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RENAISSANCE MAGIC AND NEOPLATONIC PHILOSOPHY:

« ENNEAD » 4.3-5

IN FICINO'S « DE VITA COELITUS COMPARANDA »

Marsilio Ficino, author of the most important Renaissance treatise on magic, was one of the leading philosophers of his age, so we might expect that his approach to magic in *De vita coelitus comparanda* would be a philosophical one. But the refined and rational analysis expected of philosophy in the Western tradition may seem wasted on the problem of magic if we take magic to be *essentially* primitive and irrational. In fact, the common understanding of the English word 'magic', even among educated people, is still so strongly colored by the evolutionist anthropology of J. G. Frazer and other scholars of the last century that the term only approximately translates the *magia* that Ficino wrote about. 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. To elucidate the philosophical premises that led Ficino to his magical conclusions is my task in what follows as it has been in the two related essays that preceded this report.

The first of these earlier papers argued that a short work of Proclus translated by Ficino under the title *De sacrificio* was a key ingredient in the theory of magic set forth in *De vita* but that neither the Hermetic dialogues that Ficino translated nor the Latin *Asclepius* contributed much of theoretical interest to that work. In the *Elements of Theology* and other large, systematic works of Proclus, Ficino could find a philosophically coherent context in which to understand and evaluate the terms – *τάξις, αἰσρά, συνήθεια*,

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σύμβολον – that Proclus used to explain magical action in *De sacrificio*, but because the eclectic *Hermetica* (which in any event have little to say about magic) refer only vaguely and imprecisely to a miscellany of philosophies, they offered no depth or solidity or regularity to anyone searching for a theory of magic.¹ My second paper claimed that Ficino also found crucial philosophical support for his magic in two works of Thomas Aquinas, the *Summa contra gentiles* and *De occultis operibus naturae*. Like many medieval thinkers, Thomas taught that the heavenly bodies caused the eduction of substantial or specific forms in material objects and that these forms were the source of the non-elemental or 'occult' powers found in certain objects. More important, Thomas admitted that the *figura* carved on a talisman was like a substantial form and hence could bear astrological and occult properties like those associated with substantial forms. Ficino noticed what Thomas conceded to talismanic *figurae* and imbedded this concession in his defense of magic.² Having tried to show the importance of Aquinas and Proclus for a philosophical theory of magic – and correspondingly the small significance of Hermes Trismegistus – I will attempt here to summarize certain contributions of Plotinus' three treatises on « Problems of the Soul » (*Enneads* 4.3-5) to Ficino's *De vita*.

Philosophical analysis will substantiate the familiar codicological and structural evidence, revealed first by Professor Kristeller, that points to *Ennead* 4.3.11 as a starting point for *De vita coelitus*

¹ B. P. COPENHAVER, *Hermes Trismegistus, Proclus and the Question of a Theory of Magic in the Renaissance*, read at the Folger Shakespeare Library Conference on Hermes Trismegistus in March, 1982, and to be published with the papers of that conference; PROCL. *Inst.* 5, 28, 29, 32, 103, 140-145; J. BIDEZ et al., *Catalogue des manuscrits alchimiques grecs*, VI, Michael Psellus, *Épître sur la chrysopée*; *Opuscules et extraits sur l'alchimie, la météorologie et la démonologie*, Brussels 1928, pp. 139-151; A.-J. FESTUGIÈRE, *Hermétisme et mystique païenne*, Paris 1967, pp. 34-40, 53, 55, 66-67; *Id.*, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, Paris 1950-54, II, pp. 5, 7, 14, 44-47; IV, pp. 54-78.

² B. P. COPENHAVER, *Scholastic Philosophy and Renaissance Magic in the « De vita » of Marsilio Ficino*, « Renaissance Quarterly », XXXVII (1984), pp. 523-554; AQUINAS, *De occultis operibus naturae*, 7-11, 14, 16; *Summa contra Gentiles*, III, 92, 99, 103-105; *Summa theologiae*, I, 45, 8, resp.; 65, 4, resp.; 76, 4, resp.; 91, 2, resp., ad 2^{um}, 3^{um}; 110, 1, ad 2^{um}; 2, resp.; 115, 3, ad 2^{um}; II-II, 96, 2 ad 2^{um}; *Commentarius in de generatione et corruptione*, I, 8; *Commentarius in de anima*, II, 14; MARSILII FICINI florentini insignis philosophi platonici medici atque theologi clarissimi opera et quae haecenus extitere ..., Basel 1576, pp. 541, 558, 569, 571.

comparanda.³ The topic of the first chapter of Ficino's work is intermediation among terrestrial, celestial and supercelestial entities as the basis of astrological causation:

By divine agency, the Soul of the World possesses at least as many seminal reasons of things (*rationes rerum seminales*) as there are ideas in the divine Mind and with these reasons [Soul] makes the same number of species in matter. Thus, each and every species corresponds through its own seminal reasons to an idea, and often through this reason it can easily receive something of value from on high since it was made from on high through this [reason]. ... And surely if to a given species of things or to an individual in [the species] you correctly apply the many things that have been scattered but still conform to the idea, you will soon attract an extraordinary gift from the idea into the matter thus fitly prepared – through the seminal reason of the soul, of course.

