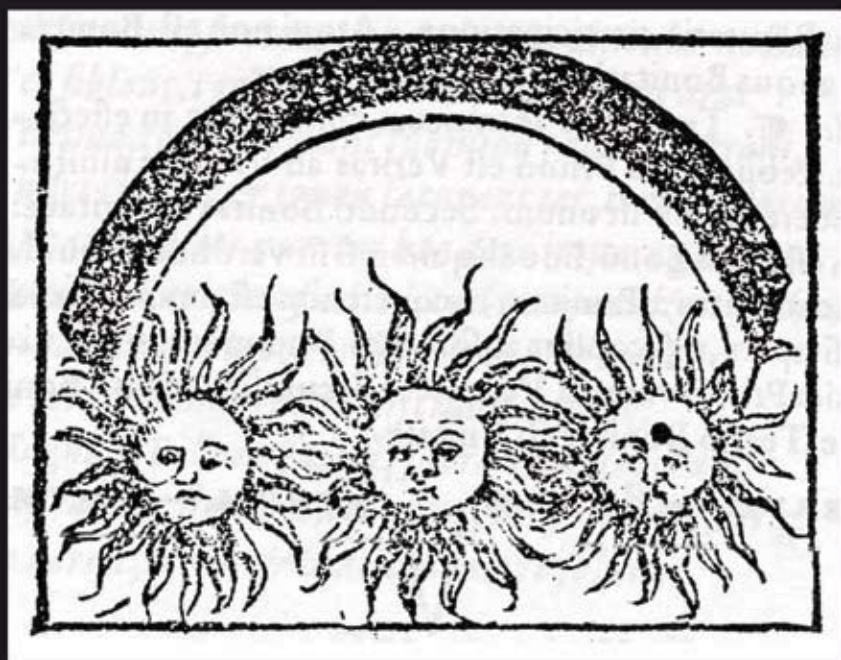PAUL RICHARD BLUM

PHILOSOPHY OF
RELIGION IN THE
RENAISSANCE

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IN THE RENAISSANCE

The Philosophy of Religion is one result of the Early Modern Reformation movements, as competing theologies purported truth claims which were equal in strength and different in contents. Renaissance thought, from Humanism through philosophy of nature, contributed to the origin of the modern concepts of God.

This book explores the continuity of philosophy of religion from late medieval thinkers through humanists to late Renaissance philosophers, explaining the growth of the tensions between the philosophical and theological views. Covering the work of Renaissance authors, including Lull, Salutati, Raimundus Sabundus, Plethon, Cusanus, Valla, Ficino, Pico, Bruno, Suárez, and Campanella, this book offers an important understanding of the current philosophy/religion and faith/reason debates and fills the gap between medieval and early modern philosophy and theology.

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Philosophy of Religion in the Renaissance

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Preface

Philosophy of religion is theology for nonbelievers. God is the highest concept that philosophy can possibly attain, therefore traditionally theology and philosophy converge on this concept. As we know from St Anselm's inquiry into the existence of God, God is that concept which requires existence, although philosophy as such cannot guarantee existence. As such, theology is the discipline that discusses the reality of God's existence, its sources and its implications, whereas philosophy establishes the theoretical conditions implied in a concept like God that is supposed to be real. The reality of God, accessible to theology, manifests itself in human practice, which is religion, whereas philosophy remains theoretical because, from its critical perspective, it is not allowed to engage in any theological commitment, as far as philosophy goes. The dialectical relationship between philosophy, theology and religion, which involves human intellectual life and world, is the achievement of Renaissance thought of the fourteenth through to the sixteenth centuries, although no philosophy is without antecedents. When Renaissance thinkers spoke about God, they aimed at extending the area of competence of any of the three: at times faith, at times thinking, at times practice, and they always claimed to reconcile all three. This is the major contention of this book.

Therefore, the term 'philosophy of religion' is used in this book as an interpretive tool to describe and evaluate how Renaissance philosophers thought about God. Modern philosophy of religion had its origin in treatises on 'natural theology' of seventeenth-century academic philosophy and therefore meant, first of all, the philosophical inquiry into the meaningfulness of speaking rationally about the divine (cf. Frank 2003). Hence, philosophy of religion was originally a continuation of the medieval philosophical theology, also known as the *praeambula fidei* (the humanly accessible preconditions of belief in revelation). However, beyond the school tradition, the question extended to the historicity of theological dogmas, the theory of worship and rituals, religious policy, the gnoseology of faith and the legitimacy of addressing matters of piety with rational means (Jaeschke 1992). Since it seems that the groundwork to this philosophical endeavor has been laid by Renaissance thinkers, insofar as they in fact raise philosophical questions about the coherence or divergence of knowledge, faith, practice, politics, metaphysics and (as will be emphasized in the Epilogue) epistemology, and insofar as Ficino and Bruno speak about religion as such, in short, since they do philosophize about religion, it seems legitimate to speak—*ante litteram*—about a 'Renaissance philosophy of religion'.

A purely theoretical book on faith, reason and religion could be written, but not by me. For in my view, a philosophical problem is constituted by its history, so that its historical stages enable us to understand what troubles us today. This

does not mean that delving into the history of Renaissance thought is an easy way out. On the contrary, doing philosophy historically amounts to doing philosophy properly. If philosophy consists in thinking theoretically, it also requires thinking about thinking—the second most difficult thinking accessible (second after God, of course) is that of others, particularly those who entered history. Furthermore, if the relationship between theology, philosophy and religion is troubled by the uncertainty of theory and action, then the practice of thinking in the past that shaped present philosophy is a case in point: the purely theoretical conundrums of the history of philosophy had nevertheless a practical effect on present-day thought.

Philosophical thinking about God in the Renaissance flourished in a variety of ways, each of which would deserve a systematic diachronic presentation. Since the publication of Charles Trinkaus's book of 1970 on *Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought* it is not anymore necessary to dispel the secularist interpretation of an allegedly irreligious pre-Enlightenment humanism. Therefore we can now scrutinize Renaissance attempts at discussing philosophical issues theologically and theological issues philosophically. Topics that are covered in this book, tentatively tagged with some names, are:

> the rational concept of God (Lull)
> the reach of reason (Cusanus, Suárez)
> Trinity (Ficino, Valla, Campanella)
> religious politics (Lull, Bruno)
> hermeneutics (Salutati)
> mythology (Salutati, Plethon)
> mathematics (Cusanus)
> logic and language (Valla)
> transcendence (Valla, Suárez)
> competing religions (Plethon, Campanella)
> secularism (Ficino, Pico)
> epistemology (Ficino, Suárez)

Each of these topics is treated with regard to the most suitable authors, and each author is presented in this book in a different and, I hope, original way, which any reader might wish to complement with reference to standard handbooks of Renaissance philosophy. I would have loved to add more philosophers (for instance Machiavelli, Erasmus, Thomas More, Vives, Contarini, Telesio, Patrizi, to name a few) as I would have liked to follow up developments in literature, fine arts and heretical movements. If some readers of this book come to the conclusion that those heretical and reformation movements are epiphenomena of Renaissance thought, in the sense of practical consequences of philosophical theology, and that Protestantism is a special case of that, in the sense of a historical reductionism (for example, modernity starts with Luther), they have found another field worth researching.

The completion of a book gives occasion to express gratitude. In chronological order, I am grateful and indebted to my students at Catholic Péter Pázmány University in Budapest/Piliscsaba who first inspired me to work on this topic. Martin W.F. Stone and the publisher accepted the book proposal, and they showed unusual patience during the vicissitudes that delayed its completion. Loyola College in Maryland supported my research with research grants from the Center for the Humanities and from the Catholic Studies Program, with allowing me to teach a faculty seminar on Renaissance philosophy of religion and with supporting student helpers. Timothy P. Sablik read some chapters; Andrew Olesh, Jr. read and corrected the entire book, watched over my English and the stylesheet (what remained awkward is due to the obstinacy of the topic or the author) and built up the bibliography. Many libraries supplied me with books, for the most part the Loyola/Notre Dame Library. To every single person involved, my sincere thanks!

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Chapter 1

From Faith and Reason to Fideism: Raymond Lull, Raimundus Sabundus and Michel de Montaigne

Renaissance philosophy starts in the Middle Ages. This is not a claim of continuity, as though Renaissance philosophy would just build upon mainstream medievalism; rather, the rupture and breakthrough—for good or ill—achieved by Renaissance thinkers was prepared during the Middle Ages. It must have been prepared as a departure, and a radical one at that, which uprooted philosophical conventions. For this is one of the aims of the present book, namely, to argue that modern philosophy originated in the Renaissance as a rupture and a beginning. Renaissance philosophy should not be seen as 'medieval' and unbecoming to a modern mind. The blessings and woes of modern thought originate in a change of perspective. The human basis of perspective as such is the distinctive mark of humanism ever since, so that changing perspective becomes the imperative of philosophical endeavor. This does not entail secularism as such, at least not necessarily. Perspective, tinkering with thinking, can turn out to be the only salvation—theologically, morally and politically. When speaking about the character of an age it is almost impossible to avoid language that alludes to evolution over time with a hint at causes and effects. After all, it's about history. The origin of modern thought in the Renaissance and its roots in the Middle Ages cannot seriously be described in terms of progress or advancement, neither in terms of decay, for this would presuppose an eagle's point of view that even looks into the future. But to foresee the future effectively is reserved for providence. Therefore to set the origins of modernity in the Renaissance and in the Middle Ages means only to extend the scope of modern thought with the intention to clarify its mode of operation. These somewhat stringent and contentious claims are advanced here to alert the readership and direct its attention to the fact that the following and ensuing chapters will deal with apparently minute argumentative quibbles and a mixture of philological, historical and literary evidence. Raymond Lull will be presented as the champion of the change that introduced the basics of modern thought—unbeknownst to him and perhaps to his followers.

Raymond Lull (Lullus, Llull; 1232–1315/1316), who was born and died on the Catalan island of Mallorca, was a pioneer of philosophical theology and logic, who continuously devised projects to convert Muslims and to reunite schismatic Christian churches. With this aim in mind he wrote several petitions to the popes of his day. In the 1290s he traveled to Rome, Anagni and Rieti in order to

present a proposal to Pope Boniface VIII for the conversion of the infidels. But it was impossible to reach the Pope who seems to have had other concerns that occupied his mind and power.[1] Petitions and proposals of this kind were obviously of marginal importance during a papacy of far-ranging political importance in Europe, but during the anxious and restless life of the sage who continued to travel between Catalonia, France, Cyprus, Jerusalem and Northern Africa this was a major focus of his life's work. The petition to Boniface was only one of his many writings with this intent. The modern reader is most likely confused and distracted by these over 200 writings. But, like every great philosopher, Lull had only one outstanding idea that was termed the *Ursatz*: 'the efficient effects the effect'.[2] The unity and uniqueness of this idea does not permit simplification. Therefore it must be stated that Lull's theology and logic are based on the notion of a correlation among finite beings and between those and the Creator. The correlation plays out on all levels of epistemology, ontology and hierarchy with the means of analogical and linguistic thinking. Lull's compelling idea was to rationalize this theological discourse with the help of a combinatoric logic to the effect that it was possible, if not mandatory, to convince and convert nonbelievers all over the world.

Since practical and political purpose had factual priority in the Catalan philosopher's endeavors, I chose to interpret the petition to Pope Boniface in the context of others of his writings. The *Peticio Raymundi pro conversione infidelium ad Bonifacium VIII papam* was written and probably presented in 1295.[3] An almost identical request was submitted to Pope Celestine V.[4] It consists of a complicated interleaving of philosophical, theological and political observations. The text begins with a piece of philosophical and religious advice, in which Lull reminds the Pope and the Cardinals that God created men so that they know, love, honor and venerate Him. The order of words is notable; it moves from knowledge to cult and thus indicates the importance of understanding God, to which Lull devoted his life and his various logical systems (*artes*). However what might appear to

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[1]   Lullus, *Vita coetanea* § 31, edited in Lullus 1964, p. 167; Platzeck 1962, I, pp. 26 ff. and chronological table III of Lull's life, p. 84; Llinares 1962, p. 109; Dupré Theseider 1971, p. 156; Carreras y Artau 1939, p. 247. On the subject of the popes in crusades cf. Hillgarth 1971, pp. 74–83; Boase 1933, pp. 226 ff.; Schein 1998, pp. 144 ff; here and in the bibliography Raymond Lull is cited as 'Lullus, Raimundus' regardless of the name form on the book covers.

[2]   Platzeck in Lullus 1964, I, p. 389: 'was ich den Ursatz nennen möchte, in dem alle Wortbedeutungen […] ihren Grund haben. Er lautet: Wirkendes wirkt Bewirktes.'

[3]   The *Peticio* is edited in Wieruszowski 1971, pp. 161–164. I numbered the 14 paragraphs of this edition. Reference to the *City of God* by St Augustine as suggested in the title of the edition ('Raymond Lull et l'idée de la cité de Dieu') is beside the point. The text is also available in Atiya 1970, pp. 487–489. For a comparison of both exhortations see Garcias Palou 1986, pp. 68–70. For a bibliography of Lull's works see Lullus 1985, II, and *Base de Dades Ramon Llull - Llull DB*: http://orbita.bib.ub.es/llull/.

[4]   Wieruszowski 1971, p. 148, and Lullus 1985, II, p. 1271 n. 41.

be a religious commonplace acquires a dramatic appeal when the author adds regretfully that the nonbelievers outnumber the Christians and adds the inference that the ecclesiastical authorities are obliged to engage in mission.[5] In the same passage he stresses that conversion to Christianity of all humans is the very purpose of the creation, whereas the sheer existence, and even more the abundance, of nonbelievers equals a failure in the order of creation; the remedy lies in the hand of the Pope.

The means available to the Pope are identical with the nature of the Church. Therefore the petitioner challenges him 'to open the treasure trove of the holy Church' because otherwise the general disbelief could appear to be caused by ecclesiastical greed. Those treasures would provide for mission in the narrow sense and, at the same time, for the 'multiplication of divine cult'.[6] Lull seems to insinuate that to withhold the treasure from the infidels would deprive God of the spread of devotion that is owed to Him. It is somewhat disturbing that Lull appears to think in quantitative terms. The quality of religion seems to depend on the quantity, the total number, of those who are Christians. A later theologian and philosopher, Nicholas of Cusa, who was very familiar with Lull's writings and method, would repeat this motif and give it a different twist. In 1453, impressed by the fall of Constantinople to the Turks, he published his dialogues *On the Peace of Religion* that advocated a plurality of religious cults—again for the sake of multiplying the veneration of God. Cusanus had adopted Lull's postulate that the triune God must be universal and thus universally recognizable, but he turned that into a hidden presupposition that operates unbeknownst to the believers of the various religions so that the diversity of religions presupposes implicitly the sameness of God, namely, the Trinity of Christianity. Hence he concluded that the existence of non-Christians does not constitute infidelity pure and simple but, rather, expresses God's will to be venerated in a plurality of ways and that, consequently, the fact that there exist many religions amounts to an increase of devotion.[7] Lull and Cusanus share the firm belief in the oneness and uniqueness of the Christian God who charges and empowers the Church to disclose the truth to all humanity, which entails that to proclaim the faith is at the heart of the Church.

The 'treasure trove' of the church is supposed to be used actively and purposefully (*ad procurandum*) according to Lull. Most likely he is alluding to the parable of the ten minas (Luke 19:11–27), which was an exhortation to work with the gifts of God. But his argument is also based on his metaphysical reasoning, as mentioned above, in which every being is active in its proper way because God

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[5]   *Peticio ad Bonifacium* (Wieruszowski 1971) § 1: '[…] et cum infideles sunt multo plures quam christiani […] quantum deceret, quod vos […] aperietis ecclesie sancte thesaurum ad procurandum, quod omnes […] ad veritatis lucem perveniant […].'

[6]   Ibid. § 2: 'Thesaurus iste quem pro divini cultus multiplicatione ipsis infidelibus dicimus reserandum […].'

[7]   *De pace fidei*: Cusanus 1959, 1, n. 4, p. 7. Cf. Blum 2004, pp. 157–163.

bestows on created beings His efficiency together with all the other finite qualities.[8] Therefore it is divine logic to assume that, if the Church is endowed with certain powers, she is obliged to put them into action rather than leave them inert. It is a mode of thinking germane to late medieval political theology, as can be seen in Pope Clement VI's bull *Unigenitus* (1343) that justified indulgences by referring to the 'treasure of the militant Church' and arguing that it was given to the Church thanks to divine compassion to the effect that St Peter was entitled to distribute it for the salvation of the believers.[9] Given the fact that in the Middle Ages 'treasure' had a material, as well as a spiritual, meaning there is no wonder that according to Lull the means of remedy available to the Church are equally twofold, namely, spiritual and bodily (*Petitio*, § 2). Not surprisingly the spiritual treasure is the word, while the crusade would be the corporeal endowment (§§ 3–4). However we may be startled to see the violent implications in the theologian's reasoning. On the other hand Lull is giving a clear message to the Pope, namely to call to arms. It was probably John Chrysostom who first distinguished the spiritual treasures from those that pertain to the body ('quae ad corpora spectant'), a distinction that is also present in the just-mentioned bull *Unigenitus*: Chrysostom was talking about martyrs who after their physical death 'continue to emit the rays and beams of their glory'.[10] Still it is likely that the Church Father considered the ecclesiastical treasure to be ultimately spiritual, whereas the Catalan missionary argued that the Church may also ply a material treasure.

Raymond Lull purposefully combines two different metaphors, that of the twofold treasure and that of the two swords. In a treatise submitted to Pope Nicholas IV known as *Libre de Passatge* (Book of Crusade; 1292) he had already used the metaphor of the two swords when he reminded the Pope that 'there are two swords, spiritual and corporeal' and urged him to personally negotiate with the schismatic Greeks and—'in case they would not reunite with the Roman Church'—to threaten 'that they would lose their land and be subjugated under the

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[8]   Cf. for instance, Euler 1995, p. 75, on internal and external divine efficiency (*ad intra*, *ad extra*). Lullus 1964, *Vita coetanea*, §§ 25 and 38, with endnote 72 by Platzeck, on the concept of 'ociositas' that is excluded from the essence of God: '[…] in praedictis et aliis huiusmodi divinis dignitatibus actus proprios esse intrinsecos et e[x]ternos sine quibus fuissent occiose etiam ab aeterno.' Note: the conjecture 'externos' instead of 'eternos' is mine and corrects an obvious misprint.

[9]   Denzinger/Schönmetzer 1976, § 1025–26: '[…] ut nec supervacua, inanis aut superflua tantae effusionis miseratio redderetur, thesaurum militanti Ecclesiae acquisivit […] Quem quidem thesaurum […] per beatum Petrum […] commisit fidelibus salubriter dispensandum […].'

[10]   *S. Johannes Chrysostomi in SS. Martyres Juventinum et Maximinum sermo panegyricus*, PG 50, col. 571–572: 'Ejusmodi est thesaurus Ecclesiae […] Temporis diuturnae opes, quae ad corpora spectant, facile intereunt. […] At non sic se res habet in spiritualibus thesauris, de martyris, inquam, qui […] semper suae gloriae fulgorem emittunt et radios.' The Latin version is quoted for reasons of convenience.

corporeal sword'.[11] As soon as predication turns into crusade the metaphor morphs into a weapon. The two swords theory entered Christian political doctrine through St Bernard of Clairvaux who had used it to explain the relationship between political and ecclesiastical power: 'Both belong to the Church, the spiritual sword and the material one; however, the latter is to be employed *for* the Church, the former *by* the Church.'[12] During Lull's time the same Pope Boniface VIII, with whom he was negotiating, adopted the two swords theory by quoting St Bernard by the letter in his bull *Unam Sanctam* of 1302 that was designed to extend papal power. This shows that Raymond Lull was quite in tune with the frame of mind of the Pope. Both endorsed the necessity to transform doctrine into action and insight into obligation, following the theological pattern that a principle cannot be idle.

Lull's theology depends on the seamless transition from theory to practice and from metaphysics to visible forms. To interpret the material or temporal sword as a weapon that needs to be wielded against the enemies of the Church expresses a kind of realism in which concepts must not remain mere concepts. That will become even clearer in his last call for action, the *Liber de fine* of 1305. This book was not only directed to the Pope but also to the Cardinals and 'all princes of the world' and sent out on the occasion of the election of Pope Clement V. Now the treasure is forged straight into a sword: 'So, Church, why are you sleeping instead of working, since such a great treasure is entrusted upon you with the spiritual sword and also with the corporeal sword?'[13] The Church's worldly wealth consists in its religious command to exert mission on earth.

In a later work Lull portrayed himself as a 'Christian Arab man' engaged in a controversy with a Muslim named Homer (Hamar). With explicit reference to *De fine* the 'treasures of the Church' have become three, namely, monasteries, a unified order of crusaders, and a tithe to finance a crusade. But Lull complains that they exist 'only in potency and inertia'. The monastery, obviously the favorite project, was intended to educate future missionaries by studying the respective languages of nonbelievers.[14] On the practical level the treasures and the swords coincide

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[11] Lullus 1954, *Quomodo Terra Sancta recuperari potest*; p. 100: '[…] ita quod sint ibi duo gladii, unus spiritualis et alius corporalis, et […] in sua propria persona deberet ire […] denunciando eis quod, si se noluerint unire cum Ecclesia, oportebit eos terram amittere et gladium corporalem subire.' A similar formula can be found in Lull's book *Phantasticus* (1311), see Beattie 1995, p. 106 f.

[12] Bernardus Clarevallensis, *De Consideratione*, l. 4, c. 3, PL 182, 776 C; quoted from Curley 1927, p. 120: 'Uterque ergo Ecclesiae, et spiritualis scilicet gladius et materialis, sed is quidem pro Ecclesia ille vero et ab Ecclesia exercendus.' Cf. Denzinger/Schönmetzer 1976, § 870, introd.

[13] Lullus 1981, *De fine*, pp. 268–269: 'Et ideo, ecclesia, quare dormis, et non laboras, postquam tantus thesaurus est tibi commendatus per spiritualem gladium et etiam per gladium corporalem?' Cf. Gottron 1912, p. 73.

[14] Lullus 1998, *Liber disputationis Raimundi Christiani et Homeri Saraceni*, p. 263: '[…] quod dominus Papa et reverendi cardinales intenderent ad tria. Quae sunt thesauri

in the unified aim that was to be pursued intellectually through the education of missionaries and practically in setting up a military order, both held together in a truly materialistic sense, namely, financially.

Language studies, armed crusade and tithe, those were the means to recuperate the Holy Land, which were also proposed in the memorandum for Pope Boniface (§§ 3–5), and they return in almost all of Lull's treatises on the conversion of the Muslims. The spiritual sword and treasure is, indeed, the establishment of new schools exactly because it is through language that the spiritual treasure can be 'communicated to the infidels'.[15] Again we can observe how Lull stretches the meaning of words, in this case the meaning of communication. The spirit of the Christian Church has to be imparted by distributing her wealth by way of linguistic communication in missionary activity. The corporeal treasure would consist in the Pope's power to institute a crusade, in which 'the Holy Land would be acquired in an honorable way and preserved by means of military occupation'.[16]

It is certainly politically correct to emphasize intercultural dialogue,[17] to which Lull's project of language schools lends itself to some extent, but it is also historically correct to note that he thought of mission in terms of military strategy.[18]

Therefore the financial treasure expresses exactly the combination of material and spiritual means. He thought of taxes to be imposed on laypeople towards the recovery of the Holy Land. Tithes of this kind were not new at this time, but

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ecclesiae; […] Et cum haec tria consistant in potentia et in otiositate […] Tria supra dicta sunt haec, videlicet quod dominus Papa et revenendi cardinales facerent in perpetuum quattuor aut quinque monasteria, in quibus religiosi et saeculares […] addiscerent idiomata infidelium. […] Secundum est, quod de omnibus militibus religiosis […] fieret alius ordo […] Tertium est, videlicet quod dominus Papa et reverendi cardinales darent decimam totius ecclesiae ad passagium, quousque Terra sancta fuisset adquisita […].'

[15]   *Peticio* § 3, Wieruszowski 1971, p. 161: 'Thesaurus spiritualis postest ipsis infidelibus communicari […].'

[16]   Ibid. § 4, p. 161: 'pro terra sancta laudabiliter acquirenda et acquisita etiam conservanda […] certo numero bellatorum'.

[17]   Pindl 1997, pp. 46–60. Sugranyes 1986, p. 18: 'Aussi Lulle s'oppose-t-il à l'usage de la force pour conquérir les âmes, fort de bonnes raisons théologiques.' Cf. Sugranyes de Franch 1954.

[18]   Hillgarth 1971, p. 50: 'Lull invariably combined the two aims of missionary endeavour and armed action to recover the Holy Land.' Cf. Palou 1981, pp. 419–438: 'Los planes estrategicos de Ramon Llull, trazados para la sujecion del Islam'. Kedar 1984, pp. 189–199, 225–228 (excerpts from Lull's *Ars iuris*). Urvoy 1980, p. 248. Beattie 1995, ch. 3. Mastnak 2002, p. 224: 'Both crusade and mission were means to the same end.' Cf. Lull's *Doctrina pueril* (1274–76): Lullus 1969, Chapter 71, p. 150: 'Saches, fiuz, que les apostres convertirent le monde par predicacion et par espandement de lermes et de sanc, et avec moult de travaux et de grief mort […].' It seems that at the same time Lull accepted violence only as an opportunity for martyrdom: *Liber contra Antichristum*, in Beattie 1995, pp. 218–288: 285–287.

occasionally Lull seems to suggest that the Church herself should give a tenth of her annual income, which he termed to be the 'matter' with regard to the 'form' of the crusade.[19] At any rate he was touching a ticklish subject because Boniface, Cardinal Benedetto Caetani before becoming pope, had been Pope Hadrian V's envoy to France for the sake of controlling the collection of Crusade tithes. Hence once Caetani had become Pope, he inferred in his bull *Unam Sanctam* that the existence and general acceptance of taxation was a clear indication of the supremacy of the spiritual power over the worldly governments. Taxation of clerics by secular princes, on the other hand, was the bone of contention in the conflicts between the pontiffs of that time and France and England, a conflict that reached its peak in Boniface's bull *Clericis laicos* of 1296. Most likely those were the problems that distracted the Pope when Lull tried to push for a crusade, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.[20] In other words Raymond Lull does not fundamentally depart from church politics of his time; he only 'rearranges' the rules of the game.[21]

In addition to those basic requests Lull also makes detailed suggestions regarding strategies towards a union of the schismatic churches: Christianization of Tartars with the intention to forestall Jews or Muslims to convert them but also to invite well-educated people from the Saracens into a Christian environment, to convert them and send them back as ambassadors of Christian faith.[22]

The self-declared missionary's 'petition' gradually assumes a more exacting tone. He not only reminds the hierarchy of its pastoral obligations, he also refers explicitly to secular people (*mundani homines*) and princes who fight and suffer even for worldly goods, but he also invokes the Muslim sect of the Assassins who did not spare themselves in their fight for liberty: 'Beware, the Christians forgo land and audacity, in which they prevailed over the Saracens; the public cause is in decline and neglected by almost all Christians; laypeople protest against the clergy!'[23] He positions himself as 'the model of a layperson who is engaged in the public good to the extent that he can liberate [the clergy] of the huge onus, whereas [the clergy] could be indicted of negligence to the damage and detriment of great

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[19]   *Passatge, De modo convertendi*, Lullus 1954, p. 112: 'Ecclesia ordinet dare decimam de bonis ecclesiasticis annuatim […]'. On misappropriations of finances intended for crusades see Schein 1998, pp. 57 ff. and 64 ff.

[20]   Curley 1927, pp. 72–87 and 115; Dupré Theseider 1971, pp. 151 ff. and 166; Wolter 1985, pp. 343–347; Mastnak 2002, p. 246. Boase 1933, pp. 131 ff.; Schein 1998, pp. 147–162.

[21]   Urvoy 1980, p. 244.

[22]   *Peticio* (Wieruszowski 1971) §§ 6–7.

[23]   *Peticio* § 10, p. 163: 'Consideretis etiam si placet, quomodo christiani terras amittunt et audaciam quam contra sarracenos habere solebant et quomodo perit respublica et sunt fere ab omni christiano neglecta et quomodo clamant layci contra clerum.' I changed twice 'at' into 'et' and 'sint' into 'sunt' following Atiya 1970, p. 489.

part of Christianity.'[24] His zeal does not admit any delay, and with that the author apologizes for his 'all too presumptuous' behavior and presses again by offering himself to be among the first to be sent into the Saracens' land.[25] Needless to say that no one sent him.

For Lull's understanding of religion it is highly interesting that he mentions laypeople three times: he complains that laypeople are discontent with their clergy; he presents himself and his program as the initiative of a layman; and finally he offers himself to spearhead the Muslim mission. His apparent submission under the authority of the Pope and the hierarchy is at odds with his rebellious threat to take over initiative, should the Church fail to obey the divine command, as Lull sees it. His repeated petitions testify that he is well versed in political and religious geography; but for our purposes the theoretical background is more interesting.

Probably shortly after his disappointment with Pope Boniface VIII, Lull wrote his book *Desconort*, which, indeed, means desolation and discomfort.[26] In its dialogues in verse Raymond converses with a hermit in a way that is obviously a dialectical soliloquy of the author on the frustration with the Arab mission and how to overcome it. At one point the hermit explains that the Pope and the Cardinals do not care to listen to the intimations and requests presented by Lull because they are simply impossible to realize. To that Raymond retorts to his having proved in his book *Passatge* that it is necessary and possible to reconquer the Holy Grave.[27] But the hermit exclaims: 'Raymond, if man could prove our faith he would forfeit merit.'[28] To which Raymond, self-confident as ever, answers by invoking the will of God who created man to be honored regardless of man's glory.[29] Interpretation

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[24]   Ibid. § 11, p. 163: 'Quare ex predictorum ordinacione haberent […] exemplum layici ad bona publica procuranda ex quo aufferetur grande honus a vobis, cum dampnum et detrimentum christianitatis pro maiori parte vestre negligentie imputetur'.

[25]   Ibid.

[26]   *Deus amorós: a ta vertut comensa aquest Desconort de R. Luyl*, Lullus 1936. The work consists of 69 stanzas with 12 hendecasyllabic verses and one single rhyme per stanza, which is a typical form in arabic poetry. (F. Rosenthal, 'Literatur', in Joseph Schacht and C. E. Bosworth (ed.), *Das Vermächtnis des Islams*, Munich: dtv, 1983, II, p. 96). Platzeck compares it with the medieval German 'Streitlied' (Lullus 1964, p. 99); paraphrases or translations are available in Peers 1929, pp. 256–267. According to Hillgarth 1971, p. 123 ff., it was written in 1305, but Peers 1929, p. 265, note 5, and the majority of scholars give an earlier date.

[27]   *Desconort* XXIII, pp. 268–276, e XXIV, pp. 277–279: 'N ermita: si la fe hom no pogués provar,/ doncs los crestians Deus no pogra encolpar / si a los infeels no la volon mostrar / […] escrit ay lo Passatge on ay mostrat tot clar,/ com lo sant Sepulcre se pusca recobrar,/ e com hom atrob homens qui vajen preicar / la fe sens paor de mort e qui ho sabion far.'

[28]   Ibid. XXV, pp. 289–290: 'Ramon: si hom pogues demostrar nostra fe,/ hom perdria merit […].'

[29]   Ibid. XXVI, pp. 303–305 & 311; '[…] Deus creà home, per so quen sia honrat,/ qui es pus noble fi e ha mays de altetat / que la fi que hom ha en esser gloriejat / […] per so que

of God's will, of the duty of a Christian, and laypeople's relationship to the authorities—that's what is at stake here. And that's why Lull was disappointed.

The very same year the philosopher concluded his encyclopedia *The Tree of Science* (*Arbor scientiae*). The preface obviously extends the lament of the *Desconort* by narrating that the author encountered a monk who heard him singing and complaining about the lack of success of his books and of his missionary enterprises, although all his efforts are aimed at honoring the Creator and at 'scolding those through whom He is dishonored'.[30] This time the dialogue continues by the monk inviting the author to write a book—the one at hand—that could explain the past projects and books. Therefore the lay missionary is poised to move on and to chastise everyone who stands in his way. This plays out specifically in his 'Apostolic Tree'.

To make that understandable, here is a brief explanation of the layout of the book: Trees are the organizing pattern in this work. *The Tree of Science* is composed of 16 'trees' with branches and roots that represent the principles and categories of being and knowledge.[31] The trees are a kind of map, a topology that explains the scope and coherence of the real world and the world of knowledge. It starts with the elements (*arbor elementalis*) and ascends gradually through the natural world, the human realm, government, and the spiritual world to the divine realm. But it does not end there; Lull rather adds a tree of examples and one of questions (*arbor exemplificalis, questionalis*). The prose sections that follow each of the tree images refer back to the previous trees and branches so that it becomes evident that any tree helps to understand any other tree, that is to say, any ontological realm is understood by, and helps to understand any other. This is typical of Lull's comprehensive method. Now in the first tree which gives an overview over the entire scheme (fol. ij r), the 'apostolic branch' is in the middle of all the branches and leads from the natural and human branches over to the spiritual and divine branches.

The body of the explanations of this apostolic tree deals with speculative theology and morals. The 'roots' stand for the cardinal and theological virtues. The tree gives Lull occasion to describe the virtues of the Pope, with special emphasis on justice and faith, which are treated by applying the so-called dignities (again, a Lullian procedure), namely, goodness, greatness, durability, potency, and so on. If the reader keeps in mind the author's recent experiences with the actual Pope, enumerating those virtues amounts to a severe critique. For instance, it is said: 'The Pope must have the faith of St. Peter, whose vicar he is, and also so great a faith that it corresponds with the faith of his people.'[32] This time the subtlety

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hom aja plena de Deu sa volentat […].'

[30]   Lullus 1515, fol. Iiij *r* a–b. I used the electronic version at Bibliothèque Nationale de France (http://gallica.bnf.fr/). Cf. Santi 2002.

[31]   Cf. Bonner 2002.

[32]   Lullus 1515, fol. lxv *v* b: 'Oportet quod papa habeat magnam fidem. quia fides sancti petri fuit magna. Et oportet quod papa ita magnam fidem habeat: quod fidei sui populi

consists in declaring the faith of the people to be the measure of the Pope's faith—and not vice versa. If Boniface or any of his contemporaries could have foreseen the dilemmas of Protestant claims on authoritative faith of the people, the scandal would have been enormous. So far the application of magnitude to faith, potency or power is applied thus: the strength of his faith must be such that it fortifies the faith of every human being; for that is why God had endowed him with the Roman Empire, namely to be strong enough and resist the enemies of the faith with the secular arm and in accordance with the universal coherence of all levels of being, the Pope has to be exemplary in a way that impresses his flock through wisdom and goodness.[33] 'Therefore it is a great evil if the Pope does not augment the faith in a great number of sheep, so that it becomes overall many, and that many more sheep live in this faith, because the grace of the spiritual life is greater than that of the corporeal life.'[34]

Therefore in the mind of Raymond Lull propaganda of the faith is the very union of the spiritual and temporal that should be embodied in the Pope as the interface between everything earthly and celestial, divine and natural, spiritual and practical. The category of opposition/difference is applied to the same problem, namely to describe the ideal unity of faith between the Pope and all peoples of the earth, which entails the call for fighting against those who oppose the Pope with their divergent faith. In the framework of universal harmony between everything in the world spiritual and material, such difference has to be overcome, and if that is to be realized in pagans, it means: crusade.

> There must be one faith in him [the Pope] and his people. Also the Pope has to harmonize the faith of everyone. And with his faith the Pope has to stand against those who are against the faith. And in the spirit of this opposition he has to destroy the errors that are rampant among the Saracens, Tartars, and Jews. […] And he has to destroy the schisms.[35]

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respondeat.'

[33]   Ibid.: 'Preterea fides pape debet esse fortis. ut fortitudo illius fortificet fidem cuiuslibet hominis. Ed ideo ordinatio dei fuit: quod imperium romanum datum fuit pape. ut cum brachio seculari papa foret fortis ad resistendum inimicis fidei. Adhuc fides pape debet esse clara hominibus per sapientiam et per bonum exemplum.'

[34]   Ibid.: 'Et propter hoc malefacit ille papa qui fidem in pluribus ovibus non augmentat. ut sit multum universalis: et quia in illa vivant plures oves. quoniam satis est maior gratia vite spiritualis quam corporalis.' The reason why the English quotation sounds awkward is that I tried to reproduce Lull's Latin, which is known to be cumbersome.

[35]   Ibid. fol. lxvi *r* a: 'quoniam una debet esse fides in se et in suo populo. Item papa cum sua fide concordare debet fidem cuiuslibet hominis. Et cum sua fide debet papa esse contra illos: qui sunt contra fidem. ratione cuius contrarietatis conari debet errores destruere: qui sunt seminati inter saracenos tartaros et inter iudeos. […] Debet etiam destruere scismata.'

Lull has contradiction work by way of entropy so that forceful contradiction has to aim at quelling any contradiction. Faith, active faith, levels out unbelief. The interpretation of the apostolic tree concludes with the exhortation that the 'salvation of the pagans is the ministry and mission, so that God be venerated, recognized, and loved, as well as honored and served more than anyone else'. This tree is fruitful only if the apostolate is assumed by 'one person for all who is the worshiper of God and ruler of all men'.[36]

The fundamental philosophical and theological reason that motivated Lull can be ascertained from the core theological statements in the same book, namely the Divine Tree.

> We contemplate this tree [the divine tree] in seven ways, namely, dignities, substance, divine persons, generation and aspiration, negation of accidents, proofs of divine productions, fulfillment without any blemish. In the first way we contemplate the roots of the tree as metaphors of the dignities of God. As substance we contemplate the trunk, namely the divine essence and nature. The properties of persons we contemplate in the simile of the branches. Generation and aspiration we contemplate in the simile of the twigs. In the simile of the leaves we contemplate the negation we state about the presence of accidents in God. In the simile of the flowers we contemplate the proofs of the productions that we will give in the blessed Divine Trinity. As fruits we contemplate the fulfillment that God has achieved without any defect.[37]

The dignities are attributes, however not in the sense of predications of the type 'this flower is red, it is five inches tall, and smells good', but in the sense of radical manifestations of divinity. 'We call dignities of God His essential goodness, magnitude, eternity, potency, wisdom, will, virtue, truth, glory; also the distinction of persons and their concordance, beginning, middle, and end, and equality.'[38] God's being essentially all these qualities distinguishes theological language from

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[36] Ibid. fol. lxxxiiij *v* b: '[…] salvatio gentium et ordinatum ministerium. ut deus recolatur intelligatur et ametur. honoretur et ei serviatur plusquam alicui alii. […] requirit unam personam comunem: qui sit dei cultor et habeat officium super omnes homines.'

[37] Ibid. fol. cxviij r/v: 'De arbore divinali. Hanc arborem septem modis consideramus, verum secundum dinitates, secundum substantiam, secundum personas divinas, secundum generationem et spirationem, et secundum negationem accidentium, secundum probationem divinarum productionum, et secundum complementum absque omni defectu. Per primam propter dignitates dei metaphorice consideramus radices arbori. Et per substantiam truncum consideramus, verum essentiam et naturam divinam. Et proprietates personales consideramus in similitudine brancharum. Et generationem et spirationem consideramus in similitudine ramorum. Et in similitudine foliorum consideramus negationem quam facimus de accidentibus esse in deo. Et in similitudine florum consideramus probationes productionum, quas dabimus in beata dei trinitate. Et per fructum consideramus complementum quod est deus completus sine omni defectu.'

[38] Ibid. fol. cxviij v.

human propositional statements. From the fact that those 'properties or qualities' are to be conceived as essential dignities follows that they not only can be defined in some way but that they are 'real' qualities and have and perform their proper actions. This is why the qualities of Aristotelian terminology are presented as dignities that make up the divinity. Lull contemplates all of these in three stages that follow from one another: 'according to their definition, and their being real reasons (*rationes reales*), and also their own acts'.[39] The term 'real reasons' needs explanation. In Scholastic philosophy statements about properties can indicate formal reasons or real reasons, that is, a proposition may refer to a property that is not included in the concept, for instance, the flower in the example given above is not essentially red. In that sense the sentence enumerated a number of nonessential properties, in this terminology: just formal reasons. A real reason would have been meant if the proposition had said 'This flower is growing', for it is an essential property for the flower to grow, and consequently the statement would refer to a real reason. In addition to this Scholastic terminology Lull applies a Neoplatonic approach that allows thinking of properties as productive. Since every essence is not an idle form but, rather, a way of being, such being can be thought of as an act. This, too, is a mode of thinking available in Scholastic philosophy and theology, but in Lull it gains theological prominence. To him the definition gives the essence that produces something.

> As goodness is the reason for the good in making good, so is magnitude for the great in magnifying, eternity for the eternal in making eternal, potency for the potent in making potential, wisdom of the wise in understanding, will for the willing in willing, virtues for the virtuous in making virtuous, verity for the veritable in verifying, glory for the glorious in glorifying, distinction for the distinguished in distinguishing, concordance for the concordant in making concordant, principle for the principled in being principle, medium for the mediated in mediating, infinity for the infinite in making infinite, equality for the equal in equalizing.[40]

The series as quoted here evinces that it could be reiterated *ad infinitum* with any property by turning it into a verb of action and the product of that, for instance, goodness—making good—the good. This is a major method applied by Lull throughout all his works, namely, to interpret propositional sentences as essential statements and to permutate them quasi-mechanically by means of linguistics. A property, as a real reason, produces that which 'has' that property. As Lull says: 'Examples of those acts and of those reasons are, for instance, that goodness is the reason for the good, because it produces the good, in order not to be idle nor the

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[39]   Ibid.

[40]   Ibid. I tried to emulate, wherever possible, the play with Latin derivatives, for instance: *bontias – bono – bonificanco; equalitas – equanti – equando*. Some of those derivatives are not standard Latin.

good to be idle. And the good is God Father, who produces through goodness the good Son.'[41] Of course, Lull plays it out again with many examples.

The Tree of Science serves as only one example out of the vast production of Raymond Lull's theology. With modifications he applied his method, as stated before, to interpret properties as essential, as rooted in God, and as therefore attainable through linguistic performances, in all his writings. The core tenet is, as can be seen in his explanation of the divine tree, that being is active, qualities are essential, and essences are productive. Hence it follows for theology—and we will see that as a thread appearing again and again into the seventeenth century—that the divine Trinity is not only a matter of revelation but humanly understandable as though it were a natural fact. Reasonability and naturalness are stealthily identified and consequently naturalness and divinity, too. With Raymond Lull this book on Renaissance philosophy of religion commences by showing not in the first place philosophical subtleties, but the human side that will dominate philosophy thereafter. For a philosophical and theological layperson, as Raymond Lull was, humanity means piety and action. Therefore he extended his theology of the productivity of divine essences into political activity. His craving for mission was bolstered by his interpretation of the divine will as something that is to be executed. His theology, as can be seen in his apostolic tree, sees hierarchy as an essential consequence of divinity to the extent that what modern sociology would call the principle of subsidiarity can be turned upside down by exclaiming: 'Church, why are you sleeping?!'

It is well known that Lull in his life practiced what he preached so that after his conversion in 1263 and his mystical intuition of his 'art' in 1273 he set about founding the college of Miramar where Oriental languages were to be taught (1276).[42] Between the years 1287 and 1309 he attempted to meet popes from Honorius IV to Clement V seven times; he also traveled to Tunis (1292), Cyprus and Jerusalem (1301–1302), Bugia in Tunisia (1307), and again to Tunis and Bugia (1314–1315). So we may gather that even before imploring the popes he had already started to 'protest as layman against the clergy' and to give his personal example that he exacted from the hierarchy.

An episode told in his *Contemporary Life* (*Vita coetanea*), allegedly narrated to some of his disciples and the major source of our knowledge of his troubled life, reveals the ideology that shaped his mission. Lull had purchased a slave as a personal teacher of Arabic. After the Muslim man had uttered some blasphemy Lull had hit him, who fought back and injured his master/student. While the slave was in jail Lull retreated to pray and meditate on the misadventure through which his teacher had become his enemy. On his return after three days he learned that the defendant had hanged himself. 'Raymond rendered grace to God, glad that He had spared his innocent hands from killing this Saracen and also liberated

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[41]   Ibid. On Lull's theology of the Trinity, implied here, see Hames 2000, Chapter 4, with the title: 'The Lullian Trinity: A means to an end?'

[42]   Burns 1971, specifically 1398–1400; Hames 2000.

him from this grave perplexity, out of which he had just implored him.'[43] We are further told that after this incident ('post haec' quasi 'propter haec') Lull received the revelation of his *Ars generalis*. From a literary point of view this story, as the entire *Vita*, is truly emblematic; it even exists in an illustrated manuscript.[44] The author obviously intended to tell a story with a moral. Again we see Lull entangled in violence and prayer. If it is God's will to exterminate the pagans, He will take care of it, whether through human hands or otherwise. A case can be made that this story exhorts to refrain from violence. Still, the slave died. A quite similar story was told by Ignatius of Loyola in his similarly narrated autobiography. The future founder of the Jesuits had quarreled with a Muslim who doubted the virginity of St Mary. Undecided whether to pursue and kill the heathen or not, Ignatius slacked the reins of his mule and let it decide which way to take—this time the Muslim's life was spared. The message is the same, as is the lesson learned: don't kill Muslims and focus on learning.[45]

A follower of Raymond Lull was Raymond Sabunde, a Catalan who worked in Toulouse and died there in 1436. Raymond, also known as Sabundus, Sebond, Sibiuda, published one influential book, his *Liber creaturarum* that from the late fifteenth century ran under the title *Theologia naturalis* and founded this genre of theology books.[46] He does not expressly deal with heathens, even though he must have been aware of them, and he also does not expressly use the combinatorial methods that characterize Raymond Lull's work. But he also continues along the lines that the relationship between man[47] and God can be that of human understanding.

Taking up the old metaphor of the book of nature,[48] he maintains that nature is quite sufficient to know anything and everything, also about God. The title of his book in full translation explains his program: '*Book of Nature or of Creatures*, which specifically treats man and his nature in so far as he is man and what is necessary to know himself and God and every duty that binds and obliges man

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[43]   Lullus 1964, *Vita coetanea*, § 13, p. 153: 'Reddidit ergo Raymundus gracias Deo, letus, qui et a nece predicti Sarraceni servaverat manus eius innoxias, et eum a perplexitate illa gravi, pro qua paulo ante ipsum anxius exoraverat, liberaverat.'

[44]   Codex Karlsruhe St Peter, perg. 92. Cf. Pindl 1995, 'Breviculum', pp. 51–54; Pindl 1995, 'Miniaturen', p. 508.

[45]   Ignatius 1991, *Autobiography* § 15, p. 74.

[46]   As to the extent of Lull's influence on Sabundus (cf. Sanchez Nogales 1995, p. 524) doubts have been raised (Puig 1994), because the younger lay theologian was certainly not a 'Lullist' in a schematic sense.

[47]   'Man' here means human being, Latin: *homo*, male or female, and pronouns like 'he/his' refer only to the grammatical *genus*.

[48]   Augustinus, *Enarratio in Psalmum 45*, nr. 7: 'Liber tibi sit pagina divina, ut haec audias; liber tibi sit orbis terrarum, ut haec videas.' For Scotus Eriugena see Duclow 2006, chapter III.

towards God and his neighbor.'[49] The book is to show that man can understand his relationship to God by reflecting on nature and on his own nature, a logic which will lead him to understanding God and moral conduct, namely human relationships and duty towards God. However in order to enhance reading this universal book, God deemed it appropriate to bestow on man the book of revelation that helps in understanding nature, more precisely, understanding the moral and theological meaning of creature. The method of the book is described in terminology that is reminiscent of Lull, namely, it is a 'science that argues with infallible arguments that cannot be contradicted, because they are based on every human being's true experience, that is, arguments from creatures and the nature of man himself. […] No knowledge is more certain than that through experience and above all everyone's internal experience.'[50] To make the reader really sure that this cognition is humanly accessible within the boundaries of nature Sabundus underscores that 'this science does not cite anything, neither the Holy Scripture, nor any theologian. It rather confirms for us the Holy Scripture, and through it man believes Holy Scripture more firmly, and therefore it precedes Holy Scripture from the human perspective.'[51] This passage was the one that caused the prologue, from which it is quoted, to be put on the *Index of Prohibited Books*. The knowledge promised consists in a constant parallel between nature and Scripture: the first book, that is nature, was given to man from the very beginning of man and world and in that sense 'any creature is nothing but a letter written by God's finger'.[52] The other book was given to man in the second place because of a 'defect' of the first book that no man was able to read because he was blind. 'Nevertheless, the first book, namely that of creatures, is common to all, whereas the book of Scripture is not common to all, because only clerics know to read it.'[53] If Sabundus was influenced by Lull, then it was probably with his predilection for letter metaphors. In an assumption analogous to Lull's he conceived of man as a letter in the alphabet of nature that is written by God: 'In this book also man is contained, he is first and foremost a letter of this very book.'[54] This can mean that man is the main letter in the book, but more probably and more literally Sabundus teaches that the most interesting writing in the book of creatures is man himself.

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[49]   Sabundus 1966, p. 25*: 'Incipit Liber naturae sive creaturarum. In quo tractatur specialiter de homine et natura eius in quantum homo, et de eis, quae sunt necessaria ad cognoscendum se ipsum et Deum et omne debitum, ad quod homo tenetur et obligatur tam Deo quam proximo.' The popular title *Theologia naturalis* (*Natural Theology*) appeared in the first prints.

[50]   Ibid. p. 33*: '[…] et maxime per experientiam cuiuslibet intra seipsum.' Similar thoughts may be found in Campanella, see Ponzio 2001, pp. 219–225.

[51]   Ibid. p. 35*: '[…] et ideo praecedit Scripturam sacram quoad nos.'

[52]   Ibid.

