Yates, "The Hermetic Tradition in Renaissance Science," p. 272. Burke takes a similar stance. He contends that there is an area "where practical magical manipulation meets scientific experimentation and where Hermetic archetypal symbolism approaches scientific theory. . . . The realm of magical thinking dwindled and that of science increased when causality came to be defined in mechanistic rather than in psychic terms. . . . Inherent in both Hermetism and science is the idea that man can obtain power over nature and thus control it. The differing methods are not in question here; what is important is that the mental outlook and the desire are exactly the same." In "Hermetism as a Renaissance World View," pp. 116-17. For a rejection of Yates' thesis, see Robert S. Westman, "Magical Reform and Astronomical Reform: The Yates Thesis Reconsidered," in Westman and J.E. McGuire, *Hermeticism and the Scientific Revolution: Papers Read at a Clark Library Seminar, March 9, 1974* (Los Angeles, 1977): 5-91.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 24. Garin adds that "after Ficino there is no writing, no thought, in which a direct or indirect trace of his activity may not be found." *Portraits of the Quattrocento*, p. 156. Purnell says that Ficino's influence on the *prisca theologia* movement "was profound." "Philosophic Concord," p. 415.

### APPENDIX I: FICINO ON ASTROLOGY

In conjunction with his astrological medicine and talismanic magic, Ficino employed various forms of astrology in *De vita*. Astrology divides into various branches depending on its use. Genethliacal astrology, or the casting of nativities, is specific and predictive. Ficino advocated it in *De vita*, but often subordinated it by emphasizing that medicine can preserve life beyond the date of death predicted by the stars.<sup>1</sup> Continuing astrology records the complete disposition of the celestial bodies at times important to us or them. It also records the horoscope at a specific moment; this interrogatory or hortatory astrology desires answers to specific personal questions in the position of the stars at the time of the question. *De vita* contains no astrology of this form. Ficino did, however, appeal to this form once in his *Commentary on Plotinus*,<sup>2</sup> but only hypothetically as a form which his opponent believes, and one which he tries to convince his opponent to reject. Ficino wrote, but never completed or published his *Contra iudicium astrologorum* against predictive and/or specific astrology.<sup>3</sup>

At the opposite extreme from the types of astrology mentioned above are judicial and elective astrology. In judicial astrology, weather, the fate of a nation, or the destiny of mankind in general can be predicted from certain celestial events such as the vernal equinox and eclipses<sup>4</sup> either by prognostications or viewed in retrospect, as when Ficino blamed Saturn and Mars for having been responsible for the plague of 1478-79.<sup>5</sup> In elective or catarchic astrology, one simply times his actions to coincide with the prognosticated dominance of favorable celestial bodies and thus comes into contact with their already-existing forces. This contrasts favorably with talismanic magic in its cooperation with nature and supports the analogy of God subordinating lower to higher things.<sup>6</sup> Ficino supported this form of astrology most often,<sup>7</sup> and he vacillated only with regard to his perceived judgement of the "severe prelate of religion."<sup>8</sup> "Thinking it superfluous to wish for things that have already happened," Ficino even

discovered that what will have influence on a nativity will also influence an activity. Thus, he applied configurations normally used for genethliacal predictions to elections, in which one can choose whether or not to act at a certain time.<sup>9</sup> Conversely, one's activities render that person receptive to the sign and planet controlling that activity; thus through metaphysical thought, one could render himself receptive to Saturn.<sup>10</sup> Thus, as Ernst Cassirer notes, one can "become a planet's child by choice."<sup>11</sup> By utilizing the stars through sympathetic magic, one can enhance his own free will rather than discover its limitations.

A more fundamental contrast between forms of astrology is that of causalistic vs. semiological astrology. Most Renaissance astrologers believed in a one-way causalistic process in which the celestial heavens alone influence events on earth. One could avoid deterministic implications, however, by emphasizing that the stars symbolize things below through the inherent sympathy of a unified cosmos. This semiological view preserves the validity of prediction and elections, but gives talismans no influences to ingest and retain. Plotinus advocated such semiological astrology. Ficino fell back on it from time to time when he is defending Saturn or he comes under scrutiny for determinism.