The magus can dispose earthly objects to receive celestial powers by manipulating material species, i.e., species in a taxonomical sense, because such species are part of a hierarchy of forms that reaches through the heavens to the divine mind. Ficino says that *rationes seminales* or seminal reasons, associated with Soul as intermediary between mind and body, are links between species in matter and ideas in mind. He also writes that *spiritus* joins man's

³ P. O. KRISTELLER, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, Florence 1937, pp. xii, lxxxiv; E. GARIN, *Le « elezioni » e il problema dell'astrologia*, in E. CASTELLI, ed., *Umanesimo e esoterismo*, Padua 1960, p. 18; cf. D. P. WALKER, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*, London 1958, p. 3, n. 2. G. ZANIER, *La medicina astrologica e la sua teoria: Marsilio Ficino e i suoi critici contemporanei*, Rome 1977, pp. 12-18, 29, 40, analyzes the influence of Plotinus in Ficino's astrology primarily in terms of *Enn.* 2.3, which is anti-astrological in the sense that it limits (though it does not eliminate) the causal as opposed to the signifying power of the stars (2.3.1.1-2; 8.8-9; 13.1-2). Although Zanier (p. 29) recognizes the special relationship between *De vita* 3 and the fourth *Ennead*, he also says (p. 16) that « altre trattazioni plotiniane del problema non aggiungono a quanto esposto niente di fondamentale ». I will argue here not only that *Enn.* 4.4.3-4 is fundamental to the argument of *De vita* 3 but also that as a philosophical account of magic and astrology it is a prominent expression of the thinking of Plotinus. In fact, the relationship of 2.3 to 4.3-4 on such matters as sympathy (2.3.7.14-23) and λόγος (2.3.16-17) should probably be understood as derivative; note that Plotinus wrote 4.3-4 in his middle period, while 2.3. is a late treatise, third from last in Porphyry's chronological list (PORPH. *Vita* 5.20-25, 6.20).

soul to his limbs as the quintessence joins objects in the cosmos to its soul.⁴

All of this – even the mention of *spiritus*, which in discussing 4.3.8 Ficino attributes to «Pythagoreans» criticized by Sextus Empiricus in *Adversus Mathematicos* – can be accounted for from the first eleven chapters of *Ennead* 4.3 or Ficino's commentaries on them.⁵ Plotinus explains in this introduction to «Problems of the Soul» how souls

by their succession are linked to the several Intellectual-Principles (καθ' ἑκαστον νοῦν), for they are the expressions, the Logos, of the Intellectual-Principles ... That Soul which abides in the Supreme is the one expression or Logos of the Intellectual-Principle, and from it spring other Reason-Principles (λόγοι), partial but immaterial ... [Even the] ultimate depth, neighboring with soul, may not go void of whatsoever degree of the Reason-Principle (λόγος) it can absorb ... Living in reason (λόγος), [Soul] ... communicates reason (λόγος) to the body – an image (εἰδωλον) of the reason within itself ... and it bestows ... upon that material the appropriate shapes (μορφαί) of which it contains the Reason-Forms (λόγοι) ... Each particular thing is the image within matter of a Reason-Principle (ἐν ὕλῃ λόγος) which itself images a pre-material Reason-Principle: thus every particular entity is linked to that Divine Being in whose likeness it is made (τῷ θεῷ ἐκείνῳ, καθ' ὃν ἐγίνετο).⁶

This much Ficino could read in the first of Plotinus' three essays *De dubiis animae*, but the remainder of the principal argument in *De vita* 3.1 led him away from *Ennead* 4.3 and toward material

⁴ FICINO *Opera* cit., pp. 531-532: «anima mundi totidem saltem rationes rerum seminales divinitus habet quot ideae sunt in mente divina, quibus ipsa rationibus totidem fabricat species in materia ... Ac si certe cuidam rerum speciei vel individuo eius rite adhibeas multa quae sparsa sunt sed etiam ideae conformia, mox in materiam hanc ita opportune paratam singulare munus ab idea trahes – per rationem videlicet animae seminalem»; GARIN, *Le «elezioni»* cit., pp. 19-23.

⁵ PLOT. *Enn.* 4.3.1-11; FICINO *Opera* cit., p. 1736; SEXT. EMP. *Adv. Math.* 9.127-130; cf. A. H. ARMSTRONG, *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus*, Cambridge 1940, pp. 54-55.

⁶ PLOT. *Enn.* 4.3.5-8-10, 17-18; 9.27-28; 10.38-41; 11.9-12; English translations of Plotinus are from S. MCKENNA trans., *Plotinus: The Enneads*, 4th ed. rev. by B. S. PAGE, London 1969, pp. 264, 268, 270, but I have indicated significant or problematic terminology by supplying the Greek in parentheses; all other translations are mine.

on specific forms and talismanic figures related to what he took from Aquinas. Higher forms, among which are *figurae* in the heavens, generate lower forms in matter; Soul makes both higher and lower forms through seminal reasons, and the lower forms she also makes through *figurae*:

Out of its own reasons the [World-Soul] ... constructed figures (*figurae*) in the heavens beyond the stars ... and impressed properties on all of them. In the stars – in their figures, sub-figures and properties – are contained all the species of lower things and their properties ... And from these highly ordered [heavenly] forms depend the forms of lower things, for these latter have been ordered from on high ... Thus, when the Soul produces specific forms and powers of lower things, she makes them through her own reasons, with the aid of the stars and celestial forms.⁷

Although Ficino found an astrologically operative substantial form and a quasi-substantial *figura* in St. Thomas, the very active seminal reasons that he discovered in Plotinus were less potent in Thomas's metaphysics. But they were quite important to the argument of *De vita* 3, whose author ends his work (3.26) by repeating what he had said about *formae* and *rationes* in 3.1. The World-Soul generates the forms of natural things through seminal reasons, which remain in touch with the ideas; hence, Soul touches the matter that she had originally formed through *rationes*. When the magus manipulates matter specified by forms associated with *rationes* of a given kind, he gains access through such *rationes* to higher powers of the same kind.⁸ *De vita* 3 begins and ends, then, with an analysis of *rationes* or *λόγοι* taken from *Ennead* 4.3.