[53]   Ibid. p. 36*

[54]   Ibid.: '[…] et est principaliter littera ipsius libri.'

Hence, if there appears to be a contrast between the two books it is merely a matter of hermeneutics, in which both books, with man included, comment upon each other. Sabundus exercises what later was to become the hermeneutic circle, in which the natural and the divine spheres melt in the human horizon. For although the book of nature remained insufficient for man to understand, at least understanding the relationship between the two books as mutually enlightening and perceiving the human interest as the main message of either book are purely rational.

The reception of this work was twofold: it can be judged to be the origin of the discipline of natural theology, that is, an extension of the traditional medieval rational presuppositions of faith (*praeambula fidei*) that pave the way to understanding matters of faith like the Trinity. The other way to see the book is as founding a theological anthropology. The very title of the later prints of this book as *Theologia naturalis* invited the interpretation that Sabundus wanted to do away with revelation and base the understanding of God exclusively on reason. The other interpretation, the anthropological one, has the bulk of the text in its favor, for most of the book speaks about man in relation to God and human self-understanding. Man is said to be 'outside of himself, remote and distant from himself by the maximum distance' because he ignores himself.[55] Self-awareness is the human task, which can be achieved by reflection and comparison, again a motive that was also in the background of Raymond Lull's method:

> If man wants to see clearly whether his properties are great and of high dignity, he must compare himself with the lower animals that do not have that. For this is all the secret and the key to the full understanding of man of himself; if he fails to do that he will never know himself and will never be content with God, but if he does it he will know himself more and more and see by experience how great it is what he has beyond the animals.[56]

Sabundus introduces human dignity, a favorite concept of Renaissance humanism, as the touchstone that differentiates and unites humanity with lower beings and with God. And, more importantly, he introduces it as a cognitive property and process. The very capacity to compare oneself with other creatures and to 'position' oneself in the hierarchy of beings—that capacity as such qualifies man as distinct from animals. (In Giovanni Pico's *Oration on the Dignity of Man* it will elevate man even above Angels.) Cognitive self-referentiality dominates Sabundus's anthropology. For instance the virgin birth of Christ is presented as a matter of dignity in conceiving humanity:

> It is better for man and more dignified (*dignius*) to assert and believe that this man, whose dignity is united with deity, was conceived from the Holy Spirit […]

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[55]   Ibid. p. 44*.
[56]   Ibid. titulus 63, p. 81.

and it is better and more dignified to believe that he was born from a virgin than from a fallen woman, because in all things human nature is made noble, since this man was more noble and excellent than all men […].[57]

Belief ennobles man. The hermeneutics of mutual illustration was to become effective in Cusanus, as we will see in the next chapter, where the question is addressed in which way and in which sense human understanding can hope for understanding humanity and divinity.

The anthropological implication of Sabundus became virulent through Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592). In his famous book *Apology for Raymond Sebond*—a chapter of his *Essays*—Montaigne pretended to defend the Catalan thinker, but one can also say that he wielded a scathing critique of his natural–theological approach under the disguise of an apology.[58] In the introductory remarks he ridicules Sabundus as an illiterate who wrote 'Spanish with Latin endings'.[59] When he adds that he found Sabundus's imaginations beautiful (*belles les imaginations*) and full of piety and observed that many people enjoy reading it, 'especially ladies, to whom we owe greater courtesy',[60] he signals that he does not take the book seriously. Beautiful imaginations are the stuff for ladies, not for scholars.[61] Montaigne also reports that he had asked the late Adrian Turnebus (Turnèbe, 1512–1565) about the credentials of the author and had learned that this book was 'a quintessence distilled from St. Thomas Aquinas'.[62] Quite reassuring information, unless one knows that Turnebus was of dubitable Catholic orthodoxy, primarily a philologist, and editor of Hermetic texts that had also interested Marsilio Ficino. It is as though someone had inquired with the late Stephen Jay Gould about the orthodoxy of Teilhard de Chardin, S.J.,—both Turnebus and Gould were excellent authorities, just not in theology. It should be stated for the record that the *Natural Theology* is not remotely Thomistic, especially because it is predominantly influenced by Anselm of Canterbury, who in theological method was much opposed by Aquinas, particularly regarding the ontological proof of the existence of God. It is obvious that Sabundus's as well as Lull's methods are germane to Anselm and his method of overlapping epistemology and ontology of the divine.[63]

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[57] Ibid. titulus 75, pp. 97 f.

[58] On doubts concerning Montaigne's sincerity that go back to the early nineteenth century see Weber 1993, p. 184, and Bippus 2000, pp. 173 f.

[59] Montaigne, *Essays* II 2, Montaigne 1991, p. 490.

[60] Ibid. p. 491; Montaigne 2007, p. 459 f.

[61] It seems that Roman censors did not take Montaigne's work seriously, either, and for the same reason, it was nothing but some elegant reading: Bideaux 1994, p. 172.

[62] Montaigne 1991, p. 491 and 460.

[63] Sanchez Nogales 1995, p. 523, cites Anselm's 'tendencia racionalista' and 'restauratción de la naturaleza humana caída'; cf. Mellizo 1985. As to the difference with Aquinas see Bideaux 1994, pp. 168 f.

Montaigne's defense is directed at two objections, which he quotes. First: 'that Christians do themselves wrong by wishing to support their belief with human reasons: belief is grasped only by faith and by private inspiration from God's grace.' The second critique was: 'some say that his arguments are weak and unsuited to what he wants to demonstrate.'[64] The refusal of the second critique is the remainder of the nearly 200 pages of the essay. The first is countered by stating:

> in a matter so holy, so sublime, so far surpassing Man's intellect as is that Truth by which it has pleased God in his goodness to enlighten us, we can only grasp that Truth and lodge it within us if God favors us with the privilege of further help, beyond the natural order. I do not believe, then, that purely human means have the capacity to do this […]. Only faith can embrace, with a lively certainty, the high mysteries of our religion.[65]

The defense confirms the critique, or at least endorses the standpoint of the critique. The natural–theological reading of Sabundus's book praises the natural intelligence of man to understand the mystery of creation. The anthropological reading is more humble. And yet, elevation of man to the dignity that permits him to fathom the divine is all the message of the Natural Theology. The critique as reported by Montaigne wishes Raymond Sebond to be a proto-Protestant who believes in Christ alone and even in private inspiration as the only source of theological insight. To which Montaigne in a gentlemanly manner and with the disclaimer not to be a theologian retorts that the alleged heretic is not at all wrong because he indeed preaches the gospel of his critics and embraces sola gratia and sola fide: supernatural aid, God's personal favor and only faith. Montaigne's defense of Sabundus undoes his reasoning. The further course of the apology dwells at length in classical sources, not the least Lucretius, to Renaissance readers the herald and epitome of ancient atheism. It concludes with a lengthy quotation from Plutarch that belies the assurance that 'excellent souls in ancient times […] failed to reach such knowledge by discursive reasoning' concerning the divine truth, with which Montaigne had soothingly opened his essay.[66] Without signs of awareness of the inconsistency, at the end Plutarch is quoted to have understood: 'nothing really IS but He alone; of Him you cannot say He was or He will be: he has no beginning and no end'. Montaigne assures his readers that this is a 'very religious conclusion of the pagan' and hammers home his own fideist message about religion. Quoting Seneca with a statement that perfectly epitomizes the dignity-of-man rhetoric ('Oh, what a vile and abject thing is man […] if he does not rise above humanity.'), on which not only the humanists built but also Sabundus, he calls it an 'absurd'

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64   Montaigne 1991, p. 491 and 500.
65   Ibid. p. 491 f.
66   Ibid.

desire or aspiration.[67] To reach for the unreachable (to make 'an armful larger than the arm') and to rise above humanity is condemned to be 'monstrous'. Man, he says, 'will rise if God proffers him—extraordinarily—His hand'. Consequently no virtue, no reason can help man in his endeavor to lift his heart: 'It is for our Christian faith […] to aspire to that holy and miraculous metamorphosis.'[68] So, faith alone is what Montaigne preaches in a feigned attempt at getting the unknown and uncouth Catalan[69] out of the firing line. But his last word is an exercise in duplicity, for it reconnects Christian terminology of salvation (metanoesis) with pagan mythology. The pretext of the book, a donation of Sabundus's work from a friend to Montaigne's father intended to be a shield and remedy against the upcoming threat of the 'novelties of Luther […] this new disease [that] would soon degenerate into loathsome atheism',[70] appears on hindsight as just another cover for Montaigne's attack on rationalism. The rhetorician Montaigne[71] sets the signposts that mark the extremes of his discourse: Aquinas's orthodoxy and Luther's heresy. Between those the body of the book mocks any claim of humanity's elevated status and man's capability to understand anything in general and the divine particularly.[72] Under the cover of plentiful entertaining reading, of excerpts from the best-known and from less accessible sources, and with the posture of the skeptic (meaning: wise) Montaigne dismantles the fundamental presupposition of any truth claim, namely the capacity to make any claim. So crumbles Sabundus's Book of Creatures and its natural theology leaving the ruins to mock religions that are ready to crop up.

Of course resistance to skepticism would not die out, nor would attempts at enlightening faith with reason. One might say that both Lull's God who is never idle and Sabundus's second revelation testify for nothing but the modern 'God of the gap'—a concept of God that seems to be invented just to help out human ignorance. The impressing dynamics of their theology, however, surges from the mutual illumination of reason and Scripture or world and the Word of God. Montaigne seems to have perceived the world as unintelligible and therefore described the human individual as thrown into blind faith and doubt. That was not Lull's or Sabundus's message. The world as such is enough of a revelation but it is miraculously enhanced by an after-revelation:

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[67]   Ibid. p. 683.

[68]   Ibid.

[69]   Montaigne's dedication of his translation of Raymond Sebond's book, ibid. p. liv: 'his uncouth bearing'.

[70]   Ibid. p. 490. Montaigne had translated the book into French. On his modifications of some theological passages see M.A. Screech in Montaigne 1991, pp. xxiii f. Cf. Bideaux 1994, p. 167; Hendrik 2001, pp. 175–202. It should be noted that Lull–Sabundus–Montaigne share one single page in A. Levi's narrative of 'the intellectual genesis' of Renaissance and Reformation (Levi 2002, p. 137).

[71]   Cf. Struever 2002.

[72]   Cf. Gontier 1998, Part I, Chapter II: 'La misère sans grandeur de l'homme.'

God has set up Two Lights, to enlighten us in our way: The Light of Reason, which is the Light of Creation; and the Light of Scripture, Which is after-Revelation from him. Let us make use of these two Lights, and Suffer neither to be put out.[73]

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[73] An Aphorism of 1651 by Benjamin Whichcote, one of the Cambridge Platonists of the seventeenth century; quoted from Taliaferro and Teply 2004, p. 135.

Chapter 2

Nicholas of Cusa and Pythagorean Theology

If there is any consensus concerning Renaissance philosophical theology, then it regards the extraordinary importance of Nicholas of Cusa (Cusanus, 1401–1464). Accordingly there is a healthy amount of scholarly work that engages with his thought, especially his *Learned Ignorance* (*De docta ignorantia*) and his book *On Conjectures* (*De coniecturis*). Both works offer themselves to a reader conversant with German idealism and philosophy of mind as surprisingly modern.[1] In more recent years obviously due to present day tribulations, his work on tolerance, *On Peace of Religion* (*De pace fidei*), has garnered some attention.[2] However in order to weave Cusanus into the narrative of this book I should like to suggest a different approach. It would be, namely, to read his work with the eyes of a learned person at about 1600, a contemporary of Giordano Bruno and Tommaso Campanella and thus still a member of the same Renaissance philosophy as Cusanus was: Petrus Bungus (Pietro Bongo, died 1601), who published a book on number mysticism that frequently drew upon Nicholas of Cusa. For the sake of experiment, let us assume we had never heard of Cusanus and tried to find out, through Bungus, what he had to teach. With this approach we avoid the temptation of projecting modern philosophical insights of rationalism, transcendental or even analytical philosophy onto this Renaissance thinker. Rather, we learn how Renaissance readers interpreted his thoughts, and from there we may understand Cusanus's thoughts on God and humanity. The first thing to notice is, then, that for him Cusanus's most important, that is, most frequently quoted work is his *Excitationes*, or *Sermons*, rather than any of the other works previously mentioned, nowadays held to be his masterpieces. Apparently in those homilies on scriptural readings Cusanus developed his theology that he enhanced by some numerological speculations, as we will see.

When Petrus Bungus published his *Numerorum Mysteria* in 1599 he expressly intended to prove the compatibility of Pythagorean numerology with Christian doctrine.[3] This work bears all the characteristics of late Renaissance

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[1] The reason for this interest in Cusanus, especially among German scholars, derives from the fact that Johann Georg Hamann and Georg Friedrich Hegel were interested in him as a source of Giordano Bruno, who had been publicized in the late eighteenth century by Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi as a possible source of Spinoza. However, this is not the issue of this chapter.

[2] Most recently: Riedenauer 2007, with ample bibliography.

[3] Bungus 1983, To the Reader, fol. c2 r: 'Gregorius ille Theologus … Oratione prima in Iulianum, disciplinam Christianam testatur esse Pythagoricam.' He bolsters his claim

syncretism as sponsored by Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico and of pre-baroque encyclopedism.[4] The author despises the scholastics' rationalizing and believes in the power of authorities, whom he endeavors to compile as completely as possible on the mystic and symbolic meaning of numbers.

Of course it is not the purpose of this chapter to do any justice to the encyclopedic scope of Bungus's work, the only purpose being to shed light on Cusanus from his perspective. However, Nicholas of Cusa was certainly one of the favorite inspirations, since quotations from him appear at least 25 times throughout the work, of which the first nine instances refer to the chapter on the number One, including a reference to *De coniecturis* which, in fact, opens the Preface. These teachings may be summarized in the following way, as they appear in Bungus.

Numbers are the natural principles of reasoning, as well as of all things, because whatever there is and is known is known in a numerical way: 'Number is the natural vibrant principle of the rational fabric.'[5] In his book *On Conjectures* Cusanus had compared the human capability of making assumptions with the infinite reason of God because both manifest creativity in some way. Hence followed his inference that reason alone is the measure of quantity, and hence this statement that the principle of reason as such is number.[6] Bungus's comparing this quotation with the sermon *Qui me inveniet* was bold but appropriate. The topic of the sermon was the Immaculate Conception of St Mary, which according to Cusanus is 'not to be disregarded as a story but founded in reason', since intellectual conception is the 'generation of the internal word in the mind itself'.[7] In other words reason is what holds theological mystery and understanding together. Number as the power of reason illustrates this point: if someone had first invented number, he

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with the assertion that Pythagorean philosophy took its origin from the Jews (c2 v).

    [4]   Cf. Meier-Oeser 1989, Chapter 3, specifically pp. 127–28.

    [5]   Bungus 1983, p. 1: 'Numerus est rationalis fabricae naturale quoddam principium.' Reference to the sermon *Qui me inveniet* (*Excitationes* 10, fol.186 r) and *De coniecturis* I 4 (see following note). The sermons (*Exitationes*) will be quoted from Cusanus 1962, volume 2; here: *Exitatio*, book 10, fol. 186 r.; the critical edition within his *Opera omnia* (Leipzig/Hamburg: Meiner, 1932–2008), volumes 16–19, is scarcely available; and Bungus might have used the Paris edition. Note: the sermons are traditionally cited by the biblical quotations in their headline. A note on translating Cusanus: his Latin is so creative and full of undertones that I take the liberty to choose between existing translations or to translate myself.

    [6]   *De coniecturis* I 4 (I 2), paraphrased by Bungus: 'Rationalis fabricae naturale quoddam pullulans principium numerus est.' (Cusanus 1972, p. 11—this critical edition changed the traditional numbering of chapters, as given first, into those added in parenthesis) One translation reads: 'The natural, sprouting origin of the rational art is number.' (Cusanus 1993, p. 60.) 'Fabrica' is also used in Chapter 3 (1, p. 6: 'mens nostra … rationalis suae fabricae') and obviously encompasses both cognitive and ontological structures. At any rate, the Latin word-order states the equivalence of order and number.

    [7]   *Exitatio*, book 10, fol. 186 r: '… intellectus concipit, seu de se generat verbum internum.'

would enumerate everything by it. The result is that number as such is not part of the numerable objects—and in a similar way Jesus as a human being took origin from something that was not part of the human condition, which includes lust and sin.[8] Incarnation, for Cusanus a key problem of the relationship between God and world, is often explained by the interference of rationality and ontology on the level of the creative mind that by way of reason penetrates the structure of reality figuratively or actually founded in numbers.

Undoubtedly there must be a basis of any number, which is unity that pervades all numbers—a doctrine adapted from Cusanus's *De filiatione Dei* where Cusanus describes of the relation between God and everything other than God by the analogy between unity, termed monad, and any number. Qua principle unity transcends what is constituted by it, but the unattainable One is attainable in everything that participates in unity. As an example, the 'denary has everything which it is from the monad, without which denary were not one number and not the denary.'[9] The relationship between numbered things and unity may be explained by way of participation that both allows for gradation and marks the same difference between number and numerable objects as that between time and timelessness in God the Creator.[10] However, unity and number are pervasive in the world, and this may be illustrated by the nature of the human soul, in as much as she is one and simple and, at the same time, gathers the variety of virtues, as Cusanus had explained in a sermon: the intellective soul holds a position 'below the First Cause and prior to what is caused as though it were at the same time caused and cause, and as though the First Cause had caused itself.' This is explained by ascribing the traditional four Aristotelian causes to the intellective soul itself as her four major virtues, namely, temperance as material cause, prudence as the formal, justice as final, and fortitude as efficient cause. Hence follows the quantitative simplicity of the soul because in her every virtue she is enclosed in any other, up to a full convergence of all virtues: 'Thus prudence is no true virtue if not sober, just and strong.'[11] The major virtue, love (*amor*), in itself is a oneness, since it is impossible to prefer two people equally, so that one of the two loves would not be true love.[12] Even multifold things, as all finite beings happen to be, are one in the sense that they unite: they unite properties in the same way as charitable love (*caritas*) unifies

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[8]   *Exitatio*, book 10, fol. 186 r.

[9]   Bungus 1983, p. 15; quoted from *De filiatione Dei* 4 (Cusanus 1962, vol. 1 fol. 67 v ; Cusanus 1959, p. 53); note that Bungus changed 'monade' into 'unitate'. English from Cusanus 1993, p. 182.

[10]   Bungus 1983, p. 23; quotation from *Ecce evanglizo*, fol. 51 v; cf. Bungus p. 25.

[11]   Cusanus, Sermon *Dominabuntur populis*, fol. 147 v, quoted in Bungus 1983, p. 33.

[12]   Bungus 1983, p. 43; quotations from Cusanus, *Quaerite primum regnum Dei*, *Excitationes* 5, fol. 74 v, and another sermon *Quaerite ergo primum regnum Dei*, *Excitationes* 8, fol. 141 r–v; the context in Cusanus is duality.

what it loves, which implies that unity coincides with peace and rest.[13] From this we may infer that it is oneness that emanates virtue in such a way that the biblical *unum necessarium* (Luke 10:42: 'one thing is needful') may be turned around in the sense that it is not only one main thing man is to focus on but, rather, that the attention to oneness assimilates everything into spiritual necessity. For, after quoting Luke, Bungus adds from Cusanus: 'Everything desires to assimilate to its principle [Cusanus: creator], which is one; for assimilation is of the cause of love.'[14] To conclude this section on unity: one is the principle of all things and actions, as can be proven through the need to have only one ruler, 'even if the government is made up of several leading men united in agreement. Otherwise confusion would arise …'[15]

Now there is plurality in the world, and indeed this starts with duality. Dual numbers are named pair because they partition and destroy unity to the extent that it could be said that one defeats one.[16] But things become more complicated (if one may use that word in Cusanian context) with the Holy Trinity. Unsurprisingly the book on number mysticism when treating the number Three affords more speculations on Trinity taken from Cusanus. Trinity can be explained as the activity within the One, since God abhors idleness; that is to say the numeric structure of God is triadic because of the triadic structure of his properties: 'God is most vigorous and having nothing imperfect, small or minute in His essence he necessarily abhors idleness; otherwise he would be most idle and consequently highest beatitude would consist in laziness and rest, which is impossible.'[17] In the following sentences, also quoted by Bungus, Cusanus shows his indebtedness to Raymond Lull. As we have seen in the chapter on Lull the impossibility of inactivity was one of his major arguments for the necessary emanation of the creation out of God's metaphysical exuberance. Cusanus and his sixteenth-century reader referred to the three 'correlatives': action arises from the agent and the 'actionable' that can be acted upon.[18] In one of the excerpts that Cusanus made for himself from various writings of Raymond Lull the notions of non-idleness and of correlatives are combined to the extent that both verge on the margin of pantheism:

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[13]   Bungus 1983, p. 49; Cusanus, *Beatus venter*, *Excitationes* 5, fol. 82 r.

[14]   Bungus 1983, p. 50; Cusanus, *Tu qui es*, *Excitationes* 1, fol. 7 v; reference to *unum necessarium* repeatedly on fol. 7 r–v. Quotation from Cusanus, *Hic est verus propheta*, *Excitationes* 5, fol. 81 v.

[15]   Bungus 1983, p. 52 f.; Cusanus, *The Catholic Concordance* (Cusanus 1991) III, Preface, § 282, p. 210.

[16]   Bungus 1983, pp. 62 and 80 with reference to Cusanus, *Quaerite primum regnum Dei*, *Excitationes* 5, folio 74 v.

[17]   Bungus 1983, p. 108; Cusanus, *In principio erat verbum*, *Excitationes* 1, fol. 12 r.

[18]   Ibid.: 'Tertium surgit ex agente et eo in quod actio fit [Cusanus: agibili], id autem est agere.' Raymond Lull is identified as the source by a marginal note, probably due to the editor of the work, Faber Stapulensis.

… goodness (*bonitas*) cannot be the reason for the good to do good without the three correlatives *bonificativum, bonificabile* and *bondificare*, … what makes good (*bonificans*) is not what can be made good (*bonificabile*), because otherwise the essence of relation were missing (*privaretur*). For that absence (*privatio*) were distorted so that goodness would have no nature and were empty and idle (*uacua et ociosa*) … Nevertheless it may be said that every correlative is the total essence of goodness, and itself is any correlative, being itself one undivided non-composite essence in its primality, truth, and necessity.[19]

Accordingly, trinity is projected throughout creation beginning with the activity of the angelic mind that—like a painter who first clears the surface, whitens it and then paints—purifies, enlightens and perfects the hierarchy of beings (a triadic structure expressly borrowed from Dionysius the Areopagite).[20] Triadic relations as images of the Trinity permeate all things, including human actions and the causality of beings (in the latter case: efficient, formal, and final causality): 'Art springs from the exercise of the artisan, and the artifice is in art as the Father is in the Son; and art is in the artifice as the Son is in the Father. What preserves the workman in the work (*operantem in opera*) is the delight, which is that good that proceeds from the exercise and the art.'[21] Later in the same sermon Cusanus expressly states that 'in every single created thing we see the triple and one God (*trinum et unum deum*) in some way of participation … In all lowest and highest creatures there is essence, virtue, and operation; and every essence of whatever creature consists of possibility, act, and union.'[22] Thus Bungus in quoting from that sermon emphasizes the metaphysical and theological implications of Cusanus's indebtedness to Lull. Again Bungus and Cusanus stress the mode of thought according to which it is the combination of triad and oneness, the essence of the Trinity that constitutes every single being making it an image of the Trinitarian God. For it has 'Being, Virtue, Operation and is therefore made of Potency, Object, and Act and is composed of its inherent correlatives'.[23] The oneness of God is confirmed by His names, and it should be noted that here Cusanus refers to '*Hebrew tradition*', that is Cabala, according to which there are eight names of God but only one was given to him by himself, namely the Tetragrammaton (YHWH), which Cusanus renders as 'ineffable, that is, to intellect incomprehensible'.[24]

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[19]   Roth 1999, § 20, pp. 55 f.

[20]   Bungus 1983, p. 115; Cusanus, *Mitto angelum meum ante faciem*, *Excitationes* 5, fol. 79 r.

[21]   Bungus 1983, p. 158 f.; Cusanus, *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus*, *Excitationes* 8, fol. 144 v.

[22]   Cusanus, ibid.

[23]   Bungus 1983, p. 130; Cusanus, *In primcipio erat verbum*, *Excitationes* 1, fol. 13 v.

[24]   Cusanus, *In principio erat verbum*, *Excitationes* 1, fol. 12 r: 'ineffabile, id est per intellectum incomprehensibile'.

Drawing upon Moses Maimonides Cusanus maintains that the other divine names are derived from His powers.

In one sermon Cusanus compares the triad of being–virtue–operation with the power of the magnet whose virtue stems from its essence and whose operation proceeds from both essence and virtue; according to this physics virtue is a predicate of the essence, which cannot be understood if not by explaining the operation: it is some kind of 'spirit' in it from the magnets that attracts a piece of iron, and so on.[25] Since attraction is experienced especially in emotions, Bungus also claims Cusanus to create a parallel between the three Persons of the Trinity and virtue–beauty–usefulness. He found, indeed, in his source the observation that what is emotionally attractive and useful corresponds to what the intellect finds true and credible.[26] Bungus then compares the letter A with the geometric triangle, which incorporates equality of lines and rectitude of angles and as such serves as a simile for God, again following Nicholas of Cusa, this time using his famous book *On Learned Ignorance*.[27] The same reference is taken up by Bungus a few pages later in order to claim that the triad, as a multifold unity, is the principle of all other numbers.[28]

Speculations on the number Four afford further insights into Cusanus's philosophical theology. While the properties of God as creator seem to have triadic structure, the name of God proper is quadruple, and it is Cusanus's German experience that contributes some examples, namely the German word GOTT, and the Slavic BOEG, with the cunning explanation that in each case the word signifies 'good'.[29] In a digression during the presentation of the Pythagorean interpretation of quaternal structures that also affect the doctrine of the soul, we learn that Cusanus held contrary to the doctrine of Origen that the soul is prior to the body 'by nature, not temporally', although a close look into the source shows that the philosopher had meant specifically the mind or intellect.[30]

Seven is the last elementary, and sacred, number applied by Cusanus, which gives occasion to learn about his teachings on the world of man. Even though man was created on the sixth day, according to Genesis, it is the seventh day, as he says under obvious influence of Augustine, when man will come to rest. This is also

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[25]   Cusanus, *Paracletus autem spiritus sanctus*, *Excitationes* 5, fol. 85 r; Bungus 1983, p. 130, refers probably to this passage.

[26]   Bungus 1983, p. 132; Cusanus, *Fides autem catholica haec est*, *Excitationes* 2, fol. 25 r.

[27]   Bungus 1983, p. 165, with reference to Cusanus, *Learned Ignorance* 1, Chapter 12.

[28]   Bungus 1983, p. 181. A more appropriate reference would have been Chapter 19.

[29]   Bungus 1983, p. 228; Cusanus, *In principio*, *Excitationes* 1, fol. 12 r; however Cusanus's emphasis is on goodness and on unity in the variety of names that reflect the variety of God's works (with particular reference to Moses Maimonides): 'Et Alemannice Eingot id est eingut.'

[30]   Bungus 1983, p. 248; Cusanus, *Idiota de mente* 5, Cusanus 2001, vol. 1, p. 547.

expressed in the *Pater noster*, since it is in exactly the seventh petition when one prays to be delivered from evil—hence Seven is the number of quietude:

> Man is the Sixth Day, that is, the microcosm. God created everything by the word; but the word is an infinite art; creatures, however, are participations of the infinite art, while the art is the eternal word or mind, the infinite light or wisdom. The way everything created came into being gradually by participating in that eternal light—all that has been described by Moses. Also, how He in the last and sixth degree [Bungus: day] created man to His image and likeness; however man He created towards himself [this left out by Bungus: while all animals and all creatures rest in man quasi in their end, whereas] man rests only in the seventh or Sabbath day. Sabbath however is light that we read not to be created; rather, God blessed it on the seventh day. Hence only in that uncreated light, called Sabbath, there is man's quietude and only in Sabbath there is man's blessed light.[31]

Not only the life span of a human being is measured in seven-year rhythms, but also history evolves in spans of seven hundred years, and the whole world history comes to its completion in seven ages, but will ultimately—again following Augustine—turn into the eighth era which on a higher level will repeat the first.[32] Of the other numbers it is only forty that gives occasion to learn from Cusanus. In this case it is the forty days of fasting of Christ that instituted the forty days of Lent celebrated in the Church; Cusanus adduces it just as one example that we always have to follow Christ's example, because all of Christ's actions serve as instruction.[33]

Again, if we had never heard of this author, we would be impressed by his combining mystical and linguistic with technical theological approaches. The powerful opening statement of Bungus's preface, mentioned at the beginning, is an example of that. Therefore we should now revisit some of the statements reported above and follow through Nicholas's way of preaching philosophy.

The assertion that number is the prolific natural principle of rational operations (as I may rephrase the opening statement now) is explained as saying that number is the principle of everything thinkable and that 'reason's unfolding of number and its using number to make surmises is nothing other than reason's using itself and mentally fashioning all [surmised] things in a natural, supreme likeness of itself—just as in and through His Co-eternal Word, God (who is Infinite Mind) communicates being to things.'[34] To apply numbers by way of reason is therefore

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[31] Bungus 1983, pp. 283–284; Cusanus, *Constituite diem solemnem*, *Excitationes* 3, p. 50 v.

[32] Bungus 1983, p. 327 and p. 633; Cusanus, *Alleluia dies sanctificatus* (2nd excerpt), *Excitationes* 3, p. 52 r.

[33] Bungus 1983, p. 505; Cusanus, *Crucifixus resurrexit*, *Excitationes* 8, p. 145 r.

[34] *De coniecturis* I 4 (I 2); Cusanus 2001, volume 1, p. 166; 'coniectura' is rendered as 'surmise'. Cf. Harries 1990 on Cusanus's speculations on infinity.

equivalent to reason's utilizing itself and to 'figure' everything by way of similitude to that very reason itself. We had already seen that Bungus creatively connected this passage with the sermon *Qui me inveniet* about the immaculate conception of Mary. Its reasonableness is illustrated by a discussion of 'conception' in the double meaning of insemination and rational operation: 'I understand "conception of wisdom" as the way in which the intellect conceives, i.e. generates out of itself the internal word.'[35] Cusanus's number speculations, taken together with his philosophical justification of Immaculate Conception, lead to a sapiential understanding that consists in a spontaneous production of a concept independent of external relations. Cusanus is describing, here, what we would call an *a priori* idea. The intellective *a priori* is structurally the same in human understanding of quantitative data as in the generation of the Son of God and in God's communicative way of being the Creator. Therefore reason, to be understood as pure and untainted intellect or wisdom, is the basis of everything:

> If one would first figure a number and then would number everything by this number, then this number would be a conception of reason or intellect and, existing before anything that is counted, it would not belong to the countable things … For the principle of countable things is nothing out of the countable things and of what depends on them. To number is to reason. [numerare est ratiocinari.] Everything that turns out well becomes so by reason.[36]

In the same sermon Cusanus develops the power of similitude that governs numerical thought as stated:
Like a king transmits the imprint of his will on the officials, thus creating the officials who are his similitude and like a seal imprints the letters in wax, which are thereby similitude to the seal, in a similar way 'God imprints similitudes of his ideas, thus communicating Himself to the intellect.'[37]

We see that for Cusanus numbers are of such nature that they express the outreach of the intellect out of itself towards what is not essentially its own. What I call outreach, the power to attain beyond the self, has the power to produce order: From the perspective of the creative mind it orders things by way of making them (as the king's commands make the essence of the military order), whereas from the perspective of understanding the creative power is the point of reference of perceiving order. This perception is of itself an outreach that emanates an order analogous to that perceived, as in numbering objects. Not surprisingly for anyone familiar with Pythagoreanism, both the numerical order of the world and numbering, that is to say, number as the principle of being and of rationally accounting, coincide. Therefore the

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[35]   Cusanus, *Qui me inveniet*, *Excitationes* 10, fol.186 r.
[36]   Ibid.
[37]   Ibid., fol. 188 r.

technological and the theoretical would then be the selfsame. … Presumably it is so. … If you conjecture such a thing, you must be able to give us some explanation of this. … Perhaps. And yet only in the manner of an inkling [ahnungsweise]. If you can make do with an approximate indication, then I would like to try to provide one. In the course of this conversation the mathematical projection of nature was mentioned. Thinking presents nature to itself as the spatiotemporally ordered plurality of mass-points in motion. With a view to this essence of nature, natural processes are re-presented. In this fashion, nature is the 'pro-', that is, the pro-duced toward the re-presenting human. As what is so pro-duced or set-forth, nature is as that which stands-over-against the human. As object of human representation, nature is procured for it and thus pro-duced. Producing as setting-forth, thought in this manner, is the basic trait of the objectification of nature. … This producing turns from the outset everything natural into the objectivity of mathematical representation. … But this representational setting forth of nature into objectiveness remains a kind of making manifest of nature.[38]

This is a quotation from Martin Heidegger that—regardless of the twentieth-century philosopher's critique—accurately describes Nicholas of Cusa's method of using mathematics in the conjectural way to describe the epistemology and ontology of the world known. 'Making manifest of nature' stands for 'des Offenbarmachens der Natur', whereby *offenbarmachen* connotes revelation. Granted that for Cusanus divine creation is the paradigm of human numerological understanding, and granted that Heidegger describes what he calls 'the theoretical' without theological implications, the convergence of both thinkers is striking.

As a preacher, that is, as a theologian who is expected to interpret the Gospel, Cusanus appeals to the intellect of his audience in order to convey the reasonability of a mystery by pointing to the quasi-mystical powers of human understanding—and numbering is an instance of that.

In the sermon *Spiritu ambulate* (Galatians 5:16) he quotes the statement of Platonic philosophers that the soul is composed of 'the same and the different': hence 'the soul is quasi a living number composed of the pair or par, i.e. what can be partitioned, and the impair or impartitionable, because the soul is life itself that can be understood as *numerus numerans*.' The power of the soul as number alive enables her 'to intuit harmony in herself as she measures extrinsic visible harmony by her incorruptible inner harmony'.[39] Please note the dialectical entanglement: The soul uncovers her inner harmony by observing exterior harmony thanks to her very inner nature. Consciousness follows cognition. The same inner relation is then

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[38]   Heidegger 1995, pp. 11 f. I use in part the English translation by Bret Davis, who kindly provided me with the typescript of his soon-to-be published translation of the *Feldweggespräche* (*Country Path Conversations*). Italics are mine: note the language of surmise in the context of mathematical projection. It is unknown to me, whether Heidegger was conversant with Cusanus.

[39]   Cusanus, *Spiritu ambulate*, *Excitationes* 7, fol. 119 r/v.

expressed by reference to the Pythagorean number Ten which comprises all basic numbers and proportions. But the soul is not only a 'living number ten' (*denarius vivus*) she is also a 'golden Dinar alive' by measuring money that easily converts its value into other currencies, encompassing in itself a multitude of monetary values. According to this simile, 'the understanding is quasi the exchange rate (*valor*) of whatever it can understand.'[40] In another sermon, *Erunt novissimi primi et primi novissimi* (a homily on the *denarius* given to the workers in the vineyard: Matthew 20:16), Cusanus explicitly combines the numerical with the monetary meaning of *denarius*: It is both the 'virtual implication' (*complicatio potentialis*) of anything countable and the measure of any value, such as a horse, wine and so on. Here the simile is employed to express that our intellect is 'quasi living gold for the intellectual life'.[41] It should be noted that *aurum vivum* is a technical term of alchemy, synonym with mercury that combines in itself properties of metal and fluidity. Thus descended the Pythagorean harmony into the profane money market and the obscure alchemists' shacks. The preacher himself appears to be irritated by the worldliness of these implications. So he takes up the question of whether numbers are not confined to quantity. The answer is that number in the sense of mathematics presupposes 'some number that subsists in itself and that judges mathematical numbers'.[42] The soul, Cusanus adds, does not depend on sense perception or imagination, for her dealing with number surpasses mathematical calculation; rather, she is created so that the glory of the omnipotent Creator is manifested to her. She is conjoined to body so that she may reach out (*ut attingat*) to the visible works of God for the sake of glory of God.[43] This appears to be a pious turn, appropriate for a sermon, but it is possible thanks to the dialectical structure of numbers, of the soul, of currencies, and so on. Each of them pertains to both realms, the intellectual–conceptual and the material, and each of them is both a principle and a contingency at the same time.

To conclude this survey of numerical references in Cusanus's sermons, his interpretation of the Seventh Day of creation is of obvious interest. In his sermon *Complevit deus die septimo opus quod fecerat et requievit* we encounter the septenarian structure of human life that seems to represent the seven days' work of God. Cusanus invites his audience to exercise contemplation in seven degrees:

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40   Ibid., fol. 119 v.
41   *Excitationes* 5, fol. 75 v.
42   Cusanus, *Spiritu ambulate*, *Excitationes* 7, fol. 119 v.
43   Ibid.

Seven degrees of contemplation

1	Life in general	Animation	From body	Beautifully about the other	Vision in sense	Vision through a glass, darkly: vestige
2	Life of the senses	Sense	Through body	Beautifully through the other	Vision in imagination	Image
3	Life of imagination	Art	About body	Beautifully against the other	Vision in rational image	In a vestige of the creatures
4	Life of memory	Virtue	Towards itself	Beautifully towards the beautiful	Vision in reason according to imagination	In the image of the soul
5	Pure will of the superior beings	Tranquility	In itself	Beautifully in the beautiful	Vision in reason according to reason	In formless faith
6	Vision of the highest desirable and beloved	Access	Towards God	Beautifully towards beauty	Vision beyond reason	In formed faith
7	Vision of the dwelling of true truth	Contemplation	With God	Beautifully with the beauty	Rest before ecstatic vision	In contemplation

Cusanus, *Complevit deus die septimo opus quod fecerat et requievit, Excitationes* 2, fol. 31 r. The table is of course what I extracted from his sermon. Here the Latin version:

1	vita generalis	animatio	de corpore	pulchre de alio	visio in sensu	per speculum in aenigmate: in vestigio
2	vita sensitiva	sensus	per corpus	per aliud	in imagina-tione	in imagine
3	imaginative	ars	circa corpus	contra aliud	in imagine	in vestigio creaturarum
4	memorativa	virtus	ad seipsam	ad pulchrum	in ratione secundum imagina-tionem	in imagine animae
5	voluntas supermorum	tranquilitas	in seipsa	in pulchro	in ratione secundum rationem	in fide informi
6	videndum summum	ingressio	ad deum	ad pulchri-tudinem	super rationem	in fide formata
7	mansio veritatis	contempla-tio	apud deum	apud pulchri-tudinem	extasis, perfectio contempla-tionis	in contempla-tione

To this structure of six by seven degrees Cusanus adds four modes of image-less contemplation which I take to represent the seventh degree of contemplation, namely that of the prophets, of Moses's *facie in faciem*, of the Apostle John resting on Christ's chest, and of Adam's state of innocence. Again Lull's handwriting shines through this palimpsest of mystical apparatus. For an assessment of Cusanus's numerological speculation, however, it is worth observing that here the factual structure of the literal meaning of Genesis, that is, the seven days, is expounded as ways of contemplation for the sake of contemplation. That is,

the literal and the mystical senses of the Bible blend. Of course we may ascribe this to the homiletic genre of the text. But we cannot overestimate the cognitive operation of such blending: The days of creation do not 'stand for' some insight that escapes rationality, they are of themselves contemplative acts, and the degrees of contemplation 'produce' reality. This reality is real, as we can see in the insistence on the operation of the soul in and around bodies, the soul and her potentials.

To later mathematicians unity as the basis of numbers seems to be obvious, as may be observed in a seventeenth-century encyclopedia of mathematics by Gerolamo Vitali (1623–1698) which still held that 'number is a multitude composed of units', which was deemed to be the same as to say: 'Number is the gathering of unities.'[44] However it should be noted that this definition entails that unity, oneness, has an ontological priority over numbered issues, or that in any multiplicity numbering proceeds from analyzing experiential data to postulating a unity beyond or before the data. The same book proudly announces that, in contrast to antiquity, 'nowadays numbers can be extended to the infinite (*in infinitum protrahi*) by the art and the rules of this truly angelic science that allegedly has been invented by the hierarchic number of Angels and with their help.' Eventually the reader is referred to Petrus Bungus's work. Although Nicholas of Cusa is mentioned only in the context of attempts at squaring the circle,[45] we still see the handiwork of this kind of mathematics where oscillating between cognitive and ontological claims gives priority to spiritual beings, thus justifying cognition through spirit. The most obvious evidence consists in the fact that mathematics does approach infinity, indeed, but only with the help of spiritual beings. The modern reader might shrug here, unless he understands that Angels are defined as enjoying human intellect liberated of bodily conditions of perception.

Cusanus's interweaving of numerical sequences with degrees of reality and intuition makes cognition realistic and realism mystic. In Cusanus numbers are never just progenies of the mind, nor just symbols; he operates with numerical relations in order to capture the reality of interconnectedness in the world of mind and objects. Therefore instead of viewing Petrus Bungus's appropriation of Cusanian thought as an example of medieval number mysticism and as a beginning of baroque encyclopedism,[46] thus running the risk of abandoning both in the file cabinet of dated scholarship, a close look at Cusanus's ways of argumentation and rhetoric discloses the metaphysical and critical potential of his philosophical theology.

It may be permitted to make a comparison with twentieth-century mathematical theory. John von Neumann argued in the mid-twentieth century that mathematical structures express and depend upon logical structures. This becomes evident when intuitively known mathematical operations in the form of decimal numbers are

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[44] Vitali 2003, p. 328.

[45] Ibid. p. 408. On his geometrical experiments, see Cusanus 2007.

[46] For the latter see Meier-Oeser 1989, for the former see Feldmann 1957, pp. 102–129.

dissolved or reduced to binary calculations. For in any, but particularly in digital, calculating it is critical that the 'carry digit 1' is shifted from column to column whenever the number of available digits is exhausted (10 in the decimal, 2 in the binary calculation). This is a step which is not determined by quantity but by a logical operation.[47] Consequently any calculation is of itself not numerical or quantitative but operational according to laws of logic. This observation enters the realm of ontology when looking at the calculating machine, which is the brain. For the brain is neurologically constructed in such a way that it can perform such calculating operations that ultimately go back to binary structures (impulse/ no impulse).[48] In addition to that—and in contrast to artificial computers—the reliability of mental calculations does not depend on the precision of every single act but on the statistical reliability of the mind's estimates.[49] Furthermore every calculation requires memory in the sense that preliminary results need to be set aside, which not only can be 'recalled' whenever necessary but also to some extent control future operations. At this point numbers turn into, or are interpreted as, commands.[50] The calculating mind, therefore, is a complicated machine in the sense that it does not (only) execute operations, predetermined by whomever, but sets its own rules on the basis of previous operations. In ordinary language we call that reflection on past experience.[51] In this model which is certainly independent of any influence by Nicholas of Cusa (except, perhaps, through Leibniz, who advocated digital calculation), numbers are indeed the objective structure of reality because they themselves express cognitive structures, namely logic, whereas logic—clearly manifest in the structure of nature, including its natural computing machines like the brain—keeps a prerogative over the instruments employed by it. This is certainly a fair Cusanian reading of von Neumann's mathematical speculations. It includes the assumption that precision is not the ultimate goal of calculation, but rather attainment of reality. But reality in and of itself is not attainable, except through approximation. The process of approximation by way of calculation is structurally identical with construing the logical relationships between objects of reality among themselves (in theological and cosmological language: creation) and between these objects and the mind (in philosophical language: cognition).

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[47]   Von Neumann 1958, p. 9: '… rules of strict logical character control this operation— how to form digital sums, when to produce a carry, and how to repeat and combine these operations.'

[48]   Von Neumann 1958, p. 43 f.

[49]   Von Neumann 1958, p. 76–80.

[50]   Von Neumann 1958, p. 20: 'Indeed, the machine, under the control of its orders, can extract numbers (or orders) from the memory, process them (as numbers!), and return them to the memory …; i.e. it can change the contents of the memory—indeed this is its normal *modus operandi*. Hence it can, in particular, change … the very orders that control its actions.'

[51]   See also Von Neumann 1987, Chapter 10: 'The General and Logical Theory of Automata', pp. 391–431.

Cusanus expresses this logico–mathematical approximation in the axiom of his book *On Conjectures*: 'The oneness of the unattainable truth is cognized by way of a conjectural [surmised] otherness; whereas, as a consequence of that, we will better understand this surmise of otherness in the simplest oneness of truth.'[52] Of course this is a circular description of the logic of truth, for it is dialectical. Truth is the object and result of surmise, of hypotheses drawn from the understanding that oneness is different from the starting point of any cognition. Once we have admitted this it might dawn upon us that even this supposed difference depends on the otherwise supposed oneness and simplicity of truth. This is where logic is presupposed, surmised, in cognition and thus controls cognition. Cognition therefore is a self-guiding operation. Cusanus declares this statement to be an extension of his discussion of 'learned ignorance' as expounded in his book *De docta ignorantia*. After he had maintained that precision of truth is unattainable and that this is the reason why an understanding of God is beyond reason, he now declares that 'every human affirmation about what is true is a surmise'.[53]

> It must be the case that surmises originate from our minds, even as the real world originates from Infinite Divine Reason. For when, as best it can, the human mind (which is a lofty likeness of God) partakes of the fruitfulness of the Creating Nature, it produces [exserit] from itself, qua image of the Omnipotent Form, rational entities (…) in the likeness of real entities. Consequently, the human mind is the form of the surmised [rational] world, just as the divine mind is the form of the real world. Therefore, just as that Absolute Divine Being is all that which there is (…) in each existing thing, so too the oneness of the human mind is the being [entitas] of its own surmises. Now, God works all things for His own sake, so that He is both the Intellectual Beginning and [Intellectual] End of all things. Similarly, the unfolding of a rational world—an unfolding which proceeds from our enfolding mind—exists for the sake of the producing [fabricatricem] mind.[54]

Nicolaus Cusanus describes in this paragraph the mutual dependency of divine reason and human reason. In the same way it is indistinguishable whether he is speaking theologically, logically or ontologically—and this is obviously the message. The world is a protuberance. Theologically speaking it is laid out by God for God's sake. Ontologically speaking, the human mind is part of that creation and enjoys a close similarity to **that** mind that is God. In logical or epistemological terms, the world is a hypothesis; in scholastic terminology: an *ens rationis*. In that

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[52] Cusanus, *De coniecturis* I 2 (I Prologus): 'Cognoscitur igitur inattingibilis veritatis unitas alteritate coniecturali atque ipsa alteritatis coniectura in simplicissima veritatis unitate. Clarius post haec huius notitiam intuebimur.' (Cf. Cusanus 1972, p. 4.—I translated as though the second clause were part of the whole sentence.)

[53] Ibid.; Cusanus 2001, Volume 1, p. 163.

[54] Cusanus, *De coniecturis* I 3 (I 1); Cusanus 2001, Volume 1, pp. 164–165.

scholastic terminology a 'being of reason' has existence in the mind without any possible claim of having real existence. On the other hand mental existence—as long as it is not a chimera, a fake or a lie—does not exclude real existence, and the question remains how *ens rationis* and *ens reale* can be coordinated. Both modes of being have in common that they are 'objective': they are objects of thinking. Therefore Cusanus's logic builds upon this traditional divide, so that the 'rational world' requires or yields ontological facts because the human mind is the unity of any potential being inasmuch as mind grants existence to what is known. It is in that sense that the human world is a protuberance of human mind which is said to be 'the being [*entitas*] of its own surmises'. Furthermore human conjecture can only work on the basis of a reality that is surmised to be its original, its surmised real exemplar. This is, according to Cusanus, the structure of the human world and its understanding. The term 'fabric' appears and opens the numerological speculations quoted above as treasured by Petrus Bungus.

After having pursued variations on the theme that number is mind and reality at the same time, Cusanus presents and discusses a geometrical figure of two intertwined triangles, the peaks of which mutually touch the baselines of the other. These baselines/peaks represent Oneness on the one side and Otherness on the other side, likened with light and darkness. This geometrical figure visualizes the dialectics of sameness and otherness in cognition as described above. They are mutually dependent. 'Notice that God, who is Oneness, is as the base-of-light; but the base-of-darkness is as nothing. Every creature, we surmise, lies between God and nothing.'[55]
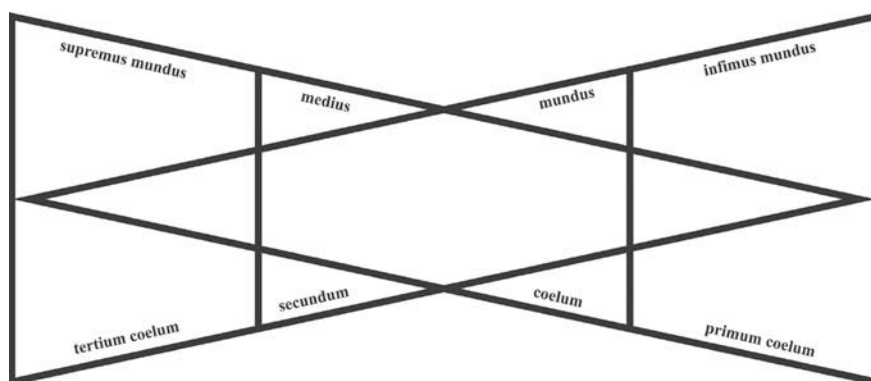
When I just claimed that the dependency of divine and human reason is mutual, this could and should have provoked protest for there is no doubt that ontologically reality is above rationality, especially if the one is associated with God to the other with man. The paradox is that Nicholas of Cusa needs either level, the epistemological and the ontological, in order to explain the incomprehensibility of

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[55]   Cusanus, *De coniecturis* I 11 (I 9); Cusanus 2001, volume 1, p. 182. Here a copy of that geometrical figure, taken from Cusanus 1962, volume 1, fol. 46v (see figure above).

human understanding of God. It would be fine and pious to assume that light is only in God and darkness anywhere else; the geometrical simile, however, suggests that the darkness reaches into the base of light to the same degree as light penetrates even the basest darkness. Therefore Cusanus is dealing, at the same time, with epistemology beyond any regional field of experience and with a philosophical theology. Epistemology then appears to be the theory of human knowledge as knowledge regardless of its concrete execution because only a transgression of the boundaries of human experience is able to establish its conditions. To transcend human knowledge in and of itself coincides with philosophical theology. It turns out—and that will be no surprise in the history of philosophy as we will see in Suarez—that knowledge of God (an epistemology of knowing what is beyond reason) is the condition of any epistemology of human experience.