The key to Ficino's astrology is its unorthodoxy. He exalted Saturn, Jupiter, and the Sun as the three planets which control the intellectual vocations, and he praised the Moon for its medicinal importance. He preferred elective over interrogatory, and semiological over causalistic astrology. Whether his unorthodoxy derived from an earlier source or is unique, regardless, Ficino did not practice mainstream astrology. But his unorthodoxy stemmed not so much from his subject-matter as from the mindset with which he approached it.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*De vita* 3 Proem and Ad Lectorem, *Opera*, pp. 529-30; 3.18, *Opera*, p. 557.

<sup>2</sup>Commentary on Plotinus 3.2, chap. 7; *Opera*, pp. 1621-22.

<sup>3</sup>In Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, 2:1-76.

<sup>4</sup>*De vita* 3.19.

<sup>5</sup>*Consiglio contro la pestilenza*, *Opera*, p. 577.

<sup>6</sup>*De vita* 3.15, *Opera*, p. 552.

<sup>7</sup>E.g. *De vita* 3.12 last sentence.

<sup>8</sup>*De vita* 3.25, *Opera*, p. 569.

<sup>9</sup>*De vita* 3.23, *Opera*, p. 567; e.g. 1.7, *Opera*, p. 499.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. *De vita* 3.22, *Opera*, pp. 564, 566. Kaske, *Books on Life*, pp. 36-7.

<sup>11</sup>Cassirer, *Individual and the Cosmos*, p. 113.

<sup>12</sup>Kaske, *Books on Life*, p. 38.

**APPENDIX II: ORIGINS OF MEDICAL SPIRIT (PNEUMA)**

The term spirit, *spiritus*, *pneuma*, or *ruach*, has been given a variety of ontological definitions. In spite of, or perhaps because of, the ambiguous nature of spirit, D.P. Walker claims that little scholarship has been done on the history of the medical spirit. As recently as 1972, Walker knew of no modern work on medical spirits besides his own two recent publications.<sup>1</sup> He asserts that one of the only adequate general studies of spirit in antiquity is G. Verbeke's *L'Evolution de la Doctrine du Pneuma du Stoicisme à S. Augustin* (Paris, 1945).

Although it took on various forms, the ontological nature of *pneuma* in the Western mind had always been associated with the vital life principle that linked and sustained body and soul. In its most primitive pre-Socratic form, *pneuma* began as some combination of the four basic elements fire, air, water, and earth. Homer used it variously as air or breath, and Anaximenes indirectly suggested that it was air.<sup>2</sup> The Pythagoreans explicitly referred to it as air and breath, and asserted that *pneuma* and void are inhaled by the universe.<sup>3</sup> A more sophisticated medical notion of *pneuma* arose in the speculative thought of some fifth-century writers, in which it was linked to respiration, cognition, and the vital principle. Diogenes of Apollonia considered it to be the vital principle of all things, and Theophrastus believed it to be the source of both sensible and intellectual cognition. He asserted that *pneuma* is dry and hot air trapped in the body, and that it circulates through the body with the blood.<sup>4</sup>

Aristotle viewed *pneuma* variously as air, breath, and wind, but he also introduced an innate *pneuma* that he considered to be a hot, foamy substance that resides in the heart and serves as the sensitive and kinetic link between the physical organs of the body and the soul. This *pneuma* originates from the sperm, and it transmits the nutritive and sensitive soul from parent to offspring.<sup>5</sup> The Stoics took a similar approach. Zeno defined the soul in a medical sense as being composed of

a warm or innate *pneuma*, some of which is emitted by the semen. Chrysippus returned to Aristotle's notion of *pneuma* as an innate and hot air, but he took this to mean literally that *pneuma* is composed of a mixture of air and fire. And he explicitly asserted that the human soul and *pneuma* are the same thing. In his *On the Soul*, he defined soul as "the *pneuma* innate in us, continuous, and penetrating the entire body, as long as the breath of life is in the body."<sup>6</sup>

A new movement of medical thought developed around one Praxagoras of Cos (fl. ca. 300 B.C.), who viewed *pneuma* as the main agent of psychic activity. He thought blood flows through the veins and produces nutrition and growth, and that *pneuma* fills the arteries and transfers movement from the heart to the muscles, which, in turn, move the body. He may also have associated *pneuma* with thought since he believed the soul to be situated in the heart. Herophilus of Chalcedon and Erasistratus of Ceos, the two chief Alexandrian physicians of the third century, increased the stature of *pneuma* and assigned to it both perception and movement. Unlike Aristotle, Zeno, and Chrysippus, these physicians now viewed *pneuma* as acquired rather than innate.<sup>7</sup> Thus, whereas Aristotle believed the purpose of respiration was to cool the innate warmth of the *pneuma*,<sup>8</sup> Praxagoras, Herophilus, and Erasistratus saw it as a process essential for nourishing and sustaining the *pneuma*.<sup>9</sup>