Ficino also tells us in *De vita* 3.26 that the philosopher who

⁷ FICINO *Opera* cit., pp. 531-532: «Haec ... rationibus suis aedificavit ultra stellas in coelo figuras ... impressitque his omnibus proprietates. In stellis autem – figuris, partibus, proprietatibus – omnes rerum inferiorum species continentur et proprietates earum ... A quibus formis ordinatissimis dependent inferiorum formae, illinc videlicet ordinatae ... Quando igitur anima gignit speciales inferiorum formas viresque, eas per rationes efficit proprias, sub stellarum formarumque coelestium adminiculo»; *ibid.*, pp. 1737, 1746; PLOT. *Enn.* 4.4.35.

⁸ FICINO *Opera* cit., pp. 571-572; F. COPLESTON, *A History of Philosophy*, II, *Medieval Philosophy*, New York 1962, I, pp. 91-92, 305-307; II, pp. 16, 47, 170-178, 306; B. NARDI, *La dottrina d'Alberto Magno sull'inchoatio formae*, in *Studi di filosofia medievale*, Rome 1960, pp. 75-85, 96-98; *supra*, n. 2.

understands these intricate abstractions is « a person skilled in natural science and astronomy, whom we are rightly accustomed to call a magus ».⁹ Ficino's *philosophus* was a magus not merely because he required additional, extra-philosophical information about astrology or natural history in order to follow the iatromathematical recipes of *De vita* but also because the philosophical basis of *De vita* was itself magical and astrological. In particular, Ficino treated celestial figure, form and seminal reason as an amalgam of metaphysical and astrological concepts, not as a mixture of unrelated notions.

Does this particular constellation of ideas – σχῆμα for *figura*, εἶδος for *forma*, λόγος σπερματικός for *ratio seminalis* – occur in Plotinus' treatises on the Soul? Yes, but not in *Ennead* 4.3. Instead, we find it in the last third of *Ennead* 4.4, where the leading motif is Plotinus' elaborate punning on the words σχῆμα, σχέσις and their cognates; words of this family occur only three times in *Ennead* 4.3, but in 4.4 Plotinus uses fifty-two of them. This lexical evidence, with the philosophical argument to follow, supports Professor Walker's claim that the rich magical theory of the latter chapters of 4.4 was important to the author of *De vita*. Another corroboration is the independent finding of Plotinus scholarship that the argument of the early chapters of 4.3 leads naturally to the final chapters of 4.4.¹⁰

Both these texts, the first eleven chapters of *Ennead* 4.3 and the last fifteen of 4.4, are part of a comprehensive collection of contested questions on the Soul which Porphyry divided into the third, fourth and fifth treatises of the fourth *Ennead*. The principal *aporiai* treated in the collection as a whole are Soul's faculties and Soul's relation to other metaphysical and physical entities.¹¹ When Ficino interrupted his commentary on *Ennead* 4.3 at the eleventh

⁹ FICINO *Opera* cit., p. 570: « Idem quoque philosophus, naturalium rerum astorumque peritus, quem proprie magum appellare solemus... ».

¹⁰ PLOT. *Enn.* 4.4.26, 30-45; GARIN, *Le « elezioni »* cit., p. 29; J. H. SLEEMAN and G. POLLET, *Lexicon Plotinianum*, Leiden 1980, coll. 982-986; W. HELLEMANN-ELGERSMA, *Soul-Sisters: A Commentary on Enneads IV 3 (27), 1-8 of Plotinus*, Amsterdam 1980, p. 41; *supra*, n. 3.

¹¹ E. BREHIER, ed., trans., PLOTIN, *Ennéades IV*, Paris 1927, pp. 13-14; A. H. ARMSTRONG, ed., *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, Cambridge 1970, p. 217.

chapter, he sensed a real division in the text: the problem in the ten chapters preceding is the World-Soul's relation to its body and to our souls, but chapter 11 introduces a new topic, the soul's descent, with the special case of the animation of cult-statues, which naturally reminded Ficino of the god-making passages of the *Asclepius*.¹² Beginning this chapter, Plotinus wrote 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 », and he had already set forth the content of this insight in the ten previous chapters which describe Soul and souls from a metaphysical and cosmological point of view. The metaphysics and cosmology of these ten chapters provided half the material – specifically, the notion of λόγοι or *rationes* as Soul's dynamic links between ideas in Mind and species in matter – for Ficino's presentation of psychic intermediation and astrological causation in *De vita* 3.1 and 3.26.

For the other half of his argument, which injected *figurae* or σχήματα into this chain of intermediation, Ficino went to the more strictly psychological chapters of the last third of *Ennead* 4.4. Memory is the faculty of Soul at question in these chapters.¹³ Plotinus asked if the evident efficacy of astrological magic and of prayer addressed to the divine celestials requires that the heavenly gods remember petitions and respond to them intentionally. His negative conclusion led him to propose another explanation for the effects of magic and prayer, and this brought him back to the system or σύνταξις of psychic intermediation outlined at the beginning of the previous treatise. One result of the ensoulment of the cosmos is that all its members, participants in a common life, respond to one another without volition and across gaps of distance and time. Commenting on 4.4.32, Ficino put it this way:

¹² BREHIER, *Ennéades IV* cit., pp. 14-22 divides the collection at 4.3.1-8, which treat relationships among Soul and souls; 4.3.9-11, which deal with the World-Soul and its body; and 4.3.12-18, whose topic is the relation between the human soul and body; cf. HELLEMANN-ELGERSMA, *Commentary* cit., pp. 38-41. But as Brehier (p. 20) notes, 4.3.12 begins with the soul's descent, which is surely anticipated in the statue-magic of 4.3.11; cf. *Asclep.* 23-24, 37-38.