The attentive reader will have noticed Kantian undertones in the interpretation of Cusanus offered here. What makes the fifteenth-century cleric comparable with the enlightenment Prussian is their common attempt to establish the relationship between humanity and divinity in such a way that the proportional distance is maintained, and yet the absolute is thought to be the inescapable condition that explains human understanding. German scholar Richard Kroner raised the question:

> is it not possible to assume that an infinite and unrestricted intellect would know nature as it is 'in itself', i.e., free from the imperfections which attach to human knowledge? … Is not nature the creator while man is the creature, and does not nature thus ultimately coincide with the infinite, perfect, and divine intellect? Such a view would issue in an absolute subjectivism superior to Kant's ethical subjectivism because the subject would no longer be man but God …[56]

Kroner answers his concerns by stressing the prevalence of ethics in Kant, the will that transcends the limits of rationality and the nature attainable by it. Nicholas of Cusa has man transcend his own understanding just by reflecting upon it.

Cusanus never tired of devising similes that illustrate his theory, for in being a theory of the formation of mental concepts it had to abandon conceptual language.[57] Geometry was one area, as we have seen. Here I choose one example that shows the common ground of epistemology and mysticism and another that suggests human knowledge to be divine in being creative. In his small treatise *The Vision of God* Cusanus endeavors to explain to his readers 'what I had before promised concerning the easinesse of misticall Divinity' and to 'lift you up to divine things' by way of a similitude. He proposes 'the image of the one that sees

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[56]   Kroner 1954, p. 87.
[57]   This has been discussed at length by Michael Stadler (Stadler 1983). Jasper Hopkins criticized that interpretation without taking into account that Cusanus overcomes the divide between thing and intellect that reigns conceptual thinking ('Introduction' in Cusanus 1996, pp. 49–51). See also Kremer 2004, pp. 3–49, specifically 39–49.

all things … [and] that lookes every way which I call the Image of God [*eicona Dei*]'. It should be hung at a wall, 'and then shall all you Brethren stand about it, a little distance from it, and looke upon it, and every one of you shall finde by experience, that from what place so-ever he lookes upon the same, it shall seem that none but himselfe alone is seen or looked upon by the Picture.'[58] The author, in the role of a spiritual adviser to a monastery, seems to stress in the first place that God is watching everyone, not only oneself but all the neighbors as well. At the same time he insists that God does indeed not only supervise the human world but also guards everyone individually, indeed. So far we have the religious meaning of the image. At the same time this double relationship between the one God and the single individual acquires an epistemological meaning. For the same misperception of egotism is also the unavoidable idiosyncrasy of human experience, which always has made experience personal by assuming that such experience is common to all and as such universal, which may only work if the objectivity of experience is bundled into the oneness of the observed object. This object, portrayed as having direct relationships to any observer, turns in this simile into another subject that is not looked upon but looking after the observers. Thus again sameness and otherness of object and subject are intertwined. In interpreting his own simile Cusanus underscores that the relationship between human sight and divine vision is proportional to the difference between the simile and reality— God's truth, in that case. 'Here in the first place wee must suppose that nothing can appear about the sight of the Image of God, but that it is much more truly in the sight or vision of God.'[59] While Cusanus obviously alludes to the proportional analogy between human experience and God's wisdom, he does not at all discredit human knowledge—since he also does not discredit the feeling of being seen by the divine eye as felt by the individual brother—he rather pays its due by establishing the truth of the single appearance as harbored and granted in absolute truth. 'Therefore if the painted face can appear in an Image, as if it looked upon all things, and everything at once, certainly this being of the perfection of sight cannot lesse truely agree unto the truth, than it doth apparently to the Image of the appearance.'[60] The experience of appearances is apparently right. It only requires other appearances that are in and of themselves so true that they are not appearances of objects or experiences made by subjects but visions of the object surmised to be the subject. Cusanus continues to spell out this paradox before he enters into the theological topic of this booklet, which is to prove that mystic experience, to lift oneself 'up to divine things', is nothing but the devotional complement of this critique of human reason.

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[58]   Cusanus, *De visione Dei*, Introduction and *Praefatio* (Cusanus 2000, pp. 3 and 5–6); Cusanus 1646, Introduction and Preface. For this text I quote the translation by Giles Randall, for I will also refer to his own introduction to the book. Meier-Oeser 1989, p. 405, ascribes the translation to John Everard, without further information.

[59]   Ibid. p. 1 f.

[60]   Ibid. p. 2.

The English translator of Cusanus's *The Vision of God,* although stressing of the aesthetic and moral sense of the work, managed to see through the abstract and cognitive implications of it. Referring to incarnation Randall states in his letter to the readers:

> God is manifest in the flesh which is a great mystery of godlinesse, and still he be Emmanuel God with us, God in us, there is no true vision or knowledge of him, for as nothing is in the understanding, but what is in the sence, first and as nothing in the sence is available till it live in the light of the understanding within and at home; so there is no true living knowledge of God within us, till he be in us formed in the face of Jesus Christ.[61]

The sense of the exhortation is to remind the reader of Christ the incarnate whom humans are invited to emulate in order to gain spiritual knowledge of God. However within this apparently Puritan interpretation of the vision, reference is made to the axiom of empiricism that nothing is in the mind that has not come there through the senses. But the author adds the flipside of that coin by reminding that understanding has to process sense data, which is a living or creative contribution of the understanding. It is this very dialectics of sensing and understanding that serves as the basis for the call to be formed by Jesus Christ. A strictly theological understanding of the relationship between God and man, manifest in Christology, converges with the philosophical understanding of intellectually reaching out to the reality beyond the human mind.[62]

Needless to say, Christ plays an important role in Cusanus's works, not only as an icon as we had seen, but also as the link that mediates between humanity and divinity as well as between reason and cosmos. The entire third book of the *Learned Ignorance* is dedicated to Christ. Cusanus describes the path to Christology thus: 'The First Book shows that the one absolutely maximum … persists in itself as eternally, equally, and unchangeable the same. The Second Book explains the contraction of the universe, for the universe exists in no other way than as contractedly this and that.'[63] Briefly put, God represents sameness, the world otherness. Hence follows the postulate of the synthetic third, for 'the many things in which the universe is actually contracted can in no way agree in the highest equality.'[64] The agreement of equality of the parts of the universe means—in more familiar parlance—the possibility of the universe to be one nature and understandable as such. That unity, which makes things comparable and understandable and which obviously is rooted in God's sameness, requires

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[61] Cusanus 1646, fol. A9v. I couldn't find any information about the translator Randall, except that he also translated the *Theologia Germanica* (*Theologia deutsch*) of the so-called Frankfurter (London: John Sweeting, 1648; also available at Early English Books Online).

[62] See Wolter 2004, pp. 140–144, and Vengeon 2005.

[63] Cusanus, *De docta ignorantia* III 1; Cusanus 1997, p. 169.

[64] Ibid.

logically and theologically a bond between God and His creation, a bond that originates in God: 'But the bond of all things is through God, so that although all things are different, they are also bound together.'[65] Cusanus then argues that the only ontological level in which sameness and otherness (the absolute and the contracted, as he calls it) may be united is human nature:

> Humanity, however, exists in this or that thing only in a contracted way. For this reason, it would not be possible for more than one true human being to be able to ascend to union with maximumness, and, certainly, this being would be a human in such a way as to be God and God in such a way as to be a human.[66]

This is a sufficient description of the formal conditions for God's becoming man and for Jesus' being divine. In view of what Renaissance Platonists would suggest, one should underscore that the ascent to the union with God—a standard theme of mystical philosophy—is deemed to be unique, a one-time achievement by the only being that unrestrictedly is human and divine. And yet it is the foundation of being human.

While the rest of Book III spells out the religious meaning of the Trinitarian God thus conceived, it is worth noting that the beginning of the book expressly reminds the reader of the achievements of the second book that covered cosmology. There can be no surprise that the cosmological treatise ends with the claim that God is a mathematician: 'In the creation of the world God made use of arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy, which we also use when we investigate the proportions of things, including elements and motions.' By now we should have learned that this is not a primitive parallelism but the essence of Cusanus's theological epistemology. The next example of a simile that transcends the distinction between things and thoughts will build upon this apparent parallelism.

> Therefore, the completely developed animal in which there is both sense and intellect is to be likened to geographer who lives in a city that has five gateways of the five senses. Through these gateways messengers from all over the world enter and report on the entire condition of the world … Suppose the geographer to be seated and to take notice of every report, in order to have within his city a delineated description of the entire perceptible world. … At length, after he has made in his city a complete delineation of the perceptible world, then in order not to lose it, he reduces it to a well-ordered and proportionately measured map. And he turns toward the map; and, in addition, he dismisses the messengers, closes the gateways, and turns his inner sight towards the Creator-of-the-world, who is none of all those things about which the geographer has learned from the messengers, but who is the maker and cause of them all. He considers this Maker to stand antecedently in relation to his map. And from the relation of the

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[65]   Ibid. p. 171.
[66]   Ibid. III 3, p. 176.

map to the real world he beholds in himself, qua geographer, the creator of the world …[67]

So, what has become of the demiurge of this world? The perfect animal, the human being, accumulates experience through senses, but instead of delving into the world, and instead of processing the 'map of the world', the human mind turns its sight to the Creator, and, again, not making a naïve analogy from the beauty of the world to the greatness of God but contemplating the relationship between Creator and creation as parallel to the work of a geographer who designs a map. Of the three elements: God, creation, world, what is of philosophical interest is the relationality that is manifest in the act of creation. Therefore the triad God–creation–world, as paralleled in man–design–map, can be summarized as God–man–world or even as God–world–man. Consequently the human mind 'finds in himself the first and nearest sign of the Creator. In this sign the Creative Power shines forth more than in any other known animal.'[68] Far from being a designer God, Cusanus's God is creative power and nothing else, and the decisive argument for that is not the order a human craftsman would make but the craftsmanship that enables him to do it. The human capability to draw maps, that is, to process sense data, is the closest evidence of there being a God. 'Therefore, the geographer withdraws himself, as best as he can, from all perceptual signs [and turns] toward intellectual and simple and formal signs.'[69] We may conclude that senses and intellect cooperate to the effect that they enable the mind to reduce its operations to its pure reasoning, which also requires reflecting upon reasoning as though it were not conditioned by external objects and bodily conditions. What mathematics always does, namely to reckon with shapes and quantities regardless of their material occurrences, is the ultimate power of human understanding, a potential that out of its inner dynamics may withdraw itself from its natural place and search for that kind of understanding that by its own nature is not abstract from the material world but self-sufficient and—perhaps—produces the object of cognition in its various aspects.

Any full treatment of Nicholas of Cusa's philosophy should discuss his indebtedness to the Scholastic philosophy and theology of his times. It was the method of this chapter to look at him from later developments. But one historic detail should be mentioned, if only as the opening of the following chapters, namely the biographical condition that prompted Cusanus to write in this style and to draw his conclusions. He was a diplomat and had been in charge of welcoming the high powered delegation of politicians and scholars that traveled from Byzantium to Italy in order to attend the Council of Ferrara–Florence in 1438–39. One of the major topics of this Council was to be the position of Christ in the Holy Trinity. This was a matter of interpreting Scripture and Tradition. Upon completion of the

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[67] Cusanus, *Compendium* 8; Cusanus 2001, volume 2, pp. 1398 f.
[68] Ibid. p. 1399.
[69] Ibid.

book, Cusanus emphasized in a letter[70] to Cardinal Julian Cesarini, who had been in charge of organizing this Council, the Christological importance of his work: 'All things work well for one who enters into Jesus, and neither any writings nor this world can present one with difficulty, for such one is transformed into Jesus because of the Spirit of Christ that dwells in one, and Christ is the end of intellectual desires.' The final clause seems to be echoed by the English translator Randall and thus seems to lead straight into seventeenth-century pietism. The main message however is this: Christology is the means to liberate from the fear of 'Scripture and world'. The theological and philosophical debate over tradition and interpretation is transformed by Cusanus into the debate on the conditions of human understanding. It is 'in learned ignorance and by transcending those incorruptible truths can be humanly known' that Cusanus hopes to solve this theological problem for his employer. All this is said in conclusion of the book while at the same time evoking the encounter with the Byzantine scholars. For it was 'returning by sea from Greece' that Cusanus embraced this new method. Beyond the biographical contingency this reference must mean that Cusanus is also poised to dispel an approach to theology that might endanger Christ as 'the end of intellectual desires'. Cusanus's philosophical theology is most likely a critique of Renaissance Platonism before it was reborn.

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[70]　　Cusanus, *De docta ignorantia*, (appendix), Cusanus 1997, pp. 205 f.

Chapter 3

Giordano Bruno's Philosophy of Religion

Renaissance Platonists did not respond directly to Nicholas of Cusa and his attempt to account for piety, transcendence and understanding. But Giordano Bruno did. The meaning of his philosophy of religion becomes clear if we look at his appropriation of Cusanus, which in turn shows the importance of Nicholas's achievement.

Giordano Bruno proclaimed a new philosophy of religion in his extremely complex dialogue *Spaccio de la bestia trionfante*. One may condense his message to the following statement: Religion is nothing but a political means for the unlearned people, while the mysteries of the divine remain reserved for the few geniuses, so that any attempt at popularizing such wisdom necessarily verges on fraud. Yet, Bruno still believes in the value of theological speculation, even though he makes it his own and departs from tradition. Therefore, one may read Bruno as concluding an effort in Renaissance thought to come to terms with the speculative and human implications of religion. This effort engaged Marsilio Ficino, who tried to Platonize Christianity, it disquieted Giovanni Pico, as well as Girolamo Savonarola, it had certainly been the main thrust of Lorenzo Valla's reform of logic, philology and piety, not to mention Pietro Pomponazzi, who in an ambiguous way put aside both the immortality of the human soul and the operation of spirits. Bruno deliberately brings to an end a strain that had originated in Raymond Lull and Nicholas of Cusa.

References and allusions to Cusanus appear throughout Bruno's works in strategically decisive moments, that is, when Bruno is about to reach the goal of his argument. This is most conspicuous in his *De la causa*, when in a panegyric of the One, in dialogue V, all of a sudden Cusanus's paradoxes of the *minimum* and *maximum*, including geometrical figures taken from Cusanus's *De beryllo* are quoted.[1] In the *Spaccio de la bestia trionfante*, one of the six dialogues in Italian language that Bruno published as a guest in the society surrounding Queen Elizabeth's court in London, Bruno proposes a fundamental reform of society and religion by staging it as a conversation of the Greek gods in heaven. In the third dialogue the gods proceed to clear the heavens (or rather the sky) of traditional imagery, in replacing the signs of the zodiac by concepts of virtue and in assigning each of the celestial images a proper place on earth. For example: immediately before the passage that features Cusanus, Andromeda is denounced as being bound to ignorance and deception; she shall be handed over to Perseus for something like re-education. Her place shall be taken by Hope as a virtue that comes from sound

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[1] Blum 2002, '"Saper trar'; cf. Blum 1999 and 1980.

labor and sets a goal to human endeavor.[2] Historians of Reformation thought will understand immediately that Bruno sets clear flags to proclaim his distaste for preaching supernatural reward and, instead, his conviction of the importance of human and earthly labor.

Then follows the sign of Triangle or Delta, a minor constellation in the vicinity of Andromeda. Pallas Athena suggests giving it to Cardinal Cusanus to experiment with. Since the Greek letter Delta has the shape of a triangle and is also the initial letter of the name of God (*Zeus*, *Dion* in accusative, which is the equivalent of *Deus* in Latin) the allusion to Trinitarian theology is immediately evident. Bruno's fictitious interlocutors, however, indulge in a lengthy digression on the squaring of the circle, which was one of the main interests in Cusanus's mathematical writings, not unrelated, however, to his theological interests. Initially Bruno links Cusanus's attempts at solving 'the geometrical intricacies of the annoying problem of the squaring of the circle' correctly with his 'divine principle of the commensuration and coincidence of the maximal and minimal figure'.[3] The text reports one of his solutions to the problem that consists in describing the gradual approximation of two radial lines that originate in the center of two concentric circles, one inscribed in a triangle, the larger one connecting the angles of that triangle: when the triangle is transformed into a polygon, the more angles it has, the less the difference between the radii, so that as the number of angles tends towards infinity the difference of the radii tends towards zero. Cusanus discusses, indeed, this geometrical problem in his *De circuli quadratura*.[4] Through the voice of Minerva, Bruno proposes his own solution to this problem. He insists that the method of coincidence—as invented by Cusanus—was the right approach because the squaring of the circle is by all means a case of coincidence of contraries, in which curved lines are being transformed into straight lines, or vice versa, and maximal distant magnitudes are made to converge. In order to make coincide the surface, as well as the circumference of a triangle with a circle, he suggests to

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[2]   Bruno 1958, *Spaccio de la bestia trionfante* III 2, p. 754 f.: 'Tolgasi […] questa Andromeda […]; la quale per la mano de l'Ignoranza è stata avinta al scoglio dell'Ostinazione con la catena di perverse raggioni e falso opinioni […]; e sia commessa alle provide ed amiche mani del sollecito, laborioso ed accorto Perseo […] [che] la promova al proprio degno acquisto. […] Là […] voglio che succeda la Speranza, quella che, co' l'aspettar frutto degno delle sue opre e fatiche, non è cosa tanto ardua e difficile a cui non accenda gli animi tutti, i quali aver possono senso di qualche fine.'

[3]   Ibid. p. 755 f: 'Mi par degno che sia messo in mano del Cardinal di Cusa, a fin che colui veda, se con questo possa liberar gli impacciati geometri da quella fastidiosa inquisizione della quadratura del circolo, regolando il circolo ed il triangolo con quel suo divino principio della commensurazione e coincidenza de la massima e minima figura […].'

[4]   Cusanus 1952, pp. 36 ff. Cf. Cusanus 2007 and Nicolle 2001, Annexe pp. 38–47. On its mathematical and historical background see ibid., 49–59; De Bernart 1999, pp. 25 ff., and De Bernart 2002, 'Cusano', pp. 356–358, and again De Bernart 2002, *Numerus*, pp. 43 ff.

inscribe and to circumscribe triangles to a circle and then to derive from them the 'middle triangle' between the two:

> I want to go over to the simple triangulation by searching one triangle that has a line equal to the line of the circle and another that occupies the surface equal to the surface of the circle. This will be one drawn around that middle triangle equidistant from that which contains the circle and the other that is contained by the circle; this I leave aside so that someone else with his intelligence may grasp it, because for me it is good enough to have shown the place of places.[5]

Bruno does not at all tell how to find this middle triangle; he rather leaves it to 'someone else' to find it out because he is contented with having shown the 'place of places'. Unless the 'place of places' is to be understood as an ideal hypothesis, the reader is induced to take this as a joke, but before we dismiss this as a digression, we have to acknowledge in which way Bruno's claim differs from that of Cusanus.

While Cusanus—in transforming a polygon of straight lines into a circle—operates with the method of approximation, which eventually results in the coincidence of zero and infinity, Bruno claims to have found one method that allows to equate any given polygon with a circle equal in circumference and in surface; indeed, after the passage quoted Bruno moves on to quadrangles, pentagons, etc. This entails the claim that his 'place of places' must be a principle of geometry not as a method or procedural rule but rather as a constituent of any geometrical figure regardless of its curved or straight nature. In other words Bruno advocates a metaphysical principle, rather than a procedure. This can be corroborated if we look back to the most influential reference to Cusanus in Bruno's work, namely, his speculation on the coincidence of maximal and minimal angles in his *De la causa* V, where we observe an emphasis on the physical reality of this point of coincidence.[6] He underscores that all angles 'originate from one individual and identical principle' and that the line that inclines gradually towards the angle of

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[5] *Spaccio* III 2, p. 758: '[…] voglio procedere […] al facile trigonismo, cercando un triangolo che abbia la linea uguale alla linea del circolo, ed un altro che vegna ad ottenere la superficie uguale alla superficie del circolo. Questo sarà uno circa quel triangolo mezzano, equidistante da quello che contiene il circolo, e quell'altro ch'è contenuto dal circolo; il quale lascio, che con il proprio ingegno altri lo prenda cossí, perché mi basta aver mostrato il luogo de' luoghi.'

[6] *Dialoghi italiani* (Bruno 1958), pp. 337 f.; Cusanus is referred to pp. 335–338. For the first time Bruno applied the paradigm of the approximation of angles in his *De umbris idearum*, see: Bruno 1991, Intentio XXX, p. 44; references to parallel places in Bruno's works are given in the footnotes. Cf. Sturlese 1991. See also the explanations of these figures in the *Corpus iconographicum*, Bruno 2001, pp. 17 and 446–448.

magnitude zero 'causes most contrary angles from the same, one and individual principle'.[7]

Bruno's talking of 'individual' is to be taken literally: he means atoms. In his later works, especially in his *De minimo, maximo et figura*, he will develop a purely atomistic geometry in which all geometrical figures are based on atomic points.[8] These minimal quantities, then, reflect the monadic structure of the universe and of all beings.

> Minimum is the substance of things; and it is the very same Magnum that operates across everything. Therefore the monad, therefore the atom, and the whole Spirit that is infused everywhere […] and that constitutes everything with its signature, are the total essence—if you take a close look—all that, as well as matter.

For, according to Bruno, 'rationally, the monad is in numbers, essentially in everything. […] Take away the monad anywhere and nowhere there will be anything numbered, nothing will be numerable, nothing numbering.'[9] That is to say, for Bruno the concept of minimum encompasses the idea of all the minimal unities, physical atoms, and the Holy Spirit that enlivens the world from inside. Bruno's appropriation of Cusanian geometry takes over the motif of the identical principle that creates the world and makes it humanly understandable and turns it into a real principle that truly has to be minimal and as great as can be (*Minimum* and *Magnum*).[10] And obviously, Ficino's beloved One has become interiorized in all things of the world to constitute its essence.

Cusanus had used the image of the angles in order to illustrate his concept of Trinity. In *De beryllo* he says that the point where the two arms of an angle meet is a 'uni-triadic' (*unitrinum*) principle which unites divisions. This point is uni-triadic

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[7]   *De la causa* V, p. 337 f.: 'lo angolo acuto e ottuso sono dui contrarii, i quali non vedi qualmente nascono da uno individuo e medesimo principio'; 'suscitando da medesimo, uno e individuo principio i contrariissimi angoli'. The translation is mine because that of Richard Blackwell (Bruno, *Cause*, 1998, pp. 98–99) translates 'uno individuo' as 'unique, undivided' which obscures reference to the One and to indivisible atoms.

[8]   See on the squaring of the circle, and generally on the transformation of geometrical figures, Bruno 1879–1891, vol. I 3, *De minimo* II 7–8, pp. 212 ff. Aquilecchia 1991, p. 139 f.; Lüthy 1998.

[9]   Bruno, *De minimo* I 2, Bruno 1879–1891, I 3, p. 138: 'MINIMUM substantia rerum est; / Atque id idem tandem opperies super omnia magnum. / Hinc monas, hinc atomus, totusque hinc undique fusus / Spiritus […] suisque / Omnia constituens signis, essentia tota, / Si res inspicias, hoc tandem est, materiesque.' Ibid. p. 140: 'monas rationaliter in numeris, essentialiter in omnibus. (…) Aufer undique monadem, nusquam erit numerus, nihil erit numerabile, nullus numerator.'

[10]   Further on the subject, Blum 2004, Chapter 7.

in itself, since from it emanates any unity, any equality and any connection.[11] Thus Cusanus projects the well-known triadic relationship of the Neo-Platonists onto the geometrical paradigm in order to make it plausible that trinity as a concept is familiar to any observant person. When returning to the simile of the acute or obtuse angles he refers to his book *De mathematica perfectione*.[12] Here he expressly described the overall meaning of his mathematical studies, namely to push mathematics to its ultimate perfection in order to make it applicable to theology, and the justification he offers is that mathematical intuitions lead very close to the Divine and Eternal.[13] We had seen that Cusanus made it his principle of devotion, epistemology and metaphysics. Therefore while Cusanus applies his mathematical research to the human understanding of God, thus retaining a metaphysical, or at least symbolic meaning to the principle of coincidence and to the infinitesimal construction of geometrical figures,[14] Bruno claims to have found a geometry based on minimals. For Cusanus geometry is paramount to human understanding; for Bruno geometry has to be truly atomistic in order to yield knowledge of the world. Bruno's geometry of minimals would avoid irrational numbers, which are postulated in Cusanian geometry of approximation. Apparently, in Bruno's geometry, transmutation of geometrical figures can be achieved by re-ordering the minimal points, of which they are composed. Since such infinitely minimal mathematical points are themselves beyond reason, Bruno's alleged solution leads eventually to the same irrationality as that of Cusanus.

For Cusanus the triangle was a device to push human reasoning to its limits where it may touch upon the meaning of Trinity. In his writing *Complementum theologicum figuratum in complementis mathematicis* he applies—as the title announces—some of his mathematical discoveries of his *De mathematicis complementis* to theological similes. Among others we find, again, the image of the maximal and minimal angle. He observes: 'We may contemplate God as an infinite angle, by means of which every transformation occurs according to

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[11] Cusanus 1967, vol. 3: *De beryllo* 22, p. 38/40: In an angle ACB: 'Dum igitur intueor in C unitrinum principium, video ipsum esse fontem, unde primo emanat unitas, seu necessitas omnia uniens et constringens. Deinde video ipsum principium, unde emanat aequalitas omnia quantumque varia formans (…). Sic video ipsum C principium, unde emanat nexus et conservatio omnium constrictorum et formatorum.' Jasper Hopkins, Cusanus 2001, translates 'unitrinum' as 'triune', which emphasizes three over one; *De Beryllo* (his numbering: 34), p. 807: 'Therefore, when I look at the triune beginning in c, I see it to be the fount from which, first of all, oneness, or necessity, emanates—uniting and binding together all things. Next, I see it to be the beginning from which equality emanates, forming, or equalizing, all things no matter how different they are […]. Likewise, I see c to be the beginning from which emanates the union, and the conservation, of all bound-together and formed things.'

[12] Cusanus 1967, vol. 3, *De beryllo* 25, p. 48.

[13] Cusanus 1952, *Die mathematischen Schriften*, p. 160.

[14] Cf. Bönker-Vallon 2001, p. 73.

imitational proportion.'[15] After repeating the comparison with an increasingly acute angle he concludes: 'Who ascends to the infinite God seems to approach rather to nothing than to something, as the divine Dionysius said.'[16] This is to say that pondering the paradoxes of infinite and nothing in rationally accessible mathematical constructions shows that the paradox of the Divinity is always present in human reasoning and that these considerations are a secure way to communicate the mystery of the Divine, and especially the Trinity.

To communicate the truth of Christian belief was the major purpose in Cusanus's *De pace fidei*, a conversation staged in heaven—as is Bruno's *Spaccio*—under the impact of the conquest of Byzantium by the Muslim Turks. Faced with the threat of nonbelievers the author broods over the fact of the plurality of religions and confessions and has a vision that, maybe, such plurality is not accidental but rather consequential to the finiteness of human nature and society.[17] Before the conversation among representatives of various religions about the key teachings of the Christian theology arrives at the concept of trinity, statues and idols are dealt with. The representative of India agrees that even if the Indians continue venerating such idols 'in their way' they hopefully will understand that they may do this in view of God as one and will thus agree in a pacific agreement with the Christians.[18] It is immediately after this agreement that the Indian brings up the difficult problem of Trinity. Trinity, if misunderstood, is in this perspective an aggravated case of idolatry and has to be solved according to the overall strategy of the author, namely to evince the unity beyond the plurality and at the same time to admit plurality as an offspring of that unity. So we should not be surprised that Cusanus, through the mouth of *Verbum*, that is the Son himself, reiterates his statement from *De beryllo* by saying:

> In the one universe one finds distinction or separation of parts; but before any distinction there is the connection of unity and equality, from which connection, separation, and distinction diverge; so, connection is eternal. But there cannot be many eternals. Hence, in the one eternity we find unity, equality of unity, and union and connection of unity and equality.[19]

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[15] Cusanus 1967, vol. 3, *Complementum theologicum* 12, p. 692: 'Sic etiam Deus ipse potest uti angulus considerari infinitus medio cuius fit omnis rerum transmutatio secundum proportionem imitatoriam.'

[16] Ibid.: 'Ex hoc elicias, quomodo qui ascendit ad Deum infinitum potius videtur ad nihil accedere quam ad aliquid, ujt etiam divinus dicit Dionysius.' The reference is to Dionysius Areopagite, De mystica theologia V, pp. 597 ff.

[17] Blum 2002, 'Salva fide et pace', and Blum 2004, Ch. 9.2.

[18] Cusanus 1959, *De pace fidei*, VII § 20, pp. 19 f.: 'etiam si cum hoc ydola suo modo venerentur, haec de uno Deo adorando, sic conclusionem capient pacificam.'

[19] *De pace fidei* VII, § 21, p. 21: 'Reperitur in uno universo partium distinctio seu separatio; ate autem omnem distinctionem est connexio unitatis et aequalitatis, a qua quidem connexione cadit separatio seu distinctio; connexio igitur aeterna. Sed non possunt

The method to reconcile the diverging religions that Cusanus pursues in this book has aptly been termed the method of presupposition: every religion presupposes, consciously or not, the unity of God and the inevitability of diversity in forms of worship. The practical conclusion drawn from this insight, however, was that God orders the spiritual leaders of the various cultures to consolidate the unity of cult in all nations.[20] Such was Cusanus's vision. He applies the theology of Trinity to a program of religious peace among the peoples that are unified by the triune God as a triangle is virtually transformable into a circle.

What happens to the Triangle or Delta in Bruno's *Spaccio*? After the triangle is offered to the Cardinal for his speculations, the heavenly constellation is replaced by 'Fede e Sinceritade' or—as it is said in the Introduction—to 'Fede, altrimente detta Fidelitade'.[21] Faith is to substitute the Trinity, but faith is not anymore the true belief of all religions but rather 'good faith' and fidelity, which are conjoined with constancy, love, honesty, straightforwardness and truth as opposed to fraud, deception or instability.[22] Bruno's speakers merge religious faith with social honesty. With implicit reference to Niccolò Machiavelli he denounces the practice of instrumentalizing religious belief for political ends. On the surface Bruno calls for religious sincerity when he says: 'Where is the world heading at, if we don't have to force ourselves to be good in an absolute sense, as if we were gods, rather than [appearing good] out of convenience?'[23]

We can take it for granted that Bruno is well aware of the multiple meanings of *fides* as well as of *religio*: In his time as a student he once was attributed the motto 'D'ogni legge nemico, e d'ogni fede'—so he knew that religion can mean law, and law loyalty, and faith fidelity. In his explanation of the honor due to Good Faith, Jove makes a few remarks on the lawmaking among 'certain Jews and Saracens' that are far from peaceful. So, universal tolerance is not what he is aiming at. Instead, Jove recommends that the virtue of Good Faith shall be honored in the Heaven so that it be honored on Earth (allusion to the *Pater noster* certainly intended). And once again he returns to the Triangle simile: The Triangle was and remains to be a sign for faith, because of all geometrical figures it is the most different from the circle and thus least easy to be removed.[24] But why exchange the Triangle for Faith in the first place?

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esse plura aeterna. Igitur in una aeternitate reperitur unitas, unitatis aequalitas, et unitatis et aequalitatis unio seu connexio.'

[20] *De pace fidei* XIX § 68, p. 62: 'Et mandatum est per Regem regum ut sapientes redeant et ad unitatem veri cultus nationes inducant […].'

[21] Bruno 1958, *Spaccio* III 2, p. 759 and Epistola esplicatoria p. 565.

[22] *Spaccio* p. 565.

[23] *Spaccio* III 2, p. 760: 'A che verrà il mondo, se tutte le reppubliche […] penseranno che non doviamo forzarci ad esser buoni assolutamente, come fusseno dei, ma per commoditade ed occasione […]?'

[24] *Spaccio* III 2, p. 761: 'Voglio dungque, disse l'altitonante, che questa virtú compaia celebrata in cielo, acciò venga per l'avenire piú sitmata in terra. Questa si veda nel luogo

Jove's reasoning is truly dialectical: As for the figure of the triangle, it is, indeed, most distant from the Circle. Nevertheless according to Cusanus it can be approximated to the circle, and it has the power of unity and diversity in its angles. In Bruno's view the power of commensuration of triangle and circle lies in the atomic structure of both. The Triangle continues to be a symbol of 'Faith'— but nothing more. Now there should be true faith, but not the true religion, as advocated in *De pace fidei*, not the one religion that ideally expresses itself in the diversity of religiosity but rather that which religious faith might contribute to human life, namely reliability, stability, good faith. Faith turns into an atomic element of unbreakable human relationship that cannot, or should not, be talked into its opposite by some subtle argument.

This is one of the overall messages of Bruno's *Spaccio* and his religious reform: measuring religion by reality, and not vice versa, and restoring unity of law and religion. The reference to Cusanus that connects the trinitarian model with geometry and religious policy discloses unexpected potentials in Cusanus's philosophical innovation, namely to keep the coincidence of contraries where it happens, in the realm of earthly life, and to see the variety of religions as a merely secular phenomenon. This was an insight that with almost mathematical necessity turned into a secularizing of religious tenets and the ensuing continuous fight against secularism. It is the same dialectics that played out between the Neoplatonist movement from Gemistos Plethon via Ficino to Pico, and at least chronologically Giordano Bruno followed suit. The reformation of the Heaven, the *Spaccio*, can be read as a reinterpretation and therefore also restoration or re-installment of religious symbols. Orion, among others an allegory for Christ and the Roman Church, is accused of being venerated as though he were Jove himself because he declared all other gods to be chimeras and fantasies just for the sake of protecting his monopolistic monotheism.[25] The thrust of the argument is not a defense of polytheism but a turn of the perspective, as always in Renaissance philosophy: the 'expulsion of the triumphant beast' consists in rationalizing that one should not pray to Jove as though he were god but to god as represented in Jove.[26] In Bruno's mind it is fully reasonable to see divinities in finite things and in representative symbols as long as one understands that the divinity is not finite and therefore not a proper object of veneration, 'for the concept of the divinity actually originates solely from the consciousness of these [moral] laws and from reason's

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in cui si vedea il Triangolo, da cui comodamente è stata ed è significata la Fede; perché il corpo triangulare (come quello che costa di minor numero di angoli ed è piú lontano da l'esser circulare) è piú difficilmente mobile che qualsivoglia altrimente figurato.'

[25]   Ibid. pp. 803–805.

[26]   Ibid. p. 779: 'Non adoravano Giove, come lui fusse la divinità, ma adoravano la divinità, come fusse in Giove […].'

need to assume a power capable of procuring for them the full effect possible in this world in conformity with the moral final end.'[27]

Transcendence becomes a postulate of human reason as an acknowledgment of the presence of the infinite in the finite (and not vice versa) in the same way as Trinity is present in a figurative way in any geometrical construct, as Cusanus had argued. Instead of abolishing all religion, and also instead of advocating a pure religion of pure reason, Bruno embraces ritual, even the veneration of animals: 'The Egyptians came to adore living images of animals and adored them under those forms, because you know that animals and plants are living effects of nature; and nature is nothing but God in things.'[28] That's as far as Bruno can get to pantheism. The question remains, what is it like for God to be in things? On the other hand it is certain, for Bruno as it was for Cusanus, that the unity of nature in God manifests itself in plurality so that, of course, the difference between God and world stays.

> The divinity is found in all things; in innumerable ways it diffuses and communicates itself, hence it has innumerable names; and on innumerable routes with reasons that are proper and appropriate to each and everything it is searched for, while it is honored and venerated with innumerable rites, because we want to obtain innumerable graces from it.[29]

The outcome of Cusanus's critical assessment of the creativity of the human mind in understanding the Creator turns into religious reform on the basis of the intimate relationship between human non-understanding and craving for understanding. In one of his 'magic writings', as they are usually classified, Bruno speaks about religion in its manifestation of sacrifice and sanctuary. He mentions famous places like Parnassus and Mount Sinai and emphasizes that God wanted to point out one unique place where He decided to be venerated. Comparing Roman, Greek, Egyptian and Jewish cults he coins the term 'local religion' (*religio locorum*) which became important in modern phenomenology of religion.[30] Bruno observes that some places seem to have a certain 'virtue' or power that favors human creativity.

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[27]   Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* III, 1, V, [6:104; A 140] (Kant 1998, p. 113).

[28]   *Spaccio* III 2, p. 776: '[…] che gli Egizii venessero ad adorar le imagini vive de le bestie, e ne adorassero in forma di quelle […] perché sai, che gli animali e piante son vivi effetti de natura; la qual natura […] non è altro che dio nelle cose.'

[29]   Ibid. p. 781: 'La divinià che si trova in tutte le cose, la quale, come in modi innumerabili si diffonde e communica, cossí ave nomi innumerieili, e per vie innumerabili, con raggioni proprie ed appropriate a ciscuno, si ricerca, mentre con riti innumerabili si onora e cole, perché innumerabili geni di grazia cercamo impetrar da quella.'

[30]   Bruno, *De rerum principiis*, in Bruno, Bruno 1879–1891, III, p. 558: 'Haec religio lororum non solum Heaebraeis, sed et Romanis et Graecis et Aegyptiis fuit optime observata.' Cf. Usener 1929.

By extension or inference this virtue must originate from the divine command so that the perspective is turned around: not anymore the place that favors creativity but, rather, the principle of creativity in search of a place manifests itself. To view places like Parnassus, Sinai or Zion as holy places makes them work as places of cult in the sense that they are places particularly apposite for spiritual works. Thus the place of cult appears to morph into the cult of places, that is, local religion.[31] Bruno emerges as the philosopher of religion who voices the insight that any religion is based, among other bases, on an act of selectively defining the way and place in which the divine is manifest (manifests itself) in the visible and human world. Hence his call for sincerity in place of Trinity. In doing so he implicitly follows Cusanus who also had debated the question of Trinity in the context of cult. At nearly the same historic time Tommaso Campanella would make sincerity a major touchstone of religious truth. That opens the question about the role of priests.

The priest, in Bruno's philosophy, is the executor of an act that in magic can be described as making contact with demons, however always for the sake of the magician himself,[32] but epistemologically speaking it is not much different from any act of cognition and love. The priestly act of reaching out to the transcendent, that is, to whatever is beyond the self in order to appropriate the other is inherently self-referential, if not egocentric. Therefore in his *Degli eroici furori* the lover is described as in danger of obfuscating the object of his love through his own sacrificial fire[33] while every kind of veneration, and especially that for deities and heroes, is determined to be a 'sacrifice of praise' (*sacrificio de laude*).[34] Heroes like Ulysses are

> sent to the stars and deified through the sacrifice of praise, which kindled the fire on the altar of the hearts of the illustrious poets and other singers, with which usually the sacrificer, the victim, and the canonized god-like would ascend to the heaven through the hand and prayer of a legitimate and worthy priest.[35]

In this paradoxical imagery of the fire that is burning in the heart of the priest Bruno describes the identification of the praying person, the prayer/sacrifice, the sacrificed object/victim, and the adored deity. Any one element of the religious cult is entangled with any other. In a critique of religion on the basis of epistemology

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[31]   Ibid.

[32]   Bruno 1879–1891, III, pp. 398, and 433. *Spaccio* II, pp. 684 f.

[33]   Bruno 1958, *Eroici furori* II 1, p. 1081.

[34]   Ibid.

[35]   Ibid.: '[…] chi arrebe notizia de tanti grandi soldati, sapienti ed eroi de la terra, se non fussero stati messi alle stelle e deificati per il sacrificio de laude, che nell'altare del cor de illustri poeti ed altri recitatori ave acceso il fuoco, con questo che comunemente montasse al cielo il sacrificatore, la vittima ed il canonizato divo, per mano e voto di legitimo e degno sacerdote?'

and metaphysics that points out where transcendence and transcendental thought converge, religious cult does not lose meaning but becomes charged with symbolic, social and philosophical meaning. From Nicholas Cusanus and his endeavor to mathematically describe the essence of the act of faith as though it were an act of reason Giordano Bruno draws the conclusion that on the one hand religion is as human as can be and on the other hand it bears the full complexity of imminence and transcendence in the human horizon.

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Chapter 4
Coluccio Salutati: Hermeneutics of Humanity

Two philosophical problems troubled Coluccio Salutati throughout his scholarly life: the freedom and dignity of human actions and the usefulness of ancient traditions for the life of a Christian. His numerous letters and various books set the tone for centuries to come, forwarding medieval and classical methods and approaches and highlighting the antinomies of a Christian understanding of freedom and pious erudition. Ever since Salutati, free will had to be thought of on the model of Divine omnipotence, and ancient mythology qualified as a legitimate source of wisdom on a par with the moral contents of the Bible.[1]

In one of his earliest surviving letters, Salutati raises the question of how to interpret an instance of Greek mythology, Hercules killing people as a punishment, by contrasting it with other classical understandings of death as the end of suffering. Implicitly Salutati argues from a Christian point of view, and he admits that to his narrow-minded contemporaries all these 'ancient histories are fables and fictions', but he freely confesses that his source, Valerius Maximus, even though reporting on pagan religion, or rather folly, is a 'more than sufficient guide to all ways of life'.[2] Seneca is the other great authority mentioned in this context, and his statement on life and death is the earliest object of an original philosophic reflection in Salutati's letters: what is the meaning of the adage that 'the greatest part of life is wasted for those who act badly, great part for those who do not

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[1]   Coluccio Salutati, born in 1331 in Stignano, studied rhetoric in Bologna. After visiting the notary school in Bologna, he held various offices in his home town and other places; in 1374 he was hired at the office of elections in Florence and became Chancellor of this town from 1375 until his death in 1406. This office implied acting as foreign minister of Florence, which had tense relationships with Rome, Milan, and other Italian centers of power. Several humanists, including Leonardo Bruni and Nicolò Machiavelli, would hold the same office. Selections of Salutati's professional letters have been published by H. Langkabel 1981, in a study on humanist ideas of civil liberty; his personal letters, some of which extended to treatises, were edited by F. Novati: C. Salutati, *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati* (four volumes, quoted as 'Novati' with indication of volume and pages). His philosophical works include *De seculo et religione*, *De fato et fortuna*, *De nobilitate legum et medicinae*, *De laboribus Herculis*. On Salutati's life and works see Ullman 1963 and Witt 1983.

[2]   Novati 1, pp. 9–12 (dated 1366). Unless stated otherwise, all translations are mine.

act, and all of life for those who do something else'?[3] His understanding of bad action is to make ever new choices and thus spoil the very beginning of life; to do nothing occurs when one ages before one's time, indulging in contemplating the end, whereas 'virtue lies in action' and 'the fruit of old age consists in the fullness of an active life.' Consequently one's life is totally wasted if prevented by death from leading any life and thus 'doing otherwise than was predicted'. In these two early musings Salutati appears to be torn between pious surrender and proactive planning. To bridge this disaccord and to assess the wisdom to be gathered from the Ancients will be the struggle of his philosophy.

The meaningfulness of human action is the major theme of Salutati's treatise *On fate and fortune*.[4] The occasion for writing it was a request from Abbot Felice Agnolelli of the Cistercian monastery of Settimo near Florence. Considering the present civil war in Perugia, Salutati asks: 'do so many evils come from fate or fortune, and what are these?'[5] The ultimate answer was to be (p. 216): 'Since divine providence cannot be unjust, the cause lies in the Perugians, whose wills are heated against each others, and who out of distorted emotions of reason, ambition, arrogance, grudge, hate and greed abuse free will for the sake of mutual destruction.' Hence not the stars or fate were to blame, but 'your vices, citizens of Perugia; in you is the cause, in yourself it must be searched!' To reach this conclusion, which in itself sheds light on the Florentine politician's view of civil order, he had to define the concepts of fate or fortune and of causality in human actions, in which divine order and free will play the key roles.

The treatise opens with the clear presupposition that the existence of God is indisputable, involving the idea from St Anselm that God is not only that greater than which nothing can be thought, but also as such incomprehensible. After alluding to St Thomas's arguments for the existence of God from the impossibility of infinite regress of causes, God is described as the necessity of itself and as eternity (I 1, p. 8). His timelessness is, then, described with the ability of the seer, borrowed from Virgil (*Georgica* 4, 393), to know 'what is, was and will come along', to the effect that 'the first day determines the last' (p. 8–9). Now this last quotation sounds much like Augustine's interpretation of the Seven Days of creation; however, it was taken from Seneca (*Oedipus* 988). As the next step of his argument, Salutati stated that God is the prime and super-temporal cause that creates and distributes time and causality because the Trinity of omnipotence, wisdom, and goodness foresees and orders everything.[6] Salutati recapitulates

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[3]   Novati 1, pp. 63–66 (dated 1368), the quotation is from Seneca, *Ad Lucilium* I, 1. A more elaborate treatment, 1398, in Novati 3, pp. 239–258.

[4]   Salutati 1985, *De fato et fortuna*. The book was first published in 1985, but survived in 15 manuscripts (Salutati 1985, p. LXXXI), and its contents were discussed in many of the author's letters.

[5]   *De fato*, prooemium, p. 5.

[6]   In the background of this reasoning stands the notion, particularly dear to Raymond Lull, that the Trinitarian God is not idle but exerts His omnipotence in the world He

the order of creation as a hierarchy of causation, starting from the angels via the bodily things, including the heavens and the natural laws under the heavens, to the animals, and finally down to man (pp. 9–11): 'A more sanctified animal, mentally more capable and able to dominate the others, was missing' he quotes from Ovid (*Metamorphoses*, 1, 76–77), before referring to Genesis 1:26–27: 'So God formed man in his likeness and image.'

This opening sets the agenda for Salutati's treatment: First, everything beyond God's power is of derivative order; however, there really is an order in finite beings. Second, this teaching is not peculiar to the Christian world but universal as testified by the pagan poets. The problem to solve, then, is how the universal human perspective can be coordinated with God's omnipotence.

According to traditional philosophy of nature, the heavens and stars, as well as the elementary world, operate with the necessity derived from their nature, for example, the celestial bodies cause weather phenomena (I 2, p. 15). Angels, too, follow the command of the creator (I 3, p. 17–18). In the elementary world, finally, things operate according to their properties, so that we may say nature is their necessity (p. 19). There is, however, one exception, namely those that are endowed with will:

> Will alone, the potential of rational creatures, is bestowed with freedom of determination, so that it were not at all will if it were deprived of freedom (which is impossible), freedom, that is, in eliciting to will or not to will, which appertains to it so naturally that it were not wrong to state that, if God would take it away, it would not be will anymore, it rather would be some other power or potential, but not will.[7]

Freewill is located as part of the natural order of efficiency in creation. It is certainly of a special kind of causation, compared with the operation of spirits and natural beings, but nevertheless entrenched in God's world. Salutati stresses the point that, supposing all kinds of causation cooperate well (that is, God's determination, the influxes of the stars, the complexions of the elements, and will itself), then we fittingly may speak of necessity. Such necessity, however, cannot be absolute, exactly because it hinges on the various contingencies just mentioned (I 3, p. 20). Necessity turns out to be the common denominator of processes in the world, as long as they actually come about. The strategy of this reasoning is marked by an attempt at thinking the universe as a coherent and ordered whole and by assigning each part to its ontologically proper place, and it is here that Salutati's definition of

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creates.

7   *De fato* I 3, pp. 19–20: 'Sola voluntas, que naturalis creature potentia est, sic obtinuit arbitrii libertatem, quod omnino voluntas non sit, si sibi libertas (quod est tamen impossibile) subtrahatur, libertas – inquam – in eliciendo velle vel nolle, que adeo sibi naturaliter inest, quod inconveniens non sit fateri quod, si Deus illam abstulerit, voluntas penitus non manebit; erit enim alia vis aliaque potentia, non voluntas.'

free will is so important. By definition will is free will because otherwise it would
be just one feature of natural causation. On the other hand, to be free apparently
launches will beyond all other kinds of powers. If this is the case, the idea of fate
needs to be analyzed in its gnoseological and ontological aspects because it has the
features of necessity and seems to oppose free acts.

Fate, indeed, is defined as 'necessity that flows from God's providence, controls
everything, and governs what exists and is effected below the heavens'.[8] In this
formula three features of fate are combined: its origin, the nature of its causality, and
its relation to effects (II 1, p. 21). As Salutati explains in the chapters that follow,
he assigned the formal property associated with fate (namely, to be inevitable) to
the necessitating power of Divine providence, thus giving the subjective feeling of
humankind towards fatality a name and an author (II 2). The seeming inevitability
of fate has its origin in the impression that it works both against any deliberate
action and beyond chance, to the effect that fatal incidents seem to come about
by combining all powers towards one (undesired) end. Therefore it is not only the
constellation, and not only some volition, nor some natural circumstance that make
up fatal necessity, but rather it is the total sum of all these which appears as one's
fate: 'Ducunt volentem fata, nolentem trahunt.'[9] Accordingly fate can be defined
as the concurrence of causes, that is, as that power that ties together all causes,
higher and subordinate causalities, in order to achieve a specific effect (II 3, p.
30). The third aspect of fate, as given in Salutati's definition, shows yet another
implication of necessity. Not only must there be a power that acts effectively and
not only must it dispose of all and any means towards the desired effect, it must
also rule its effects in such a way that these effects could not exist unless the cause
is causing, and given the cause the event must take effect (II 4, pp. 31–32).