The definition of *pneuma* went through numerous permutations from that point forward, the most significant of which dealt with the need to distinguish the traditional, materialistic definition of *pneuma* from the intelligible soul. Some Stoics began to separate the corporeal *pneuma* from the intelligible *nous*.<sup>10</sup> But this need became most pronounced among the Judaeo-Christians and Neoplatonists, all of whom advocated a divine, immaterial soul. Philo, for example, began to use *pneuma* in a spiritual, nonmaterial sense, and he describes man as created of an earthly substance and a divine spirit.<sup>11</sup> But whereas Christian scholars used the Pauline doctrine of a "spiritual body" to construct a bridge between God and man, the Neoplatonists endeavored to fashion a bridge between body and soul. Their concept of *pneuma* was thus largely absorbed by the notion of the astral body. Early Neoplatonists such as Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus discussed the "luminous," "ethereal," or "pneumatic" body and Proclus formally defined it as the "astral"

body. Deriving their view primarily from Plato's *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*,<sup>12</sup> the Neoplatonists established this body as a "carrier" of the irrational soul and viewed it as quasi-immaterial and "innate" in character. This doctrine represented a compromise between earlier theories in that it maintained a physiological basis at the same time that it replaced cruder views of *pneuma* that equated *pneuma* with soul.<sup>13</sup>

Use of the astral body as a *tertium quid*, or "an inner envelope of the soul, which is less material than the fleshly body and survives its dissolution, yet has not the pure immateriality of mind," remained a familiar idea throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>14</sup> Neoplatonic adherence to this doctrine continued through the last representatives of the Athenian school, Damascius, Simplicius, and Priscianus, the Alexandrian Platonists such as Hermeias, Olympiodorus, and Philoponus, and was revived during the Byzantine renaissance in the works of Michael Psellus and Nicephorus Gregoras. It appeared in the Latin West as the "luminosi corporis amictus" of Macrobius and the "leves currus" of Boethius, and it can be seen in Dante's *Purgatorio*.<sup>15</sup> Walker adds that the theory of medical spirits, despite certain inherent ambiguities and weaknesses, was preserved throughout the Middle Ages in a fairly coherent and consistent form, based ultimately on Aristotle and Galen, and systematized by the Arabs. Some of the more influential works included Avicenna's *Libri in re medica omnes*, Albertus Magnus' *De Spiritu & Respiratione*, and Costa ben Luca's *De Animae & Spiritus discrimine* (usually attributed to Constantius Africanus). Walker even seems to suggest that the theories of the medical spirit and the astral body were used interchangeably.<sup>16</sup>

Walker places great emphasis on the many Medieval and Renaissance cases "where medical spirits play a part in a real attempt to bridge the gap, to overcome the dualism of mind and matter" because "such attempts produced strange and philosophically audacious conceptions of man's soul, and theologically unorthodox conceptions of God."<sup>17</sup> He identifies three ancient texts that were commonly quoted as "mottos or emblems" to suggest the possible incorporeality of the medical spirit. He contends that Aristotle, in his *De Generatione Animalium*, presented such a spirit as a function of astrological affinities: "(What makes semen fertile is) the spirit which is contained in the foamy body of the semen, and the nature in the spirit which is analogous to the element of the

stars."<sup>18</sup> He asserts that Virgil, in his *Aeneid*, presented spirit as a cosmological function tending toward pantheism and spiritual magic: "The sky and the lands, the watery plains, the moon's gleaming face, the Titanic Sun and the stars are all strengthened by Spirit working within them, and by Mind, which is blended into all the vast universe and pervades every part of it, enlivening the whole mass."<sup>19</sup> Finally, and most importantly, Walker says that Galen, in his *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis*, presented spirit as a function of the astral body and soul:

If we are to declare the substance of the soul, we must say one of two things: either that it is the shining and aethereal body, at which conclusion the Stoics and Aristotle must logically arrive, even if unwillingly; or that it is an incorporeal substance, and that this body is its first vehicle, through which mean the soul receives communication with other bodies.<sup>20</sup>

Galen's influence is especially important since Ficino appears to have been the first Western scholar who cited the *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis*, which had not been known during the Latin Middle Ages.<sup>21</sup> This passage undoubtedly influenced Ficino's attempt to establish spirit as a quasi-incorporeal ontological agent in his *De vita* 3.