¹³ BREHIER, *Ennéades IV* cit., pp. 46-57; cf. HELLEMANN-ELGERSMA, *Commentary* cit., pp. 40-41.

The heavens act on all these lower things not out of any intention to choose a particular thing or to act in a particular way, nor do they act only through corporeal qualities, i.e., by heating or rarefying or the reverse. They act by certain natural powers of the soul that governs growth ... Therefore, to the extent that all corporeal objects are limbs of the cosmic animal, they are readily affected sometimes by the whole, sometimes by one another, since even things that seem to be located far from another are near by wondrous communion in a single nature.¹⁴

Prayer and magic are artificial imitations of this greater natural wonder, the sympathy given in the very structure of the cosmos.

Thus, in Plotinus' *Treatises on the Soul* Ficino found three important and distinct motivations for developing a theory of magic: one was the metaphysics and cosmology from the beginning of *Ennead* 4.3 that set forth the dynamics of Soul contemplating Mind yet operating on matter through λόγοι σπερματικοί connected with ideas in Mind; another was the psychological material from *Ennead* 4.4 that explained magical sympathy by way of a complex metaphor based on various meanings of σχῆμα or «figure» and its cognates; a third was the allusion to the magic of statues in 4.3.11. This mention of the statues had no important role in Plotinus' reasoning. In his most extensive statement on magic in 4.4.30 and following, he said nothing about them.¹⁵ While Ficino clearly saw a connection between the statues in *Ennead* 4.3 and those in the *Asclepius*, he made little use of them in *De vita*. Elsewhere, I have tried to show that while his ambiguous and unflattering references

¹⁴ FICINI *Opera* cit., p. 1745: «Coelum in omnia haec inferiora agit non consilio quodam eligente talia vel taliter agere, neque tantum corporeis qualitatibus, scilicet calefaciendo, rarefaciendo, vel contra, sed naturalibus quibusdam vegetalis animae viribus ... Quatenus ergo corporea sunt animalis mundani membra, facile tum a toto tum invicem patiuntur, quippe cum etiam quae loco inter se distare videntur sint propinqua ob mirabilem naturae unius communionem»; PLOT. *Enn.* 4.3.8.19-21.

¹⁵ Plotinus uses σχῆμα, an important word in the Platonic tradition, at 4.3.10.28 and 11.2, but nowhere else in 4.3-5. At 4.3.30.3 εἰκὼν means an 'image' of the imagination, and at 4.4.10.12 it is a «likeness» in Soul. On statues in Neoplatonism, see: J. BIDEZ, *Vie de Porphyre, le philosophe néo-platonicien avec les fragments des traités «Περὶ ἀγαθότητος» et «De regressu animae»*, Ghent 1913, pp. 143-157, 1*23*; for another sort of statue of Hermes in Plotinus, see *Enn.* 3.6.19.25-30 and FICINI *Opera* cit., p. 1720.

to the statues of the *Asclepius* gave doxographic or genealogical support to his defense of magic, Ficino found almost nothing of theoretical interest in the *Hermetica* because the treatises known to him have little of a theoretical nature to say about magic.¹⁶ Given the obvious connection between the third book of *De vita* and the eleventh chapter of *Ennead* 4.3, I believe that if a philosophically interesting treatment of the statues – based either on Plotinus or on the *Hermetica* – had seemed possible to Ficino, he would have provided it. Instead, he initiated and sustained the argument of *De vita* 3 from philosophically richer material in Plotinus and from other thinkers – Aquinas and Proclus, for example – whom he could make compatible with his reading of Plotinus.

The first eleven chapters of *Ennead* 4.3 treat Soul's relation to body and to other souls. Soul brings λόγος or a principle of intellectuality to all orders of being in the cosmos, even to the last, the forms in dead matter. Commenting on chapter 10, Ficino explained that «because the whole fabric of the cosmos and its form derives from [universal Nature], nothing at all can resist it, especially since everything from then on depends from [Nature] in a series that follows from it».¹⁷ Immaterial Soul, undivided by limitations of space, is omnipresent to matter though matter is fit to receive it only in a way that distinguishes one ensouled body from another. Still, it is not Soul, but matter variously apt for Soul, that is divided by the distinction between one ensouled being and another, and the ensoulment entails no intention in Soul, which

¹⁶ FICINI *Opera* cit., pp. 548, 561, 571-572; *supra*, n. 1.

¹⁷ FICINI *Opera* cit., p. 1737: «Cum enim ex ea pendeat tota mundi moles eiusque forma, nihil usquam ei posse resistere, praesertim quia inde omnia subsequenti serie ita dependent ...»; PLOT. *Enn.* 4.3.10.1-11; ARMSTRONG, *Cambridge History* cit., pp. 252-254; J. N. DECK, *Nature, Contemplation and the One*, Toronto 1967, pp. 42-43; J. M. RIST, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, Cambridge 1967, pp. 84-86, 94. On the Stoic origins of λόγος in Plotinus, see: ARMSTRONG, *Architecture* cit., pp. 63, 100, 107; RIST, *Road* cit., pp. 74, 255; DECK, *Nature* cit., pp. 56, 61; on the history of λόγος, σπέρμα, and λόγοι σπερματικοί in Middle Platonism, Stoicism and other pre-Plotinian philosophies, see: W. K. C. GUTHRIE, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Cambridge 1962-1981, I, pp. 6, 19-20, 278, 340, 420-424; II, pp. 299-300; III, p. 210; V, pp. 117-118; VI, pp. 214, 219, 224, 236, 281; J. DILLON, *The Middle Platonists: A Study of Platonism, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*, London 1977, pp. 46, 80, 95, 128, 136-137, 159, 252, 285, 390; D. E. HAHM, *The Origins of Stoic Cosmology*, Columbus, Ohio 1977, pp. 60-62, 75-76.