These considerations, proffered with scholastic acuteness and adorned with
classical references, aim at determining the way human will operates (which, as
already anticipated, was diagnosed as the cause of the Perugia turbulences) and
how free will is positioned with regards to God's plan. These are, indeed, the
central issues of this treatise and are essential for an understanding of Salutati's
philosophy of religion.

If it is correct that necessity, in the full sense, is given only if all levels of
causation work together to bring about the effect and if this entails that God is the
only power that unrestrictedly coordinates all causes, then everything that happens
in this created world is dependent on God's providing the necessary means.
Salutati emphasizes the paradox by observing that God does not simply necessitate
everything, but, rather, in employing or providing lower level causes for effects to
become, He can create things as either necessary or contingent, so that 'something
miraculous happens, namely necessity and contingency go together', similarly as

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[8]   *De fato* II 1, p. 23: 'ut fatum sit necessitas a Dei providentia fluens, cunta dirigens
et gubernans que sub celo sunt et efficiuntur'.

[9]   *De fato* II 3, p. 30: 'Fate guides the willing, and drags the unwilling.'

curved and straight lines coexist in natural bodies.[10] On the one hand, everything is necessary in the sense of depending on the almighty God, on the other hand, 'this very necessity implies contingency, because for the perfection and order of the universe not only necessity is required but also contingency.' However contingency is to necessity as time to eternity, which then connects with God's eternal wisdom and foresight.[11] To say it even more pointedly: Contingency is necessary for the perfection of the world; necessity is contingent on God's plan.

It becomes immediately clear that free will is embedded in God's providence. Salutati takes the murder of Caesar as an example: God foresaw and saw to it that Brutus killed the dictator, but so 'that he killed him not necessarily, but rather in a contingent way and with free will'.[12] The philosopher therefore reiterates that will is defined by freedom and that nothing can coerce will under any condition because it is by its essence free (II 8, p. 65). God operates His plans through human freedom in conjunction with several other causes, including material conditions and incidental circumstances. Free will and providential necessity are conjoined in divine providence and will, and will without determination by freedom (*voluntas sine libertatis arbitrio*) would not achieve what God provided, so that the whole process would be jeopardized if one of the elements were eliminated (p. 67). This speculation comes to its climax when Salutati discusses the Stoic understanding of necessity: He sees no contradiction to Seneca's and others' stress on its power by assigning it to God and His working. At this very point he adduces the teaching of St Paul who said: 'For it is God who works in you both to will and to work (*velle et perficere*) (Philippians 2:13).' Now we learn that the First Cause 'influences our acts far more than will itself does', to the effect that 'due to this plus of activity the whole is to be attributed to God' (II 6, p. 51). However once we have begun an action, determination and will impose themselves in order not to desist—or in order to freely derelict what had been started.[13] So the antinomy is reinforced, namely that God operates everything, and nevertheless human will is free. Towards the Stoics, then, it may be granted that we have to submit our will to fate (that is, Providence), but with the condition that our volitions (even though God 'operates them in us') remain the unrestrictedly free and secure cause of their actions and

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[10]   *De fato* II 7, p. 59: 'Necessitat [Deus] enim cuncta que de nichilo produxit ut sint, sed ut necessaria vel contingentia sint (…) ut mirabile quiddam eveniat quod simul coeant necessitas et contingentia.'

[11]   *De fato* II 7, p. 60: 'Implicatur autem huic necessitati contingentia (…).'

[12]   *De fato* II 7, pp. 61–62: 'Providit enim Deus (…) quod eum interficeret non necessario, sed prorsus contingenter et libera voluntate.' 'Providit' can have both meanings: to make sure and to anticipate that something happens.

[13]   *De fato* II 6, p. 51: 'imperat tamen arbitrium et ipsa voluntas sibimet ut a proposito non desistat et, si quandoque se voluntas ab incepo retraxerit, hoc non potest nisi voluntate sibi per liberum arbitrium imperante.'

freely cooperate with God's activity.[14] One might think that, having just recovered freedom of action, the circle seems to close because even these free acts are, of course, God's work.

Cooperation is the formula. The case of Socrates serves as an example of free acceptance of death. It turns out that free acts are those that free themselves from contingencies and necessities, as was the case in Socrates' accepting the unjust sentence. Obviously this is possible only by taking circumstances into account, by accepting the inevitable, by 'making necessity our will,'[15] as Salutati put it. What is needed is something like a gnoseology of freedom. First all acts have an ontological status as 'being' and as such they must depend on the Creator; second, according to standard metaphysics, all beings are good. Now even though God concurs with voluntary acts, metaphysically speaking He can do so only as long as they are good. Consequently God does not work 'deformed' acts: He is not the efficient but the 'deficient' cause of bad acts (II 9, p. 77). Hence free acts are free under the condition of insight into God's will and into the conditions of acting, thus mostly working under adverse circumstances; whereas evil acts, by definition, are not free but defection from the good. Therefore Salutati locates Socrates' heroism in the context of sin by playing with the words *delictum* and *peccatum*, which are said to connote dereliction and desertion.[16] Virtue seems to consist in staying the course that has been commenced on the basis of insight into what is true, good and necessary.

Naturally the question of predestination has to be addressed because it would seem promising to know one's due by knowing in advance what God might have deemed appropriate in His order. But as many cases in which something horrendous, and even immoral, happens with good results nonetheless show that it is not granted to humans to know the divine order, but—as the same stories sometimes evince—in retrospect the evil took a good turn. Salutati illustrates this with the story of David and Absalom (2 Samuel:13–14). Had David seen the entire set of events 'in the source of eternity' as it is, he would have judged it most beautiful and admired, blessed and praised God's goodness and wisdom (II 10, p. 95). Unfortunately this divine perspective is not granted to humans. But from this fact it follows, for Salutati, that 'human garrulity should stop exacting the reason of the effects of divine will'; and even more, such demand would be equal to 'demanding from the Creator, what we could not even account for in our own volitions'![17] From this it follows that, according to the humanist, we have to

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[14]   *De fato* II 6, p. 52: 'nullum inconveniens sit fato nostras subicere voluntates (…) ut suorum actuum, quos "Deus operatur in nobis" [St Paul, Ephesians 3:20], libere et ab omni compulsionis necessitate secure causa sint et agenti Deo libere cooperentur.'

[15]   *De fato* II 9: 'de necessitate facimus voluntatem.'

[16]   *De fato* II 9, p. 77; cf. Novati 2, pp. 321–324.

[17]   *De fato* II 10: 'Desinat igitur humana garrulitas de divine voluntatis effectibus petere rationem, nisi dignum existimet creaturam id de creatore querere, quod nesciremus de nostris voluntatibus assignari.'

observe history as it evolves and to try to gain insight into the workings of our will. The third tract of the *De fato* will then show the meaning of fortune, if it is not semantically identical with fate, to depend on the acceptance or rejection of the complex events humanity encounters.

At this point it should be noted that Salutati does not even attempt to solve the problem of freedom, whereas all his effort strives towards pointing out the paradox. It has been noted that he takes a strictly voluntarist concept of divine power for granted.[18] What he shows, here and in other writings, are the consequences for human affairs. As a politician and advisor—as is evident from the occasion of his *De fato*—he can only stress that political events depend on human will, for ill or for good. And considering the fact that such human volitions, because they are free, have to take into account whatever circumstances and inevitable facts might determine our free acts, Salutati comes quite close to the assessment that around one hundred years later the other Florentine Chancellor (who saw political success as depending on virtue and fortune) will offer, meaning by this the informed employment of will under conditions of unpredictable fatal influences. There is, indeed, a host of evidences that Salutati was not pursuing merely philosophical or theological doctrine but that his agenda was of practical and social orientation. For instance in a letter from 1393 to a humanist friend he took the praise offered him as an occasion to summarize his doctrine of free will and Providence: 'if there is reason for praise then only because one, exercising free will, did not deviate from the law in his actions ('which God does in and through us')—an achievement impossible without God's grace.'[19] For the humanist the workings of the will affect not only his own musings but also his relationship with his friends. More importantly, in his treatise on *The Ranking of Laws and Medicine*, Salutati dedicates an entire chapter to the structure of will. Here he maintains that, among the faculties of the human soul, will is dominant in that it commands intellect what to investigate, or where to focus attention.[20] Even if one argues that virtue consists in the operation of the intellect (as Aristotle suggested in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, 7, 1177 b), still one has to admit that the intellect as such is passive, so that it cannot perform its proper operation, namely thinking, without the governance of will; hence the conclusion that virtue comprises both will and intellect.[21] Immediately before this

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[18] Trinkaus 1970, p. 85 f. and passim; Keßler, 'Salutati: der Humanist und die Wissenschaften', in Salutati 1990, p. XVII. An investigation into Salutati's sources is not the aim of this study, therefore one reference may suffice: Occam, *In Sent. I*, dist. 38, C (Occam 1962, fol. gg v *verso*): 'voluntas divina est libera inquantum est operativa'; L, p. gg vi *recto*: 'modum quo scit [deus] omnia futura contingentia exprimere est impossibile omni intellectui pro statu isto'; O, p. gg vi *verso*: 'sic intelligendum deum habere scientiam necessariam de futuris contingentibus, quod deus necessario sciat hoc futurum continges.'

[19] Novati 2, p. 476.

[20] Salutati 1947, (the Latin text of Salutati 1990, is a reprint of 1947, with identical page numbers): *De nobilitate legum et medicinae*, 23, pp. 182–196.

[21] *De nobilitate legum*, 23, p. 188.

point, Salutati had defended that wisdom cannot exist without prudence and that speculation is not at all the ultimate aim of human life. It is prudence that brings wisdom to perfection, supposed that wisdom is not limited to knowledge but comprises understanding of both human and divine things. Then, against Aristotle, Augustine is right in saying:

> And, as the study of wisdom consists in action and contemplation, so that one part of it may be called active, and the other contemplative, the active part having reference to the conduct of life, that is, to the regulation of morals, and the contemplative part to the investigation into the causes of nature and into pure truth, Socrates is said to have excelled in the active part of that study, while Pythagoras gave more attention to its contemplative part, on which he brought to bear all the force of his great intellect.[22]

The question of will has transformed itself into the related issue of the active and contemplative life. Contrary to common understanding, contemplation is understood to be search for truth as such, whereas active life is interpreted as striving for the good: good for the family, friends, homeland, society and ultimately that kind of beatitude which is natural for man to wish and that, finally, is being aspired to for the sake of itself.[23] This sort of volition is not only higher in ranking against intellectual achievements, it proves the point that will has to be free, if it qualifies human beings and their orientation toward beatitude. The gnoseology of freedom is not only rooted in the order of creation but also in the nature of the human soul, and freedom is the root of individual and social practice. The soul and her potentials should be the center of attention, not for the sake of theoretical knowledge but for the direction of virtues. Improvement of morals and maintenance of society are the true purposes of studies.[24] Theoretical and practical knowledge are both activities, hence contemplation, too; the difference lies in their ultimate end, which—for contemplation—is the beatific vision of God.[25]

The treatise in question defended, against the traditional medieval hierarchy of university faculties, the superiority of laws over medicine. The thrust of the argument was that medicine deals with natural objects, whereas jurisprudence directs human voluntary activity and eventually serves the individual and the societal good. Medicine fights corporeal illnesses, whereas 'laws prescribe honesty and prohibit the opposite, they contain in an admirable way the wills

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[22]   Augustine, *City of God*, 8, 4 (http://religionanddemocracy.lib.virginia.edu/library/tocs/AugCity.html). Salutati 1947, p. 180.

[23]   *De nobilitate legum*, 22, p. 180.

[24]   *De nobilitate legum*, 5, p. 36.

[25]   *De nobilitate legum*, 5, p. 38. Cf. *De laboribus Herculis* (Salutati 1951), IV 1, 7, p. 501 f.: 'intellectus (…) duplex est, practicus scilicet et speculativus. Ille namque sicut ist cogitat operatur'.

of men not to derelict righteousness of action.'[26] Moreover, medicine is limited
to the individual, the concrete body, but 'laws treat the "mystic body", which is
made of the plurality of men in households, counties, cities, peoples, kingdoms
and empires—the kingdom of kingdoms; they all are designed, founded and
maintained by laws'. Sanity, which is the balance of bodily humors in medicine,
is concord in society.[27]

If Salutati could have seemed to head towards some pietistic self-consolation
over the irreconcilableness of will and providence, it is evident that he aimed both
at individual salvation and political order and that he sees both rooted in the same
anthropology of created freedom. Therefore it is not surprising that Salutati also
referred to the free-will problem when advising friends on the question whether
to flee the city in times of plague.[28] In a letter, cited earlier, where he explains
the meaning of life in terms of moral action, he distinguished the words '*ago*'
and '*facio*' (doing vs. making) by their way of transcendence: Making terminates
in something bodily perceptible; whereas doing tends towards incorporeal and
spiritual objects.[29]

One more consideration is necessary: From the treatment of the question,
especially in the treatise on law, the impression could arise that Salutati laid such
a high emphasis on the primacy of will that he might appear irrational. This,
however, would not match the image of the skilled politician or the political vision
just mentioned. Evidently he emphasized will, for the sake of his argument, but
was well aware that will without reason is willful. In a simile he compares will
with a ship: In the same way as a ship is driven by winds, water and oars, will is
motivated by starry influences, sensual incentives and freedom of determination.[30]
However, he takes the comparison further, arguing that the rudder to the ship is
as reason to the will, each steering and keeping the other on track. Reason helps
pursue the aim of life, the good, unless reasoning falls to error and takes for good
what is evil. Within the voluntaristic mode of thought, in the same way God
engages human freedom in order to pursue His aims, so does human virtue and
free will employ reasoning to steer the course. Even if there is a predominance of
will in the faculties of the soul, will cannot operate without the judgment of the
mind, determining where and what object is conducive to the pursuit of happiness.
In another passage Salutati explains that in an ideal status, when free will is
perfectly formed, will would choose of two alternatives the one that is 'willed by

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[26]   *De nobilitate legum*, 38, p. 252.

[27]   *De nobilitate legum*, 38, p. 254.

[28]   Novati 2, pp. 228–237.

[29]   Novati 3, p. 248.

[30]   *De laboribus Herculis* (Salutati 1951), III 21, p. 344. Salutati repeatedly polemicized
against astrology, for example *De fato*, III 1, and Novati 1, pp. 281–288; therefore within
the simile of the ship (p. 344) he stresses that for the virtuous sailor, Hercules, the vessel
cannot be shaken by winds in the same way that will cannot be overcome by celestial
influences.

true reason'; actually will would not need to decide at all, since it would be drawn by the right one 'without the delay of deliberation'.[31] However, this is not the ordinary case, but that of the hero, and if we remember Socrates' attitude, we see that giving in to the necessities of the circumstances, or to make necessity our will, describes the process of deliberation over what is truly good and how to achieve it. In this sense, will is not commanding reason, but rather reason, ideally, tells what to wish. It is exactly the mutual forces of reason and will that make up free will, as Salutati continues, and that assess the options in order to make up one's mind.[32] Or, as Salutati stated in his *De fato*, 'Will forces upon itself necessity, if it wills to follow reason and throughout wills what right reason tells it to do.'[33]

Evidently Salutati displays a vast knowledge of scholastic method and terminology, but it is also clear that he tends to undermine these by shifting focus from doctrinal disputation towards engagement in the practical meaning of the problems that occur. It is surely indicative that he started his treatise *On Fate and Fortune* with the *incipit* 'Quotidianum esse videmus' ('It is a daily observation …'). Therefore it is safe to say that for him the apogee of theological subtleties serves as a lighthouse toward which a Christian should aim; however, these need to be translated into language and images that can be communicated to a world of real humans. Part of Salutati's efforts was therefore spent on analysis of words, of ways of speaking, of which we encountered but a few examples. He dedicated even more attention to observations of human conduct, in which his published correspondence abounds. His true vocation as a humanist (in the narrow sense of the term) he saw in recuperating the wealth of ancient literature and its instantiations of matters human and divine.

Some of the references above were taken from *De laboribus Herculis*, the largest, but incomplete, work of Salutati, dedicated to the interpretation of the myths of Hercules' labors in Greek and Roman literature. It was conceived as a model of how pagan mythology can and should be read and understood by Christians. Of course the humanist followed the lead of Dante (who had called on Virgil to guide him through the *Inferno*, populated with pre-Christian personalities and Christian sinners), of Francesco Petrarca, who initiated the humanist quest for classical scholarship, and of Giovanni Boccaccio, author of *De genealogia deorum gentilium* with a seminal set of two concluding chapters that defended

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[31]   *De laboribus Herculis*, IV 2, 7, p. 558: 'Hoc enim habit consumate perfecto liberum arbitrium rectum est, et voluntas eligit libere partem illam contradictionis quam ratio vera vult, imo non eligit sed in ipsam fertur sine cunctatione deliberationis.'

[32]   *De laboribus Herculis*, IV 2, 7, p. 558: 'Vellet enim libertas arbitrii, que quidem actus est rationis et voluntatis, primo discutere deliberareque quamnam contradictionis partem eligere deceat et in illam impellere voluntatem'.

[33]   *De fato*, II 6, p. 55 f.: 'Imponit ipsa sibi tamen voluntas necessitatem si rationem sequi vult, ut illud omnino velit quod sibi ratio recta dictabit.'

reading pagan literature.[34] What is important for an understanding of Salutati's philosophy of religion is the method of reading such sources he suggests and the understanding of human relationship to God that is implied.

Perhaps Boccaccio had already made the most essential statement when he claimed that ancient poets were rightly termed theologians: As the ancient poets 'first composed hymns of praise to the gods, and, as I have said, in a poetic guise, presented their great powers and acts, they won the name of theologians even among the primitive pagans [*a prisca gentilitate*].'[35] Salutati will reinforce this observation by making worship of God the origin of poetry: 'The origin of Poetry—which they [the philosophers of our times] attack so doggedly—lies in the praise of divinity and virtue, which the heathens have in common with the true religion.'[36] Salutati transforms into a philosophical principle Petrarch's apologetic argument that 'theology is a poem about God', since the Bible compares Christ with a lion and a lamb, and Christ himself liked telling fables.[37] In Salutati, the argument has advanced from explaining literary ploys to bestowing theological dignity on human speech.

Boccaccio had provided an encyclopedia of ancient mythology that later would serve as a handbook for Renaissance artists.[38] He had devised genealogy as the organizing structure and compiled the information obtainable from classical sources by explaining the kinship of the various deities. He certainly took as his model those genealogies that mark the epic structure of some biblical narratives, for example, the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew.[39] By making genealogical

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[34] Cf. Garofalo 1947, p. 38–43; Eugenio Garin, 'Le Favole antiche', in Garin 1973, pp. 63–84; Ronconi 1976, for Petrarch and Mussato; Mésoniat 1984. It should be said from the outset that Salutati's interpretation is not a Christian appropriation as might be expected; see Simon 1955, pp. 176–177.

[35] Boccaccio 1956, *Genealogy of the Gods*, 15, 8, p. 122. Boccaccio 1998, *Genealogie deorum gentilium lib. XV*, 8, p. 1546.

[36] *De laboribus Herculis*, I 1, p. 9: 'Est igitur poetrie, quam isti tam mordaciter impugnant, initium laudatio divinitatis atque virtutis quam gentiles hauerunt cum vera religione communem.' The book begins with the statement that, before dealing with the deeds of Hercules, some words on poetry are in order, because these tales are despised not only by ordinary people but also by 'qui se philosophos nostro tempore gloriantur' (p. 3). If the words 'mordaciter impugnant' are to be taken as a clue, the accused person may be the Camaldolensian monk Giovanni da Samminiato, who, according to Salutati's letter to him, had begun 'mordaciter pungere' classical studies. Salutati retorted by defining poetry in similar terms as quoted. Ullman 1963, p. 59, confirms the identity of the addressee; cf. Mésoniat 1984, p. 33.

[37] Petrarca, letter to his brother Gerardus, *Familiares* X 4, quoted from Garin 1958, pp. 30–35.

[38] Seznec 1953, p. 258; Boccaccio was used alongside with, for example, Lilio Giraldi and Cartari.

[39] Mazzotta 2000, p. 361. It should be noted that 'genealogie' in the title is genitive case singular (depending on 'liber primus, secundus' etc.) and not nominative plural as

succession the unifying bond of Greek Gods, he foreshadowed the form of thought that became dominant among Renaissance thinkers according to which truth and wisdom are handed over from sages to sages to the effect that true wisdom can be secured by tracing it back to the primordial revelations of mythic figures like Zoroaster, Hermes and, of course, Moses. Boccaccio's origins of mythological figures, then, will be transformed into the myth of origin. He concluded his treatment with two chapters that explained the nature of poetic fictions and defended their usefulness. Salutati, being fully aware of the objections against reading pagan poetry, decided to give an exemplary treatment of just one mythological narrative, that of Hercules, and therefore opened his work with his defense of dealing with pagan mythology. Boccaccio, author of various narratives that encompassed more or less moral and more or less remote personages, appeared to offer a service for the learned audience, but he was compelled to conclude it with an apology for his enterprise.[40] On the contrary Salutati started with a broad offensive to promote classical studies in a Christian society, and this attitude is only reinforced by the fact that he started each book of the *Labors of Hercules* with a renewed defense of this task.

A brief look into the book shows the way Salutati proposes to read ancient fables. For example the parallel of the ship and the voluntary action, mentioned above, was prompted by Hercules' struggle with the ocean: 'Let us now see', he suggested, 'what ships may signify for poets.'[41] Here an example from the beginning of the myth: The interpretation of the hero's birth is preceded by a digression on the physiology of human conception.[42] Then follows a discussion of the factual events that are put in an understandable order. The fact that Jupiter begot Hercules with Alcmene under the disguise of Amphytrion: 'what else can it be than the influence of the heavens that operate invisibly through Amphytrion, i.e., the semen?' Also the fact that Jupiter was assisted by Mercury, the servant and spokesman of the gods, hints at astrological influence because the planet Mercury is said to execute the dispositions of the governing stars.[43] The next chapter offers a 'moral' interpretation according to which Amphytrion and Alcmene represent soul and body, and since Jupiter and Mercury, who represent reason and communication, were involved, it is evident that Hercules stands not only for man as such, but even for 'the future philosopher'.[44] All these explanations rely upon various poets, as well as on standard authors in all kinds of scholarly disciplines. Now what is striking for any Christian reader is the fact that Salutati openly applies the method of biblical interpretation: he first explains the words

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some authors seem to assume (see translation in Boccaccio 1998, and title of Hege 1997). This is critical because Boccaccio endeavors, indeed, to join all deities into one kinship.

[40]   On the apologetic outlook of Boccaccio's book XIV see Hege 1997, pp. 12–17.
[41]   *De laboribus Herculis*, III 21, p. 344.
[42]   *De laboribus Herculis*, II 8–9.
[43]   *De laboribus Herculis*, II 10, pp. 119–120.
[44]   *De laboribus Herculis*, II 11, pp. 122–125.

and events, and then he transfers to a symbolic meaning and concludes with some moral application.

As a reminder it might be sufficient to quote Nicholas of Lyra who, in the early fourteenth century (not long ago for Salutati), had reported the rule for reading the Bible with the well known jingle: 'Litera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria. Moralis quid agas: quo tendas anagogia.'[45] More specifically, he had explained that there is a basic difference between the 'literal or historic' narration of the facts and what they stand for, which is termed the 'mystical' or 'spiritual' meaning. The latter can be unfolded in three ways: all facts and events of the Old Testament pre-announce what will happen in the New Testament, which is the allegorical meaning; what the events tell us, the readers, about our actions, which is the 'moral or tropological' meaning; and what we may hope for with regard to our future beatitude, which is the 'anagogical' meaning. Nicholas uses 'Jerusalem' as an example: it is some city with a specific place and history; in a moral sense it refers to the faithful soul; allegorically, it signifies the Church in this world (*ecclesia militans*); and anagogically it looks forward to the community of saints (*ecclesia triumphans*). Nicholas also reminded his readers that there is 'an interior and an exterior book', which reinforces the basic divide between the more hidden spiritual meaning and the obvious literal meaning of scripture.[46] What is worth observing in this version of the *sensus* doctrine is that this French Franciscan theologian emphasizes the 'agenda' of reading the Bible. From the acts of the biblical world we learn about our duties and hopes.

Salutati's immediate inspirations were Dante and Boccaccio. Not only had Dante made Virgil his guide through the Underworld, he even had explained that he wanted his epic *Divina commedia* read according to the four senses. 'The meaning of this work is not of one kind only; rather the work may be described as "*polysemous*," that is, having several meanings.' Then follows a summary of the four senses.[47] The scandal implied in this claim to have a secular epic interpreted in terms of Holy Scripture is only mitigated, but not taken away, by its contents, the journey of the soul from hell through purgatory into paradise. In his *Convivio*, Dante explained 'how to eat this "dinner"', and this time, there can be no doubt that the matter is secular. Plus, it is announced from the outset to be meant as an allegory.[48] Therefore in explaining again the four senses, he calls the poetic

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[45]   Nicolaus de Lyra, *Prologus in Bibliam*, PL 113, col. 28 D; also in his commentary on St Paul's Letter to the Galatians, Chapter 4: Nicolaus de Lyra 1488, fol. x8v–x9r.

[46]   Nicolaus de Lyra, PL 113, cols 28 C–29 A. On this basic divide in the meaning of Holy Scripture see de Lubac 1998–2000, vol. 2, p. 25, and passim.

[47]   Dante, *Letter* 10, to Can Grande della Scala § 7, quoted from the English translation published in Mazzotta (ed.) 1991, p. 5. The term Dante proposed in the Latin original is the Greek 'polysemos' (Dante 1921, II, p. 485). On the authenticity of the letter see Sarteschi 2005 (with bibliography).

[48]   Dante 1921, II, p. 71: 'per allegorica sposizione quelle intendo mostrare, appresso la litterale storia ragionata'.

way of telling fables 'a pleasant lie' (*bella menzogna*) that conveys some truth. Dante hastens to add that this kind of poetic allegory is different from that of the theologians—but he does not dwell upon the difference.[49] He might have referred to the usage of allegory, as quoted from Nicholas of Lyra, in the narrow sense of pre-figuration or typology according to which the Old Testament announces the New Testament. And there can be no new covenant to follow secular poetry, one should think. The only clue Dante's text gives is the word 'lie': evidently biblical narratives are true on the historical plane. But nevertheless, even though poetic fictions are 'lies' in the literal/historic sense, the factuality of the facts told 'precedes the moral understanding'. [50] When Dante claimed that his *Divine Comedy* deserved a multifold interpretation, he ran the risk that his work could stand side by side with the biblical books.[51] On the other hand, to claim this kind of exegesis for a secular work entailed, willingly or not, that he transformed exegesis into what we now would call hermeneutics, the need and right to investigate the meaning of fiction beyond the narrative. In literary hermeneutics, fictionality against factuality becomes the basis of interpretation. In poetry, consequently, fiction equals invention and thus emulates Divine creation to the effect that the poet gains importance over the factuality of his fiction.[52] From this perspective we can appreciate Salutati's courage. He presents a whole system of allegorical and moral inferences on the basis of poetic fictions—and even worse, the core of their contents, pagan mythology, is supposed to be fictitious, fake and false. Consequently the intentions of the authors acquire greater importance than the factual reality of the stories.

'A poet is a very good man, experienced in lauding and blaming, who in metrical and metaphorical speech hoards truth under the mystery of some narration.'[53] As for the first part Salutati explicitly applied the definition of the rhetorician to that of the poet. This move allowed him to emphasize the role of the poet's personality. The key concept of the activity of the poet in this definition is 'figurativo sermone'—metaphorical speaking. Throughout the first book of his work Salutati insists on the operation of transferring 'words for words, things for things'. On his

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[49]   Dante 1921, II, p. 101 f.: '… allegorico, e questo … è una verità ascosa sotto bella menzogna. … Veramente li teologi questo senso prendono altrimenti, che li poeti.'

[50]   Dante 1921, II, p. 102: 'sempre lo litterale dee andare inanzi, e sanza lo quale sarebbe impossibile e irrazionale intendere agli altri … onde … impossibile è venire all'altre, massimamente all'allegorica, sanza prima venire alla litterale.' Both de Lubac (1959–1964, vol. 4, pp. 319–325) and Singleton (1991, p. 150) skirt around the fact that Dante does not disclose the difference; he only says that in the Bible the historical truth is manifest.

[51]   Cf. Mésoniat 1984, pp. 73–75, on various interpretations of this claim.

[52]   Sarteschi 2005, p. 86.

[53]   *De laboribus Herculis*, I 12, p. 63: 'Est igitur poeta vir optimus laudandi vituperandique peritus, metrico figurativoque sermone sub alicuius narrationis misterio vera recondens.'

account all poetry started with the civilizing task 'to contain the savageness of the people' by extolling virtuous men to heaven and to educate them to admire virtues with the help of sermons 'exchanging words for words and facts for facts' so that they believed that those whom they knew to be mortals were being transferred to heaven.[54] To attract 'rude people' to religion was the primary function of such metaphorical speech, even concealing that the gods were actually human and base. Nevertheless, worshipers of the true God also took recourse to 'words that were agreeable to creature when talking about the Creator'. [55] Figurative or—as we would say—metaphorical expression is unavoidable in religious discourse. And here the poet comes in.

> In the same way as the divine Scripture consists of the love of God and the neighbor, of which it is made and into which everything composed in it is to be dissolved, in the same way secular—as I may call it—and human poetic scripture has a creator and a creature, and everything contained in it is to be referred back to these or their actions.[56]

The author of the Bible conveys the message of self-reference and reference to humanity, and analogously secular fiction narrates about actors and actions. But these are viewed in terms of divine creation, and the parallel would remain incomplete, if it did not also refer back to the poet as creator. This argument is brought forward as the foundation for a pious reading of pagan texts. But one more reflection on Salutati's method is necessary.

Not only had the preachers of true religion adapted their mode of expression to the simple folk and not only had Lactantius confirmed that figurative language was proper to narrate true facts,[57] but the Bible itself has infinite meanings, exactly because its author is the Holy Spirit with infinite wisdom.[58] With reference to the well-discussed multitude of meanings of the Bible, the humanist emphasizes

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[54] *De laboribus Herculis*, I 1, p. 7: 'non plano orationis genere sed verba pro verbis et res pro rebus suavissime commutantes'. Cf. the definiton of poetic language in Novati 4, p. 177 (to Giovanni da Samminiato): 'quae vel rebus vel verbis aliud intelligit quam ostendit.'

[55] *De laboribus Herculis*, I 2, p. 15. Cf. Novati 3, p. 225, sq. on poetry described in terms of rhetoric.

[56] *De laboribus Herculis*, II 2, p. 82: 'Unum tamen dixerim quod, sicut habet divina scriptura dilectionem dei et proximi, qua componitur et in quam quicquid est in ipsa compositum resolvatur, sic secularis, ut ita dixerim, et humana poetica creatorem habe et creaturam, in quos aut in quorum actus quicquid obtegit redigatur.'

[57] *De laboribus Herculis*, I 13, p. 71.

[58] *De laboribus Herculis*, II 2, p. 87: 'Illa cum autorem habet spiritum sanctum, ad infinitos sensus ordinata est. Nec potest excogitari veritas litterae congruens quam illa infinita sapientia de cuius throno processit ab initio non intenderit.'

the authorship of God and, at the same time, encourages interpretation.[59] The omnipotence and omniscience of God, which served as the basis of human freedom, as we have seen, also sets hermeneutics free. One of the earliest theoreticians of the multiple interpretation of the Bible was Origen, who was known to Salutati.[60] In the fourth book of his *De principiis* that deals with Scripture, he admitted the unsuitability of human language to divine wisdom.[61] From this the need for a spiritual interpretation becomes evident. But part of this incongruity is that, in the Bible, logical consistency on the historic level cannot always be found.[62] The most compelling argument is that St Paul had set an example of spiritual understanding when he interpreted Abraham's two sons by two women (supposing that Abraham's behavior was not quite recommendable in this case) as an allegory, meaning the old and the new covenant.[63] Origen continues to cite examples of inconsistencies on the literal/historical level that should document that the Holy Spirit had 'enveloped and hidden arcane mysteries in ordinary language under the pretext of some story about visible things'.[64] In this perspective Origen explains the need and desirability of a multi-level reading of Scripture. But this multifaceted approach is neither arbitrary on the side of the readers nor is it contrived to mend some glitches in an otherwise true story.[65] In the Church Father's view 'divine wisdom provided some stumbling stones or breaks in the historical events by inserting some impossibilities and inconsistencies' in order to open the understanding for the higher meaning.[66] Given that the spiritual and the material 'stories' run parallel, he explains, and given that some truth cannot possibly be explained in worldly terms, the Holy Spirit had to insert occasionally what barely or impossibly or not at all had happened.[67]

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[59]   On the late medieval swaying between strict literalism and divine authorship see Froehlich 1977.

[60]   Quoted a.o. in *De laboribus Herculis*, II 10, p. 119; Novati 4, p. 235 (Letter to Giovanni Dominici).

[61]   Origenes, *De principiis*, IV 7, PG 11, col. 355 B, with reference to 2 Corinthians 4:7; reiterated IV 26, col. 399 A.

[62]   *De principiis*, IV 12, col. 366 B.

[63]   *De principiis*, IV 13, col. 370 A, referring to Galatians 4:24, the *locus* that had prompted Nicholas of Lyra's digression, quoted above.

[64]   *De principiis*, IV 14, col. 371 A: 'involveret et occultaret sermonibus usitatis, sub praetextu historiae alicuius et narrationis rerum visibilium, arcana mysteria.'

[65]   Such is frequently the attitude in the debate over literal, or even 'fundamentalist', *versus* purely theological or literary reading of the Bible in cases like the Galileo affair or the debate about creationism.

[66]   *De principiis*, IV 15, col. 374 B–375 A: '… offendicula quaedam, vel intercapedines'.

[67]   *De principiis*, IV 15, col. 375 A: 'ubi autem spiritali consequentiae rerum gestarum historia convenire non peterat, interdum inseruit quaedam, vel minus gesta, vel quae omnino geri non possent, interdum etiam quae possent quidem geri, nec tamen gesta sunt.'

So, the narrative authorship of the Holy Spirit has precedence, and as a consequence factual truth—in the Bible!—is of secondary order. That calls for a spiritual interpretation which, of course, may not and cannot be arbitrary once we have gathered that we do not understand what is hidden but we do understand there is something to it, thanks to the interpretive hints given in the text.[68] 'Hermeneutics is based on the fact of the non-understanding of the discourse', as Friedrich Schleiermacher will put it later.[69] This is precisely Salutati's strategy. Throughout his commentaries on Hercules and the Greek mythological world, he strives to reconcile contradicting information and impossible events by making the existence of such stumbling blocks his points of departure. For instance, he raises the question why Jupiter has various names and interpretations, or why Hercules has a twin brother for some and for some not. One might object that Greek mythology does not have a single author, and the Holy Spirit is certainly not the author. Salutati adapts biblical exegesis by making deliberate authorship (of many humans) the basis of an interpretation that seeks humanly accessible wisdom in fundamentally false narratives. This entails, and he explains it at length, that those heathen authors must have intended some truth that does not depend on Revelation and is nevertheless reconcilable with it. Boccaccio had quoted Varro who, according to St Augustine, had famously divided theology into mythical, physical and civil. Not surprisingly such fabulous theology was chastised by Augustine, and therefore Boccaccio had made a strategic move: without further ado he categorized the theology of the poets—the sources of his mythology—as physical theology.[70] The effect is that dealing with pagan mythology equals natural theology, usually associated with investigation of nature in terms of evidence of God's creating power.

The fictionality or createdness of poetry justifies giving it an allegorical and generally spiritual interpretation, as was stated earlier. As an example Salutati refers to an allocution of Venus to Love in Virgil's *Aeneid*: 'My son, my strength, my great power, you alone, son, who scorns the shafts of the highest Father.'[71] The poet must have said this out of the profundity of divine majesty, namely the unity of essence in multiplicity of persons. And Salutati continues explaining that even though Virgil and the other pagan poets had no knowledge of trinity, while reporting about their gods and trying to extol them to divine majesty, they brought forward ideas that are quite appropriate—not to pagan gods, since they do not exist but to

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[68]   *De principiis*, IV 9, col. 362 C: 'intelligere non possunt quid in his lateat, intelligitur tamen quod lateat quid'.

[69]   Schleiermacher 1996, *Die allgemeine Hermeneutik* (1809-10), Einleitung § 1, p. 194: 'Die Hermeneutik beruht auf dem Factum des Nichtverstehens der Rede.'

[70]   *De genealogia deorum*, Preface and XV 8, Boccaccio 1956, pp. 6 and 121 f.; cf. Augustine, *City of God*, VI 5–6; Hege 1997, p. 8 f.

[71]   Virgil, *Aeneid*, I 664 f.; my translation reflects the punctuation in Salutati, *De laboribus Herculis*, II 2, p. 82: 'Nate, mee vires, mea magna potentia, solus, nate, patris summi qui tela Typhoea temnis.' Cf. Novati 1, p. 303.

the true God.[72] The hermeneutic method has to be such to relate back to the true God and His creatures, or their properties sound like fables. Here Salutati dares to maintain that the interpreter eventually excels the original author in understanding what he wrote.[73] The original relationship among the facts, the narrator and the reader is turned upside down: the interpreter first sees the authorship in the reported facts, and from there he is entitled to make sense of them and to take command not only over truth of the matter—what was called historical sense—but even over the intentions of the author. From this perspective it is easy to find truth, Christian truth, all over ancient mythology. The multitude of deities, for instance, foreshadows the unity and trinity of God. Salutati argues that given the variety of names for one single deity (for example, Diana, Proserpina, Moon), it is evident that, in all these multitudes of gods, the poets presupposed just one essence that acquired as many names as it has powers. For 'these names, since they are not identical with things, signified not many gods, but rather various potencies, acts, and effects of the same one thing.'[74] Salutati thus reaches a rudimental version of the 'presupposition method' that later will be developed by Nicholas Cusanus, who saw the true religion presupposed in the others. If there is truth in pagan fables that must be unearthed by the interpreter and if the Old Testament was to be the fulfilled by the New, then Greek and Roman mythology becomes something close to an old covenant for Christianity. Marsilio Ficino will especially play on the typology of ancient wisdom and Christian belief, the parallel of Socrates and Christ being the most visible example.

With such a daring project Salutati faced objections and criticism from his contemporaries. In a letter from 1378 to his friend Giuliano Zonarini, he defended his beloved Virgil, who had been called a liar. The humanist answered by playing with the term *mentificus* (fabricating lies), which rather should be understood as 'mentem faciens': 'forming the mind'. And, more seriously, he suggested a high-minded reading of the scorned pagan fictions and epics, which can well be as edifying as Christian readings. Even more, they can be judged as highly theological, supposing that 'either truth tends to emerge from the swamps of falsities, or the omnipotent God willed to reveal himself to the mortals through the testimony of all sects and beliefs'.[75] Even though the interpreter carries the burden of proof that he correctly understands the ultimate meaning of poetic fiction, he may rely upon

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[72]   *De laboribus Herculis*, II 2, p. 83: 'vero deo congruentia protulerunt.'

[73]   *De laboribus Herculis*, II 2, p. 86: 'audacter affirmem ipsum [interpretem] sine controversia veram autoris elicuisse sententiam, aut si forsitan illa non fuerit, et ad id quod autor intendisset nomina non accedant, longe commodiorem sensum quam autor cogitaverit invenisse.'

[74]   *De laboribus Herculis*, II 2, p. 85 f.: 'sic omnem illam deorum numerositatem unam omnium presupponentes essentiam iuxta potentiarum varietatem …'

[75]   Novati 1, p. 302 f.: 'sive proprium sit veritatis inter falsitatum inundationes emergere sive Deus omnipotens se voluerit mortalibus omnium sectarum et professionum testimonio refelare.' See the word play on p. 306.

God's will to reveal Himself not only through his creation and not only through the Bible but even through non-canonical texts. And the reason is—as it was in the justification of free will—His omnipotence. In one of the many letters that defend his method, in this case addressed to the Camaldolensian friar Giovanni di Duccio da Samminiato, he defended seeking truth in the works of the gentiles by reminding that God is truth itself: 'not simply truth but all truth, true and infinite and full truth, that is, source, seed and origin of all truths.' And as his reason he applied the Hermetic formula, according to which God is an infinite sphere of which the center is everywhere and the circumference is nowhere. In Salutati's version: 'God is the center that coexists with infinite circumferences, which cannot be said more or less distant to any of these, because he is everywhere.' Consequently 'it is the mind that connects with God, and from whatever state of life it invokes him, it will find him, since he is nowhere absent.'[76] And this held for the ancients, too.

A Dominican friar, Giovanni Dominici, who had been informed about the debate between Giovanni da Samminiato and Salutati, intervened with a voluminous treatise by the title *Lucula noctis.* In Chapters 3 and 24–26 he takes up the major achievement one could gather from Salutati, namely the foundation of heathen wisdom in God's wisdom and revelation. In Chapter 3, pretending to summarize the humanist's discourse, he puts it as the doctrine to imitate God's wisdom and also refers to the notion that God is 'infinite intellect that is present everywhere'.[77] After having elaborated on the various disciplines that are supposed to be present in God, Dominici concludes, seemingly echoing Salutati, that 'all so called secular sciences not only contain marvelous truths but also lead us to the radiant divine knowledge'.[78] His response to this framing of the argument proves that human knowledge is throughout incompatible with Divine Science considering substance, object, essence, mode and effect. Most importantly the Dominican derives from Aristotelian epistemology that human knowledge, in comparison with Divine Science, is shaky opinion and that God's knowledge of creature does not depend on investigation of particulars but on Himself, which is the only science in the proper sense.[79] In conclusion: 'God's science is the cause of things, conjoined with will; our science comes from things and not from the whim of will.'[80] Here he uses a key word that marked Salutati's philosophy, and he insists on this objection in the following chapters where he proves this inference: imitation of God is possible

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[76]   Novati 3, p. 541: 'sed Deus centrum est infinitis circumferentiis coexistens, cui, cum ubique sit, nulla propior nullaque distantior dici potest. … mens est quae Deo coniungitur et de quocunque statu vite clamavit, quoniam ipse nusqam abest, invenit illum, ad quem solum omnis creatura cogitur suspirare. Cf. *Liber XXIV philosophorum* in Lucentini (ed.) 1999, n. 2, p. 56: 'Deus est sphaera infinita cuius centrum est ubique, circumferentia nusquam.'

[77]   Dominici 1940, *Lucula noctis*, 3, p. 28.

[78]   *Lucula noctis*, 3, p. 34.

[79]   *Lucula noctis*, 24, p. 194 f.

[80]   *Lucula noctis*, 24, p. 197: 'Nam scientia Dei est causa rerum voluntati coniuncta; scientia nostra a rebus procedit nec hoc pro libito voluntatis.'

only through love (*dilectio*), which depends on cognition. But cognition is the fruit of obedience, and this eventually is found in conversing with the Bible.[81] Probably Salutati would have agreed with the adage: 'Blind is human will and the intellect is guided like a preceptor by her husband'. But the next is certainly contrary to his philosophy: 'Will is barren if not coupled with intellect, her husband.'[82] Dominici does not dwell, here, upon the pagan readings; he points out what lies at the heart of Salutati's philosophy: both freedom and wisdom. Without using the term, he is wary of some *bona fide* paganism that derives from the emphasis of the human approach to the Divine, both in ethics and in piety.

The question arises: How serious was this attack? Dominici had been a successful preacher in Venice and reformer of the Observant branch of his order, but he had to leave Venice because he had promoted the 'Bianchi', a short-lived popular religious movement in 1399 that much resembled the late medieval penitentiary commotions.[83] The Chancellor Salutati had supported his coming to Florence. Dominici later preached at Salutati's funeral and of course praised his great virtues.[84] He also shared the civic patriotism of Florentine humanism, and warned as any Christian humanist will do in the future: 'Studying worldly writings and learning about the beasts of nature, we become like the beasts. But studying sacred Scripture, we discover our own sacred nature.'[85] This is nothing but the central motive of humanists' idea of dignity (cf. for instance Petrarch's letter on his ascent to the Mount Ventoux; or the first sentence of Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae*). Also his rules for the education of young citizens exploits the motive of 'raising' children from beasts to men.[86] As a Dominican he knew St Catherine of Siena and enjoyed the support of her spiritual advisor, Raymond of Capua. He was doubtlessly a learned person and easily competes with Salutati in adducing authorities from any angle of the library, including classical sources,[87] even though his book is tedious,

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[81]   *Lucula noctis*, 25, p. 198. Cf. Dominici's *Induite novum hominem* in Di Agresti 1970, pp. 172–177. An interesting controversy concerning pagan and Christian sources in school teaching, perhaps related to Dominici's activity, is reported in Robert Black 2007, pp.112–116.

[82]   *Lucula noctis*, 26, p. 203: 'Es siquidem ceca de se humana voluntas et tamquam pedagogo, marito intellectu, directa.' And p. 204: 'Voluntas sterilis est, nisi intellectui, viro suo, copuletur.'

[83]   Bornstein 1993, p. 177–187, on Dominici; p. 196, on Salutati's first positive, then skeptical attitude towards the Bianchi. Further biographical data on Dominici, who eventually became a cardinal and was beatified, in Colosio 1970, and Denley 1982.

[84]   Lesnick 1990, p. 209.

[85]   Ibid. p. 209, paraphrased there from a manuscript source. On Dominici's political commitment, pp. 214–221.

[86]   Dominici, *Regola del governo di cura familiare*, in Garin 1958, pp. 70–89; 85: '… sollevando lo 'ntelletto della bestial carne e facendolo umano.'

[87]   Debby 2001, p. 93, suggests that Dominici employed different literary genres, for instance biblical commentary and domestic guides, and accordingly he praised or

lengthy and written in poor Latin. In his treatise on education he objected to pagan readings, but without any theoretical argument, just pointing out that children risk believing in ancient gods and thus becoming 'heathens rather than Christians'.[88] This argument is strictly focused on the psychology of the infants, for likewise the author warns against holy pictures embellished with gold and silver, which could seduce them into becoming 'idolaters rather than believers'.[89] On the other hand, Dominici dedicated the *Lucula noctis* to Salutati in a most friendly manner, and Salutati cared to respond in a letter-treatise. Unfortunately the part of the letter preserved (if it was not interrupted by the writer's death) deals only with minor arguments concerning the education in the Seven Liberal Arts whereas the reply on the attack on voluntarism[90] is missing. However I am inclined to believe that both the *Lucula noctis* and Salutati's answer were staged for the learned audience among their common friends. The title word 'lucula' is an *ad hoc* Latinization of the Tuscan word 'lucciola', glowworm (firefly).[91] The prologue also explains that the idea for this title came from Salutati's Christian name, Colluccio. This is a diminutive of Nicolaus, which as such would mean, according to Dominici's etymology, 'Neco-laus' (praise killer), a wordplay which presupposes that the author was aware that Salutati frequently rejected praise.[92] So he invents another etymology: 'Colluceo', brilliant. The author modestly calls himself a worm,[93] so that he appears to be just a firefly compared with the humanist. This kind of musing about names occurs throughout the humanist's work, for instance when explaining the characters of Heracles, Amphytrion and so on. Salutati responded by emphasizing the communicative skills of his friend, expecting that Dominici keep himself busy with preaching, advising confessants, conversing with the Lord, reading or elevating himself by means of contemplation with his 'little wings' (of a bug).[94]

As a professor of theology Giovanni Dominici became the teacher of St Antonino. And on the surface the *Lucula noctis* looks like a scholastic *quaestio*.[95] The first twelve chapters appear to present Salutati's position, Chapters 13–17 serve as the response, and the remaining Chapters 18–47 refute the twelve theses. But when we read, for instance, the third chapter, we must be alarmed by the pedantry of the proceeding: 'I argue that it is licit for Christians to use secular books thus: Catholics have to imitate God as much as possible. But God not only has all truth but is all truth. *Ergo* it befits a Catholic to study all truth as much as he

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condemned human learning.

[88] Dominici, *Regola del governo di cura familiare*, in Garin 1958, p. 71.

[89] Ibid.

[90] As announced in Novati 4, p. 214.

[91] Novati 4, p. 209 note.

[92] *Lucula noctis*, Prol., p. 3. Cf. Novati 2, p. 477 (mentioned above); 3, p. 85.

[93] *Lucula noctis*, Prol., p. 4. Also elsewhere, see Colosio 1970, p. 13.

[94] Novati 4, p. 210.

[95] Cf. Gilson 1952, p. 733.

can…' When he comes to the propositions to be proved he adds: 'even though they are commonly known'.[96] No serious scholastic would indulge in such dullness, especially not when fighting a 'brilliant' humanist. Those passages rather sound like the *Epistulae virorum obscurorum* (1515) of the Reuchlin debate on Jewish sources when supporters of the humanist wrote under the disguise of scholastics in poor language in order to discredit the scholastics' case. Looking back to the prologue, it catches our eyes when Dominici, in a seeming formula of modesty, invites his reader to go over the book's surface, 'for it has nothing profound'— he could have meant honestly. On the other hand, in the chapters that refute the humanist's arguments Dominici abandons scholastic syllogisms and frequently employs forms of rhetoric and preaching, as can be seen in the adages quoted. The *Glowworm* is perhaps deliberately frustrating a readership that expects a solid scholastic response to Salutati's provocation, as Giovanni da Samminiato had wished for.[97] Still, the arguments stand.

Salutati's and Dominici's books complement each other. They present the paradoxical situation in which the Dominican defends skepticism and the power of reason and trust in Scripture whereas Salutati fosters pietistic trust in God and epistemic optimism and trust in the creative potential of man. This is indeed the situation of early modernity and specifically of the Renaissance. Salutati's hermeneutic method encompasses the elements: trust in God's revelatory power— even by means of verbally ungodly myths—, man's participation in divine spirit, which is omnipresent, and the moral duty to find God in any and every expression. This opens the route towards that form of thought that will characterize Renaissance Platonism, especially in Ficino and Pico, namely the *prisca theologia* to which Christianity is heir as legitimately as to the Old Testament and to Jewish wisdom.