<sup>1</sup>D.P. Walker, "The Astral Body in Renaissance Medicine," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 21 (1958): 199-233; "Francis Bacon and Spiritus," in *Science, Medicine and Society in the Renaissance*, ed. A.G. Debuss, II (New York: Science History Publications, 1972): 121-130.

<sup>2</sup>F.E. Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon* (New York, 1967), p. 160.

<sup>3</sup>Aristotle, *Physics* 4.213b.

<sup>4</sup>Theophrastus, *De sensus* 39, 44. Peters says a similar theory appears among the medical writers (see *De morbo sacro* 16). In *Philosophical Terms*, p. 162.

<sup>5</sup>Aristotle, *De Generatione Animalium* 2:735a, 736a-737a.

<sup>6</sup>David E. Hahm, *The Origins of Stoic Cosmology* (N.p.: Ohio State University Press, 1977), pp. 158-59.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 160-61.

<sup>8</sup>Aristotle, *De Juv.* 14-27; *De Partibus Animalium* 1.1.642a31-b4.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Galen, *De Usu Respiratione* 1,2; *An in Arter. Nat. Sang. Cont.* 2 for Erasistratus' position and respiration.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Cicero, *De Legibus* 1.7.22; Seneca, *Epistolae* 121.14.

<sup>11</sup>Philo, *De opif.*, 135.

<sup>12</sup>Plato, *Phaedo*, 113D, 247B; *Timaeus*, 41E, 44E, 69C.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Dodds, *Elements of Theology*, Appendix II: "The Astral Body in Neoplatonism," pp. 313-21, for a more in-depth analysis of the complexities and ontological ambiguities associated with the astral body.

<sup>14</sup>Dodds, *Elements of Theology*, p. 313.

<sup>15</sup>Macrobius, *Comm. in Somn. Scip.* 1.12.13; Boethius, *Consol. Philos.* 3.9; Dante, *Purgatorio*, 25.88ff.

<sup>16</sup>Walker, "Astral Body in Renaissance Medicine," p. 120 and n. 8.

<sup>17</sup>Walker, "Medical Spirits," p. 288.

<sup>18</sup>Aristotle, *De Generatione Animalium* 2:736b-737a. In Walker, "Medical Spirits," p. 289. In his commentary on *De Generatione Animalium*, Professor Johannes Morsink illustrates the ambiguous ontological relationship between *psyche* and *pneuma*, or soul and spirit. He states, "It is not entirely clear whether Aristotle thought the soul to be identical with this *pneuma* or very closely connected with it. I think the latter is the best interpretation. It is true that at 737a9, Aristotle refers to this hot air as the soul-principle. And he says of this principle that it is emitted together with the bulk of the male semen. Sometimes this soul-principle is separable from that bulk and sometimes not. This line of thought is open to the claim that the soul and the *pneuma*, which clearly is the other item emitted from the bulk, are one and the same. Still, Aristotle calls it a soul-principle, and not merely soul *per se*. That is, the *pneuma* is the moving principle and carrier of the soul, which fits much better with what Aristotle said a few lines earlier." *Aristotle on the Generation of Animals: A Philosophical Study* (New York, 1982), pp. 112-13.

<sup>19</sup>Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.724-27, trans. Knight, p. 169. "Principio coelum, ac terras, camposque liquentes, / Lucentemque globum Lunae, Titaniaque astra / Spiritus intus alit, totamque infusa per artus / Mens agit molem, et magno se corpore miscet." In D.P. Walker, "Medical Spirits in Philosophy and Theology from Ficino to Newton," *Arts du spectacle et histoire des idées. Recueil offert en hommage à Jean Jacquot* (Tours, 1984. Reprinted in *Music, Spirit and Language in the Renaissance*. Edited by Penelope Gouk. London, 1985), p. 289.

<sup>20</sup>Galen, *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis*. In Walker, "Medical Spirits," p. 289.

<sup>21</sup>Cf. *Opera*, pp. 1465, 1477, 1484-1485. In Kristeller, "Ficino and His Work," p. 21 and n. 10. Kristeller attributes this information to Prof. Jerome J. Bylebyl.

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