is present to the whole material cosmos as water is present to a net stretched and given shape in the sea. Body, including the body of the cosmos, is an automatic consequence of Soul's procession from Mind. Nature, that aspect of Soul that does not remain entirely with Mind, brings the physical universe into being by carrying form and life even to the dim margins of the All illuminated by Mind.¹⁸ This is why statue-magic showed « insight into the nature of the All ». « Soul is everywhere tractable », wrote Plotinus, but « its presence will be secured all the more readily when an appropriate receptacle is elaborated ». This is what Ficino meant by a *proprium animae susceptaculum*, a concept he used both in the commentary on *Ennead* 4.3.8 and in *De vita* 3.¹⁹

Plotinus called Soul a λόγος of Mind, meaning that it is a diverse and hence imperfect expression of the intellectuality more simply present in Mind. He also said that even matter receives what λόγος it can, thus making Soul the medium for a transmission of intellectual-principles or λόγοι that join the more perfect forms of Mind, the ideas, to the less perfect forms of the physical cosmos, material objects in their various shapes. Soul, a λόγος of Mind, gives body its λόγος. The forms that bodies take are corporeal expressions of λόγοι descended from ideas in Mind through Soul and souls to matter. Ficino's explication of this psychic cosmology in his commentary on 4.3.10 has more imagery in it than light:

The world always abounds naturally in growth from the procreative (*seminarius*) power of its own Soul, as any living being does from its seed (*semen*) ... Therefore, Soul (especially the World-Soul) as a principle of life acts always and chiefly in itself inasmuch as its intelligence forms its own reason (*ratio*) from just this source ... But it is in the nature of reason (*ratio*) to think discursively with itself, and it swells everywhere and exults with the seeds of all things ... Indeed,

¹⁸ PLOT. *Enn.* 4.3.8.38-60; 9.12-51; 10.14-17; FICINO *Opera* cit., pp. 1734-1737; ARMSTRONG, *Cambridge History* cit., pp. 254-255; HELLEMANN-ELGERSMA, *Commentary* cit., p. 34.

¹⁹ PLOT. *Enn.* 4.3.11.1-6; MCKENNA, *Plotinus* cit., p. 270; FICINO *Opera* cit., p. 1736, cf. 549, 556; ARMSTRONG, *Architecture* cit., pp. 55-57, compares the idea of « appropriate physical receptacles » in 4.3.11 to *Corpus Hermeticum* 16.6, which was not one of the treatises that Ficino translated.

from this inward and rational motion, through the seminal reasons of things, grows the rational form of the world ...²⁰

But Ficino's presentation of the same material in the first chapter of *De vita* 3 (supra, p. 353) was much more schematic, a clear outline of correspondences among ideas, souls, seminal reasons, and material species accessible to the magus.

In the *Plotinus Commentary*, Ficino insisted that while the presence of the World-Soul to a fit material receptacle might cause the life of an ensouled being, it was not to be identified with the life of that being, its individual Soul. Christian orthodoxy compelled him to sacrifice some of Plotinus' subtlety on this other major topic of *Ennead* 4.3, the relation of souls to Soul, and this caution influenced his reaction to the assertion of Plotinus in 4.3.8 that « sympathy ... between soul and soul is due to the mere fact that all spring from that self-same soul ». Ficino responded that « our souls sympathize so much with each other and also with the World-Soul that they are often affected together by a like excitement, and an impulse of some sort flows quickly from one to the other, ... [but] this by no means requires », he added, « that our souls are begotten by the World-Soul ». ²¹ Ficino was careful about the causes of cosmic sympathy, but of the fact of sympathy he made good use in his treatment of magic.

Plotinus had much to say about sympathy in the last third of the second part of « Problems of the Soul », a serious and sustained philosophical analysis of magic and prayer from a perspective

²⁰ FICINO *Opera* cit., p. 1737: « Item mundum semper naturaliterque pullulare ex seminaria suae animae potestate, sicut vivens quodlibet ex semine suo ... Anima ergo vivendi principium mundana praecipue agit semper atque potissimum in seipsa prout intelligentia eius hinc quidem suam rationem format ... Atque et ratio naturaliter secum ipsa discurrit, et omnia turget gestitque seminibus rerum omnium ... Ex quo quidem intimo rationalique per rationes rerum seminales motu nascitur forma rational[i]s mundi ... »; ARMSTRONG, *Cambridge History* cit., pp. 248, 255; DECK, *Nature* cit., p. 58; HELLEMANN-ELGERSMA, *Commentary* cit., pp. 32, 355, 416, 425; supra, n. 6.

²¹ FICINO *Opera* cit., p. 1734: « ... ad hoc ipsum aut animae nostrae tum invicem tum etiam cum anima mundi adeo consentiant quod consimili saepe afficiantur instinctu, et impulsus aliquis facile ab aliis fluat in alias non est utique necessarium animas nostras esse ab anima mundi progenitas »; *ibid.*, pp. 1735-1736; MCKENNA, *Plotinus* cit., p. 266; HELLEMANN-ELGERSMA, *Commentary* cit., pp. 416, 428.