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[96]   *Lucula noctis*, 3, p. 27. Denley 1982, p. 114, speaks of 'over-elaboration, prolixity and interminable sequences of quotation'.

[97]   Cf. Colosio 1970, p. 53, for a list of contrasting assessments of the work. A broader study should investigate the links between piety and politics in Dominici (who died on a mission to convert the Hussites), Giovanni da Samminiato and Salutati.

Chapter 5

Humanism Applied to Language, Logic and Religion: Lorenzo Valla

Is it possible to renew piety through grammar? Lorenzo Valla tried to do exactly this. From his research into the history and structure of human language—Greek and Latin, specifically—he concluded that words and their usage gain access to the understanding of the human soul and its relationship to God.

Human speech is certainly natural, Valla observed, but its meaning is a matter of convention. Such conventional meaning of utterances, then, is their quality. The semantic triangle of thing, utterance, and sign consists of two natural elements (thing and utterance) and one artificial, the signification. Needless to say that written words are just 'signs of signs', thus adding nothing important to the semantic triangle.[1] If this is the case, then the word 'thing' refers to thing (not a specific or individual one, but to thing as such). The word 'thing' is a sign or notation for the thing. Consequently thing is an utterance or a vocable that encompasses the meanings of any vocable.[2] 'Thing' in this semantic definition obtains a higher level than 'vocable' because it is indeed the one thing that encompasses the meanings of the words. 'Thing' refers to everything. It is worth noting that Valla draws upon the juridical application of the Latin word *res*, where it denotes the cause of the matter, the issue the court case is about and hence 'thing' is the most general 'representative' in the speech.

What does that have to do with God and piety, one would ask. Valla observes that—as a word—'God' is one below many others since 'spirit', 'substance', 'essence', 'something' and 'thing' transcend it insofar as they more generally refer to a scope of things. But in dignity the word 'God' transcends everything else because the power of signification of this word extends to the author of all these things.[3] In the passage just discussed Valla explores the structure of linguistic reference and uncovers that there is a twofold power in language: on the one hand words or language in general refer to things in a way that is peculiar to the artistic nature of humans; on the other hand it can attain a reality that transcends human reach. In the first function language can build up generalizations that cover more and more potential referents or objects of possible meaning. In this case words refer to objects that are general by a natural hierarchy of significations, thus

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[1]   Valla 1982, *Retractatio* I, 14, 24, p. 123.

[2]   *Retractatio* I, 14, 22–23, p. 122 f. On the elusiveness of any modern semantic interpretation of Valla's philosophy see Copenhaver 2005, 515–516. Also note the debate between John Monfasani and Richard Waswo: Monfasani 1989; Waswo 1989.

[3]   *Retractatio* I, 14, 24 p. 124.

covering 'things' in more and more unspecific intentions as 'thing' refers to any referent that qualifies as a thing. Valla's linguistic analysis dispels the confusion that may arise from the fact that in human acts of signification a hierarchy of meanings can be construed that seemingly tends towards a level of universality that is ultimately all-encompassing but in point of fact refers to no thing that is by itself universal. 'To talk about things … is to apply the theory of the universe implied by our language to the particulars of which we speak.'[4] The universality of 'thing' is only that of signification, whereas the same human semantic power is able also to refer to that universal that in and of itself is the creator and thus above all. In short God is not an abstraction from things, and the word 'God' refers to God and not to things. The debate reported here appears in Valla's *Retreatment of All Logic, Including the Fundamentals of Philosophy*.[5] In this treatise references to God and to theology again and again show up in seemingly surprising contexts. The bulk of the text is strict linguistic and logical discussion of the modes of speaking. However the conclusion to its proem states clearly that the purpose of this work was to 'redirect posterity to truly theologizing'.[6] Therefore the treatise includes a chapter on the meaning of 'spirit', 'God', and 'Angel'. In discussing Aristotle's concept of God, Valla reports statements that are in themselves contradictory: namely that God is an 'eternal perfect animal' and that 'God and nature do nothing in vain'.[7] Aristotle's error is this inconsistent usage of terms that need to be clarified: God cannot be called an animal since the concept of animal entails a body, and pairing God and nature either makes nature something like God's wife or deifies nature. The concept of God is at stake because nature can be neither God's opponent, nor His helper. Consequently God would be superfluous or nothing at all. The only reasonable solution to this problem is to evacuate the meaning of 'nature', too. It turns out to be the word for the forces, property and quality of the world body. In this sense Valla interprets the term 'nature of things' as well as the Pythagorean concept of 'Cosmos' which denotes ornament, that is: a quality. To this Valla adds a short invective against the formula microcosm/macrocosm because it induces giving divinity and animality in the heavens and in man and also creates a link between the stars and human fate.[8] Again by analyzing the proper meaning of words and their improper usage in some authorities, Valla stresses the extraordinary proposition of God and—quasi in passing—deposes the idea of nature. While God is defended as the true creator, the word 'nature' is reduced to signifying only the quality of the world without any implication of a

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[4]   *Retractatio*, I, 2, 17, p. 15, cf. p. 48, when he refers to Ulpianus. Cf. also Laffranchi 1992, p. 37.

[5]   *Repastinatio dialectice et philosophie. Retractatio totius dialecticae cum fundamentis universe philosophie* (cf. Valla 1982).

[6]   *Retractatio*, p. 7.

[7]   *Retractatio* I 8, 11, p. 54; cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XI 7, 1072 b 28 f.; *De caelo* I 4, 271 a 33.

[8]   *Retractatio* I 8, 12–13, pp. 54–55.

higher being that might conceptually compete with God. Thus Valla is entitled to denounce the Greek deities and demons as anthropomorphisms which hinge upon an unclear understanding of not only spirituality and corporeality but also of contemplation and action. For it appears that Aristotle tried to grant spiritual beings the capability of thought (contemplation) but not of action. Valla maintains—no different from his humanist predecessor Salutati—that to contemplate is to act. Furthermore, he defines contemplation as deliberation conjoined with inquiry, which evinces that this kind of action is limited to humans and not all to the divine.[9] Even if contemplation is the only thing God does, then it implies that He cares about nothing and does not expose Himself—would that mean that God is not concerned with the living or the dead?

As became evident from Valla's attempt at distinguishing generalization through hierarchization of words from universality as the true referent in the concept of God, his linguistic analysis aims at separating language-dependent categorization from the true universals. 'Thing' played the key role of an expression that refers to anything without being a 'something' that qualifies to be universal itself. Therefore he also targets the notion of 'being' (ens). Aristotle had determined the object of metaphysics to be 'being as being' (to on ê on—ens prout ens), which had been used to think that being as such is a being. As Martin Heidegger would say much later: 'Das Sein ist nicht' (Being *is* not), meaning that there is no superior level of being beyond actual beings. While Scholastic interpreters would say that 'being qua being' determined the peculiar, metaphysical perspective of things, namely the study of the properties and modes of being, Valla criticizes that this expression only states that 'being' is a participle and not a noun so that *ens prout ens* (being qua being) could be rendered as: '*ens* as derived from *esse*'. As we will see, Suarez will side with the Florentine humanist in saying that 'qua being' does not establish a supernatural realm of being but refers, theologically speaking, to the dependency of all things in their being on God so that 'qua being' stresses the notion 'qua created'. For Valla the result is that there is no such thing as a being and the inference: 'Man is so he is being' is wrong.[10] Being should not be reified as though there were a being beyond all before anything that determinates all; rather, being has no other meaning than 'that thing that is'. The common error of Aristotelian philosophy originated, according to Valla, in the habit of Greek language to transform an adjective or a participle into a noun by adding the Greek article 'tó', thus creating the appearance that being is a thing rather than a verb.[11] Here again the power of signification settles the argument: participles draw their meaning from the verb to which they belong.[12] For these reasons Valla established that, instead of 'being', 'thing' is the highest, even the only, transcendental.

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[9]   *Retractatio* I 8, 20–21, p. 57 f.
[10] *Retractatio* I and 2, 15, p. 15.
[11] *Retractatio* I 2, 4, p. 12.
[12] *Retractatio* I 2, 5, p. 12.

Every sensitive reader of Valla's reasoning will have guessed why he downplays being as such: to say 'x is a being' would translate into: 'x is a thing that is'. Now as we have already seen, the linguistic tendency to generalize would turn into reifying that general notion of being so that the proposition would acquire the meaning: 'x is a being in the sense that it is that thing that in and of itself *is*'. This would not only be logically flawed because no stone and no person is in and of itself; therefore 'x is a being' would be a false position. The proposition would even claim a metaphysical property because its signification would transcend the intention to subsume the object under the category of things that happen to be. Since there is only one thing that signifies unrestricted being and whose essence is, indeed, to be, namely God, such a proposition would claim that 'x is God'.[13] Valla has no qualms to subsume God under the transcendental 'thing' (res), as we have already seen since he separated the linguistic from the metaphysical/theological sense of transcendence: 'thing' transcends all nouns in potentially referring to any given thing, whereas God transcends all things in being truly what He is and in being the author of all things—and of all utterances for that matter.

Considerations like the ones reported so far appear to be entirely 'academic' in the sense as provoking only fellow teachers at the schools. Other works, however, prove that Valla had a clear political and moral agenda, and in this context it is obvious that he really hoped to restore Christian piety through grammatical reform.

In his book on the elegance of Latin language *(Elegantiae)* Valla quoted a motto of Quintilian, who had said: 'All law consists in interpreting words or in distinguishing right from wrong.'[14] 'Elegance', by the way, means exactly this: not a lush and luscious appearance, but appropriateness to the occasion, which in the area of linguistic expression requires the right and honest word. 'For we do not measure a topic so much by its intrinsic nature as by the skill of the writer, with the result that subjects are generally judged to be either sublime or insignificant according to the degree of the author's ability.'[15]

Valla applied that motto not only to legal issues but to philosophy and human thought in general. Truth for him consists in distinguishing right and wrong and in interpreting words in a proper way. That was his strategy in his famous book on the donation of Constantine. Since it dealt with a legal matter, it was presented as a speech in legal court, a *declamatio*. The speaker claims to defend 'the cause of truth, the cause of justice, and the cause of God'.[16] He invokes St Paul, who had recommended criticizing priests in public in order to intimidate others (1 Timothy 5:20) and who had resisted St Peter 'because he was reproachable' (Galatians

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[13]   *Retractatio* I 2, 12, p. 14. Laffranchi 2000 offers an interesting assessment of Valla's position in the history of rhetoric, but he limits his interpretation of the transcendentals to paraphrasing the text.

[14]   *Elegantiae*, Proem. III (Valla 1962).

[15]   Valla 1986, p. 17.

[16]   Valla 2007, p. 5.

2:11). With pretended modesty Valla claims not to be St Paul, the critic of St Peter, but rather to emulate St Paul in unifying with God's Spirit through obedience.[17] St Peter's successor, the Pope, should be the guardian of grammar, as Valla maintained in his inaugural speech as a professor of rhetoric in Rome in 1455. Latin, he said, is 'a common language that fosters sciences, serves the progress, and enriches the arts'.[18] Neglect of Latin language would inevitably lead to the decline of the liberal arts as one can see in Africa and Asia after the downfall of the Roman Empire, that is, when Islam had taken over the birthplace of Christianity.[19] Therefore it is the office of the Pope whom all disciplines should serve to maintain this language unharmed. Christians abolished the Roman Empire but cherished the Roman language, and in this sense the Roman Pontiff holds the rudder (*clavum*) of Latin faith against all currents and storms.[20] Evidently Valla plays with the Latin words for rudder and key (*clavus/clavis*) and insinuates that Peter's 'key', the biblical symbol of the Pope's authority and—at the same time—a traditional symbol of grammar, is his steering tool.[21] In the case of the Constantine Donation, for the well-trained humanist it is a shame that this document that supports the Pope's claim on earthly power was written in a miserable language. The humanistic view on this document deliberately combines personal and factual elements and thus expresses the author's intention to turn the factual incorrectness of the document into the moral depravity of the falsifier.

Although this work of Valla's has been interpreted many times, its main arguments deserve to be summarized[22] again in order to clarify the humanist's standing as an early reformer of the Church and as a theologian who may well be unorthodox[23] but nevertheless serious:

> An argument of Reason of State and of ecclesiology: Emperor Constantine could not have intended to make the donation, not being legally entitled to do it, whereas Pope Sylvester could have neither wanted it nor legally accepted it.
>
> A reason of international law: The Emperor's property could neither be given nor received but always remained within the disposal and power of the Emperor.

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[17]   Ibid.

[18]   Valla 1994, *Orazione per l'inaugurazione dell'anno accademico 1455–1456*, §14, p. 194.

[19]   Ibid. § 28, p. 198.

[20]   Ibid. §§ 29–33, p. 199 f.

[21]   In the dedication of his *Elegantiae* the divine letters are termed the keys of Apostolic power: *Elegantiae*, in Valla 1962, vol. 1, p. 2.

[22]   I will paraphrase the author's summary in his foreword, Valla 2007, pp. 9–11.

[23]   'I am not induced by hatred for the pope but motivated for the sake of truth, of religion, and also of someone's fame,' Valla commented upon his critique in one of his letters to Cardinal Ludovico Trevisan: Valla 1984, n. 22, p. 248.

A plain reference to historic facts: It was not Sylvester who received a gift on the occasion of Constantine's baptism but his predecessor, and this gift was something unspectacular serving the personal dwelling of that Pope.

The famous philological proof: The alleged document contains nothing but 'contraria, impossibilia, barbara, ridicula', that is, statements that are—in ascending order—factually wrong, logically impossible, grammatically poor, and morally detestable.

An argument of state law: Even if the donation had taken place it would be no legal title on which to found the Church State.

A practical consequence of the preceding: There is no legal title that confirms the *status quo* of the Pope's state.

The most important result of this overview of the six reasons is that legal, ecclesiological, philological, and moral aspects are insolubly intertwined.

At the distance of centuries Valla's speech is certainly entertaining reading, but more importantly it obviously foreshadows the Protestant Reformation. The concluding exhortation of Valla's speech contains quite a number of Reformation motives, which we also have seen in Raymond Lull's attack on the papal authority. The speaker plays out the difference between the peoples and the Pope, denying what he is actually suggesting, namely 'to restrain the Pope as he surges ahead in his unbridled course and to force him to stay within his own borders, but only to counsel him, when perhaps he has already recognized the truth, to move back voluntarily from a house that is not his own into the one where he belongs and into a haven from irrational tides and cruel storms'.[24] That this to say, Valla threatens that the Pope would be overturned if he does not consent to restrict his area of responsibility to the spiritual life, where he belongs, and to give up his earthly power. This is exactly what will happen about a hundred years later. Then indeed the Pope was declared to be 'the vicar of Christ alone and not of the emperor as well'. The political meaning of this prophecy would be the end of wars between the Church and individual states. But the spiritual meaning is expressed in Valla's personal warning. 'But if he should refuse, then we should gird ourselves for a second, much more aggressive speech.'[25] The author could not anticipate the conclusions that critics of papacy like Martin Luther would draw.[26] The importance of this warning lies in the responsibility of the layperson towards the church and papal authority, including the right to rebellion.

Against this interpretation it might be objected that most of Valla's arguments had a history and a context, mainly that of the critique of papal worldly engagements that had pervaded church history ever since Constantine.[27] But a counter argument can be taken from the objections against Valla that had been

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24   Valla 2007, p. 159.

25   Ibid.

26   Cf. Camporeale 2002, p. 578.

27   Robert Black 1995 with bibliography.

raised by the Vatican librarian Agostino Steuco, who in 1547 (that is a century later, when Reformation was a fact) decried Valla's 'fake piety' and argued that the Church *does* need worldly riches that represent its sincerity.[28] This is a typical Counter Reformation argument, for it resonates with Jesuit ecclesiology, which was opposed to Protestant inspirationism and subjectivism and insisted on the necessity of sensual, visible or tangible manifestations of sacraments, worship and piety.[29] Furthermore the Catholic reformer not only tried to beat the pre-reformer in his home field, the philology of ancient documents,[30] but he also attacked him on his linguistic sensibility by maintaining that it is a 'community of language' that ties religion and the disputed document, imperial and papal power together: 'You see the decree is connected with confession [meaning both religious belief and Constantine's confession to Pope Sylvester], for its context is identical in both […]. As I said, there is one context in the same way as there is one speaker.'[31]

Therefore, although it might seem illegitimate to project Valla's actions into a future that would become a political and religious movement called Reformation, it is nevertheless inevitable to read his works this way, especially in the context of his grammatical reform. As we have already seen in the context of his ontology, it was necessary for him to speak about God when speaking about words. Valla's very last work, a speech in praise of St Thomas Aquinas, reveals his understanding of professional theology, and from there we can look back at his treatment of the concept of God in his re-treatment of logic.

Shortly before his death in 1457, Valla was invited by the Dominicans of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, the main convent of this Order in Rome, to give the annual lecture in praise of Thomas Aquinas.[32] The circumstances of this invitation remain unclear, and the text survived only in a few manuscripts.[33] The humanist has a twofold agenda in his oration: to discuss the very nature of an *encomium*

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[28]   Agostino Steuco: *Contra Laurentium Vallam, De falsa donatione Constantini* (Steuchus 1578), tom. 3, fol. 253–290; fol. 253F: 'impia simulataque Laurentij pietas'; fol. 254: 'Sordida religio contemnitur.'

[29]   We will see that in Suárez.

[30]   Robert Black 1995, p. 74. On Steuco's philological skills see Delph 1996.

[31]   Steuchus 1578, fol. 256 B: 'Vides igitur decretum coniunctum esse cum confessione, eundem utriusque contextum, ut si vera est confessio, nempe Constantinum edidisse sua voce eam cofessionem, reliqua quoque necessario sunt vera. Est enim, quemadmodum dictum est unus, idemque contextus, unusque loquitur ubique.'

[32]   Valla *Encomium Sancti Thomae Aquinatis* (Valla 1886). French translation in Mesnard 1955. Mesnard underscores Valla's impact on Reformation. On the history of those annual Thomas lectures in the fifteenth/sixteenth centuries see O'Malley 1974. A sample of late enlightenment criticism is the academic address by Pietro Ragnisco (Ragnisco 1892).

[33]   Kristeller 1967, pp. 72–79, and Kristeller 1974, p. 63 f.; Gray 1965; Fois 1969, pp. 456–469; Di Napoli 1971, pp. 115–122; Camporeale 1972, p. 3, starts his treatment with this piece of Valla's paradoxical prose, cf. 3–5 and passim; very much in detail, including the history of this genre and Renaissance Thomism, Camporeale 2002, pp. 123–176 (first in: *Memorie Domenicane* 7, 1976).

(and, consequently, of an exemplary person) and to treat the relationship between theology and philosophy.

The talk begins with a series of digressions, first on the legitimacy of invoking God in an exordium, then on the quality of witnesses. He emphasizes that such invocation is proper to rite and cult and therefore can be employed to non-divine affairs; consequently even evil spirits can be implored. But the true meaning, he insists, is to invoke the help of God himself. Concluding this initial excursus the speaker turns to the 'Ave Maria' as an apt way to begin an encomium in praise of the Saint.[34] As for the form, we here encounter a classical intertext. For Valla integrates that what he is set to do into the ancient tradition and distances himself from it at the same time. He gives the current practice a traditional meaning and interprets this same tradition from his humanist historical point of view. The beginning is an adequate prelude to the speech, inasmuch as it creates the expectation that there is only one who deserves praise, namely God—however, by the intercession of Our Lady.

Drawing upon the etymology of the word *martyr* in the second digression, he identifies martyrs, witnesses (testimonies) and confessors.[35] On philological grounds he argues that there is no difference between martyrs and confessors, because whoever confesses Christ is a martyr. Again the speaker follows a double strategy: on the one hand, he levels out any hierarchy among the saints. On the other hand, he fulfills the expectations of his audience in placing Aquinas on the supposedly higher level of a martyr.

This exordium must have appeared to his audience as 'patchwork', so that some declared him to be 'insane'.[36] Probably this reaction was prompted by the fame of the philologist, of whom one might well have expected a polemic similar to that on the Pope's power. In fact Valla had criticized Aquinas's comments on St Paul for his ignorance of the Greek language.[37] It was one of the humanist's strategies 'to coerce truth to emerge by various reasons, contradictions, examples,

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[34]   Valla 1886, *Encomium*, p. 390 sq.

[35]   *Encomium*, p. 391.

[36]   Vahlen in Valla 1886, introduction p. 385, quotes Gaspar Veronensis, *De gestis tempore P. M. Pauli II*: 'cum audivisset Laurentium Vallam (…) illum insanire iudicavit (…). Nam (…) evagatus est atque stulte digressus (…). Fuit ergo illius oratio velut pannus consutus et ex varietate pannorum confectus'.

[37]   Cf. Poggio Bracciolini, *Invectiva quinta in L. Vallam*, in: Bracciolini 1964, p. 246: '[Valla] qui Aristotelem et caeteros graecos, e nostris Albertum Magnum, et Thomam Aquinatem ut ignaros philosophiae reprehendat, qui beatum Hieron. et Augustinum duo fidei nostrae luminaria, male de doctrina Christiana sensisse suis prophanissimis vocibus et scriptis dictitet (…)'. Thus might have been the expectations, when Valla was invited to talk about Aquinas. Valla's critical remarks on Aquinas' New Testament commentaries in Camporeale 2002, pp. 266–330.

and comparisons'. [38] The hidden truth that Valla's digressions are intended to put forth is the uniqueness of veneration, as it is due to God, and to stress that any other praise is legitimate only as a derivative from and in function of the true praise of God. In the same way as the Highest Good is the ultimate measure of lust, so has the cult of saints to be related to true holiness, if the panegyrist shall be justified.

Approaching more closely his topic, Valla plays with the name of Thomas by observing that in Hebrew this name may signify either abyss or twin brother.[39] Figuratively speaking, *this* Thomas was an abyss of learning, and he was in himself science and virtue intertwined. This allows Valla to liken Aquinas to cherubim and seraphim because in his combined virtues of knowledge and charity he is, indeed, the Angelic Doctor, a title Valla presupposes as known without mentioning it.[40] Having thus consciously played with the rhetorical devices of eulogy,[41] the speaker expresses his embarrassment that he is not able to applaud Thomas for those achievements for which his hosts consider him to be famous, namely for having shaped scholastic theology.[42] Referring to a lecture that was given previously on the same occasion by another speaker, he admits that, among the Dominicans, Aquinas is considered 'second to none'. This eulogist had even reported of a dream in which St Augustine—doubtless the greatest theologian—declared Aquinas equal to him in glory. But the main reason for Thomas's priority over any other theologian would be that he—as distinguished from earlier theologians—had applied logic, metaphysics and all natural philosophy to proving theology. But here Valla has a problem. Even though he claims to like Aquinas's subtlety and his diligence, as well as the vastness, variety and 'resoluteness' of his learning, he despises 'the so called metaphysics and the modes of signification' and so on, introduced by the more recent theologians.[43] It should be noted that the encomiast is not accusing Aquinas of such terminology; rather, he interrupts his praise ('Ista autem …') in order to chastise the abuses of the later developments in scholastic theology.[44] While Valla's contemporaries admire them like new heavenly spheres or

[38]   Valla 1977: *On pleasure – De voluptate*, III, XII, § 6, p. 272: 'At orator multis et variis rationibus utitur, affert contraria, exempla repetit, similitudines comparat et cogit etiam latitantem prodire veritatem.'

[39]   Valla 1886, *Encomium*, p. 392.

[40]   Ibid.

[41]   Ibid.: 'quid tu cum ista hyperbole vis (…)?'

[42]   Ibid. p. 393: 'eum ad probationem theologiae adhibere logicam, metaphysicam atque omnem philosophiam (…). Lubricus hic mihi et anceps locus (…).'

[43]   Ibid. p. 394: 'Ista autem quae vocant metaphysica et modos significandi et alia id genus, quae recentes theologi tamquam novam sphaeram nuper inventam aut planetarum epicyclos admirantur (…).'

[44]   Di Napoli 1971, p. 118 f., mentions that 'modi significandi' is not Thomist, but rather Occamist terminology, and underscores that Aquinas is eventually being presented as the 'minor male' in comparison with Scotus and the later scholastics (p. 122).

planetary epicycles, Valla deems them indifferent, if not injurious, to research and alien to the ancient theologians, in any case. To him, the author of the 'Trenching (or grafting, or reparation) of logic and philosophy',[45] these 'barbaric' terms such as 'ens, entitas, quiditas, identitas, reale, essentiale, suum esse' are both pointed and pointless.[46] Not only did the Church Fathers ignore this terminology, given that it did not exist in Greek, it also fails to foster any knowledge of the Divine. According to Valla there is only one way of doing theology, that of St Paul. The Fathers 'were content to emulate Paul' (a motif we have encountered before) 'for he is by far the prince of all theologians and the master of doing theology'.[47]

Well then, what to do with Aquinas? It seems he has to find his place among the venerated theologians. The names given here include Cassianus, Anselm and other medieval scholars, including John Duns Scotus and Albert the Great. All these seem to be inferior to Aquinas. The serious competition, then, is with the great Church Fathers. Valla's Solomonic solution is to create a set of five Greek and five Latin Church Fathers that are paralleled as twins:[48]

> Basil—Ambrose
> Gregory of Nazianzus—Jerome
> John Chrysostom—Augustine
> Dionysius the Areopagite[49]—Gregory the Great
> John Damascene—Thomas Aquinas

In order to bring his unusual panegyric to a harmonious conclusion, Valla attributes to each of the twin theologians a musical instrument: *lyra, cithara, psalterium, tibia* and—to John Damascene and Aquinas—the *cymbalum*. The speaker does not dwell too much on the symbolism of such instruments, and justly so, since the cymbals have a bad resonance in St Paul, who in a passage not far from another, already cited, called a man without love 'sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal'.[50] What he emphasizes is, again, the motive of twins, because the cymbal is made of two parts that, brought together, bring about 'a merry, blithe, and plausible sound'[51] in harmony with all the other teachers of the Church.

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[45]   Valla 1982, 2 vols.

[46]   Valla 1886, *Encomium*, p. 394.

[47]   Ibid.: 'se totos ad imitandum Paulum apostolum contulerunt, omnium theologorum longe principem ac theologandi magistrum.'

[48]   Ibid. p. 395.

[49]   This pairing is, interestingly justified with the remark that it was Gregory who among the Latins first makes mention of him, a statement that entails some doubt about his authenticity.

[50]   1 Corinthians 13:1 (King James Version); on symbolism of musical instruments see Giesel 1978.

[51]   *Encomium*, p. 395.

The humanist thus reaches his aim in praising Aquinas without dispensing with his philosophical and theological convictions, and he does so in the dialectical way that marks all his philosophy: provoking the audience and reshaping common assumptions of scholarship into a new harmony.

Such harmonious concert will soon be disturbed by unsettling noises. For on the one hand Reformation theology will soon follow Valla's lead into a purely Pauline, in fact purely biblical, theology in which the authority of the Church to interpret the Bible and that of the patristic tradition will be severely questioned. On the other hand Valla's historicizing the interpretation of theological basic tenets may lead into something like a relativism; witness of this will be just a generation later with Giovanni Battista Spagnoli Mantovano (1447–1516), a Carmelite monk and a true heir of Renaissance humanism.[52] In a vigorous attack on Thomism[53] he maintained: Truth consists of variety, and truth evolves in history. His key commonplace to express both aspects is Seneca's saying: 'Veritatem dies aperit (Truth will come to daylight).'[54] He uses this motto after having discussed some apparent contradictions in the interpretation of Thomas's teaching and before discussing 'degrees of approbation' of a doctrine.

Therefore Mantovano's strategy is to show that the inherent truth in Aquinas's theology depends on further research, so that eventually it might 'come to daylight'. But this saying is quite akin to the well-known motto 'Veritas filia temporis' (truth is a daughter of time), which goes back to the Greek myth of Saturn (Kronos/Chronos) as the God of Time[55] and was a mode of thought frequently applied in Renaissance literature.[56] This means that for the critic there cannot be a definite and ahistorical truth since truth evolves over time. Therefore one might render the motto as: Truth is a 'secular' phenomenon. Indeed earlier in his pamphlet Battista states that truth shows up more and more over time: 'Quod in dies veritas magis apparet' (170). His reason is that many teachings of theologians at times have been accepted and later rejected. He illustrates this by a quotation from Psalm 19

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[52] For some biographical data and for a bibliography see Kristeller 1967, pp. 80–90; this book contains on pp. 127–185 the critical edition of Mantovano's work discussed here; reference is made to this edition. The text of the lectures, to which the edition is an appendix, is available in English in Kristeller 1974, pp. 29–91, on Mantuanus 65–71. As for the name it should be noted that Carmelites, as in some other religious orders, abolished their civil or family name and were called by their Christian name plus the place of origin, in this case Mantua.

[53] It had remained almost unknown until Paul Oskar Kristeller's edition.

[54] *In Thomistas* in Kristeller 1967, p. 180; Seneca, *De ira*, II 22. Kristeller in his footnote refers to a similar remark in *Epistulae morales* 33, 11. However, there is no connection between Mantovano's and Seneca's usage, as Seneca then refers to gullibility and patience.

[55] Beyerlinck 1665, vol. 7, letter V, col. 84 E, refers to Plutarchus.

[56] Saxl 1936, pp. 191–222, esp. p. 200 n. 1.

that says: 'Day to day uttereth speech, and night to night sheweth knowledge.'[57] The learned Carmelite understands this verse as saying that the days 'spit out' what the previous day had said, while it is night and darkness that purport to teach knowledge—which is quite opposite to the common reading of the Psalm. Time is critical since knowledge is only acquired over years and by accumulation.[58] Thus the author dares to add some of his own, namely a bold interpretation of the well-known 'spiritus ubi vult spirat' (The wind bloweth where it listeth—John 3:8): combining this motto with Paul (1 Corinthians 12:11) he suggests that the Spirit granted some revelation to Aquinas, some other to others, to the effect that it is true for all believers, for the totality of Christianity, because 'the temple of God (…) this is you all.'[59] This statement has highly debatable implications, for it might lead from the common and skeptical understanding that no individual may attain perfect knowledge to the apparently subjectivist thought that every individual does have access to some revelation (a clearly Protestant teaching) and from there to the eschatological ideal that the whole of the community of Christians by the fullness of time will have the perfection of the revelation.

Battista tries to downgrade Aquinas by making truth an ongoing work in progress. Of course it was not Battista's intention to secularize truth; rather, he holds that it was God's intention to spread knowledge over all humanity. But this entails that knowledge of the one truth is diversified through the centuries and among the peoples.[60] Consequently there cannot be one authority alone, and even in minor authors there is some truth. Mantovano's text collects a great number of classical arguments on the plurality and unity of wisdom. It connects human fallibility with freedom and authority with eclecticism. He was evidently influenced by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola,[61] who also advocated the plurality of learning for the sake of Christian doctrine in his *Nine hundred Theses* and in his *Oration* that served as a program to it.[62] In his defense against the condemnation of some of his theses, as we will see, the young Count had even claimed that contradiction is the essence of theological endeavors so that heresy is either congenial with the search for the truth of revelation or there is no such thing as heresy and he also adduced St Augustine

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[57]   Psalm 19 (18), 2 (Caeli enarrant gloriam dei), King James Version; *In Thomistas*, 170: 'Nam dies diei eructat verbum, et nox nocti indicat scientiam.'

[58]   *In Thomistas*, 170: 'succedentibus annis per additamenta inventas.'

[59]   1 Corinthians 3:17 (my translation); *In Thomistas*, 171: 'singulis dividit prout vult et non solum Thomae. Sed omnibus fidelibus est dictum: templum … dei … quod estis vos.'

[60]   This thought is not alien to Renaissance thinkers: Nicholas of Cusa defends it in order to explain the existence of competing truth claims in religion; see Blum, *Religionsfrieden,* 2002.

[61]   Three letters of Pico's to Battista Spagnoli are extant, see Garin 1979, p. 265 f. Here Pico reports on his project to reconcile Aristotle and Plato and talks about his readings.

[62]   Pico della Mirandola 1942; Farmer 1998.

as his ally who had called it extremely hard to tell a heresy.[63] One reason is, again, that since all men strive for illumination, none accomplishes it fully.

As for Thomas Aquinas's role, Mantovano assigns him his place among other teachers not much different from Valla's ranking:

> Thomas is great and deserves high praise, as he was more than average in some sciences and specifically in the best. But as for genius he cannot compete with John [Duns] Scotus, Aristotle, and Augustine; as for intensity in writing, and as for appropriateness and variety of speech he cannot be compared with Jerome and most others; and as for number of books he does not beat Chalcidius, Varro, Augustine and Origen. So, he has his place among the teachers of the third rank; because the first rank belongs to the Apostles and Evangelists, the second to the older Eastern and Western Church Fathers, while the third rank is for those younger doctors who have chewed some gist of truth out of the texts of the Fathers and the Bible by a flowerless new and raw mode of talk and by intricate questioning.[64]

Thus Mantovano bears witness for the beginning of historicizing and temporalizing truth and specifically Christian dogmatics, which has its origin in humanist learning such as Valla's. It was the humanists who first developed a sense of the historical differences of language and learning, first in secular fields like grammar and rhetoric, then also in matters that were essential to Christian life. Before the Protestant Reformers deplored the alleged aberrations of Church tradition from the original meaning of Holy Scripture, humanists like Battista Mantovano and, before him, Lorenzo Valla sought to put crucial facts in a chronological order and even to relate them to ancient sources, which were deemed closer to truth.

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[63]   *Apologia*, in Pico 1971, p. 145: 'Item etiam discordant (…) sic quod sibi contradicendo, unus necessario falsum dicit: et tamen ex hoc neuter eorum hereticus reputatur. (…) Dicta ergo istorum, non innituntur infallibili veritati, cum sibi contradicant; quorum una pars necessario est falsa: ut patet per philosophum 4. Methaphisice'. Ibid. p. 144: 'Possunt ergo dicta Augustini egregii et divini doctoris, non semper in omnibus continere indubiam veritatem, cum ipse circa ea dubitet erraverit necne. Et quod dictum est de Augustino, dictum intelligatur similiter de aliis doctoribus'. Ibid. 126: 'ut et illud Augustini dictum in libro de Haeresibus verificari videamus, Nihil esse difficilius, quam definire, hoc est haereticum aut non haereticum.'

[64]   Kristeller 1967, p. 183 f.: 'Magnus ergo Thomas et magna laude dignissimus, qui in quibusdam et eis quidem excellentissimis scientiis non mediocris fuit. Sed de ingenio cum Johanne Scoto, cum Aristotele, cum Augustino non contendat, de scribendi labore et utilitate copiaque dicendi Hieronymo et plerisque aliis non se aequiparet, de librorum numero cum Calcidio Varrone Augustino et Origine non certet. Sedeat inter tertii ordinis doctores, primi namque ordinis, ut in primo libro dictum est, sunt Apostoli et Evangelistae, secundi ordinis veteres orientalis et occidentalis ecclesiae patres, tertii vero ordinis sunt hi iuniores qui sine flore sermonis novo et rudi genere dicendi et problematicis quaestionibus de scripturis patrum et legis aliquem succum veritatis emungunt.'

The notion that truth may evolve over the centuries, as well as the notion that truth reveals itself in various guises according to historical circumstances, are both parallel to the seemingly contrary image that truth loses its force over the course of tradition and decays through human conversation with it.

What then is a truly biblical and philosophical conception of God? It can be only such—according to Valla's logic—that reads both philosophical statements and quotations from the Bible following strictly pious semantics. Valla's retreatment of logic has the following order of subjects: first he distinguishes the notions of essence and substance then he discusses the hierarchy of genus and species, and only then he discusses the concept of spirit, God, and Angel. The gist of his discussion of the words 'essence' and 'substance' is that we leave ordinary language behind if we apply these philosophical terms in religious matters. The Church Fathers had tried to apply the equivalent Greek and Latin words in a proper way to the persons of God, but any such interpretation verges on heresy.[65]

One of the problems involved is the role of matter in substance. The result of the discussion of the difference between genus and species is Valla's complaint that the so-called Porphyrian Tree is asymmetrical: while the positive determinations (substance, body etc.) are further distinguished, the negative branches remain empty. He demands that 'incorporeal substance' should be distinguished into 'creating' and 'created'; the latter then should be divided into 'angelic' and 'non-angelic'.[66] What had puzzled Christian philosophers is the fact that man is by nature both a spiritual and a corporeal creature; the person of Christ thus becomes even more paradoxical because He is not only a composite of spirit and body but also of God and man.[67] With these considerations the intricacy of philosophical talk about the Trinity is opened.

In the first, linguistic, approach we are told that referring to God evidently implies referring to something like man. For instance when we say to God 'you alone are holy, you alone are the Lord', we talk as though we were addressing a human being.[68] Although the author does not say so, this potential misunderstanding is rooted in the referential power of human words, as we had seen in the meaning of 'thing'. Therefore speaking about God sounds like speaking about human affairs, and analyzing the power of speech is the only way to approach an appropriate theological discourse. As had been observed before: 'in divine things we lack proper words and therefore we content ourselves by comparing God with things created by Him. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen.'[69] Valla applies the metaphor of visibility to the image of the sun.

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[65]   Valla 1982, *Retractatio*, I, 6, 5, p. 43: 'unde Hieronymus ad Damasum scribens ait sub his verbis (…) venenum latere, et propter acipitem ambiguumque horum nominum sensum, et quosdam in heresim incidisse et se a nonullis hereticum appellari.'

[66]   Ibid. I, 7, 10, p. 49.

[67]   Ibid. p.50.

[68]   Ibid. I, 8, 1, p. 50 f.

[69]   Romans 1:20; Valla, *Retractatio*, I, 8, 5, p. 52.

In ordinary parlance we would understand that the Trinity can be compared to the rays, power and vivifying potential of the sun. Therefore it is tempting to say that 'the rays and life are similar to the Father, the light similar to the Son, the burning similar to the Holy Spirit, or: the Father is the divine power, the Son the divine wisdom, and the Holy Spirit the divine charity'. The philosopher wants to convince us that we have to take the similitude, the mere comparison, out of the linguistic game to the effect that we have to 'add essence' (*adiungam essentiam*) to the comparison. Therefore the Father 'is the powerful and living sun', the Son 'is the bright sun' (rather than: the sunny brightness), in the same way as the Holy Spirit is not the burning 'of the sun' but rather 'is the burning sun'.[70] It could seem as though Valla suggested taking the divine Persons as qualities and at the same time as distinguished by qualities like power, brightness and heat. In that case Valla would fail 'to identify the three Persons with the divine substance';[71] but his reference to essence evinces that he rather intends to show a linguistic way to unfold the one essence in three identical expressions that do not place a wedge between substance and properties.

Following the advice of St Paul to relate the invisible to the visible things for human understanding, Valla shows how language can try and undo the semantic relation between words and things when its referent is God in whom such relation does not exist. If it is true that there is a semantic triangle between words, meaning and things, then it is also possible to trace back the essence of the thing by depriving it of its referential aspect and emphasizing the essential of the meaning. So the analogy is: if the sun is different from its rays and powers, but they refer back to it, then also the creation is different from God in referring back to God. And even within the Trinity the persons singularly are not God, but the relation between the persons points to God's essence. On another occasion Valla went as far as to say that the persons of the Trinity are its 'quality', which is not heretical only if we do away with any Scholastic understanding of categories.[72] Every theologian, including St Paul, St Augustine, but also Salutati and every other Christian humanist, was aware that the Bible is speaking in metaphors; therefore the aim of language-aware philosophical theology was to penetrate to the core of the meaning of metaphor. In the simile of the sun it is clear that 'the sun is not something different from its power light and burning, and in the same way God as the Father must be the power that generates God as the light, who breathes God as charity, which is the Holy Spirit.'[73]

Despite what one might have expected, the humanist is not dissolving theological discourse into language games, but he plays the game in order to

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[70] Valla, *Retractatio*, I, 8, 6, p. 52: 'sed adiungam essentiam comparaboque Patri (…) "solem potentem vivumque".'

[71] Nauta 2009, p. 199, within a chapter on Valla's theory of the Trinity.

[72] *Elegantiae*, 6, 34, Valla 1962, p. 215. Trinkaus 1996.

[73] Valla 1982, *Retractatio*, I 8, 8, p. 53. Valla's rendering of the Trinity seems to have been exploited by anti-Trinitarians a century later; see Fois 1969, p. 535, and Vasoli 1982.

get the prize. Therefore—paradoxically—the result is a quasi-platonic and definitely essentialist understanding of theology, which becomes very clear when he reinterprets the meaning of 'hypostasis': if there are three hypostases in God, namely Father, Son and Holy Spirit, they may be seen or interpreted as properties, but there must 'underlie' something substantial, the essence. As we will see in our chapter on Campanella this is the same option that emerged when a theologian trained in Scholastic philosophy amalgamated it with Neoplatonism. However Valla emphasizes *that* concept of God that allows for piety that is worth venerating, that is almighty, and consequently is to be feared.[74] From Aristotle's God 'which piety, which religion, which sanctity'[75] would follow? Without endorsing any of these schools, reference is made to Thales, Pythagoras, Plato, the Stoics, and—notably—the poets. Their theology is also the one which then would guarantee the correct doctrine of the immortality of the soul, which will be the topic of the next chapter in Valla's book.[76]

Valla's peculiar approach was—as has been said several times—to analyze language and to penetrate each word for the sake of reaching the referent, the meaning itself, the truth. This is why in him oratory and philosophy clearly merge, or, rather, 'a strong philosophical agenda is hidden behind the screen of rhetoric'.[77] However it is elusive to lump his efforts together with any of the existing late medieval and Renaissance strains; Valla is not an Occamist, nor a skeptic, and definitely not anti-metaphysical.[78] Valla's search went truly for metaphysics—the real thing, so to say. He turned humanistic awareness of linguistic subtleties into unearthing the semantic power of language, which necessarily led him to aim at the ultimate reality of any signification process. Therefore he would never have put up with a linguistic turn that smacks of nihilism or with any epistemology that would place the burden of proof on the analysis of mind. For him truth is 'out there' and it can be found by means of speech. One last example can show that: He loved to stage dialogues, for through a common speech humans come to truth, although the speakers mostly uncover their cunning and trickery. That was the major topic of Valla's provocative treatise on lust,[79] where he tricked his readers into believing that lust is the highest good and that God is 'capable of … existing as a mere instrument of pleasure'.[80] But thematically more apparent, it happened in his treatise on free will. Valla not only shows that every human being who

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[74]   Valla, *De voluptate*, III 12, Valla 1962, vol. 1, p. 979; Valla 1977, *On Pleasure* III 13, pp. 273–277.

[75]   Valla 1982, *Retractatio*, I 8, 22, p. 58.

[76]   Ibid. 23, p. 58 f.

[77]   Fubini 1999, p. 296 f.

[78]   Fubini 1999, p. 300 and 302. Against assigning Valla to such schools see Nauta 2003. On Valla's quarrels with his contemporaries and the intellectual pattern implied, see Blanchard 2000.

[79]   Valla 1977.

[80]   Monfasani 2000, 'Theology', p. 13.

wants to be free tries to wrestle liberty from fate or Providence, he also shows that our attitude towards providence and responsibility is tainted by a schizophrenic conception of God. For, after showing that Boethius's interpretation of freedom and divine foreknowledge leads into literally nothing, he construes a duality of gods, namely Apollo for divine foreknowledge and Jupiter for divine necessity.[81] It is fair to say that in Christian thought God is both, and that is implied in the concept of providence, which sees for things to happen. But in terms of human discourse, namely thinking and speaking, the alleged duality is rooted in a man's duplicity: 'It is possible for you to do otherwise than God foreknows, nevertheless you will not do otherwise, nor will you therefore deceive Him.'[82] Deception of God and oneself is also the topic of the dialogue on religious orders. Through a witty analysis of the term, Lorenzo proves that 'obedience' is either servitude or not a virtue that distinguishes friars from laypeople: 'To adhere to the Rule of an Order means to obey God, not men. We laymen do this too, for no better law could be drawn up than the one derived from Christ and the apostles.'[83] Even the religious vow itself is ambiguous, for it either means 'greed and desire' or a *quid pro quo* with God.[84] Speaking thus of religious vows reveals the selfishness and duplicity of human aspirations. Therefore it is the task and competence of the philosopher–theologian to see through those language games and to aim at the substance of what truly can be meant or should be meant. The moral implications of this kind of thought, rather than the details of the argument, make Valla at times look like a precursor of protestant reformation.[85] Any critic of Scholastic terminism as well as every single pious thinker must come to the conclusion that once the grammatical reform is done we need to look for that kind of philosophy that honestly promises access to the divine.

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[81]   Valla 1948.

[82]   Ibid. p. 169.

[83]   Valla 1985, p. 43.

[84]   Ibid. p. 32 f.

[85]   On Valla's theological unorthodoxy see Monfasani 2000, 'Theology'; he basically reiterates critique by Fois 1969, p. 536; compare to this the cautionary remarks in Celenza 2004, pp. 89–100; furthermore Fubini 2001, pp. 139–140.

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Chapter 6

Georgios Gemistos Plethon: From Paganism to Christianity and Back

With Coluccio Salutati and Nicholas of Cusa we have observed two decisive moments in early modern philosophical theology. A new, anthropocentric and political approach to wisdom and righteousness forced the Florentine humanist to reassess ancient literature as to its power to open insights into divinity that remained valid for Christian belief. He and his predecessors were well aware that they were operating an inference that could be inverted: Christianity helped interpreting antiquity, while at the same time Greek mythology was called to aid in understanding Christian faith. Before long, humanists and their heirs were moving in a dangerous circle that sought help for interpreting Christian faith in pre-Christian antiquity, implicitly Christianizing the Ancients, and eventually induced to rationalize and historicize Christianity—a process that will require further amendments endeavored in the ages of confessionalization[1] and enlightenment. Nicholas of Cusa who entered into the Italian humanist world as a diplomat from the German Empire north of the Alps and as a professional theologian discovered the Neoplatonic element in Eastern Theology to be the tool late scholasticism had searched for that allowed to stretch theological argumentation towards the limits of rationality. Lorenzo Valla had shown that linguistic humanism, engrossed with pagan sophistication, could precipitate, if not come head over heels, into a fundamentalism that acknowledges only human linguistic creativity and divine omnipotence—and nothing in between. Hence what was needed in the first half of the fifteenth century was a further investigation into the theological competence of antiquity and the humane relevance of the divine. Here, of course, Raymond Lull's and Raimundus Sabundus's first attempts at naturalizing theology and re-Platonizing Christianity came in handy.

The single most important event was the Council of Florence in 1438–39. It is ironic that Nicholas of Cusa and Lorenzo Valla were the great absences from this Council, although Cusanus had been instrumental in organizing it. It may be doubted whether Valla would have helped at all in an event that depended so much on linguistic subtleties, or the neglect thereof.[2] Another curious fact about the

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[1] This is a technical term, introduced into historical studies by the historians Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling to describe the variety of denominations and their establishment all over Europe, culminating in the Thirty Years' War.

[2] It is well known that the antagonism concerning the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Son had to be blurred over by translating Latin 'ex' (out of) with Greek 'dia'

Council is that the key interpretation of its importance for philosophical theology was made public about fifty years after the event, namely Marsilio Ficino's narrative in his prefatory letter to his 1492 translation of the works of Plotinus. In 'a cunningly contrived legend',[3] Ficino justified his rendering Plotinus in Latin by reporting how Cosimo de'Medici had been enthralled by lectures given by Georgios Gemistos Plethon during that Council and therefore had destined him to publish Platonic works. His apology makes it appear as though the introduction of Platonism into Florentine culture was an immediate outcome of the Council. But most authors who refer to this famous *Prooemium*, addressed to Lorenzo de'Medici, discuss the alleged foundation of the Platonic Academy in Florence. However they rarely continue reading down the same page where—for a second time—Plethon is mentioned. The passage reads as follows: 'Nowadays few have interpreted his [Aristotle's] thought—apart from our complatonicus Pico—with the same faithfulness (pietate) as once did Theophrastus and Themistius, Porphyrius, Simplicius, Avicenna and recently Plethon.'[4]

This statement contains more than one surprising claim:

> Plethon is a reliable interpreter of Aristotle.
>
> Plethon and Pico are the most recent Aristotelians; more precisely, they are the latest candle-bearers of true Aristotelian tradition.
>
> Plethon, along with the other authors mentioned, is religiously orthodox.

If that's what the Council of Florence made possible and what motivated reinstating Platonism, the most urgent questions are: who was this Gemistos Plethon and what did he himself think about his orthodoxy? Another humanist's account yields an interesting perspective:

> Good luck! On the 30th of July [1447], … we came to the Spartan foothills of Mount Taygetus. There near the ancient and once famous city of the Lacedaemonians, about 30 stadia away on a steep river bluff, is located the impregnable town they today call 'Spartaboune' or Mysistrate. There we found Constantine Dragaš, of the royal family of the Palaeologi, the gloriously reigning despot, and—the reason for my return visit—his guest, that eminent personage, the most learned of the Greeks in our time, and, if I may say so, in his life, character and teaching a brilliant and highly influential philosopher in the Platonic tradition. Also, I saw rushing to meet me in the palace itself the gifted

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(through). On Valla's position in these matters see Fubini 2001, pp. 153–156.

[3]   Stausberg 1998. I, p. 82: 'geschickt inszenierte Legende'.