primarily psychological but secondarily metaphysical and physical. Since Plotinus wished to absolve the heavenly gods of intentional or moral complicity in the base affairs of earthy beings, and since he admitted relations of causation and signification between the celestial and the terrestrial, he claimed that, as far as the gods are concerned, such effects of magic and prayer occur spontaneously, without volition.²² To clarify this point, Plotinus offered a comparison between medical and magical actions; the metaphor seems to have made a deep impression of Ficino the physician, who remembered it several times. Plotinus proposed in 4.4.42

the analogy of many powers ... in one living organism ... which, independently of plan or ... method, act without any ... will: one member ... is helped or hurt by another in the mere play of natural forces; and the art of doctor or magic healer will compel some one centre to purvey something of its own power to another centre. Just so the All: it purveys spontaneously, but it purveys also under spell; a petition brings to some one part the power laid up for each: the All gives to its members by a natural act, and ... the giver does not know of the gift ... A man may therefore help himself to what lies open to all ...²³

The techniques of magic available to men are simply imitations of what Plotinus in 4.4.40 called « the true magic, ... the Friendship and the Strife ... within the All. Here is the primal mage and sorcerer – discovered by men who thenceforth turn those same ... magic arts upon one another ». Although Plotinus did not use the medical analogy in this chapter, Ficino began his commentary on it by pointing out that

any organ of an animal has the power to attract its proper share of nourishment, as the heart [attracts] spices, the liver sweets [and so on] ... The condition of the cosmic animal is the same; throughout are scattered things that can strongly attract to themselves one thing or another ... In this [cosmic] animal different powers naturally disjoined

²² PLOT. *Enn.* 4.4.31.8-15, 24-29, 48-50; 32.1-32; 34.33-38; 35.4-8, 22-23; 36.25-27; 37.17-20; RIST, *Road* cit., pp. 203-206, mentions the Stoic origins of the doctrine of sympathy, as does ARMSTRONG, *Architecture* cit., pp. 77, 98.

²³ PLOT. *Enn.* 4.4.42.6-19; MCKENNA, *Plotinus* cit., p. 324; FICINI *Opera* cit., pp. 532-533, 570, 1748; M. FICINO, *Commentaire sur le Banquet de Platon*, ed., trans. R. MARCEL, Paris 1956, p. 220; MS Vallicellianus F 20, f. 138v; RIST, *Road* cit., p. 207.

from one another are closely conjoined by the Magus, ... and the cosmos commits no sin.

Ficino then explained that there are four such powers dispersed through the universe and available to the physician: « occult qualities of species, figures, harmonies and prayers ».²⁴ Only the first two, species (εἶδος) and figura (σχῆμα), are of immediate interest.

Often in *Ennead* 4.4, only a few times in 4.3, Plotinus used the word σχῆμα in three ways:²⁵ broadly, his σχῆμα refers to the form, shape or figure of an object or set of objects, and in this general sense the word had a considerable philosophical history long before Plotinus;²⁶ more specifically, it refers to the figures formed by the heavenly bodies, such as the stable figures in the zodiac or the mobile planetary aspects, and this is the commonest use of the term in *Ennead* 4.4;²⁷ in another specific application Plotinus used σχῆμα for the gesture or attitude of a dancer in a performance or of a magician in a ceremony.²⁸ The verb σχηματίζειν « to configure », and the derivative nouns for « configuration », σχηματῖσις and σχηματισμός appear in similar connections in 4.4.²⁹ Plotinus also treated σχέσις, which really means « condition », « state » or « habit », as if it were synonymous with σχῆμα, and he gave it an astrological reference.³⁰ The purpose of his elaborate punning on the philosophical, astrological, theatrical and magical

²⁴ FICINI *Opera* cit., pp. 1747-1748: « Quodlibet animalis membrum vim habet ad portionem nutrimenti propriam attrahendam, [u]t cor ad aromata, iecur ad dulcia, ... eadem est animalis mundani conditio in quo passim dispersa sunt quae rem hanc aut illam ad se rapere possint ... Sunt et differentes in hoc animali vires inter se a natura disiunctae quae frequenter a mago coniunctae ..., non peccante mundo. Nominat Plotinus quatuor quibus mirabilis insit virtus, scilicet qualitates specierum occultas et figuras concentusque et vota ». PLOT. *Enn.* 4.4.40.1-9; MCKENNA, *Plotinus* cit., p. 323; RIST, *Road* cit., p. 206.

²⁵ This analysis of terminology is based on the *Lexicon Plotinianum* of SLEEMAN and POLLET, *supra*, n. 10; for occurrences in *Enn.* 4.3, see 2.24, 12.24 and 20.29.

²⁶ PLOT. *Enn.* 4.3.2.24; 20.29; 4.4.5.17, 18; 23.18; 29.23; ARIST. *EN* 1160^a2; *De an* 414^a20; *Part. An.* 640^a34; *Pl. Rep.* 365e, 373b; *Legg.* 685c; *Plt.* 291d.

²⁷ PLOT. *Enn.* 4.3.12.24; 4.4.33.37-38; 34.13-14, 20, 27; 35.15, 19, 46, 49-51, 58, 60, 65.

²⁸ 4.4.33.12; 34.29; 40.14, 21-22; *Pl. Legg.* 635a, 669d.

²⁹ PLOT. *Enn.* 4.4.33.16, 20, 33, 34-35; 34.7, 15, 18, 19, 21, 24, 27; 35.12, 15, 44, 47, 55; 40.15.

³⁰ 4.4.26.2; 29.23; 31.13; 34.4, 29, 32; 34.10, 22; 35.20.

senses of these words was to prove that the effects of cosmic sympathy, especially the magical effects, were automatic, unintentional and hence not attributable to any willed act of the celestial gods.

The beautiful analogy in which Plotinus introduced these words occupies chapters 33, 34 and 35 of *Ennead* 4.4. He compared the cosmos to a dancer; modifications in the structure of the cosmos to changes in the arrangement of a dancer's body; and configurations of stars to particular gestures of the dancer. The stars that make up a given celestial figure are no more the causes of the events they signify than the dancer's gesturing limb is the cause of what the dancer communicates through his whole body. The true causes of events signified and meanings communicated are the dancer and the cosmos, but just as the dancer concentrates on the whole performance rather than on any momentary gesture, so the cosmos has no intention of forming the physical figures constituted by the stars, much less the terrestrial events caused by those figures. As Ficino wrote in his commentary,

The whole cosmos is a single living being dancing to a pattern of music ... First the dancer looks intentionally to the music within him, next through this music to the cycles of the limbs of the cosmos, and third through these cycles he somehow sees to the things that follow from them or are at least signified by them.³¹

These cycling cosmic figures are one of the magician's four sources of power because, as Plotinus wrote, « the magician ... draws on ... patterns (σχήματα) of power, and by ranging himself also into the pattern is able ... to possess himself of these forces ». Ficino located these powers in the spheres, the parts of the spheres and the stars – specifically in the fixed and mobile figures made up of stars. « What happens below the Moon », he explained, « follows especially from these powers of natures and of figures ... The celestial figures indeed signify lower events, while natures together with

³¹ FICINO *Opera* cit., p. 1746: « Totus mundus est animal unum ratione musica saltans ... Ipse quidem saltator intentione spectat primo insitam sibi musicam, deinde per hanc membrorum mundanorum revolutiones, tertio per eas prospicit quodammodo quae inde sequuntur vel saltem significantur »; PLOT. *Enn.* 4.4.33-35; ARMSTRONG, *Architecture* cit., p. 99.

figures cause them by disposing matter ».³² Although this causation is unintentional on the part of the cosmos, it is not irrational, for λόγος guides all the celestial configurations. In fact, Plotinus tells us that the σχήματα are brought into being by λόγοι, and are themselves λόγοι. He adds that in addition to the powers deriving from heavenly σχήματα there are other marvellous effects, also shaped by λόγοι and associated with some non-elemental quality in earthly objects, like stones and plants. This is another of Ficino's four sources of power, the one he called « occult qualities of species ». He revealed the origin of occult qualities in a key passage of his commentary on chapter 35 of *Ennead* 4.4:

All powers of natural things exist, first, in the seminal reasons of Nature in general. From there, they are soon carried over into the spheres of the world and their figures, the fixed and the revolving, and thence into the species of natural objects, in which wondrous, supra-elemental powers [derived] from them lay hidden, and also from the same figures of the heavens powers [descend] wondrously into lower figures.³³

The significance of this passage and of its larger context in the Plotinus *Commentary* emerges when we consider the several senses in which Ficino, much as Plotinus in his use of σχῆμα, employed the word *figura*.

As clues to the magic of *De vita* 3, the most important of Ficino's *figurae* are the natural celestial figure seen in a group of stars and the artificial talismanic figure carved on an amulet. The lower artificial figure can draw power from the natural figure above because both figures belong to the hierarchy of forms stretching from Mind through Soul and its λόγοι to body. At the end of his chapter (3.16) « On the might of the heavens and the powers of

³² PLOT. *Enn.* 4.4.34.33-38; 40.14-19; McKenna, *Plotinus* cit., p. 323; FICINO *Opera* cit., p. 1746.

³³ FICINO *Opera* cit., p. 1746: « Virtutes rerum naturalium omnes primo sunt in seminalibus rationibus naturae communis. Hinc mox traducuntur in mundi sphaeras earumque figuras, tam volubiles quam firmas, hinc in rerum naturalium species, in quibus inde latent vires super elementa mirabiles, atque ex ipsis coeli figuris in figuras inferiores vires quoque mirifice »; PLOT. *Enn.* 4.4.34.9-11; 35.4-8, 12-22, 65-70.

the rays whence images are thought to get their power », Ficino concluded that

an image (*imago*) will be more effective if the elementary power in its matter is well adapted to the specific power naturally implanted in the same matter and if this also adapts to the other specific power to be received through a figure from the action of the heavens.

A material *imago*, say the likeness of a scorpion carved in a gem, opens three sources of power: the manifest power of its elemental qualities; the occult power of its specific form; and another occult and specific power deriving from the likeness of the artificial figure of the scorpion to the natural figure of the constellation Scorpio. « One figure needs the other », warned Ficino. He insisted that a material *imago* cannot be fully active unless all three of these powers are in conformity and reinforce one another.³

From Plotinus and Aquinas he learned how they could be in conformity. In *De vita* 3.17, he set forth the linkages that bind figures in terrestrial objects to ideas in supercelestial Mind:

Figures ... [made up] of natural parts possess a special property inseparable from species inasmuch as [figures] along with species got their dispositions from action of the heavens. Actually [figures] have a very strong connection with ideas in Mind ... And since ... [figures] are a kind of species assigned to their own ideas there above, they undoubtedly get their own powers from there. This is why ... the species of natural objects ... are bound to particular figures.³⁵

What exactly is the chain of causation that joins figures to ideas? Ficino clearly thought of *figura* as a marginal sort of specific or

³⁴ FICINO *Opera* cit., p. 553: « De potestate coeli, de viribus radiorum unde vim sortiri putentur imagines »; *ibid.*, p. 554: « Praeterea imaginem efficaciorum fore si virtus in materia eius elementaris conveniat cum speciali eiusdem virtute naturaliter insita atque haec insuper cum virtute altera speciali per figuram coelitus capienda »; *ibid.*, p. 555: « Exigit enim figura illa figuram »; *ibid.*, pp. 531-532, 542, 548, 552, 558; cf. PLOT. *Enn.* 3.3.4.37-41; DECK, *Nature* cit., pp. 61-62.