[4]   Ficino 1983. II, p. 1537: 'cuius mentem hodie pauci, praeter sublimem Picum complatonicum nostrum ea pietate, qua Theophrastus olim et Themistius, Porphyrius, Symplicius, Avicenna, et nuper Plethon interpretantur'. About this preface see Sebastiano Gentile in Ficino 1990, pp. XIII–XLII; Gentile 1994; cf. Vasoli 1999, pp. 23–50; Hankins 1990 and 2007; Blum 2004, pp. 167–175, and Blum 2005. As for the spelling of the name, I maintain the final 'n', which helps to avoid confusion with Plato.

young Athenian, Laonikos Chalkokondyles … remarkably learned in both Latin and Greek literature. … Et alias ut obmittam.[5]

Georgios Gemistos Plethon is still living, probably in his nineties, and Cyriac of Ancona (quoted here) cares to visit him in his native Mistra on the Peloponnese. But the presence of young Laonikos distracts the visitor's attention—whatever that might have been, the diary keeps explicitly silent about. Tellingly, a few pages later on, Cyriac reports that upon paying a visit to the famous wise man he mused about

> the ruins of once-famous Laconican towns … [and] the pitiable ruin of the human race, because the fact that the world's outstanding towns, marvelous temples sacred to the gods, beautiful statues and other extraordinary trappings of human power and skill have fallen from their pristine grandeur seems not so serious as the fact that, throughout almost all the regions of the world, that pristine human virtue and renowned integrity of sprit has fallen to an even worse condition …[6]

The first thing we may state about this record is: Cyriac was an antiquarian hunting for ancient monuments, and Gemistos was one of these. Still there was some logic in encountering the old sage because he represented, indeed, and deliberately so, the splendor of antiquity.

Born circa 1355, Gemistos, at some time in his life, perhaps in Florence, took on the name Plethon (semantically an equivalent to Gemistos, suggesting fullness or plethora) certainly alluding, by this name, to the ancient philosopher Plato. He died in 1452 in Mistra where he had been head of the philosophical school, suspected of being a neo-pagan, but also famous—as we have seen—for his wisdom and scholarship.

One of the most influential achievements was Plethon's edition of the Chaldean Oracles based on the collection current in the Byzantine world thanks to Michael Psellos.[7] The new compilation opened with statements that appear deliberately

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5 Cyriac 2003, Diary V, p. 299. Except for the last sentence (which means: 'The rest I leave out'), I follow Bodnar's translation.

6 Cyriac 2003, p. 328: 'At et cum equidem inde Gemistei Platonici dilectissimi nostri gratia Laconicam Mysisthratem revisissem … aegro magis animo ferendeum censebam miserabilem ipsam humani generis calamitatem, quod et non tam graviter conspicua illa mundi oppida sacrave superis mirifica templa speciosaque simulachra, ac alia humanae quidem potentiae atque artis eximia ornamenta a prisco suo splendore cedidisse videmus, quam deteriorem in modum per omnes fere mundi regiones humanam illam priscam virtutem et animi inclytam probitatem corruisse visum.' On Cyriac's antiquarian passion: Mitchell 1960, p. 468–474.

7 Plethon 1995; Woodhouse 1986, p. 51–53; Kieszkowski 1936, p. 157–161; cf. Stausberg 1998 ch. B 1; Tambrun 1999, pp. 9–48; Athanassiadi 2002.

mysterious and promise cosmological wisdom, in which order and hierarchy, dynamics and holiness, humanity and transcendence are interconnected:

> Inquire after the channel of the soul: wherefrom, in what order,
> Having served the body, to that order from which you flowed
> You shall rise again, combining the act with the sacred word.[8]

Fate, the splendor of the Father, Paradise, demons and the divine are further topics of this hymnic text that elicits devotion and elation: 'Oh man, the contrivance of most daring Nature!'[9]

In his treatise 'Nomon syggraphe', which obviously drew upon the book of 'Nomoi' by Plato,[10] Gemistos discussed the basic tenets of what he suggested to be a theology that may have political and moral meaning.[11] In a quite surprising move the book starts by maintaining that a variety of opinions haunts humanity as to what are the most important issues in life. No doubt beatitude is what all men are seeking, but the means and meaning of it seem to be controversial: Pleasure, wealth, glory and virtue are the favorites. Of course we recognize a plethora of ethical treatises which are repeated with this assessment, and once for all I will take no pride in mentioning Gemistos's sources every time. The consequence Gemistos draws from this diversity is notable: We need to know the nature of man, and in order to do this, we need to study the nature of things, which leads directly to the nature of the divine.[12] After this initial chapter follows a chapter on the major authorities in theological matters, which—being a key to Plethon's lasting influence and, perhaps, his intentions—shall be discussed more extensively later. After a refusal of skepticism the main treatment of the subject initiates with a prayer:

> Come to us, O gods of learning, whoever and however many ye be; ye who are guardians of scientific knowledge and true belief; ye who distribute them to whomsoever you wish, in accordance with the dictates of the great father of all things, Zeus the King. For without you we should not be able to complete so great a task. But do you be our leader in these our reasonings, and grant that this book may have all success, to be set as a possession for ever before those of mankind who wish to pass their lives, both in private and in public, established in the best noble fashion.[13]

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[8]   Woodhouse 1986, p. 51.

[9]   Woodhouse 1986, p. 52, line 39.

[10]   Pléthon 1858, *Traité des lois*. Cf. Webb 1989, pp. 214–219.

[11]   Some hints at possible Neoplatonic backgrounds of Plethon's *Laws* in O'Meara 2003, pp. 203 ff., who also suggests parallels with al-Farabi's *The Best State*.

[12]   *Traité*, I 2.

[13]   Woodhouse 1986, p. 328 f.; *Traité*, I 4, p. 45.

This is a quite remarkable confession of a philosopher: His gods are the gods of learning, *theoi logioi*. *Logios* can have the meaning of: logical, reason-guided, erudite and eloquent, or oracular. The choice is ours. Many a Christian reader might have associated the venerable hymn 'Veni Sancte Spiritus'. However Plethon is evidently praying to those who control both science and opinion (*episteme* and *doxa*) that they may guide the rational discourse of this book, which is, by its title, a *syggraphe*, a covenant of general Law.

Chapter I 5[14] informs the reader about the general dogmas (*dogmata, nomoi*) of Plethon's theology:

> The Gods are more blessed than men.
> They provide (*pronoein*) for any good and no evil.
> There is a plurality of Gods that admits for degrees.
> Zeus is the highest and mightiest of the Gods.
> He is unbegotten (*agenetos*) and self-engendered (*autopatros*).
> Poseidon is his first son and head of all other Gods.

There is a hierarchy among the lower gods, manifest in the importance of their actions. There is even a bisection among the Gods, those who stem from Zeus, and illegitimate ones; the former living on Olympus, the latter dwelling as Titans in Tartarus.

> The Gods of Olympus and of Tartarus form a grand and holy One.
> On the lowest level there are demons that operate on earth.
> Nevertheless all the Gods are outside time and space.
> They are begotten (*genetoi*) from the one cause of all and in duration without beginning and end.
> In Zeus essence and existence (*ousia, praxis*) are identical.

If this system were found in some middle platonic fragment, we would be tempted to relate it to Plato, Plotinus, Proklos and similar sources, together with ancient Greek theogonies. But Plethon wrote this around the year 1400 or in the first half of the fifteenth century. We also recognize peripatetic, if not scholastic, rationality, such as the identification of essence and existence, and the differentiation of time and duration, not to speak of the intricacies of the unbegottenness of the Father and the generation of a preferred Son of God.

As is well known, Plethon's *Nomoi* was in part destroyed posthumously by his friend and former student, Georgios Gennadios Scholarios (ca. 1405 – after 1472), by then Patriarch of Byzantium, who believed his teacher's theology to be a reinstating of ancient polytheism. But Scholarios was also one of the Byzantine scholars who introduced scholastic philosophy into the Greek world; in 1435–

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[14]   What follows is excerpted from *Traité*, pp. 44–59.

36 he had translated Petrus Hispanus' *Logic*.[15] As Arnold Toynbee convincingly argued, Plethon's work marks an interesting option within the tribulations of the Byzantine Church, which was about to dissipate between the millstones of the pressing Ottoman Empire and the Roman Church. It seems Plethon suggested saving Greek identity by restoring the ancient unique Greek culture. Scholarios's solution was what actually happened, namely to preserve the Eastern Orthodox Church at the mercy of the Turks and of Mehmet the Conquerer who, indeed, appointed Scholarios Patriarch of Constantinople after 1453. Cardinal Bessarion, another student of Plethon's, opted for the Roman Church, in which he made his career as a Cardinal.[16]

But this scenario leaves the question open, as to whether Gemistos Plethon actually believed what he was teaching. This question had been raised by Scholarios himself. Bessarion, in a letter of condolence, did not hesitate to assume that Plethon would 'join the Olympian gods', and—supposing the Pythagorean doctrine were acceptable—that Plato's soul had been reborn in Plethon.[17] If we take Bessarion's witness as an indication that Gemistos' *Nomoi* were to be taken metaphorically we may absolve him easily of heresy, against Scholarios' rage. But, still, one has to ask for the purpose of such metaphors. From the perspective of Greek national identity Bessarion would take sides with the sage of Mistra, and justly so, since his letter was addressed to the defunct's sons. On the other hand if we believe that in the eyes of the Roman Cardinal there was nothing wrong with Olympic gods, then he must have reconciled such parlance with Roman Christian dogmatics. The humanist Janus Pannonius for example had no qualms in seeing Plato reincarnated in Marsilio Ficino, as confirmed by Pythagoras.[18] This interpretation leaves us with the task of understanding Gemistos's intentions when he incorporated recognizable Christian theology in a theogony of pre-Christian stance.

Three things should be addressed here: First, Plethon's theogony in drawing upon Greek gods is only remotely in concordance with ancient mythology as known from Homer and the other sources. Second, it appears to be a treatise that can be labeled as systematic, not much different from Christian scholasticism. And third, it is presented—not as a *quaestio*, nor as an apology or an exhortation—but clearly as a work of instruction, as an outline of social, political and moral order, as *Laws*.

If Gemistos had intended to launch the belief in the Ancient Olympic deities, he might have set to work like a nineteenth- or twentieth-century classicist, harmonizing and ordering thus the ancient upper- and underworld, and he would have tried to make his readers believe that Zeus had quite a powerful command over

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[15]   See Szkholáriosz 1999, p. 214. Cf. Karamanolis 2002, pp. 253–282.

[16]   Toynbee 1981, p. 308.

[17]   Toynbee 1981, p. 308; *Traité*, Appendix XV, p. 404; Woodhouse 1986, p. 13.

[18]   Pannonius 1784, *Epigrammatum* lib. 1, nr. 236, I, p. 561. 'Nuper in Elysiis animam dum quaero Platonis, / Marsilio hanc Samius dixit inesse senex.'

the affairs of this world, and so forth. Let us just recall the legend that Wolfgang Schadewaldt used to pray to the Greek Gods or that Werner Jaeger sincerely hoped to restore ancient 'Paideia' in Weimar Germany.[19] The Byzantine sage also probably should have established a system of virtues identified with any of these deities, like Giordano Bruno was to do in his *Spaccio de la bestia trionfante*. His work would have been some restoration and Renaissance of Ancient creed. But, since he only picked part of the mythologies of the Ancients and rearranged them around a theological system that cares much about questions like the ontological status of the gods, he effectively closed the door to the historical past by pretending to reopen it. As it can be argued that Petrarch rediscovered antiquity when he was writing personal letters to ancient authorities like Cicero and Livy, but that he— at the same time—created the awareness that they were really past, in the same way we have to acknowledge that Gemistos' message to any learned reader of his *Nomoi* must have been that they were finished with the Ancients and should brace for a new religion contrived of the spoils of the Greeks. The question is: what kind of religion? Now this becomes clear by a subordinate question to the puzzlement over his mythology, namely the authorities he evokes for his work.

As it has been said, the variety of understandings of the meaning of life was the initial question that opened the *Nomoi*. This led to the question concerning which were the best possible guides in the quest for the divine. In Chapter 2 of Book 1 Plethon dismisses the poets and the sophists: The poets aim at pleasing their readers; the sophists do not care about truth but strive to elevate themselves above the humans. 'Both drag the divine down to the more human level and elevate the human to the more divine level according to the human measure'. Better than any man, the legislators (*nomothetoi*) and philosophers are able to pronounce soundly (*pythoit' an tis ti hygies*) on these matters because they deal with the common good and with truth as basis of well-being.[20] So Plethon adduces his authorities: Zoroaster in the first place, followed by Eumolpos,[21] because he had introduced the Eleusinian mysteries to Athens, which taught the immortality of the soul. After this follow the legislators Minos, Lycurgus, the Argonaut Iphitus and Numa. Then Plethon refers summarily to the Brahmans of India, the Mages of Medians, that is, Persians, and the Curetes, who distinguished themselves for having taught some of the major tenets listed above, namely the ranking of second- and third-order deities and the immortality of the creation and offspring of Zeus. Plethon is not tired of mentioning further sources, among others the priests of Dodone as interpreters of the oracles, one prophet Polyeidos, then Teiresias, who taught metempsychosis, Chiron, and the Seven Sages: Chilon, Solon, Bias, Thales, Cleobulus, Pittacus and Myson. This list is rounded off by some more familiar authorities, namely,

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[19]   For Jaeger see Schmitz 2001; I heard the anecdote about Schadewaldt as a student in Germany.

[20]   *Traité*, p. 28.

[21]   A fabulous Thracian singer and priest of Ceres, who brought the Eleusinian mysteries and the culture of the vine to Attica (Lewis and Short).

Pythagoras, Plato, Parmenides, Timaeus, Plutarchus, Plotinus, Porphyry and Jamblichus.[22]

How to read this list? Gemistos hastens to affirm that he has not at all intended to say anything new as the sophists do,[23] a claim that will be one of the points of criticism for Scholarios who insistently reproached Plethon's inventive innovations. What distinguishes these sages from the sophists, according to Plethon, is their universal concordance to the effect that 'never their truth was newer than what has wrongly been stated'.[24] Innovation, indeed, is the ambition of the Sophists, and ambition leads to innovation. A brief look at Plethon's more famous writing, his dissection of Aristotle's dissent from Plato, reveals who the sophists might have been: the Aristotelians, because vanity was the major cause responsible for Aristotle's apostasy from Platonism.[25]

Plethon's authorities also exclude the poets, as has been said. He does not dwell upon them, but the very title page of his *Nomoi* gives an important clue. He announces:

> This work comprises: Theology according to Zoroaster and Plato, using for the gods recognized by philosophy the traditional names of the gods known to the Hellenes, but restoring them from the sense given them by the distortions of poets, which do not precisely conform with philosophy, to a sense which does … conform to the greatest possible degree [with philosophy]…[26]

This is a clear refusal of the mythological theology of the Ancients. From this point of view the prayer, quoted above, is even more revealing: It is not addressed to the Muses, as any classicizing writer would have emulated, but to the philosophical gods. Ancient Greek mythology is restored to rational philosophy. And this restoration is remarkable by some blatant absences: Not only the Muses, but also Apollo, Athena, Venus and many other gods that inhabited Olympus seem to have moved out.

Nevertheless some Hellenic gods—namely Zeus, Poseidon and Hera— are reinstated, and Plethon justifies his claim with the list of authorities just mentioned. Not surprisingly antiquity is the measure of truth. Unfortunately some of these ancient authorities are legendary at best. Therefore Scholarios had an easy game mocking Plethon for certainly never having read all of them. And the lack of authenticity also necessarily jeopardized their teachings. Every scholar as learned as Scholarios could detect this. Plethon however put enormous effort into affirming the harmony of the ancient teachers and their status. The capstone of his construction of ancient wisdom was certainly Zoroaster, the most ancient of

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22   *Traité*, pp. 30–32.

23   *Traité*, p. 32: 'oud' …neoterioumen'.

24   *Traité*, p. 34.

25   Plethon 1973, pp. 312–343.

26   *Traité*, p. 2, translation from Woodhouse, p. 322, with alterations.

all sages, who—in Plethon's narrative—revealed the truth about the gods to the Persians and other Asian peoples.[27] In order to boost Zoroaster's authority Plethon even edited the Chaldaean Oracles from Michael Psellos and published them as Zoroaster's oracles. And again, every scholar of his time could easily verify this maneuver.

Therefore the past was for Plethon a means to an end. He appears to have been dependent on construing a strong claim of antiquity for a philosophical theology, which did not originate exactly among the Ancients. This brings us to the second question, which I will treat only briefly.

As we already observed in the initial prayer, Plethon's gods are ambiguous: they are connected with *logos*, and as such they are both reasonable and oracular, and in guiding knowledge they are based on science and on opinion. This becomes even more evident in a summary of his doctrines. It starts by exhorting: 'These are the main chapters that anyone who wants to be prudent or right-minded (*phronimos*) has to know: First this about the gods that they exist…'[28] The startling word here is *phronimos*. The most common usage of this word refers to practical knowledge, right-mindedness in this world, nothing close to wisdom and sanctity.[29] In Plato's book *Nomoi* there is only one passage that suggests some sapiential meaning of this word,[30] but even there this property is dependent on *logos*; and on the whole, the context belongs to ethics more than to theology. The existence of gods, we may conclude, is a matter of practical prudence. It should also be noted that in Plethon's system of virtues, *phronesis* exercises reason in humans, in as much as they are gifted with reason (*logikon ti zoon*).[31] This virtue, then, is divided into piety, natural knowledge and soundness of judgment (*theosebeia, physike, euboulia*).[32] Such piety can well do without revelation. The absence of the muses and the poetical deities indicates that there is no room for mystical inspiration from the Gods—and certainly no grace familiar to Christians. Plethon's mythology is Greek or Hellenic only in appearance. Most probably he endeavors to meet the expectations of an audience filled with humanist classicism, but in point of fact

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[27] *Traité*, p. 30.

[28] *Traité*, p. 262; Cf. Woodhouse 1986, p. 319, who suggests 'prudent' and 'right-minded'.

[29] See Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott: *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v.; Scholarios contraposed *sophos* and *hieros* to *phronimos* in his polemics agains Juvenalios, a pupil of Plethon's, by stating: 'Allà sophòs men ouk ên, oudè hierós, phrónimos dé.' (He was neither wise nor saintly, but prudent.) Scholarios 1935, p. 482, 6–7 (letter to Manuel Raoul Oises).

[30] Plato: *Nomoi* 12, 963 e: 'aneu de au logou psuchê phronimos te kai noun echousa out' egeneto pôpote' (I quote from the online edition of Perseus Project: http://www.perseus.tufts.edu).

[31] Plethon: *Peri aretôn (De quatuor virtutum justa explicatio)*, PG 160, p. 865.

[32] Ibid. p. 880. The virtues are explained as follows: *Theosebeia* regards the divine, *physike* the natural, *euboulia* the human things.

he brings this phase of emulation to an end. Plethon's Zoroaster, then, has less likeness with the legendary founder of a still existing religion of venerable age than with Nietzsche's Zarathustra.

We may conclude that Plethon's religion is a rational religion, a religion for philosophical reasons. Toynbee even compared it with 'Religion of Humanity' proclaimed by Auguste Comte (1798–1857).[33] An earlier heir could be Helvetius (1715–1771) who stated that religion is nothing but the perfection of human morals and should be treated like experimental physics.[34] What we may learn from the Byzantine sage and what he perhaps had in mind, and—historically more to the point—what the Medici and Ficino might have gathered from him, is how religion should be built and which purpose it serves. The extensive discussion about the generation of gods can be read as an application of metaphysical principles like one and many, principle and principled, form and matter, and so on. Here Gemistos makes extensive use of common knowledge among Platonists and scholastic theologians. From this follows a discussion on providence and fate and eventually a systematic account of cults. At this point it might help to look again at his student's, Scholarios's, critique. His major objection is that Plethon is a 'Hellen', that is, a polytheist,[35] who has read the books of the ancient Greeks, in order to follow that creed, as opposed to Christians who read these books just for the study of the language. As for the Western Christians, Scholarios was certainly right, as is evident in Salutati and Valla—at least in part. But the Patriarch tops this critique with the allegation that the old sage was influenced by someone who was a Jew, an Averroist, and lived at the Turkish court.[36] It seems that the Orthodox prelate reveals more hatred than rational arguments and expresses deep disturbance about his teacher's way back to the past. It is the mythology of the past, indeed, that serves the philosopher for his reply. He reminds the Patriarch that Plato and the Pythagoreans used to refrain from putting scientific issues in writing, preferring to rely on oral tradition, for if one possesses wisdom in books, one might postpone the care for the soul. On the other hand circumstances and morality require a memory for those who cannot study without interruption.[37] Gemistos rebuffs the accusation of heresy by referring to the literary theory of unwritten mythology to the effect that his own revival of ancient paganism acquires rationality and moral necessity. By the act itself, when Scholarios burned Gemistos' work he paradoxically underscored its urgency for their times. Ever

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[33]   Toynbee 1981, p. 301: 'Plêthon apes Eastern Orthodoxy as solemnly as Comte apes Western Catholicism.' He refers to Plethon's prayers, calling them 'frills … as provocative as … superfluous'.

[34]   Helvétius, *De l'Esprit*, préface in Helvétius 1793, vol. 1, pp. 53–54.

[35]   Masai 1956, p. 35, and Woodhouse, p. 238. Cf. Anastos 1948, pp. 271–273.

[36]   Masai 1956, p. 58; Garin 1983, p. 88 f.

[37]   Masai 1956, p. 136; Garin 1983, p. 90 f.

since, it has been beside the point to try to reconcile Plethon's paganism with his Orthodox Christianity.[38]

The Byzantine sage was not an Enlightenment cynic. But he had a wide range of theories and traditions at his disposal. Whatever were the pressures to which he might have responded (the desired revival of the Greek nation, the defeat of the Byzantine delegation at the Council of Florence, the Ottoman Islamic surge), he summoned the past—and where he missed it, he made it—and built a systematic account of what philosophical theology should do. But he offered it disguised as a new religion that pretends to be ancient. Whoever got hold of this book must have perceived that with it antiquity had come to an end; it was waiting for the antiquarians like Cyriac of Ancona, and it called for a renewal of religion, temporarily disguised as a Renaissance.

This is the basis on which we should read Plethon's unintended role in Florence, which turns out to be quite ambiguous if we look at how he was referred to. In the same way as Ficino instrumentalized Plethon for his project of a new Christian Platonism—about which more will be said, soon—the attention has to shift from the enigmatic figure of the Greek sage to intellectual policy in Florence. The foreword to the Plotinus translation was meant to be a strategic move on a chessboard with Giovanni Pico in a key position.

Pico quotes Plethon, indeed, one time, but in a context that makes their association by Ficino's pen even more surprising because it is in Pico's *Commentary on a Song of Love*, which is known to be a harsh criticism of Ficino's appropriation of ancient mythology. Specifically Pico refers to the technique of the Ancients to hide truth behind metaphors so dear to his Florentine colleague and invoked by Plethon. Here Pico betrays that he is familiar with Gemistos' work and offers his own hermeneutics of mythology: Oceanus, 'father of gods and of men', he claims, is an image to signify the Angelic Mind, the cause and source of every other creature which comes after it'.[39] His authority is Georgios Gemistos, 'a much approved Platonist'—approved by whom? So Pico hastens to add: 'These are the waters, this is the living fountain, from which he who drinks never thirsts anymore: these are the waters or the seas upon which, as David says, God founded the whole world'. Pico's artifice here is to channel ancient and Gemistian mythology back into clear waters of Christianity. This does not mean that Plethon is Christian but that Pico at best has learned from him how to translate pagan wisdom philosophically while he does not advocate this very paganism but turns it into biblical correctness. If there is any canopy that covers Plethon and Pico, they stick their heads out at opposite ends.

This little skirmish (over decades) shows how philology of ancient mythology has developed since Boccaccio and Salutati. The early humanists were concerned

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[38]   Cf. Codoñer 2005. In this context note the presence of Pletho in Benozzo Gozzoli's painting *The Adoration of the Magi* (1459) in the chapel of the Palazzo Medici Ricciardi in Florence: Seitter 2007.

[39]   Pico 1984, *Commentary on a Canzone of Benivieni* II 19, p. 115.

with justifying reading ancient mythology at all; they tried to persuade their Christian audience that there actually is some kind of theology in antiquity which, as a theology, deserves respect among others because it is in itself consistent— as consistent as the biblical histories are. What Plethon does is to emphasize consistency over history to the effect that he rearranges the Greek gods according to his own moral and philosophical system, thus creating a rational religion. Giovanni Pico in a way returns to the early humanists by pointing out that one particular pagan god correctly represents exactly one Christian thought or tenet. Pico does so because he sees that stripping consistent theology of factual truth amounts to paganism.

> Since apologetics is in itself a propaedeutics to theology it would be fatal if she would rely sooner or later on Valla's initiative. If he doesn't support faith, but is supposed to prove it as possible and reasonable, the apologete … bases factually his proof on history, i.e., on testimony, which obliges him to submit the different texts available to him to a critique.[40]

As for enrollment of these thinkers into Aristotelianism we may conclude from this that the pious Aristotelianism represented by Plethon and Pico—purported by Ficino—is in reality anti-Aristotelianism and that the Greek's defense of religion is of dubitable Christianity. With this collapses the first claim proffered in the quoted statement, namely that Plethon was a reliable Aristotelian. Ficino's association of Pico with Plethon is even more questionable because Plethon had endeavored to prove that Aristotle is at variance with Plato, and with Christianity, whereas Pico just recently had mounted an attack on the distinction between Platonic and peripatetic conceptions of the One and of Being. Already in 1484 Pico announced to Ermolao Barbaro that he was about to divert from Platonic studies in order to show that Plato and Aristotle contradict only in words while in the matters they were most concordant.[41] The *De ente et uno* was to become a sample of this project. This is justified, according to Pico, by the same Themistius, who in Ficino's praise is a founding father of true Aristotelianism.

   A few remarks on chronology: The Plotinus edition was dedicated to Lorenzo de'Medici and printed on 7 May 1492, one month after Lorenzo's death (8 April), but it had already been solemnly presented to him on 12 November 1490.[42]

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[40]   Marcel 1959, p. 87. (My translation).

[41]   Pico della Mirandola 1971, I p. 368 f.: 'Diverti nuper ab Aristotele in Academiam, sed non transfuga, ut inquit ille [Themistius], verum explorator. Videor tamen (dicam tibi, Hermolae, quod sentio) duo in Platone agnoscere, et Homericam illam eloquendi facultatem supra prosam orationem sese attollentem, et sensuum, si quis eos altius introspiciat, cum Aristotele omnino communionem, ita ut si verba spectes, nihil pugnantius, si res nihil concordius.' Cf. Garin 'Introduzione' in Pico 1942, p.9.

[42]   Kristeller 1937, I, pp. CXXVIII and CLVIII; Marcel 1958, pp. 504, 507 f.; On Lorenzo's personal copy see Gentile, Sebastiano et al. 1984, n. 115, pp. 147–149. On

Whenever Ficino wrote his preface he did not withdraw his references to Pico in it, even though *De ente et uno* was written in 1491 by this *complatonicus*.[43] Furthermore there is Ficino's harsh rebuttal of *De ente et uno* in the commentary on Plato's *Parmenides* with the famous passage 'Utinam ille mirandus iuvenis': 'Had this admirable youngster just diligently pondered over the disputations and queries, presented above, before being so cocksure as to assail his teacher and so headstrong as to publish views that run counter to those of all Platonists …!'[44] The controversy has a heavy bearing on either philosopher's concept of God; what I want to emphasize at this point is that Ficino's outburst—if it was factually justified—presupposes that Pico possibly could have read (and not perhaps anticipated) the *Parmenides Commentary*, which, consequently, must have been in the making while Pico published his *De ente et uno* and Ficino introduced Plotinus.[45]

The preface to Plotinus suggests to the reader that Pico had been providentially instrumental in stimulating Ficino to continue his work, inspired by Cosimo de'Medici, as Ficino describes it. When comparing Pico's with Plethon's role we must come to the conclusion that Ficino actually needs Pico in order to justify his own work and that means that in the passage quoted two rhetorical strains merge: the Pico strain with the Plethon strain.

Ficino employed the figure of young Pico as having urged him to translate Plotinus—and we may leave the miraculous circumstances aside—in order to explain why he went beyond the command of Cosimo's who had commissioned only the *Corpus Hermeticum* and Plato. Now as is well known according to Ficino's narrative, this idea that had been associated with the founding of the so-called Platonic Academy, that is, making these key texts available in Latin, came to Cosimo from Gemistos Plethon. Giovanni Pico, then, serves as a stepping stone between the remote event of the Council of Florence, when in 1439 Cosimo encountered Plethon, and the new translation of Plotinus, to be dedicated to

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Lorenzo de' Medici's patronage for Ficino see Bullard 1990, although she does not mention this dedication.

[43]   Garin 1937, p. 42, says the dedication of *De ente et uno* to Angelo Poliziano dates 1492, but there Pico speaks in present tense about 'Ethica hoc anno publice enarras', and Poliziano started teaching Aristotle's *Ethics* in 1490–91: Grendler 2002, p. 238. Cf. Viti 1994, p. 119.

[44]   *In Parmenidem*, cap. 47, Ficino 1983, II, p. 1164: 'Utinam mirandus ille iuvenis disputationes, discussionesque superiores diligenter consideravisset, antequam tam confidenter tangeret praeceptorem, ac tam secure contra Platonicorum omnium sententiam divulgaret, et divinum Parmenidem simpliciter esse logicum, et Platonem una cum Aristotele ipsum cum ente unum, et bonum adaequavisse.' I partly used the translation in Kraye 2002, p. 379.

[45]   According to Kristeller 1937, I p. CXX, the Parmenides commentary was begun after November 1492; but Ficino complains that Pico should have read his 'disputationes, discussionesque', which in fact appear like independent *quaestiones* inserted into the commentary; these might have been written beforehand.

Cosimo's grandson Lorenzo. The divine inspiration—instilled by Plethon and forwarded from Cosimo via Pico to Ficino—is invoked in order to Christianize the project, but this would have sounded dubitable if related only to notorious heathen Plethon.

Consequently we may sum up the narrative as follows: Plethon convinced Cosimo that Hermetism and Platonism contain 'mysteria', hitherto unknown. Plotinus, in Ficino's view, must be the completion of the Medici project, which is now presented as an attempt to save religion. Ficino, well aware of the pagan implications of Plethon's doctrine, made Pico his accomplice, exactly *because* Pico had criticized the non-Christian implications and inconsistencies of Neo-Platonism and *because* he had advocated the compatibility of Aristotle and Plato from a 'higher point of view' (as he maintained in his letter to Ermolao Barbaro). Thus Pico was to help in saving Ficino's reputation as a religious philosopher. For this purpose Ficino had to parallel Plethon with the unsuspected Pico, to the effect that Plethon became, so to say, 'christened'. This achieved, Ficino may now present Plotinus's works to Lorenzo as the source that discloses the 'philosophiae mysteria' which had inspired Cosimo.

Therefore the next step in our inquiry about the philosophical concept of God in Renaissance philosophers has to be to interpret Marsilio Ficino's self-declared intentions in his translating Plato, Plotinus and other sources and in producing his own Platonic Theology.

Chapter 7

Marsilio Ficino's Philosophical Theology

The greatest temptation when discussing Marsilio Ficino's Platonic philosophical theology consists in falling in love with his own enthusiasm for the ascent to the One. That's what Ficino's works were written for. Thanks to the works of Paul Oskar Kristeller, Michael J. B. Allen and James Hankins—to name just a few—we have a very good understanding of the making and general Platonic outline of Ficino's thought,[1] his struggles with ancient and Christian forms of Platonism,[2] and his particular position within Humanism and Renaissance in making available and accessible the works of Plato.[3] Yet the 'temptation' remains, namely to analyze the intellectual ascent within the Neoplatonic patterns of thought, thus entering some kind of speculative competition with Plotinus, Proclus and others, or to interpret Ficino either as building a "philosophical system" of his own (as Kristeller did in his monograph that originated in the 1930s and was first published in 1943) or as a key figure in the *Rezeptionsgeschichte* of Plato. Some scholars have noticed that Ficino's statements about God and humanity might be at odds with Christian doctrine and have therefore studied his indebtedness to medieval scholasticism[4] or compared his religiosity with Renaissance humanism and beyond.[5] But before one can successfully incorporate Ficino into the history of religious thought one has to analyze the structure and scope of his thoughts on God and the transcendent.

Therefore it is the purpose of this chapter to assess Ficino's adaptation of apparent Neoplatonic figures of argument that he employed to justify Christian views. First the epistemological and metaphysical significance of the hierarchy of beings will be at stake, which will involve the doctrine of the spiritual beings, namely angel and soul. Then the notion of Oneness will be analyzed regarding its function of transcending the finite world and its rhetorical function within Ficino's agenda of philosophy and piety. Finally Ficino's very concept of religion, as expressly discussed by him, will give insight into the importance of his thought for the relationship between humanity and divinity on the various levels of theoretical and practical philosophy.

As an illustration of the Platonist temptation we should first look at some programmatic statements by the Florentine philosopher. In doing that we should

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[1] Kristeller 1937, 1943 (definite version 1988) and 1987.
[2] Allen 1981, 1984, 1995, 1998.
[3] Hankins 1994, 2003; Garfagnini 1986.
[4] Kristeller 1967 and 1974; Collins 1974.
[5] Trinkaus 1970, pp. 734–753, Vasoli 1988 and 1999, Lauster 1998, Celenza 2004, Chapter 4, Edelheit 2006 (Edelheit 2008 was published after completion of this chapter).

read them not only as advertisings but also as users' instructions and as warnings. Such an approach also entails that we may never take Ficino's statements about God, Plato and Christianity at face value but as expressions of his state of mind. That sounds cynical but is the only protection and antidote against misuse, of which we have to suspect (as shown above) Ficino's role model, Gemistos Plethon.

Ficino's major work was his *Platonic Theology Concerning the Immortality of Souls*, dedicated to Lorenzo de'Medici. The dedication starts with trumpeting that Plato was (and actually is) 'the father of philosophers', for he taught the basic insight 'that our minds bear the same relationship to God as our sight to the light of the Sun', so that 'as the human mind receives everything from God, so it should restore everything to God'.[6] Apart from the fact that this is Neoplatonic imagery we should ask ourselves in which sense sight returns anything to the sun. So we have to note that Ficino operates with suggestive metaphorical rhetoric that deserves to be interpreted. The remaining 18 books of the *Platonic Theology* unravel the implications of the opening statement. The proem to Lorenzo maintains that Plato encourages piety, and as such his doctrine is 'theology' that turns everything 'quickly' into 'the contemplation and worship of God' (*pium cogniti dei cultum*— literally: the pious worship of the cognized God). From this follows—and it is important to emphasize that it is not the other way around—that Plato's philosophy contains two messages 'of utmost importance: the worship of God with piety and understanding, and the divinity of the souls.'[7] Let us recapitulate: Plato teaches a mutual relationship between God and soul, which is filled with universal receiving and restoring, an all-and-everything that passes hither and thither between the human soul and God. From that follow two fundamental statements about Platonism, philosophy or religion (as though there were no difference between these): first, that they consist in the performance of worship, and second, that the soul is divine.

Philosophy, then, is a combination of performance and metaphysical claims, while it is unclear at this point which is first. Even more, worship is a combination of piety and understanding, and philosophy is the praxis of worshiping what intellectually has been understood. A little bit further in that same chapter Ficino seems to reiterate the standard program of natural theology: 'that in the divinity of the created mind, as in a mirror at the center of all things, we should first observe the works of the Creator, and then contemplate and worship the mind of the Creator'.[8] The traditional element lies in the interchangeability of God's works and understanding God. Ficino's novelty is to interpolate the human mind that serves as a looking glass and medium (*speculo rerum omnium medio*). Obviously Ficino transposes natural theology from contemplating the works for the sake of contemplating the maker (nowadays best known as the watchmaker metaphor) to the analysis of the *finite* mind towards an understanding of the *perfect* mind.

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[6]   Ficino 2001–2006, vol. 1, Proem, p. 9.
[7]   Ibid. pp. 9–11.
[8]   Ibid. p. 11.

In this shift of perspective he resembles somewhat Nicholas of Cusa, although I would maintain that Nicholas aims at and achieves more of a critique of human reason than a new theology. Nevertheless for Ficino the operation of the mind is not purely intellectual but worship, praxis. Ficino's claim is followed by an open amalgamation of Platonism with religion and philosophy. For 'those arguments of the Platonists (…) fully reinforce the claims of religion', and to 'contemplate the higher objects which transcend the senses, and [to] find happiness in putting things themselves before their shadows (…) is what Almighty God especially demands'.[9]

We should not be mistaken; the last statement is not a theological nor a philosophical one, for that would be dull, being just a Neoplatonic expression of Christian belief. Rather, talking about praxis, the claim that Platonic claims coincide with Christian claims is politics. For embedded in this perspective Ficino voices his conviction to be the chosen one by divine providence ('a trust that is not vain'—*nec vana fides*) 'in imitation of Plato' to show that

> many who are wrong-headed and unwilling to yield to the authority of divine
> law alone would at least accept those arguments of the Platonists which fully
> reinforce the claims of religion; and that irreligious men who divorce the study
> of philosophy from sacred religion will come to realize that they are making the
> same sort of mistake as someone who divorces love of wisdom from respect for
> that wisdom, or who separates true understanding from the will to do what is
> right.[10]

At this point it would be tempting to make a comparison with Augustine, who is duly invoked in this proem. Ficino pledges to have taken encouragement from the church father to 'paint a portrait of Plato as close as possible to the Christian truth'.[11] But the case could be made that Augustine ultimately rejects Platonism and, moreover, that Augustine, in contrast to Ficino, does not emphasize rationality in Christian belief; he rather strives at transcending human reasoning, which was also Cusanus's primary aim. Certainly both philosopher–theologians did not transform worship into converting others, whereas Ficino's love for Platonic philosophy urges him to convert nonbelievers. In his later letter that introduced the Plotinus translation he even more clearly addressed his intended audience as those who recklessly are Aristotelians and hence corrupt.[12] To interpret intellectual satisfaction as worship towards the object of intellection necessarily turns contemplation into action, or philosophy into religious policy.

For a philosopher the question remains: what makes God so attractive? Given Ficino's programmatic approach we can expect that he will have a peculiar way of

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9   Ibid.
10   Ibid.
11   Ibid.
12   Ficino 1983, vol. 2, p. 1537, preface to Plotinus. See above p. 96 note.

ascending to the existence of God, let alone proving it, which is indeed the main theme of the first book of *Platonic Theology*, where he describes the access to the divine as an ontological, intellectual and logical development. Starting with the body as the lowest level of the ontological hierarchy he arrives at the soul, which he then describes in terms of motion and stability. Therefore in Book 1, Chapter 5 he defines the soul as that 'whose external activity wanders over intervals of time, and whose life, that is, internal activity, is dispersed as it were in a flood' and from which he infers that we need to 'posit another form, more sublime, whose activity is constant and whose life is at once whole and united'.[13] Philologically speaking Ficino is taking up Plato's determination of the soul in his *Phaedrus* and also in his *Laws*, book 10,[14] but this is not the point here, although it is striking that both in Plato and in Ficino the ultimate aim is political and moral and not 'just' metaphysical. Ficino then contaminates this reasoning with another model of thought that is best known from Thomas Aquinas's Fourth Way,[15] namely, to speculate about degrees of perfection. Since the soul, as being in motion although with a certain stability, is less perfect than anything that is described as 'whole and united', there must be something that meets this description. In a long series of variations on the same theme and with references to various authorities Ficino establishes that there must be something like Angel that meets these requirements and which at the same time is the ultimate design of the 'all-powerful Creator of the universe',[16] namely, an ontological level that is 'most like Himself in that He has taken the pure minds, which of all things are most like Himself, and has exalted and extended them over and about the forms that are combined with matter by an immeasurable space (…)'.[17] The following Chapter 6 then declares that the soul as being in motion 'passes from one thing to another', and consequently it contains the variety of things it cognizes. Now at this point Ficino does not immediately prove that the Angel is a motionless plurality, but he logically infers that there must be something which is motionless and yet not unity. Ficino does not develop or defend this thought, hence he evidently relies upon a genuine scholastic formal approach to the four concepts of unity, plurality, stability and motion. 'But since in every respect these two are the opposite of each other, they cannot come one immediately after the other.'[18]

unity	plurality
immobility	mobility

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[13]   Ficino 2001–2006, vol. 1, Book 1, Chapter 5, p. 61.
[14]   See his commentaries on Laws X, Ficino 1983, II, p. 1517; on Phaedrus, Chapters 5–8, pp. 1366–1369. Cf. Allen 1981 and Allen 1984, pp. 86–85.
[15]   *Summa Theologiae* I q. 2, a. 3 c.
[16]   Ficino 2001–2006, vol. 1, Book 1, Chapter 5, p. 77.
[17]   Ibid.
[18]   Ibid. Book 1, Chapter 6, p. 79.

That is to say Ficino operates with a quadrangle of opposites in which there is no way to move from mobility-plus-plurality to immobility-plus-unity without passing through either mobility-plus-unity or plurality-plus-immobility. 'It remains then that angel is motionless plurality.'[19] The postulated plurality in Angel is that of 'a plurality appropriate to intellect, that is, one that has as its essence and being the power of understanding, the act of understanding, and the many species of things understood'.[20] It is not at all clear at this point of the treatise how the understanding of the angel and the presence of the species in the angel is different from the presence of the species in the human intellect. The only difference can be that the human intellect would acquire the species from the operation of cognition which will be a theme later in Book 8 of *Platonic Theology*. It is critical to note that Ficino here seems to have no quandaries about the epistemological implications; he boldly concludes that 'something else must exist above angel that is not only motionless but entirely one and simple. This is God (…).'[21] This statement is now followed by arguments that, indeed, God has to be simple and hence also one. We learn soon[22] that this is the first of a series of 'proofs' that God is a necessary postulate beyond Angel.[23] Let us remember that the existence of the angel was a postulate itself; therefore I must confess that the validity of these arguments escapes me.

In the remainder of the chapter Ficino proceeds thus: he stresses that mind and its object are different; they are distinct not only ontologically but also in dignity. Hence it follows that truth, order and the good are located beyond the intellect. All this amounts to the conclusion 'that all things take their origin from it (the highest good, that is, God) as from their father, and that all things aspire to it as for their fatherland'.[24] A few details of this reasoning are worth mentioning. On his way to argue that truth lies ahead of mind Ficino construed an experiment in which the entire body becomes an eye and thus improves sight indefinitely, and analogously mind as such leaves all other functions of the soul behind (that is, such functions that tie the soul to the body). Then, he says, the 'remaining sole, uncontaminated mind will be angel.'[25] This passage corroborates our suspicion that 'angel' is merely a postulate in the process of abstraction, which appears to be experimental or hypothetical. On the epistemological level it is noteworthy that for Ficino this mental experiment yields a difference between truth and mind, or intellect and its object. A distinction which immediately turns into a metaphysical one and is

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[19] Ibid. p. 81.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid. p. 83.

[23] Cf. Allen 1995, Chapter 1.

[24] Ficino 2001–2006, vol. 1, Chapter 6, p. 91.

[25] Ibid. p. 83.

incidentally supported by a quotation from Plethon's *Chaldean Oracles*: 'Beware that the intelligible lies outside the mind.'[26]

Following the Platonic method of supereminence the postulate of a coincidence of truth in mind is not far away. In a first step Ficino argues that truth is not only an intellectual feature but something that pervades even matter insofar as it is 'truly called matter and truly it is the substrate of all natural objects.' In a reversal of this argument it follows immediately that truth is not without mind: 'But if truth is superior to mind, and because it is superior does not lack inferior goods, then truth does not lack the clarity of mind.'[27] So, the proportional analogy is this:

matter — intellect <is proportionate to> mind — truth

Intellect or mind (two denominations for the same thing, the first stressing its operations, the second its essence) deals with truth when it finds and processes it in any object of cognition. However there exists no truth in matter. Truth as such lies beyond or above mind. But for the sake of analogy, although truth is not mind it cannot be 'mindless'. The key argument is an application of the principle of participation, according to which 'what is superior is not destitute of what is inferior.'[28] If inferior levels in some way participate the dignity of the superior ones, (that is, in our case matter somehow is true), then on the contrary the lower levels are embedded in the higher ones—and this is the epistemological and metaphysical power of the higher levels. That is what makes God attractive for the mind. The only detail that needs to be clarified is that in God truth and clarity are indistinct although clarity is the feature with which the mind cognizes truth. God is 'simplest truth, truth not hidden from itself'.[29] What follows in this paragraph is the preparation of the convergence of the transcendentals, unity, truth and goodness, which opens Book 2 of the *Platonic Theology*.

The role of transcendentals in Ficino is very important, particularly when compared with his contemporaries. But before entering this debate, a look into the further development of Book 2 is necessary. First of all there is no further proof of the existence of God in this 'Platonic theology'. Ficino prefers to discuss the oneness and power of God. This includes His intellectuality that is even bolstered by an apocryphal quotation from Orpheus that employs a key Platonic term, *eidos*: 'Jupiter, form of all'.[30] For Ficino's epistemology it is critical that God be both the Platonic Form, to be understood as the intellectual and metaphysical

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[26]   Ibid. p. 83; Pléthon 1995, nr. 28a.

[27]   Ibid. p. 85.

[28]   Ibid. p. 84: 'quod superius est, non caret bonis inferioribus' (my translation); the Latin text establishes a rule, and not—as Allen's translation suggests—a particular property or state of affairs.

[29]   Ibid. p. 85.

[30]   Ibid. Book 2, Chapter 11, pp. 162–163. There is no such Orphic saying, according to the commentary, p. 329, note 31.

origin of everything, and paramount of everything that is known. For this reason Ficino translates *eidos* as 'species'. For, as he explains in Chapter 9 of the same book, 'God understands Himself first and every individual thing too.'[31] In order to make that thought palpable Ficino applies the principle of affinity that guarantees mutual enclosure of mind and thought, for which again he switches track between epistemology and ontology by maintaining that 'the way something reaches the point of being intelligible is the same way it reaches the point of being intellect.'[32] To understand what is material acquires the metaphysical meaning of transforming it into something intellectual with the ultimate end of transformation into mind. The conclusion is obvious: 'Because nobody is further removed from matter than God, so nobody understands more perfectly than God.'[33]

By now it is no surprise that in the next step understanding is qualified as 'desirable as a good.'[34] That explains why God is both self-sufficient and at the top of the hierarchy, the last preceding stage being—as we have seen—Angel. Since the angelic level of intellect operated in multitude, Ficino now specifies the difference between angelic and divine knowledge. Angel cognizes through forms, whereas God is above such kind of mind. The general epistemological rule is this: 'whatever intellect does it does through its own nature and thus it acts through understanding. Therefore, whatever it makes, it understands.'[35] Hence it follows that God whose 'being and understanding are identical (…) acts by understanding.'[36] Epistemologically speaking, 'God's knowledge and activity are coextensive;' whereas ontologically and cosmologically speaking, His knowledge reaches exactly as far as his operation.[37]

In the view of everyone familiar with Neoplatonic thought, Ficino moves on common ground. The question is, why does Ficino offer this kind of argumentation as an alternative to known philosophical theology? To audiences either unacquainted with Scholastic argument or—even more so—well-versed in logic and ontology, Ficino's argument must appear as rhetoric. Not that there is anything bad with that. Humanists firmly believed that rhetoric is the highway to a sound

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[31]   Ibid. p. 149.

[32]   Ibid.

[33]   Ibid. It is lamentable that modern English has to render the undistinguished *nullus* with a corporeal 'nobody'.

[34]   Ibid.

[35]   Ibid. p. 153. The latter sentence is my translation of: 'Ergo,quaecumque facit, intellegit.' Allen translates: 'Therefore it must understand everything it creates.' The modifier 'must' deflects from the convertibility of understanding and making, whereby acting is transformed into producing. For the principle applies not only to God but to every intellection.

[36]   Ibid.

[37]   Ibid. The quotation is Allen's translation; the cosmological interpretation is my literal translation of the same sentence: 'Eatenus vero cognitio eius extenditur quatenus operatio.' This is to highlight the ambivalence of Ficino's language.

soul and society. But if one takes an irreverent position—as a historian should do and as some Renaissance thinkers did—it is obvious that Ficinian cosmology is not at all proof against a materialistic turn. That can be seen in Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525) who is best known for his critique of the doctrine concerning the immortality of the soul. He endorsed Marsilio Ficino's theory of the continuity of levels of spirit pervading all things, which included for instance the presence of certain natural virtues in human beings on the basis of the 'the general consensus that man is in the middle between the eternal beings and those that come to be and pass away'.[38] But this did not keep him from denying the spiritual dimension of demons, angels and miracles, thus turning the Neoplatonist uniformity of the cosmos into a non-transcendent reality. While Renaissance Platonists spiritualized nature it was Pomponazzi's endeavor to naturalize spirit. In that he was consistent with his book on *The Immortality of the Soul* that also gave entirely natural reasons for the interaction between soul and body leaving the belief in immortality to the teachings of the Church.[39] A solution to this riddle could come from tracing the varieties of Neoplatonic influences in Ficino.[40] Although that is possible and necessary in a scholarly way, in the framework of philosophical theology and philosophy of religion it is equally necessary to see the rhetorical, political and educational outlook of Ficino's endeavor. This is all the more evident in his merger of what he deems to be Platonic and what Christian.

An exemplary case is Ficino's amalgamation of the figure of Socrates into his program. In his summary of Plato's *Laws* he has three personalities represent ancient wisdom: 'We know that Pythagoras' wisdom consisted in contemplation, that of Socrates more in activity, finally that of Plato in contemplation on a par with action.'[41] Socrates' central role is to confirm Christianity. His exemplary behavior as reported in the *Apology*, together with his teachings in the *Crito*, serves as 'confirmation of the doctrine of the Gospel, reinforcement of the role of martyrs, exemplar of justice, incomparable strength, contempt of mortal things, desire for the eternal, and finally foundation of religion'.[42] Therefore in his summary of Plato's *Phaedo*, which is part of the sequence of dialogues that portray the personality of Socrates, Ficino refers back to one particular letter in which he had argued that 'Socrates's life is a kind of image of the Christian life or its shadow' with the express implication that Christ's life is the 'idea of virtue as a whole'.[43] We should

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[38]   Pomponazzi 1970, *De naturalium effectuum causis sive de incantationibus*, cap. 3, p. 25.