³⁵ FICINO *Opera* cit., p. 555: « Figurae ... partium naturalium proprietatem cum specie inseparabilem peculiaremque possident, utpote quae coelitus una cum speciebus destinata fuerunt. Imo et cum idaeis maximam habent in mente mundi regina connexionem. Atque quum ipsae ... species quaedam sint idaeis ibi propriis designatae, nimirum vires inde proprias sortiuntur. Ideoque ... species naturalium certis figuris ... astriguntur ».

substantial form, the form that makes a thing what it is, a member of its species. He cites St. Thomas on this point, which he echoes by claiming in a metaphysical pun that change in the *species* of an object implies change in its *forma*.³⁶ Moreover, he knew the passage of *Ennead* 4.4.35 in which Plotinus associated λόγος with the occult properties carried by εἶδος (which can mean both « substantial form » and « species »), and in commenting on it he explained how *rationes* in Nature (an aspect of Soul) transmit power to the celestial spheres and the figures constituted by them. In turn, the heavens and their figures give power both to natural species and to figures constituted of lower objects.³⁷ Because the whole movement takes place through entities which in greater or lesser degree are *rationes*, the common dynamic term in the process is *ratio* or λόγος. Plotinus gave the name λόγοι to the celestial σχήματα and, because λόγοι have the function of informing matter, his λόγος is also an εἶδος.³⁸ Thus, if σχῆμα, λόγος and εἶδος (*figura*, *ratio* and *species* or *forma*) can be the same entities, metaphysics reinforces the visible, physical similarity between terrestrial and celestial figures.

In the *Enneads*, then, Ficino had evidence of a sufficiently close kinship between two of the three sources of power – specific form, celestial resemblance and material qualities – whose conformity he required in an *imago*. All Plotinus lacked to complete the structure was the Peripatetic concept of hylemorphic union between matter and form, for true hylemorphic composition would endow even the matter of the *imago* with the conforming properties radiating from natural to artificial figure. The λόγος that was the εἶδος of the gem could be in the same order with the λόγος that was the σχῆμα made up of stars. But a material object in Plotinus is not like a composite substance in Aristotle; its matter remains

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 555, 558; THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa contra Gentiles*, III, 105; *supra*, n. 2.

³⁷ PLOT. *Enn.* 4.4.35.67-69.

³⁸ DECK, *Nature* cit., pp. 59-62; RIST, *Road* cit., pp. 85-86, 107-110; ARMSTRONG, *Architecture* cit., p. 54, 107; *Id.*, *Cambridge History* cit., p. 252; *supra*, nn. 33, 37.

passive and finally dead to the form, which is sometimes said to be *on* it rather than *in* it. So Ficino had to complete his requirements for an effective *imago* from his own essentially scholastic doctrine of substantial form, influenced chiefly by St. Thomas.³⁹

Ficino appealed to Aquinas as guarantor of his orthodoxy in the final chapter of *De vita coelitus comparanda*, where he also recapitulated the Plotinian teaching on λόγοι or *rationes* that he had introduced in the first chapter of his treatise:

Mercurius says that the priests got a harmonious power from the nature of the world ... Following him, Plotinus thinks that the All can be favorably arranged when the World-Soul joins it together insofar as it breeds and drives the forms of natural objects through certain seminal reasons implanted in it by divine agency ... Through reasons of this sort, the World-Soul can easily apply itself to the material things it originally formed through these same reasons, when the Magus or the priest applies the forms of things ... which properly incline towards one reason or another ... Sometimes it can also happen that higher gifts descend if reasons are applied to forms in this way insofar as reasons in the World-Soul are joined to intellectual forms of the same Soul and through them to the ideas of the divine Mind.⁴⁰

Although his convictions on the strict formlessness of prime matter made Thomas reject the doctrine of seminal reasons as it was commonly understood in the Middle Ages, i.e., that seminal reasons were forms existing virtually in the potency of matter, Ficino could perhaps have taken Aquinas's references to *rationes seminales* as compatible with what Plotinus taught about λόγοι σπερματικοί.

³⁹ DECK, *Nature* cit., pp. 74-77; ARMSTRONG, *Cambridge History* cit., p. 256; *supra*, n. 2.

⁴⁰ FICINO *Opera* cit., pp. 571-572: «Mercurius sacerdotes ait accepisse virtutem a mundi natura convenientem eamque miscuisse. Sequutus hunc Plotinus putat totum in anima mundi conciliante facile confici posse quatenus illa naturalium rerum formas per seminales quasdam rationes sibi divinitus insitas generat atque movet ... Itaque per rationes eiusmodi animam mundi facile se applicare materiis quas formavit ab initio per easdem, quando magus vel sacerdos ... adhibuerit formas rerum ... quae rationem hanc aut illam proprie spectant ... Fieri vero posse quandoque ut rationibus ad formas sic adhibitis sublimiora quoque dona descendant quatenus rationes in anima mundi coniunctae sunt intellectualibus eiusdem animae formis atque per illas divinae mentis idaeis», PLOT. *Enn.* 4.3.11.8-12.

The pure passivity of matter in Plotinus and the stark immateriality of his λόγος may have encouraged Ficino to make use of this Neoplatonist approach to the problem of matter and form in conjunction with the more familiar Thomist hylemorphism.⁴¹ It was Ficino's eclectic genius that put philosophical doctrines so distant from one another equally at the service of an original theory of magic.

⁴¹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, I, 4, 1, resp.; 115, 1, ad 2^{um}; 2, resp., ad primum, 2^{um}, 4^{um}; III, 32, 4, resp., ad 3^{um}; *supra*, n. 8.

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RENAISSANCE MAGIC
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