[39]   Di Napoli 1963; Blum 2007.

[40]   See above all Allen 1998.

[41]   Ficino 1983, vol. 2, p. 1488.

[42]   Summary of Crito, Ficino 1983, vol. 2, p. 1390. A different translation in Farndell 2006, p. 129.

[43]   Ficino 1983, vol. 2, p. 1390: 'Christi vitam esse virtutis totius ideam.' Farndell 2006, p. 130, translates: 'the ideal pattern of all virtue', thus obscuring the Platonic terminology. See note 46.

be aware that this is a 'weak interpretation' of the life of Christ, supposing that he is the son of God and the savior of humanity, which is certainly more than just an idea. However we have seen in the concept of God that Ficino likes to combine the intellectual with the ontological meaning of the word *eidos*. Ficino also reminds the readers of Platonic dialogues that the said letter 'confirmed the Old Testament with the help of Plato, and the New Testament with the help of Socrates.'[44] Whatever these dialogues had to say about immortality and understanding, they are also part of Ficino's agenda to turn Platonic philosophy into a Christian action. It also should not remain unmentioned that Ficino's introduction to the *Apology* mainly seized the occasion to discuss demonic practices,[45] a feature probably alien to mainstream Christianity but part of Ficino's overall philosophy as manifest in his *Three Books on Life*.

The letter mentioned has the title, 'The facts of Socrates's life lend support to Christian beliefs'.[46] While applying the typological method that searches for parallels between the Old Testament and New Testament, which he expressly mentioned in the commentary quoted before, Ficino maintains 'that Socrates, though not a type (*figura*) like Job or John the Baptist, was perhaps foreshadowing of Christ, the author of our salvation: he served as a preparatory signal, so to speak'.[47] And how does Socrates 'foreshadow' Jesus? He was not a simpleton,

> but rather with a singular excellence of mind and also (…) divinity and the inborn powers of prophecy, throughout his life he placed the goods that are eternal before those that pass away. He bore wittingly all the discomforts of the body, especially starvation and nakedness and all the evils of fortune.

And so on and so on: Socrates was really a nice guy, wasn't he? In a more strict sense the typological method is applied to some facts that materially correspond to similar ones in Christ's life, such as the 30 pieces of silver, the ritual washing, Socrates' last supper conversations, the wine cup, the cock and even Socrates' occasional states of trance, purposefully rendered as 'transfiguration'.[48] The most striking trait underscored in this panegyric is Socrates' role as 'a doctor of souls [who] devoted his attention to purging the minds of men everywhere within the confines of his native city'.[49] Everyone in Florence knew that Ficino, as the son of the Medici house physician, Diotifeci, had been bestowed with the project of

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[44] Ibid.

[45] Allen 1998, Chapter 4, and pp. 202–208: English translation of that summary. Cf. Farndell 2006, pp. 122–128.

[46] This and further quotations from Allen 1998, pp. 211–212; cf. Ficino 1983, *Epistolae* 8, p. 868; another English translation in *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, vol. 7 (Ficino 2003), nr. 8, pp. 12–14.

[47] Allen 1998, p. 211.

[48] Allen 1998, p. 212.

[49] Allen 1998, pp. 209–211: 'tanquam animorum medicus'.

translating and popularizing Platonism so as to 'heal the souls'.[50] Consequently, we have the following set of analogies:

Socrates : Christ = Socrates : Ficino

The Medici philosopher identifies himself with Socrates, Job or John the Baptist in preannouncing Christ—a kind of Christ, however, that is the savior of society in being a role model in civility, intelligence, endurance and—of course—piety.

There are enough examples in Humanism of how the obvious parallel of Socrates and Christ could be treated. Petrarch drew upon the mutual exchange between teacher and pupil as a parallel to one's dedication to Christ.[51] Salutati was convinced that Socrates would have died a martyr had he known of Christ and that he certainly would never have betrayed him by fleeing from Rome and trying to escape prison as St Peter had done.[52] The Byzantine scholar Bessarion, a friend of Ficino and a defender of Platonism, expressly warned against styling ancient figures like Plato and Socrates as pre-Christians or Saints.[53] Throughout his efforts to mediate between his teacher, Plethon, Christian Platonism and Aristotelianism, Bessarion strove against the plain instrumentalizing of Platonism for a defense of Christianity. Best known is Giannozzo Manetti (1326–1459) who, being a biblical scholar and one of the first humanists to know Hebrew, presented Socrates in a parallel life together with Seneca. He clearly refrained from making the ancient philosopher an anonymous Christian; the only Christianizing element in his biography is to explain Socrates' 'demon' as a guardian angel.[54] Obviously humanist ethics was interested in ancient paradigms, including the Stoic Seneca, without necessarily Christianizing them. Filippo Beroaldo (1453–1505) paired Socrates with the known atheist Democritus for their exemplary equanimity.[55] As we have seen, this changed with Ficino. His intended confirmation of Christianity through ancient wisdom turned into a Christian interpretation of that antiquity to the effect that the Christian perspective enlightens the wisdom of the pagans. The price to be paid is a flattening-out of the specific Christian message, including Christology, and the identification of humanist discipleship of antiquity with imitation of Christ. This necessarily verges on the margin of paganizing Christendom. For what is the need to imitate Christ as the ideal of good behavior if we may emulate Socrates as exemplified in his interpreter, Ficino? In his adaptation of the *Symposium*, Socrates' Christ-like role went so far as to describe his discipleship like the flock of a Good Shepherd. There, in the seventh oration that replaces Alcibiades's talk

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[50]   The biographer Giovanni Corsi in Marcel 1958, p. 682: 'animis medendis missus'.

[51]   Petrarca 1933–1942, p. 228.

[52]   Salutati 1985, *De fato et fortuna*, tract. 2, cap. 9, p. 73.

[53]   Mohler 1927, p. 231.

[54]   Manetti 1979, p. 149–151.

[55]   *Symbola Pythagorae*, Beroaldus 1513, fol. 99v–110v; 105 r.

of the original *Symposium*, Socrates figures as an allegory of Eros, having all the properties of Eros portrayed in Diotima's instruction. The 'usefulness of the lover' is said to consist in conversing (*consuetudo*) with Socrates—which in modern times can only mean imitating him. For 'the true lover like a pastor shields the flock of lambs against the false lovers like against the voraciousness and pest of wolves.'[56]

It was most likely this kind of appropriation that provoked the satirical vein of Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536), who in discussing the Reformation issue of justification through works quoted Socrates saying: 'Whether God will approve of our works I don't know, but we will eagerly strive to please Him.' This he famously sealed with a half-earnest, half-ironical comment: 'I barely can hold back to say: St Socrates, pray for us!'[57]

A further investigation would make it necessary to clarify Ficino's Christology and doctrine of the Trinity, topics that easily could fill a book themselves.[58] But for the development of this problem among other authors it is important to take a brief look at Ficino's doctrine of the transcendentals.

For the sake of concentrating the argument I suggest taking a look at Ficino's summary of one of the most decisive chapters of Plotinus' *Enneads* (6.9), which I translate here because it is not available in English otherwise:

> Whatever is besides the first consists of many parts or powers that are coordinated into the one form of the whole.
>
> As long as unity (*unitas*) in its multitude of something prevails, the essence persists, which otherwise would disappear when unity is lost. Unity therefore maintains essence; hence the same produces essence and being (*esse*). Unity that dominates in the multitude (which is opposed to it) does not exist of itself nor emerges from the opposite multitude, therefore [it emerges] from pure unity above essence, which is everywhere multiple, and consists simply in itself. When we say one body and one soul, one heat and one chill, this is a unity by predication and not one body, otherwise it would not fit to a soul. Also, [it is not one] chill, otherwise it would not at all fit heat.[59] In a similar mode of speaking we find one itself more eminent than any essence, by virtue of which what participates more the one, also participates more the essence.

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56   Ficino, *De amore*, VII 16, Ficino 1983, vol. 2, p. 1362.

57   Erasmus 1972, p. 253 f.: 'Proinde quum huiusmodi quaedam lego de talibus viris, vix mihi tempero, quin dicam, Sancte Socrates, ora pro nobis'. For more on Socrates in the Renaissance see Marcel 1951; Blum 2006.

58   Lauster 1998 is the most extensive study in this field. Also cf. Edelheit 2008, Chapter 3.

59   'One' said about body and about soul cannot be the same 'one'; for on the level of finite beings to be one soul is not the same oneness as to be one body because both are different kinds of substances.

Moreover the highest perfection of being itself (*ipsius entis*) consists in identity and status; yet these are grounded in unity in the same way as diversity and movement in number. Hence unity that exists as the cause of perfection for a being (*enti*) is superior to being. Therefore we say that being is either identical with unity or different from it. We certainly will admit that unity is the foundation of identity; therefore if we say the first [alternative], namely, that being is the same as unity, certainly there must be before this unity the unity prior to that by which it is identical. But if we say the second, namely, that unity is distinct from being, clearly unity itself is sooner identical to itself than distinct from being, and sooner it will be absolutely first by absolute firstness (*primitate*), that is, by its own nature, before it will be prior to being, that is, related to being. It is also impossible to say that being is distinct from unity so that it were prior to unity; for if it is said to be distinct from it [unity], it were sooner identical with itself—identical, however, through unity.

Furthermore nothing can be thought superior to simplicity itself, but that is unity itself. Unity, then, is not only the first of all but also firstness itself (*primitas*) by virtue of which anything else anywhere is prior. Through it even being is prior to what follows, that is, through unity both conjoined with it and superior to it. It is also excluded to say that being in the first intention[60] is neither one nor not one. For if it were not one, that is, most simple it would not be in the first intention. Hence, what is out there seems to have unity. Think that being and one occur together: since being is capable of plurality it cannot force itself to be one; on the other hand, one itself forces being to be either unique or united. Justly Boethius said: Cause and reason of being is unity. And Avicenna and Averroes admitted that unity is the nature of any thing.[61]

What Plotinus had pondered in this section was the categorical applicability of the oneness to everything that is: 'All beings are beings due to the one.'[62] Ficino rather aimed at proving that oneness is paramount of being by forming the top of the hierarchy of anything that is. He therefore ascribed ontological and creational powers to the One, which becomes not only the point of reference for the essence but also the author of its existence (*esse*). Consequently oneness is not an abstraction from single beings but rather an emergence from that unity that by necessity cannot be immersed in beings. The effect is that we have to distinguish between oneness by predication (this or that particular in modes of speaking) and the supereminent oneness in which all singulars participate. He corroborates his analysis by showing that other transcendentals, specifically identity and simplicity, are grounded in unity, now taken as firstness.

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[60]   Ficino uses the first intention (*signum*: the primary reference of the word 'being' when it means a single object) as an indication that being implies unity.

[61]   Plotinus 2005, pp. 756 f.; Ficino 1983, vol. 2, p. 1798.

[62]   Plotinus 2005, Enn. 6.9, Chapter 1, p. 757: 'Omnia entia ipso uno sunt entia.'

There can be no doubt that Ficino is talking about God, which becomes evident in the following chapter. Here Plotinus said: 'In general it is true for being and essence that essence or being (*essentia vel ens*) and one are the same, so that who finds being itself has obtained the one.'[63] Ficino, however, continues his reasoning about oneness and plurality and—drawing upon Plotinus's considerations—teaches his readers that 'essence, life, and intelligence are three particular perfections that are distinct from each other, where as perfection *simpliciter* precedes the three perfections mentioned and is indivisible and therefore stable in itself.'[64] From this Ficino concludes that unity as simplicity is anterior to being, life and wisdom. It is unmistakable that Ficino alludes to the divine Trinity. However his attempt at establishing oneness beyond essence leaves Trinity behind so that the question may come up whether Trinity is perhaps already the first instantiaton of plurality. This is a problem that more than a century later Campanella will try to solve. As we will see he will restore the essential meaning of oneness.

In commenting on Plotinus' One Ficino tries to think the super-essential, that Being that *is* not (in Heideggerian terms). His Neoplatonic interpretation of the One is quite compatible with Plato's 'un-written doctrine' as unearthed by the Tübingen School in the 1960s and 70s.[65] He seems to share with Martin Heidegger the concern for transcending the tangible being, and that is why he reads Plato in a Neoplatonic way. But we should not forget that Ficino's intentions are religious and thus moral, if not political. Hence we should not be misled by the speculative rigor and the Scholastic formality of Ficino's argumentation in this section on the One and Being. This can be seen in his commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*.

Ficino inserted in his extensive commentary on *Parmenides* a series of discourses (*discursus*) in which he proves the superiority of the One over Being. In the first discourse he maintains that something one is partly distinct from others, partly subsumed with them under some union. This statement is obviously of ontological content; therefore it is surprising that it is immediately followed by a linguistic observation, namely, that 'to say "essence", or to say "one" does not yet constitute a proposition, but only "essence is one" is a proposition.'[66] This raises the question of why Ficino bolsters the metaphysics of the One with oneness by predication, to which he also had referred in his Plotinus commentary. The answer can be taken from the conclusion of this discourse: 'The One itself is said to be beyond essence, not because of some deficiency, but because of excess; for it is better than essence or it exists in essence as its apex.'[67] Obviously predication requires uniting

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[63] Ibid. Chapter 2, p. 758.

[64] Ibid.: 'ipsa igitur simpliciter perfectio (…) indivisa est et ita semper permanet in seipsa.'

[65] Tigerstedt 1974.

[66] Ficino 1983, *In Parmenidem*, Chapter 41, p. 1157: '… quaelibet res … est unum aliquid partim in se ab aliis distinctum, partim subiens cum caeteris unionem. Rursus dicere essentiam, vel dicere unum nondum et sermo, sed dicere essentiam unum, iam est sermo'.

[67] Ibid. p. 1158.

essence and oneness, from whence it follows conversely that essence has to be subordinate with respect to oneness. Such subordination or hierarchy may not be of propositional, but only of ontological nature; hence follows the ascent from essence to the one, in a metaphysical sense. If such wordplay is allowed, Ficino has the transcendental 'one' transcend into transcendence. Predication, combined with ontological arguments, facilitates that transformation.

From there it is no big leap for Ficino to take the apex of every being to mean its principle so that—as we have seen before—things tend backwards to the principle as their origin, which consequently has to be good.[68] Goodness, then, joins oneness as a transcendental beyond essence. The epistemological side of that move allows the claim that 'as sense is related to the sensible good so certainly is the intellect related to the intelligible good.'[69] Any Aristotelian would object that what is good to see or to understand is not necessarily good in itself, for that would obscure the distinction between perceptible-in-itself and perceptible-for-us. The goodness of the object does not determine the goodness of the cognitive action and vice versa. However Ficino concludes his discourses by stating that the One is Goodness itself and transcends intellect, life and essence.[70] 'No essence rests in itself, it rather strives for the good through actions and simply aims at nothing but to be well and with the good. Hence is clear that beyond essence as such (*simpliciter*) there is something else, that is, the good itself.'[71]

Unfailingly Ficino offers also the return to finite things by maintaining that this goodness and oneness is endowed with communicability that tends to spread over everything.[72] Although it is well known Scholastic teaching that the good expands by itself (*bonum est diffusivum sui*), nested in epistemology and Platonic hierarchy, it serves as a moral appeal to strive for knowledge of God. Yet the most surprising turn in this chapter is still to come. After reiterating that all shortcomings or privations, all changes, and even the formless matter participate in some way in oneness and goodness and that they, of course, aspire to unite with the Good, Ficino ventures to say that we 'conjecture' (*coniectamus*) the existence of the One and the Good as the principle of everything. Not only does he employ a key term of Cusanus's epistemology, he also risks jeopardizing the entire metaphysical claim of his discourses on the One by downgrading his arguments to conjectures, however necessary and coherent. Ficino's discourses on the One may be read as analytical *a priori* judgments on the meaning of essence and the transcendentals. The terminology of inference and conjecture, however, pertains to the realm of *a posteriori* argumentation, even if the basis of conclusions is not sense data but concepts. It is in this section that Ficino makes his famous remark

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[68]　Ibid. Chapter 42, p. 1158, Chapter 44, pp. 1159 f.
[69]　Ibid. Chapter 46, p. 1161.
[70]　Ibid. p. 1164, headline for Chapter 49.
[71]　Ibid. Chapter 49, p. 1164.
[72]　Ibid.: '… ad primum … Pertinet et communicabilitas per omnia se diffundens.'

about Giovanni Pico's having failed to heed the lessons of those discourses.[73] For our understanding of Ficino's theological philosophy it is crucial to see how he intertwines logical speculation and metaphysical claims with the human, linguistic and moral approach, which is also reflected in the shift of perspective from an analytical to a conjectural inference. This becomes even more evident when Ficino moves over from philosophical theology to describing the function of religion in the human perspective.

The nucleus of Ficino's philosophy of religion can be found in the conclusion to his paraphrase of Diotima's speech in his commentary on Plato's *Symposium*: 'It appears that we first venerated God in things, thence things in God; however, we appear to worship things in God in such a way that we more than anything else gain ourselves and that we appear in loving God to have been loving ourselves.'[74] The first part of that statement turns *a posteriori* finding God into relating everything that is to what elsewhere would be called the creator. It is the relationship between the creator image of God and pantheistic piety as a flip-coin. The subsequent clause that seems to qualify the act of veneration deflects from God to the self as the aim of such worship: what is achieved in worshiping God is the establishment of the self, so that in hindsight it is self-respect that again derives from love of God and makes it possible. This is no trivial finding. Again we encounter Ficino's figure of argument according to which the relationship of man and God is truly mutual and mutually conditioning. Moreover veneration and worship are reduced to their basic meaning of reference that turns out to be self-referential. The consequence may be that worship of God is but a species of outreach in the most elementary and quasi-existential sense. The treatment of the same issue in the *Platonic Theology* lends support to such an interpretation.

Book XIV of *Platonic Theology* endeavors to prove its overall claim, that is, the immortality of the individual soul, through twelve divine gifts that make the soul imitate God, namely

> that God is the first true and the first good; that He is all things; that He is the author of all, about four, in all, and for all time; that He provides for all; that He governs with justice; that in governing He remains steadfastly in His habitual condition; that He proceeds with moderation and sweetness; that He lives in superlative magnificence and delight; and that He gazes upon, marvels at, and cultivates his own beatitude.[75]

These twelve attributes of the divine are built into the human soul and push her to become God herself—however, not as a pious desire but as a fundamentally human activity: 'Everywhere whatever men do they refer to the procession of

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[73]   See chapter on Plethon.

[74]   *De amore* VI 19, Ficino 1983, p. 1355: '… deum primo in rebus coluisse videamur … et amando deum, nor ipsos videamur amasse'.

[75]   *Platonic Theology* XIV 1, Ficino 2001–2006, vol. 4, p. 219.

these properties, and they seek and strive for nothing else but to procure them as fully as possible for themselves.'[76]

Ficino labels this strife of the human towards the Beyond the *conatus*. 'So the aim of our soul's whole endeavor is to become God.'[77] This term *conatus* has not only connotations with the will but also with the natural animal drive and the movement of objects towards their proper place, therein included the frustration of such endeavor. From there one might be induced to conclude that the tendency towards the divine is nothing but the soul's return home. On a whole that may be true, but Ficino recounts as the ultimate divine gift the property 'to intuit, admire, and revere himself as blessed'.[78] That's what God does, and the soul follows suit.

Self-reverence as self-reference is the distinctive mark of humanity according to Chapter 8 of Book 14, where Ficino explains this twelfth divine gift that indicates immortality, namely, 'that we worship ourselves as we worship God'.[79] Divine love and veneration of the self is what humans claim for themselves, to the effect that their self-reference turns into self-divinization, when men 'greatly worship and venerate themselves as though there were some divinities'.[80] However this turn is not a historic development but the specific difference of being human against being an animal. Therefore the humans' God is their mind: 'They are entirely dependent on the mind as on God.'[81] Not only morality, based on shame and modesty, but also external signs of worship and cult ensue according to Ficino.[82] For the topic of his book—the immortality of the soul—Ficino has to ensure the closeness of human veneration to God himself. Therefore he concludes that 'Mankind is so close to God that it penetrates the secrets of the divine mind and comes to know God's work, the order, that is, of the world.'[83] In terms of epistemology it is worth noting that it is not any kind of inductive knowledge about the works of God that leads from the effect of the cause, from creation to the creator; rather, the affinity and closeness (in terms of metaphysics and theology) of the human soul to the divine mind grants insight into the laws of nature. Hence follows that man, based on 'this closeness, he judges himself immortal.'[84]

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[76]   Ibid.; 'seek and strive' stands for: 'expetunt et conantur' (p. 218).

[77]   Ibid. p. 219–221; 'endeavor' stands for 'conatus' (p. 220).

[78]   *Platonic Theology* XIV 1, Ficino 2001–2006 vol. 4, p. 218: 'seipsum adeo beatum intueri, mirari, et colere.' My translation, now. On the anthropological implications see Toussaint 2008 and Lollini 2008.

[79]   Ibid. XIV 8, headline p. 279; it is called the 'sixteenth sign' in Book 13 where there had been listed four previous signs.

[80]   Ibid. I corrected 'particular divinities' into 'some divinities' for 'quasi quaedam numina'.

[81]   Ibid. and p. 280: 'tamquam ex deo'.

[82]   Ibid. p. 281. Cf. Blum, *La religione naturale*, 2002.

[83]   Ibid. p. 285.

[84]   Ibid. p. 289.

In the following chapter of Book 14 Ficino argues that 'for mankind religion is the most appropriate and truth-telling of all things.'[85] For that purpose he offers two definitions of religion; the first relates it to the nature of man as distinct from animal, the second stresses its naturalness. 'The lifting of our mind to God, the king of heaven, is as properly ours as the raising upright of our body towards heaven.'[86] Body and mind are here united by way of a cosmological analogy. Such an analogy requires setting itself apart from the lower level, that of animals. Therefore Ficino continues: 'Worshiping the divine is as natural to men almost as neighing to horses or barking to dogs.'[87] So if worshiping is natural to man and defines man's essence, then animal behavior has to be disqualified as not worshiping or 'honoring things celestial';[88] however in order to keep the analogical hierarchy working, prophecy is to be attributed to animals. The behavior of reptiles or birds that help foretell natural events qualifies as prophecy analogous to humans worshiping God 'for the sake of the future life'.[89] These distinctions show that the argument by analogy is dangerous because there is no boundary between the levels of the hierarchy so that not only humanity can approach divinity to the level of indistinctiveness or that the distinction between beasts and men can be blurred for the same reason. Tommaso Campanella will explicitly ascribe worship to animals with the same purpose, namely to prove the naturalness of religion, and with the same method, that of proportional analogy. In Ficino's line of argument prophecy leads to his second definition of religion, namely 'that instinct which is common and natural to all peoples and which we everywhere and always use to think about providence and to worship it as the queen of the world'.[90] Note how providence and prophecy merge, thanks to their connotation with vision and projection—again it is the notion of outreach that drives the argument.

Ficino has this characterization of religion follow by a description of the function of the Prophet. His major concern is the social nature of humanity, the necessity of laws and of manifest signs of the divine. Summarizing Plato's *Protagoras* (322 a–d) Ficino reminds his readers 'that Jove himself, the creator of all, had sent Mercury down to men with the law—had dispatched, that is, a prophet, an interpreter of the divine will and a giver of both divine and human law'.[91] No word about Christ.

In his commentary of St Paul's letter to the Romans, one of his latest works, Ficino downgrades the meaning of visible cults by maintaining that Christ and

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[85] Ibid. XIV 9, p. 291.

[86] Ibid. p. 293.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid. p. 295.

[90] Ibid. In his commentary on Plato's *Laws* X he simply postulates that natural instincts can never be in vain, and hence there must be superior beings (*necesse est esse superos*) as objects that fit human religiosity (Ficino 1983, vol. 2, p. 1516).

[91] Ficino 2001–2006, vol. 4, p. 297.

St Paul did not support them.[92] At the same time he defines the office of the prophet in the person of the apostle Paul to be the abolition of ceremonial cult (identified with Judaic law) and preaching the Gospel, defined as the narration of God's Son's 'eternal as well as temporal birth'.[93] With such exegesis Ficino, then Canon at the Cathedral of Florence, risks transforming the historic Incarnation into a metaphorical tale. This becomes even more ambiguous in his earlier treatise *On Christian Religion*, which he wrote alongside with his *Platonic Theology* in the 1470s, where he presents Christ as 'nothing but a book of morals or even of divine philosophy alive, sent from heaven, and the Idea of virtues visible to human eyes'.[94] Giordano Bruno will conclude from there that Christology along with all religion works only because it is nothing but 'a moral fable'.[95]

Marsilio Ficino's attempt at salvaging Christianity and converting neopagan Aristotelians branched into extremely abstract speculation in order to capture the transcendence and absoluteness of God and a moral religiosity that in the end could only lead to a quasi-pietistic interiorization or spiritualization of the mystery of the divine by making the theoretical ascent an essential feature of being human. Both branches have their common root in Ficino's method of mediating ontological levels and of alternating between epistemology and metaphysics. Since he believed he could persuade his contemporaries of the existence of God by stressing His attraction and the human drive for Him, the Neoplatonic otherness of the One converges with the existential feature of humanity to be self-referential. His formula that in loving God we appear to be loving ourselves may then be transformed into a characteristically modern diagnosis according to which theology ceases to be the word about God and glides unavoidably over to talk about men: anthropocentric theology is anthropology.[96]

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[92]   Ficino 1983, vol. 1, p. 432.

[93]   Ibid.: 'Evangelium filii Dei … de utraque illius nativitate aeterna, temporalique.'

[94]   Ficino 1983, vol. 1, p. 25: 'Quid aliud Christus fuit, nisi liber quidam moralis, imo divinae Philosophiae vivens de coelo missus, et divina ipsa idea virtutum humanis oculis manifesta?' Cf. Vasoli 1988.

[95]   Bruno 1958, *Spaccio* III, p. 780: 'favola morale'. Cf. Hick 1993.

[96]   Cf. Toussaint 2008, Chapter 2: 'L'humanitas devant l'anthropologie', pp. 31–45. The term 'anthropologia' originated in the Renaissance through medical as well as philosophical discussions on the nature and 'dignity' of man (ibid. pp. 40–43).

Chapter 8
Giovanni Pico against Popular Platonism

Francesco Petrarca, in his invective *On His Own Ignorance and that of Many Others*, discusses at length the teachings of ancient philosophers, including Aristotle and Plato, relying heavily on Cicero's *De natura deorum*. At one point he declares:

> [Cicero] labored to compose things that I believe should never have been written. I wouldn't believe they should be read either, except that reading and understanding such trifles about the gods awaken our love for true divinity and the one God, and that, as we read, our contempt for foreign superstition awakes reverence for our religion in our minds.[1]

What appears well in accord with his Augustinian Christian piety throughout his work can also be understood as an attempt at damage control made necessary by his own endeavor to propagate ancient wisdom.[2] Befriending antiquity exposes the reader to pagan theologies and calls for a firm belief in Christianity. The immediate effects could be seen in the debate between Salutati and Dominici in an earlier chapter. Little more than one hundred years after Petrarch, the revival of ancient and non-Christian wisdom brought humanists to a crisis, of which the controversy between Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico is paramount. This crisis still deserves interpretation because it determines the long-term impact of Renaissance Platonism on modern philosophy; even more it marks the beginning of modern philosophy of religion, if it is correct that philosophy of religion aims at a philosophical account of the syndrome that constitutes religion. In this chapter that follows Salutati's, Pletho's and Ficino's endorsements of pagan mythology dogmatics is at stake and the coherence of mythological imagery. Again, this chapter will approach the problem from a purposefully chosen angle that eventually may allow reading the better known works of the main figure, Pico in this case, in a new light. Therefore, instead of claiming an exhaustive treatment of Pico's thoughts,[3] I want to present the Florentine quarrel about Platonic Love from Pico's perspective.

The year 1486 saw Giovanni Pico particularly busy. He had recently returned from Paris and was preparing his great council or disputation of 900 theses in

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[1]   Petrarca 2003, p. 295: *On His Own Ignorance* IV, § 83.

[2]   According to Fubini 2005, Petrarch's references to Augustine serve purposes of self-defense and competition with the Church Father.

[3]   On Pico's relationship to the Church and to Christian theology of his time see Blum 2008.

Rome; so he was writing his *Oratio* that would become his most famous work, and he was, of course, collecting the material for his *900 Theses*. For this purpose he met for further briefings with his teacher of Averroist Aristotelianism, Elia del Medigo. On his way to Rome in early May 1486 he found time and energy to kidnap Margherita, the wife of Giuliano Mariotto dei Medici. However after the fight and his humiliating arrest that ensued, he remembered his allegiance to the saintly Savonarola and concentrated all his vigor on studies of Hebrew, the Qur'an and other reading.[4] In addition to all this—as his editor and nephew Gianfrancesco Pico reported—

> he also wrote something Platonic, in vernacular language, in which one finds much to clarify the olden theology (priscorum Theologiam), i.e. much of the abstruse opinions of the sages strewn in enigmas and riddles (scirpis[5]). Perhaps—leisure permitting—I will try and translate this into Latin, in order that such a man's egregious teaching may not become available to some vulgar people.[6]

Gianfrancesco is evidently referring to Giovanni's *Commento sopra una canzona de amore*. His remark is as ambivalent as Giovanni's work: On the one hand, he appreciates its purpose to set some of the pagan theology in order; on the other hand, he still deems it inappropriate for the masses and therefore regrets that it was composed in Italian.

Girolamo Benivieni, himself the author of the *Canzona* on which Pico commented, reports to have been reluctant to publish this book after Pico's death. The reasons he pondered were certainly the same as those which irritated the nephew, mainly the problem of whether Pico's text was compatible with Christian doctrine. Such concern is plausible, for Girolamo Benivieni, his brother Domenico, and Giovanni Pico were all in some way involved with the Florentine religious reformer Girolamo Savonarola.[7] Girolamo Benivieni's version of the origin of the poem and the comment is:[8] Benivieni had 'read with pleasure' (*amenissima letione*) the learned commentary on Plato's *Symposium* by Marsilio Ficino and thus felt invited to 'condense in a few stanzas what Ficino had explained on many pages and in most elegant style'. Readers interested in intertextuality will observe how Benivieni, by means of modesty, reduces his responsibility for the contents of his own poem. This *Canzona* inspired Pico to add his 'learned and elegant as well as rich' commentary (*non manco dotta et elegante, che copiosa interpretatione*: that is, he re-expands the condensed poetic doctrine). But doubts arose. Actually

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[4]   This is how Garin represents Pico's conversion, Garin 1937, p. 25–27. On Pico and Savonarola see Edelheit 2008.

[5]   Cf. Aulus Gellius, *Noct. Att.* 12, 6.

[6]   Pico 1942, p. 13. Quoted from Gianfrancesco Pico's biography of Giovanni in Pico 1971, fol. *4r.

[7]   Re 1906, Part 1, Chapters 4–5; Poliziotto 1982, pp. 100 f. Cf. Garfagnini 2006.

[8]   Pico 1971, p. 733.

both Pico and Benivieni reconsidered the poem, and they both believed that Pico jotted down his commentary not in the way the matter deserves but rather out of 'tender and particular affection' (*tenera et singular affetione*) to the poet and that both—once 'the spirit and fervor' in which they had written had subsided—doubted it appropriate to treat heavenly love in the Platonic mood rather than as Christians. Consequently they refrained from publishing the twin writings unless they could 'reform' it from a Platonic into a Christian text.[9]

A minor problem is hidden in this narrative, for Pico had explained his commentary to Domenico Benivieni with a letter, dated November 10, 1486, assuring that Girolamo was right in caring for Pico's health but not in praising that *Commentary*: it was 'nothing to get excited about. I wrote it when I was bored [*ociosi*] and had nothing else to do, as a way of relaxing my mind, not of exciting it.' However Pico continues this apparent gesture of modesty by announcing: 'It is only a prologue to the Commentary on Plato's *Symposium* which I am planning to write.'[10] Two biographical facts should be taken into consideration in this context. First Domenico Benivieni was mentioned in the dedication of Pico's 1491 treatise *De ente et uno*, as one who had (probably) attended discussions about the compatibility of Plato and Aristotle, together with Lorenzo de'Medici and Angelo Poliziano—a debate that took Ficino's Platonism to task; second Girolamo Benivieni had attended discussions on the same subject at San Marco in Florence in the presence of Savonarola.[11] In other words, with this canzone and its commentary the trio was plotting against Ficino—and this not only after the disaster of the failed disputation in Rome in early 1487, or at the time of *De ente et uno*, but already in 1486.

Benivieni's narrative justifies the publication of the commentary with public pressure on releasing the book after Pico's premature death, Benivieni himself now relying upon the discretion and the sound Christianity of the readers. He explains his deliberations in a very long and convoluted sentence, in which he invokes Thomas Aquinas, whose authority should be able to restrain the errors of the Nobleman—'if one can speak of errors'. Also he adds as a disclaimer that the title of the commentary expressly indicates that 'Canzona et commento' are written not according to the Catholic truth but rather in the mind and meaning of the Platonists. Finally this text gives an important insight into the core of this great

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9   Ibid.: '… nacque nelli animi notri qualche ombra [d]i dubitatione se era conveniente a uomo professore della legge di Christo, volendo lui trattar[e] di Amore massime celeste, et divino, tratarne come Platonico, et non come Christiano pensamo che fussi bene sospendere la publicatione di tale opera, almeno sino ad tanto che noi vedessimo se lei per qualche reformatione potessi di Platonica diventare Christiana.'

10   Ibid. p. 382; English translation taken from the Introduction in Pico 1984, p. 5.

11   Pico 1942, p. 386. Ridolfi 1981, p. 146: Savonarola is said to have disdained both ancients.

philosopher, as Benivieni promises, and with that he defers responsibility onto his late friend.[12]

From these two accounts on Pico's *Commento* by the nephew and the friend, we gather quite a number of important clues to its interpretation. In the Florentine environment it was evidently more scandalous to write in Italian than in Latin when it came to the wisdom of the ancients. It was, generally, dubious to treat such matters as divine love with strong reliance on pagan philosophy. Nevertheless Pico's achievement in doing so was outstanding both as an elaboration of his thought and for the correct interpretation of the pagan mysteries. It is noteworthy that Gianfrancesco Pico continues his report with praising his uncle's merits in his 'general method of commenting', mainly regarding the Holy Scriptures.[13] On a biographical note we learn that Pico not only wrote his *Commento* during or after his chivalric adventure with Margherita, he also was inspired by an erotic bond with Benivieni, a bond not much different from what Marsilio Ficino advocated in his commentary on the *Symposium*, which, incidentally, was to be reinterpreted in Pico's commentary. Yet in the first place Benivieni cautions the reader that such a Platonic treatment of divine love might be harmful to the Christian feelings of the readership, even more, that it elaborates on the contrast between these two approaches, which becomes evident in the text. My contention is that in reality this is the main thrust of the *Commento* as a whole. This interpretation would mean that the year 1486, with the publication of the *Oratio* and the *900 Theses*, probably marked Pico's endeavor to correct, bend or divert Florentine Platonism in a way that Christian truth would not suffer harm from ancient, pre-Christian and unchristian philosophizing. Phrased otherwise, when Benivieni trusts that the readers will discern the spirit that drives Pico's exposition, he invites us to take a critical look at the Platonic interpretation of love in order to judge to what extent it may be compatible with Christian theology, mainly of Thomistic branding.

What Benivieni does not say is that he himself had already 'reformed' the commentary by erasing all invectives against Marsilio Ficino that occur throughout the text.[14] Now Ficino's *De amore* had been the work that had prompted the *Canzona*. Was the poet, then, protecting the late head of the Platonic Academy? Given the fact that he emphasized his condensing and shortening of Ficino's theory and Pico's new elaboration of the poem, he cuts his own ties that once bound him to Ficino and endorses Pico's interpretation.

Thus, we are about to discover another riddle in addition to the many questions that surround Pico's prolific writing in this time: His writing and planning commentaries on Platonic love in vernacular and his competing with Ficino were part of the hazardous project to challenge all intellectuals of his time in Rome and to set up a new style of philosophizing and a new approach to Christian and non-Christian sources. Not only the *Oratio* and the *900 Theses* are involved but

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[12]   Pico 1971, p. 733.
[13]   Ibid. fol. *4v.
[14]   Pico 1942, pp. 13–15.

also *De ente et uno* because this short text was the most blatant attack on Ficinian Platonism and also *Heptaplus* because here many of the motives of the *Oratio* and of the *Commento* are repeated and developed further. Since the *Commento* has survived in rather sketchy prints and manuscripts and since the style of writing sometimes sounds clumsy due to occasional scholastic formulas and interspersed Latinisms, it has remained relatively neglected in Pico studies, but it might turn out to be a key to interpreting the major intentions of the author.

Since Pico's teacher Elia del Medigo[15] was also involved in his various projects, a letter of his, written in 1485, lends insight into some philosophical issues that troubled Pico at that time. After acknowledging having received from Pico not only scabies, but also a horse, Elia del Medigo discloses for the first time, as he says, his personal view on Cabala. Cabala, as we well know, was to be the major news in the *Oratio* and in the *900 Theses.* Pico not only included it in his broad survey of global wisdom, he also seems to have put all his spiritual hope in this ancient mysticism because it claimed to be the true transmission of the Word of God into mankind, and it fostered an understanding of the human soul within the cosmos that most precisely expressed Pico's view of the dignity of man. Elia remarks[16]:

> Since you are so busy with 'this blessed Cabala' (isto benicto Chabala), let me tell you that in my Hebrew commentary on [Averroes'] De substantia orbis I spoke about the spiritual power (de virtute spirituali). And what I have to say is unknown to all who deal with it. (…) [The cabalists] believe that in this world there are beings of a lower degree (gradus) than the degree of the glorious God, who is called the Infinite, and these flow—that is: they are not made nor produced (sunt fluxa, non dico facta vel producta ab illo)—from Him, who is named the Infinite. These have various degrees. The higher grade of these is above the movers of the heavens and the visible bodies in heaven. The order in which the produced beings are produced and maintained within the order is this, namely by the Sephiroth, i.e. numberings. Thus they call these 'flowed from the Infinite'. For they believe that in the Infinite there is no thinking or apprehension, and also no terminus or determination, since it is an intellectual disposition. One cannot speak about will, intention or thinking in it and generally of no disposition. So it is impossible that [thinking] is a thing that comes or flows (proveniens seu fluxa) out of it, i.e., the Infinite. The first that flowed from it (the Infinite) are the beings mentioned, according to the degrees which one calls Sephiroth, as I said, and these are agents by virtue of God, whom they call Infinite, and by the flux that they obtain from Him, and they are identical by His virtue, because they,

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[15]   On his life and works see C. Black 2006, pp. 12–15.

[16]   Elia's letter to Pico in Pico 1942, pp. 67–71; the passage quoted on pp. 68–69; the Latin spelling is Elia's. This letter is discussed in the context of Averroist cosmology in Bland 1991, pp. 37–42, and mentioned in C. Black 2006, p. 13 f.. On Elia's allegiance to Averroism see also Bland 1995.

the Sephiroth, depend on Him and have flown from Him, that is the Infinite. According to them, the order we find in the world is that of the Sephiroth. The First, however, that is called the Infinite, of this one can assert no disposition or positive property; they even refrain from calling it intellect, as also Averroes observes in his Destructio destructionum 4, namely that Plato and the Platonists do not want to call God an intellect or maintain that He is an intellect.

This is a very interesting letter, first because its awkward wording conveys authenticity of an intellectual more familiar with Hebrew than with Latin terminology. He evidently struggles with transforming cabalistic stereotypes of expression into Latin, thus the repetitive insistence on 'the Infinite' as the name of God. If I am right, by 'Infinite' he refers to the En Soph. But for anyone accustomed to humanist elegance, as Pico was, the insistence on the Infinite as a name must sound like an invitation to translate this epithet into whatever terminology one prefers, lest the ineffability be safeguarded.

Second, Elia intends to clarify, for the first time, what people dealing with Cabala tend to misunderstand. Even if Elia does not identify himself as a cabalist, he cannot possibly have had his fellow Jews in mind, but he must mean to correct outsiders who, like Pico, try to come to grips with it. He gives a summary of the relation between the En Soph, the Sephiroth, and the visible World and concludes with an issue that Latin philosophers might know well enough, namely Averroes's take on Platonism in defining God.[17] Thus Elia affords Pico with a fine hermeneutics of the Infinite and the World. The structure of the World as such, expressed in the Sephiroth, and easily convertible into Pythagorean numbers, is not a product of the Divine Mind—as Christian Platonists tend to assume—but rather an efflux of God, who for want of differentiation (disposition) is by no means a mind.

Such is the interpretation available to a devout Christian familiar with Platonism. And Elia's contention is that this God—truly invisible, super-essential, undivided, independent—is the same in Averroes, Plato and the Cabala. Whether this is a correct rendering of the Cabala I cannot assess, but what is striking is that this very view is the main message in Pico and that this message is at odds with Ficino.

Let us remember that this letter came during Pico's preparation for the great revelation of cabalistic wisdom in his Roman disputation and while he was commenting on Benivieni's rendering of Ficinian love. It may, then, help to read Pico's polemics against Ficino in his *Commentary* on Benivieni.

One interesting example highlighting Pico's disagreement is the interpretation of Caelus–Saturnus–Jupiter.[18] According to Pico Saturnus's castrating Caelus symbolizes that, indeed, the Highest God is inactive in as much as his testicles

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[17]   In his own treatise on being, Elia presented his interpretation of Aristotle, but in this letter he implicitly comments upon his understanding of Platonism that was missing. Cf. Geffen 1971, p. 161.

[18]   *Commento* II 20, in Pico 1942, p. 511 f.; Pico 1984: II 21, pp. 115–117.

fall into the water thus giving birth to Venus, that is, fertilizing the world. In one remark against Ficino only recently discovered, Pico argues that it is incoherent to understand such emasculation as a diminishing of perfection: First, that is not the meaning of castration; second, not Caelus but his influence would have been castrated; and third, one would have to say that also Jupiter castrates Saturnus.[19]

Pico is criticizing the fact that in the Ficinian model, emanation may be understood as a gradual decay of power and dignity. Keeping in mind Elia's rendering of the Sephiroth as those that guarantee the integrity of God and still derive their being and the being of the material world from God without admitting the thought of decay, it is obvious that Pico follows the same strategy: creation does not exhaust the creator. Pico even warns that the misunderstanding by 'a certain Platonist' is equivalent to Manicheism.[20] He renders the castration with Elia's term 'influxo'[21], that is, the influx of the plenitude of ideas: '… everything which Uranus [Caelus] communicates to Saturn, that is the plenitude of the Ideas, which descends from God into the Angelic Mind, is represented by the testicles of Uranus.'[22]

One may use the agreement between Pico's critique of Neoplatonist emanation and Elia's critique of misrepresented cabalism as proof that Pico was essentially an Averroist (provided that Elia was a faithful commentator on Averroes)—but that's not the point. The thrust of both arguments is directed against disparaging the mystery of creation.

Elia's critique implies yet another assumption that bears on the meaning of Christian Platonism: As the Cabalistic view is, so to say, tripartite, God–Sephiroth–World, so has the Platonic world to consist of at least three levels, parallel to Caelus–Saturn–Giove: God creates one and only one creature, which is merely intellectual or spiritual and that creates all other finite beings. The reasoning behind this model seems to be clear: Only if the finite world is created, or structured, by something eternal, which contains the structure (ideas) of this world, only then God is not affected by the finiteness of His creature, and—even more importantly—only then the world is not pervaded by God. This intermediate level—name it Sephiroth, Angelic Mind, First Created—keeps world and God apart and together. It is the ultimate theism without pantheism. The trouble is that this doctrine is not in all respects compatible with Christian theology. The Ptolemaic cosmos that depicted a *Primum Mobile* as the first sphere below the *coelum empireum* (also defined as *habitaculum Dei*) was well consistent with this thought. But Christian psychology insisted that the human soul is not the offspring of a universal intellect but, rather, that every individual soul is immediately created by God.

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[19]   Bacchelli 2001, p. 118, fr. 9.
[20]   Pico 1942, p. 512: '… parole in quel luogo male intese e a qualche platonico e a tutti e' Manichei …'; Pico 1984, p. 116.
[21]   Bacchelli 2001, p. 118.
[22]   Pico 1942, p. 512; Pico 1984, p. 116.

Pico notes this contradiction by referring from the Saturn–Caelus debate back to an earlier chapter that discussed God as the creator of spiritual substance. There he blamed Ficino for having erroneously ascribed the true Christian doctrine to Plato.[23] As Pico sees it, Plotinus, Aristotle and his Arab commentators maintained that God created 'immediately' one, and only one, perfect intellectual being: the first Mind from which, then, may stem other spirits.[24] The implication is that according to the ancient schools God does not create, without intermediate creation, the human soul directly, which contradicts the Christian doctrine of the individual soul. With this assertion Pico opens the question of how far one can go in Christianizing Plato, as Ficino does. The strategy Pico follows seems to be this: First, he claims to expose only the true interpretation of Platonic philosophy, which—of course—entitles him to criticize some who claim to be Platonists but lack consistency. Then, he shows that the most important tenets of Platonism, correctly interpreted, are incompatible with Christian theology—or, rather, that it takes an additional hermeneutic effort to interpret Platonism in a Christian way.

From this perspective the first chapter of the *Commento* acquires meaning beyond the occasion for which it was written. Obviously inspired by Elia's instruction as quoted before, Pico opens his treatise by reminding that, in Platonic terms, 'God is not Himself being but the cause of all being,' so that it is tenable to say that God is not intellect but, rather, 'the source and cause of all intellect.' This, he says with a wink, 'can give a modern Platonist a good deal of trouble'.[25] Ficino's trouble must have been that his entire strategy of Christianizing philosophy, and specifically of proving the immortality of the individual soul, depended on the philosophical theology of God as supreme intellect,[26] whereas Pico already here attacks this kind of Platonism by underscoring the metaphysical gap between the created human mind and God. In the long Chapter 5 of *De ente et uno* he came back to this fundamental difference. On the second of four levels of approaching the 'darkness' of God, he states that 'God is neither life, nor intellect, nor intelligible, but better and more excellent than that.'[27] In order to make his statement plausible, Pico marshals Augustine and Dionysius the Areopagite.

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[23]   *Commento* I 4, ibid. p. 466: 'Però mi maraviglio di Marsilio che tenga secondo Platone l'anima nostra essere immediatamente da Dio produtta; il che non meno alla setta di Proclo che a quella di Porfirio repugna.'

[24]   Ibid. pp. 465 f.: '… dico che Iddio ab aeterno produsse una creatura di natura incorporea ed intellettuale … E però oltra lei niente altro produsse … secondo e' Platonici da Dio immediatamente non proviene altra creatura che questa prima mente …'

[25]   *Commento* I 1, ibid. p. 462: '… e' Platonici … diranno che Dio, non est ens, ma è causa omnium entium. Similmente che Iddio non è intelletto, ma che lui è fonte e principio d'ogni intelletto; e' quali detti, per non essere inteso il fondamento loro, a' moderni Platonici danno gran noia.' (trans.) Jayne, Pico 1984, p. 77.

[26]   Cf. Jayne in Pico 1984, p. 180, note 10.

[27]   *De ente et uno,* Chapter 5, Pico, *Scritti*, 1942, p. 416: 'Deum scilicet nec esse vitam nec intellectum neque intelligibile, sed melius aliquid atque praestantius omnibus his.' For

His philosophical aim is to show that Platonism is not even conducive to rationalizing Christian faith; but if it is used this way, it endangers both a correct interpretation of Platonism and the foundations of faith. Pico's famous *Oration on the Dignity of Man* should be read as an appeal to spiritual conversion to which knowledge of all sorts of wisdom contributes if properly applied. It should also be read as part of Pico's larger project to keep paganism in check, of which the *Commento* and *De ente et uno* were parts. A Neoplatonic philosophy in which human intellect is contiguous with the divine mind is frivolous in the eyes of Pico and his friends. Perhaps it was the Italian language that was perceived as dangerous, for Ficino's commentary on the *Symposium*, Benivieni's poetic condensation of it, and Pico's expansion of it all circulated in the vernacular, which certainly amounted to popularizing Platonism. More dangerous was probably the fact that ancient philosophy and mythology were interpreted there according to their internal logic. Petrarch's hope that the study of ancient mythology might enhance reverence for Christian truth was shared both by Ficino and Pico. Yet Pico's sense of Christianity had changed towards some kind of piety.[28] Hence, although the *Commento* originally contained a sufficient number of hints against popularizing pagan Platonism, Girolamo Benivieni and Gianfrancesco Pico already deemed it politically incorrect to serve the market with philosophical trifles.

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futher references see note 66 in Pico 2006, p. 87.

[28]   This did not spare Pico suspicion of heresy, but that is another facet of his work.

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Chapter 9

Tommaso Campanella: God Makes Sense in the World

Tommaso Campanella's achievement in philosophy is tainted by his nearly three-decade-long ordeal in prison: Having been arrested for political rebellion in Naples in 1599, he was and remained throughout his life under suspicion of heresy. Consequently he wrote and rewrote his works, while again and again they were confiscated or awaited censorship or were entrusted to friends for publication and sometimes embezzled. As a result, more than many other philosophers, Campanella advocated one substantial thought in a variety of works in an effort not only to reformulate lost books but to retrieve that very insight and to salvage it for posterity. It is evident that frequently the same arguments and formulas return *verbatim* in various writings and in, on first sight, surprising contexts. All this evinces the interpretation that Campanella's thought revolved around a central message that has to be taken as a whole and is reiterated in his writings.

Before his first imprisonment in 1591 Campanella had already completed several books, among others *The sense of things and magic.*[1] *At the beginning of his 27 years of incarceration he composed his Real philosophy*[2] *that contained the famous City of the Sun and his Metaphysics.* Then followed his *Atheism Overcome.*[3] It is important to see at this point that these works cannot be categorized as, say, natural philosophy, metaphysics, political philosophy and theology; rather, they all aim at unifying these areas of theory. This is certainly one, if not *the*, central idea of Campanella: Natural philosophy has a theological foundation, which is equivalent to metaphysics and, at the same time, has bearing on politics. Readers of the *City of the Sun* cannot help but see the parallels to modern systems of social engineering, welfare and dictatorship.[4] They also keep wondering what to take seriously and what to account for 'utopian'. But in the context of his other writings it is undeniable that the *City of the Sun* explores the political application of religion and metaphysics. Therefore the *Atheism Overcome* is more conducive to understanding his intentions, as they are expressed in the subtitle, *Philosophical*

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[1]   *Del senso delle cose e di magia*: Campanella 1925 and 2003; Latin: *De sensu rerum et magia*, Campanella 1620. On his life and work see Firpo 1985.

[2]   *Philosophia realis*, in Campanella 1975, vol. 2.

[3]   *L'Atesimo trionfato*, Latin: *Atheismus triumphatus*, Campanella 2004 and 1631. For overviews of this book see Cassaro 1983, and Angiuli 2000.

[4]   Cf. Blum 2004, Chapter 10.

Understanding of the Universal Religion Against Machiavellist Anti-Christianity.[5] The aim of this work is to prove, in philosophical terms, the universal meaning of religion, which is at the same time the Christian faith, in order to ban the threat against Christianity as identified in Machiavellism.[6] In a move that surprised his censors Campanella takes the existence of disbelief, of critique of Christian religion, and of various cults for granted so that the investigation of all forms of belief is his methodical starting point.

> I as a human mind, examined all religions under the heavens: among animals, plants, angels, and stars; I did this with common reasoning in order to assure myself and the others of what I believe and to find my place among the creatures, in which divine worship is reflected—sometimes more, sometimes less, sometimes appropriately and reasonably, sometimes inappropriately and naturally.[7]

As Campanella explains in Chapter 1, religion and worship are weakened or misled by want of awareness and thought, by false prophets, overzealous obedience, unawareness of dangers from opposing views, by self-confidence and lack of religious reverence, by philosophical relativism, despair over religious negligence or abuse. The last category is identified with Renaissance hedonists and cynics like Pietro Aretino, who chastised the insincerity of priests and princes of their times but played along instead of calling for reforms.[8] Those who rely

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[5]   Campanella 2004, *L'Ateismo trionfato overo Riconoscimento filosofico della religione universale contra l'antichristianesmo macchiavellesco*. This is the first edition of the Italian original. The subtitle was intended to be the main title, whereas the more provocative title 'L'Ateismo trionfato' was suggested by Gaspar Schoppe: Campanella 1927, p. 162. The title of the first Latin edition was: *Atheismus triumphatus Seu reductio ad religionem per scientiarum veritates* (Campanella 1631).

[6]   In a letter dated 30 August 1606 (Campanella 1927, p. 26), the author summarized his plan thus: 'Un volume contra politici e macchiavellisti chi son la peste di questo secolo e di tal monarchia, fondando la ragion di stato su l'amor parziale; mostrando a loro con novi ed efficaci argomenti quanto s'ingannano nella dottrina dell'anima, ed in pensar che la religion sia arte di stato. Scoprendo anche come tutti principi chi seguîro tal opinione *ab initio mundi* han perduto la vita e lo stato in sé o subito nei posteri loro; ed avanzar ogni scrittore in questa materia, di maniera che non possa risponder qualunque ostinato sofista, per consenso d'ogni savio.' Almost the same in letter nr. 2, Campanella 2000, p. 24.

[7]   Campanella 2004, cap. 1, p. 15; the Italian text starts with: 'Io senno humano esaminai tutte le religioni …' The Latin version (Campanella 1631) says, cap. 1, p. 1: 'Ego intellectus humanus omnes examinavi Religiones …' In the margin to Chapter 1 (Campanella 1631, p. 4) the author emphasizes that he is not speaking for himself but on behalf of human reason: 'ego, non ut ego, sed ut humanus intellectus.' On censorship concerning this work see 'Introduzione' and Ernst 1989; also Campanella 1951, pp. 9–54.

[8]   Reference to Niccolò Franco (1515–1570) and Pietro Aretino (1492–1557) on p. 19.

upon themselves and therefore do not believe in any religion are identified as Machiavellists,[9] to which we will have to return in more detail. After this critique of religious sentiments, or lack thereof, Campanella recapitulates, in Chapter 2, arguments against religion in general and specifically against Christianity. He first establishes his principle—which needs to be discussed later—that the triad of power, wisdom and love pervades all human activities. Failing to recognize this principle leads to tyranny, false authorities, decay of scholarship and hypocritical truth claims for one's religion, including reference to miracles and martyrs that any religion claims for its own testimony.[10] Then he enumerates a number of arguments against Christianity such as the difficulty to believe in the Trinity, the Eucharist, the Mother of God as a virgin and the incarnation. The power of God for salvation and to prevent evil is equally dubitable.[11] Campanella's arsenal of disbelief seems quite complete and is, indeed, common to all times. At stake are not only particular Christian dogmas but also the relation of God to the world and the warrants of Christian belief, be these of epistemological or of metaphysical nature (for example, the validity of testimony and the existence of evil). However it may well be that all these arguments and the areas they address are of the same validity because Campanella concludes his review of anti-religious feelings with quoting from the Bible: 'He showeth himself to them that have faith in him. Perverse thoughts separate from God.' (Wisdom 1:2–3) This quotation is illustrated with reference to the Machiavellists and Epicureans who are said to deny God out of self-love and to blind themselves against the truth.[12] The apparent fideistic allusion makes it necessary to find out whether Christianity can be defended against its critics with philosophical arguments that address their rationalism and to interpret the epistemological meaning of self-love and the 'perversion' of self-blinding.

The chapters that follow are intended to answer these questions: Divine reason pervades all things, so that religion is, in a sense, natural to all (Chapter 3). Incarnation, that is, God's becoming man, shows God's care for humanity, which requires to distinguish between the universal governance of the world and God's concern with particulars (Chapters 4–5). The undeniable existence of evil is attributed to the reductionist perspective of particular beings (Chapter 6). A further

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[9]   Ibid.

[10]   Campanella 2004, pp. 20–23; Campanella 1631, pp. 4–7. This and the following issues are numbered, but in an inconsistent way.

[11]   Campanella 2004, pp. 23–27; Campanella 1631, pp. 12v–14, adds three arguments: determinism that allows to do what one likes (because there is no salvation nor punishment depending on acts), the Aristotelian doctrine, including the eternity of the world, the mortality of the soul, and religion as an invention for political aims; finally the Lucretian argument that religion corrupts morals. Also, Campanella added preliminary responses to these arguments so as not to offend pious readers. (A note on pagination: the 1631 edition usually numbers pages, but occasionally folios.) For a modern collection of arguments against religion see Dawkins 2006.

[12]   Campanella 2004, p. 27.

instance of God's care of particulars is said to be the immortality of the soul, which entails the existence of past and future, as well as higher and lower realms of being (Chapters 7–8). Given the variety of religions, a distinction is made between natural religion and regional customs (Chapter 9). However since charity and justice are natural virtues, the Christian religion is perfectly natural (Chapters 10–12). Consequently Campanella examines a variety of cults and founders of religions (Chapter 13) and establishes criteria to judge their sincerity and veracity (Chapter 14), which further requests scrutiny of the testimonies and of miracles (Chapters 15–16). The last chapter of the book summarizes the argument by maintaining to have given evidence that religion is truly natural and naturally true.[13]

This overview shows that Campanella's book is a serious attempt at a philosophy of religion even though—or exactly because—Christian dogmas fit in neatly and meaningfully. What distinguishes him from philosophical theology of scholasticism and from Christian implications in various natural philosophies of his time is his perspective on Christianity as a truly natural outcome of human thought and as the epitome of metaphysics and science. Here he continues the thread of thought known from Raimundus Sabundus and Raymond Lull. According to these defenders of Christianity one could say any pagan thinker could have come to the conclusions that match Christian doctrine, for God is the absolutely wise being; and how could a wise thinker not infer what God thought and willed? 'An image of God is the wise philosopher and the honest man,' as Campanella says;[14] and even though he stated this while dismissing visual representations like statues, still, he maintained that natural wisdom leads to true knowledge of God. At one point he admits that the belief in the Eucharist is the most difficult for Christians to gain and only warranted by the Gospel, but then he associates it with natural magic, which receives its power from belief, so that the Eucharistic mystery amounts to the 'supernatural magic of Christ'.[15] Therefore Campanella believes in Christ 'philosophically'[16] because He is a reasonable consequence of the philosophical concept of God. For, since God is that reason which governs the world, it is consistent that this reason 'incarnates' as His Word.[17] 'Once we believe in this incarnation, everything else proceeds by way of reason: it is appropriate for God to be born from a virgin, to resurrect and ascend to the heaven and to

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[13]   Ibid., p. 217: 'Si è visto dunque che la Religione è vera naturalmente …' The Latin version adds a few more chapters discussing Machiavellism.

[14]   Campanella 2004, Chapter 9, p. 146.

[15]   Ibid. Chapter 12, p. 170–173. In *Theology*, the Eucharist is defined as: 'miraculous return to the super-eminent Monad' ('ad Monadem supereminentialem … mirifice homines reducens'), Campanella 1949 sqq., lib. 24, vol. 2, [part 1], p. 12.

[16]   Ibid. Chapter 15, p. 203: 'Io di Christo sto molto ben persuaso filosoficamente.'

[17]   Ibid. Chapter 11, p. 132: 'Io … trovo qualche distintione tra Dio e la sua ragione e arte [1631, p. 98: 'Rationem, seu Artem suam'] con la quale fece il Mondo e lo regge, … era conveniente che s'incarnasse questa ragione.'

work miracles; also that he dies and suffers equally conforms to humanity, and all problems are easily solved.'[18]

Both for the defense of Christianity and for a philosophical understanding of what constitutes religion, the question is: what are the criteria to distinguish true from false religions? Or, the same question in other words: what makes religion authoritative? In Chapter 14, Campanella lists six such criteria,[19] which, however, may be reduced to consistency and sincerity. His criteria are:

1. Miracles and martyrdom. Note that these two are not separate in that they are both supernatural 'patents'; and they confirm each other mutually.
2. Prediction of the testimonies through prophets heightens credibility.
3. Prophecy by the believer himself adds to credit when it comes true.
4. A fellowship of miracle-workers and martyrs testifies for their master.
5. Righteousness, firmness in speaking and knowledge of divine issues give authority.
6. The continuity over time confirms a religion.

In reviewing a number of religious leaders, among whom are Mohammed, Pythagoras and Socrates, Campanella points out that all of them lack at least one of these criteria. This is especially true for the ancient Greeks, who have 'no mandate from God' for want of miracles, although they are 'worthy to be taken as Christians in terms of natural law'.[20] At least they followed reason, acknowledged its limits and based legislature on reason, yet do not deserve undoubted trust.[21]

But does not Campanella claim Christianity to be naturally the true religion, while excluding the pagans just for being natural? It is an obvious paradox that for him connectivity with the supernatural is, in fact, natural to religion. Therefore it must be seen how he integrates the supernatural into the reasonableness of religion and how he comes to a philosophical understanding of the divine. Before we pursue this question it should be mentioned that sincerity is Campanella's major criterion to assess religions and their founders against the background of true religion: Lies and deceit are his accusations against Mohammed,[22] Numa Pompilius, Genghis Khan, Romulus and others throughout Chapters 13 and 14.

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[18]   Ibid. p. 134. In *Theology*, incarnation is the highest degree of communication of God with creature, because then 'creature is at the same time creator' ('ita quod creatum possit dici creator'); the other three degrees being: creation according to the divine ideas, the natural transformation of beings, and virtues bestowed by divine grace: Campanella 1949 sqq., lib. 18, vol. 1, pp. 18–20.

[19]   Campanella 2004, Chapter 14, p. 186 f.; cf. *Dio e la predestinazione* (Campanella 1949 sqq., lib. 1, vol. 1, pp. 24–28), with ten criteria, and *Cristologia* (Campanella 1949 sqq., lib. 18, vol. 1, p. 38 ff.), where the criteria are applied to the incarnation..

[20]   Campanella 2004, Chapter 14, p. 189; Justin Martyr is the source, here.

[21]   Ibid. Chapter 13, p. 181.

[22]   Cf. his book against Mohammedans, Campanella 1960.

The political aspect of religion is stressed here, and we need to come back to that later. In short, religious law-givers are either authorized by God (testified according to the criteria mentioned) or they are mean spirited, if not devilish, or they follow natural reason.[23] The six criteria of true religions, viewed as an agenda for a philosophy of religion, are essentials based on credit or credibility and coherence. Furthermore they are described as human actions that testify the divine; and as such they operate in time and society.

A definition of religion derived from that would be: Religion is the testimony of God through actions that on the level of humanity manifest the divine by creating a social and historical continuum of credibility. In Campanella's own words: 'Religion is nothing but wisdom;' it is 'the major art of our life' and 'the unifying soul of the souls of all citizens, and consequently of their bodies and fortunes.'[24]

A critical assessment of this concept of religion would have to discuss the means and levels of credibility. Such critique of credit would probably conclude that humans tend to believe what exceeds natural warrant to the effect that claim and credit form a circle. In his critique of competing religions Campanella would, then, appear to be pointing to potential weaknesses in this circle. Since another major argument of his is consistency (and if we leave the epistemological approach aside), a metaphysical question arises, namely, how such coherence of human actions is possible insofar as these are supposed to manifest the divine.

Occasionally Campanella maintains that even animals have religion, as stated in the initial sentence of the *Atheism Overcome*. Obviously they perform admirable works, like spinning, nesting, and so on; and they form republics as elephants do, which also seem to worship the moon and have ritual baths after sexual intercourse. Even plants appear to appreciate the beneficial rays of the sun.[25] Nevertheless they all do so without awareness of the governor of the world beyond some natural knowledge: their 'religion' is 'limited to the convenience of their present life, otherwise they would communicate with humans (as these do with the angels, conversing about this great affair), whereas they evidently let everything go for a meadow or for sex.'[26] So, if there is any religiosity in animals it is limited to—but also manifest in—their artful operations in managing their lives and to some inclinations that enable them to organize a kind of social life and even

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[23]   Ibid. p. 180.

[24]   Ibid. Chapter. 7, p. 73: 'la Religione, che non è altro che sapienza'; Chapter 9, p. 95: 'arte principale del viver nostro, qual è la Religione'; Chapter 12, p. 166: 'Religione, che è l'Anima unitiva, per l'unità divina degl'animi di tutti cittadini, e per consequenza di corpi e fortune'. *Fortuna* connotes both fate and possessions; cf. Chapter 10, p. 127, and below p. 158. Cf. the poem 'Fede naturale del vero sapiente' (*Scelta di poesie filosofiche*, nr. 3, Campanella 1998, pp. 16–36).

[25]   Ibid. Chapter 7, pp. 67, 70 f.

[26]   Ibid. p. 71. The Latin edition calls it 'umbratilis religio', shadow of religion (Campanella 1631, p. 43).

hierarchy, as bees do.[27] In a way animals even transcend their own realm because—although they do not communicate with higher beings—they still have a kind of religion that consists in 'serving more noble creatures, from which they receive mortal benefits.' That is, prior to consciousness, animals are factually connected with higher beings like sun and moon, which reward them. What sounds like an anthropomorphism is meant as an analogy to qualify human religion, the purpose of which is 'to serve the creator, from whom to receive immortal beatitude'.[28]

Yet for Campanella this analogy is also founded in reality because the vertical connectivity to higher beings, which is essential to religiosity and which makes animals appear to be religious, is not dependent on discursive reasoning but based in a kind of 'sense', with which all things are endowed. This was the topic of Campanella's early philosophical work, *The sense of things and magic*, to which he refers back in his *Atheism*. His axiom is this: 'Every thing acts and is acted upon according to its proper sense; and by a higher sense things are guided to do the secondary things.'[29] As to the appropriateness of such sense the example given is that of fire that is not suited to produce clockworks. This kind of sense is present not only in animate beings but also in stones and plants, for they all grow and interact with the environment by nutrition, repulsion of adversities, and so on.[30] What in Aristotelian and scholastic terms is the nature and essence of things is for Campanella their sense that has them operate 'naturally', that is, according to their nature. The finality of things, in Aristotelian terms, which converges with their essence in so far as it is the final cause of the processes of their lives, is reinterpreted as the sense of things that helps them—through purposeful interacting with other things—to conserve their being: 'Every part of the world has as much sense as is sufficient for its preservation.'[31] Campanella's usage of 'sense' is therefore dialectical: on the one hand it determines, and is limited to, the self-preservation of beings as they are; on the other hand it has them relate to other things in some way. This makes them instantiations of a totality, which Campanella calls an 'animate mill', in which every living being is similar to the

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[27]   Ibid. p. 70 f.

[28]   Ibid. p. 72.

[29]   Ibid. Chapter 3, p. 30: 'Quinci si vede che ogni natura age e pate secondo il suo proprio senso, e che da senno maggiore sono guidate a far le cose seconde.' Campanella uses two words, both related to the Latin *sensus*: it appears that 'senso' emphasizes the receptive (sensual), 'senno' the prescriptive (reasonable) meaning of 'sense'.

[30]   Ibid. p. 28. Cf. Campanella 1939, p. 309, and Campanella 1623, p. 84.

[31]   Ibid. Chapter 7, p. 64. The Latin version clarifies: 'sensu, vel infuso, vel assistente' (Campanella 1631, p. 39), which suggests that the *sensus* is given specifically by God.

world,[32] or, in a more familiar image, a clockwork that never needs adjustments.[33] Consequently the 'sense of things' is both their property to be what they are and one general, intelligent governance of the world. To present the relationship of particulars to one another and to the whole as some kind of sense entails viewing this relationship as a spiritual reality, which comes close, or is analogous, to some sort of perception[34] and to some kind of self-reference of particular beings. Both the essence of a thing and its relation to other things and the whole are modeled upon animistic activity. Transcendence, that is, the presence of otherness in the very being of a particular thing, appears to be the activity of some kind of intelligence that operates within the thing. The aim of this metaphysics is apparent from Campanella's persistent polemics against atomism and Aristotelianism.[35] What he tries to escape is any philosophy of nature that takes beings and the universe as an unordered heap of things and also any philosophy that is content with forming a conceptual framework—as scholasticism is alleged to have done—in which things may be properly located, but no necessity or harmony holds the world together.[36] In both cases God would play no role in the world, not epistemologically nor physically. Of course, both would be versions of atheism.

In terms of metaphysics for Campanella the realms of the natural and the supernatural tend to merge, and the knowledge of being qua being (the strictest definition of metaphysics) evinces knowledge of beings on all levels of reality, including God and his way of creating and maintaining the world. 'Science is the idea of things made.'[37] Consequently science must be knowledge of God's relationship to the world and—more importantly—of the presence of God's

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[32]   Ibid. Chapter 3, p. 38: 'E tutto il Mondo è un mulino animato, et ogni animale è simile al Mondo …' Leibniz, who was much influenced by Campanella's philosophy of senses (Leibniz 1960, vol. 4, p. 396 f.), used the simile of a windmill to dispel mechanistic notions of the universe in his *Monadology*, section 17 (Leibniz 1991, p. 83).

[33]   Campanella 2004, Chapter 5, p. 51.

[34]   Probably similar to Leibniz's 'perception' of a 'simple substance' (Leibniz 1991, section 14, p. 75) and to Whitehead's 'prehensions' of 'actual entities' (Whitehead 1969, Chapter 2, section 1, p. 23).

[35]   The most substantial critique of Aristotle and Aristotelians is his *Philosophia sensibus demonstrata* (Campanella 1992), which is at the same time a defense of Bernardino Telesio (1508–1588).

[36]   Cf. Di Napoli 1947, p. 237. It should be noted that the editor of *De sensu rerum* (Campanella 1925), Antonio Bruers, was interested in Campanella's philosophy of senses because he himself defended a kind of spiritualism that—embracing both empirical and religious research—aimed at describing some phenomena of nature as caused by some 'volitive and intellective intervention external to the human world and life'. Such 'science of the soul' would mediate between physics and metaphysics (Bruers 1941, pp. 38–42).

[37]   Campanella 2004, Chapter 5, p. 52: 'Perché l'idea delle cose fatte, in cui consiste la scienza, sta nella mente dell'Artefice, però egli [Aristotele] nega ogni idea ancora.' The notion that created beings are in God's mind as (Platonic) ideas is common to the scholastic tradition: see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I 15; the difference is that, now, science

ideas in created things. By way of analogy, these ideas, God's intelligence, must be manifest in things in some spiritual way, which is at least their 'sense'. In a section of his *Metaphysics* dedicated to epistemology Campanella has all levels of cognition converge in an essential similitude of everything with every cognizing being: 'Cognition, be it sensual, imaginative, intellective, remembering, consists in that the knowing is—or becomes—the being of the known. Hence in factually being or in being innate it proceeds from essence and not at all from impression or information.'[38] Degrees of cognitive certitude depend on the ontological similitude of knower and known, which is weakest in objects of mere imagination and strongest in the cognition of the thing itself. Hence a metaphysical approach is used to close the gap between subject and object, as modern language would term the problem. The metaphysical approach mediates between theological and natural knowledge opening the option that revelation and rational experience are but modalities of wisdom.[39] At the same time, intelligibility, seen as the ontological status of the objects of cognition, demands then a minimal 'sense' in all things. Furthermore since degrees of cognition mark degrees of what the thing is about to become, such 'sense' yields self-reference with regard to that aim, although one should not confound such 'cognition' with logical reasoning. Thus Campanella concludes his epistemological excursus: 'Obviously all beings sense themselves, since they themselves lack what they become. So, ontologically and essentially, knowing is being; but rationally they are distinct in as much a judgment about being is made.'[40]

Needless to say that the knowing God—who ultimately is the being of things—is ontologically prior to their existence. As any scholastic theologian would have it, God has the ideas of things in himself from eternity. In as much as His ideas are manifest in the creatures He is also internal to things. Peculiar to Campanella is the conclusion: Since God understands—or intends—Himself, He makes all things understand and express His 'ideal science'; furthermore, He makes all things to be, and He, in loving himself, makes all things love their own being,

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in general is defined as the idea of creation. Cf. the commentary on Aquinas in Suarez 1865, lib. 3, c. 5, n. 6, p. 211, discussed in the following chapter.

[38] Campanella 1638, pars 2, lib. 6, cap. 8, art. 2, p. 60: 'Cognitionem sensitivam, imaginativam, intellectivam, memorativam in eo consistere, quod cognoscens est esse cogniti: vel fit. Ergo in facto esse, vel innato esse, essentiari, et non immutatione, aut informatione omnino.' On 'essentiari', here translated as 'proceeding from essence', see below. One cannot help thinking of George Berkeley's formula: 'esse est percipi', when Campanella says: 'cognoscens est esse cogniti'.

[39] Ponzio 2001, pp. 74–80.

[40] Ibid. p. 61: 'Constat ergo seipsa omnia sentire; quoniam seipsa sunt absque eo quod fiant; realiter ergo et fundamentaliter cognoscere est esse: formaliter vero distinguitur; qua est iudicatum esse.' On Campanella's epistemology see Floss 1998, pp. 580–582.

which depends on God.[41] God as unrestricted intelligence has His creation truly represent His intelligence, including self-referentiality, which—on the plane of created beings—splits into self-preservation and reverence of the creator. Against this background the 'religion' of animals and plants is to be explained by their very existence because it includes their self-love, or self-reference, which mirrors and represents God's self-referentiality and as such refers back to God. Unbeknownst to themselves lower beings testify the existence of God through their actions. After Marsilio Ficino had made self-referentiality of man a major foundation of religious worship, Campanella expands it to the creation in every part.

The dialectics of 'sense' culminates in the function of beings to represent the sense of the Creator. One qualification is needed here, namely that particulars cannot represent the wisdom of God entirely, but only in part.[42] Nevertheless the world as a whole is a 'statue and image and theater of His glory and His visible trophy.'[43] This is also one reason why single statues cannot represent God.[44] But on a metaphysical level things do manifest God, namely through their triadic structure, which reflects God's power, wisdom and love. Power, wisdom and love constitute every being because 'it is and lives as much as it can be and knows to be and loves its own being, and if it cannot or knows not or wills not anymore, it is lost'.[45] Campanella's 'sense' sometimes covers all three properties; sometimes it refers only to wisdom. At any rate, without these three, that is, without this triadic, spiritual structure, things would be unable to exist and operate according to their nature: for instance, heat would stay where it is and not fight coldness, or a stone would stay in the air if put there.[46] In *Atheism Overcome*, the triad is called 'three eminences', 'component metaphysical principles', and 'metaphysical

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[41]   Campanella 2004, Chapter 5, p. 52: 'Di più, Dio, perché è interno alle cose, intendendose fa che tutte intendano, et esprimendo la scienza ideale, fa che tutte siano, et amando sé, fa che tutte amino il proprio essere, che da Dio pende.' His inspiration was Bernardino Telesio, cf. Telesio 1965–1976, lib. 8, cap. 3, vol. 3, p. 170: 'Itaque intellectionis cujusvis principium smilitudo est sensu percepta …'

[42]   Ibid. Chapter 6, p. 53. On the variety of cognitive senses see *Metaphysics*, lib. 1, cap. 6, art. 3 (Campanella 1994, pp. 312–318).

[43]   Ibid. Chapter 5, p. 47. Cf. the sonnet *Del Mondo e sue parti*: 'Il mondo è … statua di Dio …' (Campanella 1998, p. 37; cf. p. 44). *De sensu rerum* ... say in the subtitle: 'ubi demonstratur Mundum esse Dei vivam statuam', Campanella 1620.

[44]   Campanella 2004, Chapter 9, p. 146.

[45]   Ibid. Chapter 2, p. 20: 'ogni ente componersi di potenza, sapienza et amore, benché semplice sia, e che tanto è e vive, quanto può essere, sa essere et ama il proprio essere, e se non può o non sa o non vuole più, si perde.' The author refers to his *Metaphysics*, cf. Campanella 1638, pars 2, lib. 6, prooemium, p. 1 and *passim*; cf. *Epilogo magno*, Campanella 1939, pp. 184–187, and the Latin version of it: *Philosophia realis*, Campanella 1623, p. 3.

[46]   Campanella 2004, Chapter 3, p. 32 f.

eminences'.[47] They are 'eminent' in as much as they are present over and above all natures and essences, and as such they are genuine metaphysical principles that constitute every being as such: 'being is power, wisdom, and love.'[48] Historically speaking they are transcendentals, that is, properties of every being as being; but in Campanella they are not abstractions but agent principles that constitute and make a thing behave as it does inasmuch as it is what it is. More importantly these 'eminences' reflect the triadic structure of God, the Trinity.

This triad was the leitmotiv of Campanella's major work, his *Theology* in thirty books, which he wrote between 1614 and 1624, always in prison, but never managed to publish in print, due to opposition in Paris, where the philosopher spent his last years.[49] The first three books treat the general concept of God, Trinity and cosmology. In the *Cosmology* Campanella asserts that every perfect being proceeds from power, wisdom and love (all three of which refer to its own being). Where in common language we need to use the word 'proceed', Campanella has his own term: *essentiare*. Power–Wisdom–Love 'essentiate' a being, that is, this triad makes its essence whence it comes to be and exists. Now this applies to the perfect being, namely God, and the triad is equivalent to the Divine Persons. Imperfect beings are related to some aspects of the Trinity, some more or less to the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit.[50] Referring to Augustine, as he frequently does, Campanella agrees that every being is an image of the Trinity, especially creatures with reason, in which there is power, intellect, and will, or there is at least some trace of it, an imperfect and volatile hint.[51] Although power–wisdom–love are the key concepts, there is no wonder that they can mutate to being–form–order or to power–intellect–will or, in another context, to necessity–fate–harmony[52] because it pertains to the logic of this thinking that basic elements are transformed according to the context; and Campanella takes much care to differentiate some of these triads when it comes to metaphysical and theological precision. At this point it is sufficient to note that cosmology is a first-rank issue of theology because the creation is a vestige and representation of God.

All creation is a *processio* or emanation from God, as the very first chapter of the cosmology states.[53] To be created is equivalent to having emanated from the creator. Campanella explains that this is a 'real relation', that is, a relationship

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[47] Ibid. Chapter 2, p. 20: 'tre eminenze'; Chapter 4, p. 45: 'principii conponenti metafisicali'; Chapter 11, p. 133: 'eminenze metafisicali'.

[48] Ibid. Chapter 11, p. 132: 'lo essere è potenza, sapienza et amore.'

[49] *Theologicorum libri*, (Campanella 1949 sqq., lib 1, vol. 1) Introduction. This work is still not yet completely published, although its first volume came out in 1949. The titles of the individual volumes are bibliographically confusing, because the main title, *Theologicorum liber …*, appears on the cover as though it were the subtitle.

[50] *Cosmologia* (Campanella 1949 sqq., lib 3), pp. 34 f.

[51] Ibid. p. 34–36.

[52] Ibid. p. 36.

[53] Ibid. p. 10.

based on reality, but only for the thing created, whereas the creation constitutes merely a logical relation, that is to say: in God nothing changes really when He creates, while the created things are truly different from God and related to Him due to their dependence. In scholastic terms God is the efficient, exemplar and final cause of things. Created beings 'participate' in the perfect being, that is, they 'take part' of that which is fully existent and do not have being in fullness. In participating they do not 'toticipate' (take the whole).[54] This asymmetric connectedness between supreme (perfect) being and creation leads to the thought that all finite beings are dependent on the first being, which does not depend on them. Consequently finite beings are not necessary but quasi-accidental to the Creator.[55] In a different context we learn that all things are in competition with others, from which follows that animals, plants, stones and so on, are rooted in the same basic elements but only incidentally and by chance. The thrust of the argument is that behind this disorder there must be an organizing force and wisdom. But here it is noteworthy that Campanella maintains the finite beings to come to be by accident so that we may infer that God's power and wisdom are their substance.[56] Another important implication is that according to Campanella essence and existence are not identical in created beings (as they are in God). While this distinction is common knowledge since the scholastics,[57] Campanella gives it a specific turn by concluding that finite beings need 'something exterior, in which and towards which they exist'.[58] Scholastic thinkers had debated whether essence preceded existence, obviously referring to finite beings: the question was, whether the essence of a thing (for example, the nature of a horse) is prior to its existence or coming to be, or—vice versa—the essence depends on there actually existing such a thing (that is, there is no horse-nature without a real horse). Campanella seems to assign the existence of finite beings to their createdness or coming to be and the essence of every finite thing to God in whom essence and existence are congruent and identical. The essences of things, then, are the ideas in God's mind (as already mentioned), and this is the meaning of God as exemplary cause.[59] Elsewhere Campanella clarifies that ideal causation does not give concrete being to things but the agent, the *ideator*, 'regulates' by means of

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[54]   Ibid.: 'Quod autem est per participationem, est quasi pars eius quod est per essentiam, totius entis non capax: participat enim, non toticipat.' Cf. Campanella 1638, II, p. 99.

[55]   *Cosmologia* (Campanella 1949 sqq., lib 3), p. 12: 'Igitur nulla res finita est simpliciter necessaria, sed quasi accidentaliter respectu primi entis.' This metaphysical theology will come to full development in Spinoza. For a comparison of Campanella with Spinoza see Cassirer 1974, vol. 2, pp. 80–82 (footnote).

[56]   *Dio e la predestinazione* (Campanella 1949 sqq., lib. 1, vol.1), p. 64, nr. 7.

[57]   Cf. *Metaphysica*, pars 2, lib. 6, cap. 2, art. 2 (Campanella 1638, pp. 3–11); Aquinas, *De ente et essentia*; Di Napoli 1947, p. 235 f.; Di Vona 1968, on Campanella pp. 284–292.

[58]   *Cosmologia* (Campanella 1949 sqq., lib 3), p. 12.

[59]   *Cosmologia* (Campanella 1949 sqq., lib 3), pp. 18–20.

fate, necessity, and harmony and coordinates the properties.[60] In comparison to the first ways of causation, Campanella's treatment of God as final causality sounds rather conventional: The purpose of created beings is their similitude with God; hence God is the aim of all creatures. However it should be noted that this finality entails unity of God and creature because 'what is similar is, in so far as similar, one with that to which it is similar'. Consequently all things tend towards God, and the good all things strive for is ultimately participation in God.[61] Createdness as participation and participation as the aim of being come full circle, and this—as we have seen—applies even to elephants.

Power, wisdom and love, this triadic structure of God, expresses itself in the three ways of causation that create the world: power causes efficiently; wisdom is exemplar to the essence of created beings; and love relates them back to the creator, as is profusely explained in the first book of the *Theology*.[62] Power, wisdom and love are nothing but the three persons of the Trinity itself, as already said. The second book of the *Theology* discusses this theory with many subtleties that meet the various approaches of the Church Fathers and the Scholastics, among whom Campanella tends to appreciate most Thomas Aquinas. As an example that allows more insight into Campanella's philosophical method, here are his conclusions about the origin of the three persons in God:[63] Power–Wisdom–Love are termed *primalitates*, a neologism that expresses the 'eminence'—as it was termed before—from the point of view of the originating principles. These are in a way attributes of God, equivalent to fecundity, intellect, and will. In this triad Trinity has its root, that is, its constitution and distinction (in this sense *primalitates* may not be seen as attributes, since attributes may be subsequent to the essence, whereas the triad precedes it). For, the essence of Trinity and its peculiar differentiation is at stake when theologians discuss trinity and unity. Now one axiom of Christian theology is that in God everything is identical. Therefore power, wisdom and love must be 'formal distinctions' in the sense that they are conceptually distinct while factually identical. From that it appears that the triad constitutes the essence of God but not persons. As already stated the primalities power–wisdom–love 'essentiate'

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[60] Campanella 1925, p. 335 (addition to the Latin edition of *De sensu rerum*): 'Causa finalis et idealis [esse] non dant, sed illa determinat, ista regulat agentem … passiva vero est concinnatio materiae et qualitatum activarum ab Ideatore sic concinnante, per Fatum, Necessitatem et Harmoniam, et fit non facit.' Cf. *Metaphysica*, lib 2, cap. 1 (Campanella 1638), p. 101: 'Est ergo idea essentia Dei, et relatio simul ad creaturas …'

[61] *Cosmologia* (Campanella 1949 sqq., lib 3), p. 20; cf. *Dio e la predestinazione* (Campanella 1949 sqq., lib. 1, vol. 2), p. 100–106. In his *Apologeticum*, Campanella expressly refers to Ficino's *Platonic Theology*, Book 18, for the doctrine that all beings naturally revert back to God and that, though in a derivative sense, animals have religion (Ernst 1992, p. 576 f.).

[62] *Dio e la predestinazione* (Campanella 1949 sqq.), lib. 1, vol. 1, Chapter 9, and vol. 2, Chapters 12 and 14.

[63] *De Sancta Monotriade* (Campanella 1949 sqq., lib. 2), p. 130.

being. However since the primalities are only 'formally' distinct and since they 'essentiate' divinity, God can never be understood with regard to one person only because none of the three persons is fully being, since God consists of all three of them. As an integral being the distinction of persons originates in God's essence. From this follows another problem: In traditional terminology the divine persons 'proceed' from each other, which seems to connote 'pro-ceeding'—'going away'. Therefore according to Campanella the process of differentiation of God into persons is an 'emanation into the interior' (*ad intra*),[64] a process that does not entail any distance of space, time, essence or variability. So, beyond or before any concept of emanation, process, distinction and so on, we need to think of a unique kind of differentiation that makes no difference of essence but lies at the origin of any further differentiation, distinction and distance. This is the Trinity. At this point the argument seems to turn around: after it was said that the primalities, because of their identity in God, do not constitute the persons of the Trinity, they still are relations within the essence, and these relations originate from one another: Will or love emanates out of power and wisdom (because what is unknown or impossible cannot be loved); wisdom emanates from power (as we cannot know what we do not possess) but not from will (since we know much of what we do not want to know); but power emanates from none. Consequently it is the emanations or 'proceedings' of the primalities that make the distinction of persons. These emanations are neither motions nor acts distinct from essence (which they constitute); they are relations. They are elations, however, at the basis or origin of God, and as such they are not only virtual relations or such that are only conceived by reason, but real. So, we come to the paradoxical conclusion that the primalities (power–wisdom–love) are not in and of themselves the three persons of the Trinity but bring them forth by being real relations. It may be said that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are natural consequences of the universal structure of reality, here under the metaphysical conditions of being the first and supreme being. (This is, obviously, the same conundrum as that observed in the definition of religion: the supernatural is part of its nature.)

The question is legitimate: why is this important, why does Campanella make this effort taking on the tradition of Catholic theology, and what follows from there for philosophy? Within Campanella's work no branch of philosophy would be complete without pursuing the unifying momentum of reality. And this is—as could be seen—his insistence upon the 'sense of things' that unfolded into the metaphysical principles of primalities. Therefore he strives to show that this primeval structure not only represents the divine, it even lies at the root of the Persons of God, and therefore explains the ultimate meaning of God, while—at the same time—the primalities tie God and the world together, being equally rational, metaphysical and natural. In doing so Campanella not only draws upon the Christian tradition; he also re-interprets it. Finally to the third version of the same question, Campanella's philosophy attempts to unite philosophical branches, proving him

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[64]   Ibid. p. 132.

to be in a certain sense a systematic philosopher. His analysis of the primalities tends not to coin *ad hoc* terminologies and theories, but he shows their theoretical potential by exploring and differentiating them on all levels. What might appear to be arbitrary, namely, to maintain that all beings are endowed with sense, turns out to be a fruitful and realistic tool for describing the nature of things, the inherent structure of reality. In the first place his achievement is to have detected—in a new way—that reality is not simply real but consists of antagonisms and synergies, in his terminology: power–wisdom–love. It should be remembered that in his theory of finite beings all things emanate from the primalities but none of them fully. This is not to say (at least not at this point) that some things are powerful, some wise, others willful. Rather things have these in various combinations and priorities and not necessarily consciously. Furthermore, the intricate structure of the primalities themselves, their being relations, proceedings, conceptuality and so on, is exactly what has to be sorted out in finite reality: things are not just things but interconnected in complex ways as relations, forms, concepts, and so on. Therefore Campanella's unifying philosophical instrument, the sense of things and their primalities, turns out to be a diversifying tool that calls for differentiations and scrutiny of real things.

It is significant that Campanella coined the term 'Monotrias' for the Trinity,[65] thus emphasizing what all theologians wrestle with, the oneness of the three Persons. Campanella is motivated to highlight oneness because his major aim is to make plurality emanate from that sameness that yields diversity. Therefore at one point he addresses the question whether the primalities make God a composite being. He reports that to be the scholastics' debate whether the attributes of God are mere notional differences or real ones,[66] real differences being those that obtain even if no mind thinks of them. His response recapitulates the solutions offered by Scotists, Thomists and others that the primalities as such are distinct in and of themselves because, as already seen, one comes out of the other and hence must be different 'in some way'.[67] Yet they are not different 'things' (*res*); rather, the distinction of the primalities is that of 'realities' (*realitates*) of things. In short: this distinction does not evince numerical plurality, nor any composition, since it is the 'essentiation' and most perfect unity.[68] If this is so in the first being, also in finite beings the primalities—or transcendentals, for that matter—do not entail

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[65]   *De Sancta Monotriade* (Campanella 1949 sqq., lib. 2).

[66]   *Dio e la predestinazione* (Campanella 1949 sqq., lib. 1, vol.1), p. 136.

[67]   Ibid. p. 138: '… nec possunt quae sic se consequntur non distingui secundum naturam aliquo pacto'.

[68]   Ibid. p. 142. Cf. *Metaphysica* lib. 2, cap. 2, art. 4, Campanella 1638, p. 99: 'Sunt ergo Primalitates, non quidem tres Essentiae, aut Res, aut Divinitates, aut Unitates; sed Essentialitates Realitates primi Entis.'

composition with being;[69] rather, the primalities are principles 'before' the being, or 'pro-principles'.[70]

What may sound like a struggle over words discloses the core of doing philosophy, to capture reality in language. Campanella mentions that he aims at expressing in language what goes beyond physical description. Therefore he calls the distinction of the primalities 'terminological': even though the single primalities are essentially identical, they differ in what they intend. For instance on the absolute level love is identical with power and wisdom, but it is defined as, and aims at, that inclination that is called love. Consequently it appears that reason separates it from itself.[71] This insight, which is fundamental in philosophical conceptualization, applies to the transcendentals in general, as the context shows. For, when Campanella referred to the scholastic debate over the distinction of attributes in God, he remarked that the traditional transcendentals (*bonum, verum, ens, iustum, pulchrum, aeternum, infinitum,* and so on) are actually 'objects' of the primalities,[72] that is, the most general notions of being qua being are that towards which the primalities tend. Conversely the transcendentals such as 'good', 'true', 'beautiful', but also 'just' and other virtues (which, according to Campanella are combinations of transcendentals) imitate the primalities.[73] Reason categorizes properties and attributes and combines them by rationally reduplicating and objectifying those metaphysical principles that not logically but ontologically precede the conditions of the possibility of mental and physical differences. It is safe to say that transcendentals (not only in God) are no things and, yet, realities. As a result Campanella reduces the number of transcendentals to those three that match primalities: power–being, wisdom–true, love–good. All other transcendentals are said not to 'mark' everything.[74] When Campanella discusses oneness as a predicate of God it becomes clear that he aims at holding together what language and concepts must express as distinctions.

It might seem that Campanella would draw upon the combinatoric logic of Raymond Lull, who also devised a system of divine properties that are reflected in some way in the finite world. However the difference lies in the reduction of those properties—and hence of the transcendentals—to just those three that constitute the relations between the divine Persons. Since goodness and truth are 'objects'

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[69]   Campanella 2004, Chapter 11, p. 133.

[70]   *Metaphysica* I, Campanella 1638, p. 78: '… principia … entis, ut ens, sunt proprincipia, sive primalitates …'

[71]   *Dio e la predestinazione* (Campanella 1949 sqq., lib. 1, vol.1), p. 140: '… dicam distingui terminative.' *Terminative*, here, obviously connotes both the intended aim (*terminus*) and terminology. Further on: '… et separatur [amor] a ratione a seipsa, ut est sapientia et potestas.'

[72]   Ibid. p. 136.

[73]   Ibid. p. 142.

[74]   Ibid. p. 150: 'Caetera mihi transcendentia non videntur, quoniam ab his non sigillantur <omnia>.'

of will and wisdom, in Campanella they cannot be on the same level, as they are in Lull's circle of nine general principles. On the other hand the circle lacks some transecendentals that are ontologically equivalent to goodness, namely, unity and entity. Nevertheless Campanella's critique proves that he saw the family resemblance.[75]

As we have seen in the debate between Ficino and Pico, Platonists take the One above and before Being, whereas Aristotelians maintain that only what *is* can be one. First of all Campanella clarifies that in the sentence: 'The one is,' or 'It is one' (*unum est*), 'is' does not function as a verb of action and therefore does not state anything exterior to, and distinct from, 'one'.[76] It simply states identity. Therefore Campanella suggests, implicitly taking up Pico's argument, that oneness only confirms a thing to be what it is and whatever it may be as a word.[77] To say that a thing is one, says it is *this* thing, and consequently oneness and essence converge. This, of course, is not the meaning of the numerical 'one', which is a derivative of the transcendental. Yet language suggests a difference where there is none: 'One is' (or even: 'This is one') is a proposition that refers to a truth that is undone linguistically by splitting oneness and being into a two-word proposition as though 'one' and 'is' were distinct, what the statement professes to transcend.[78] This is not only a linguistic peculiarity but germane to metaphysics, as Campanella concludes: The supreme One cannot communicate its oneness, and, still, it communicates, if not its substance, nevertheless its image.[79] So, not only in theology conceptualization through language betrays the intent, but in all metaphysics one has to see through the meaning that concepts and words both convey and conceal. General properties of being always need to be subtly analyzed by means of analyzing what their terms entail.

The primalities also play an important role in Campanella's arguments for the existence of God. He offers thirteen of them. The first and second are variations of Thomas Aquinas's Fourth Way, from the eminence: What is by participation or of secondary rank presupposes that from which it depends.[80] The third, fourth and fifth argument condense the theory of power, wisdom and love. Power is that on what every thing depends that is not *per se* and self-sufficient (a variation of Aquinas's Third Way). Since all things 'sense' their being and love it, fighting back what is adverse, they have some notion that hinges on wisdom *per se*. Of course the self-love of things is also said to depend on the first love, from which all loves emanate.[81] The sixth argument recapitulates the primalities as the origin

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[75]   *Metaphysics* lib. 2, cap. 3, art. 6 (Campanella 1638), p. 113.

[76]   *Dio e la predestinazione* (Campanella 1949 sqq., lib. 1, vol.1), p. 200.

[77]   Ibid. pp. 200–204.

[78]   Ibid. p. 204: 'Dices enim ens nominaliter esse idem quod unum, non autem verbaliter.'

[79]   Ibid.

[80]   Ibid. p. 62.

[81]   Ibid. pp. 62–64.

of order in the world and leads to the teleological argument (Aquinas's Fifth Way), today known as the argument from design, of which Campanella's arguments seven through twelve are variations. Since the world consists of contraries and chance cannot coordinate them, it postulates an 'intelligent cause of things'.[82] The same applies for the complexity of animal bodies. In the ninth argument the primalities feature as fate, necessity and harmony in finite beings that testify for God. The tenth and eleventh arguments postulate an intelligent craftsman from the order of the stars and the earth. It is surprising that Campanella admits 'anomalies' in astronomy and makes it his strongest argument because only an intelligent and an omnipotent architect could handle them.[83] (It should be kept in mind that Campanella advocated astrology because it is not the body of the stars but their intelligences that operate as 'secondary causes' in executing God's providence.[84]) The twelfth argument draws upon government: if not only Venice, Rome or Spain have a government, but even animals and plants, such wisdom must originate in the supreme wisdom.[85]

After the arguments from the consensus of peoples (the thirteenth) Campanella attacks the most common arguments from motion. First of all the existence of God is known not only through ordinary arguments from nature, but it 'falls into human souls', makes them saints and prophets, and is proven only by 'extraordinary and inferred' arguments. As is evident from those arguments that Campanella endorses, even though they seem to conclude *a posteriori* from the order of the created world, ultimately they presuppose the concept of the trinitarian (powerful, wise, loving) God. As Kant much later will observe, the allegedly a posteriori arguments turn into inferences from the one a priori argument (known as the ontological),that is, from the concept of God's perfection. It is probably this that Campanella means when he terms his arguments 'extraordinary' and 'inferred'. Stories of miracles, confirmed by prophets, are valid. Aristotle's argument of the prime mover is illogical, according to Campanella.[86] First it presupposes that mover and moved are always distinct, which is valid only in 'violent' and artificial movements. On the contrary, what moves naturally has an internal principle of movement. According to *Atheism Overcome* such intrinsic movement applies particularly to the elements, the angels and the souls. Here the infinite regress is mentioned as the only, but weak, reason for the Aristotelian argument.[87] Second the mover argument

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[82]   Ibid. pp. 64–66.

[83]   Ibid. p. 68. This is perhaps an early version of the modern 'fine tuning' argument, which tries to incorporate Darwinism into the design argument. On admission of imperfection in the arguments for the existence of God see Blum 2002, 'Gottes Plan'.

[84]   Campanella 1630, p. 2 (Praefatio).

[85]   *Dio e la predestinazione* (Campanella 1949 sqq., lib. 1, vol.1), p. 68.

[86]   Ibid. p. 70. Cf. Negri 1990, pp. 113–117, and Campanella 1992, pp. 28 f., on creation without succession.

[87]   Campanella 2004, Chapter 3, p. 39.

assumes that movement is eternal, so if that is not true (as Christianity teaches), there is no God.

Throughout his *Theology* Campanella defends a concept of God as the real basis of reality, and obviously this also applies to the realm of human activity, if even the sense of the animal kingdom is manifest in their activities. Here it is where Campanella's theology becomes political. His entire *Atheism Overcome* was intended as a political pamphlet as its title suggests. After discussing general issues of religion and theology, Chapter 10 comes to the point: Christian politics is based upon charity and the prime reason (God), whereas others are based on justice and 'second thoughts'.[88] The axiom is that all politicians strive for a unified and universal state, as promised by God to Abraham, and even tyrants implicitly aim at it, thus confirming the axiom.[89] It should be noted that in the sixteenth century the term 'law' (Latin: *lex*, Italian: *legge*) refers to law, constitution, commandment, as well as to religion. Therefore Campanella differentiates that such 'law' is preferable that allows all people to live because it is natural and connected to the primeval innocence of man, which is the set of moral principles based on loving God and the neighbor.[90] Other human communities, contrary to nature, are based on justice. Justice, understood as that virtue that guarantees the right to what has been acquired, is not conducive to community because it serves the interest of the individual rather than holding people together. Furthermore, being a public virtue, it prevents only trespasses against other people but cannot aim at prohibiting 'secret' sins, like fornication, greed, hate and similar vices.[91] Obviously Campanella is trying to bridge the divide between public politics and private morals, a distinction—however debated—that is presupposed in modern democratic or republican constitutions. If charity is the foundation of a state, as envisioned by Campanella, universal reason has to take the place of justice. By implication any society depends on God's love, which therefore must be the law effective in all. Law, understood as reason or as a rule derived from reason, is an emanation of Jesus as the reason or wisdom of God.[92] If Christ is the 'living reason as such', human reason is derived from it, and consequently philosophers could never contrive a society better than the Christian one.[93]

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[88]   Ibid. Chapter 10, p. 99: '… e l'altre la giustitia e ragioni seconde' (headline).

[89]   Ibid. p. 99.

[90]   Ibid. p. 100.

[91]   Ibid.

[92]   Ibid.: '… perché ogni legge è ragione o regola di ragione, dunque ogni legge è splendor della luce di Iesù …, perché la ragione o sapienza è qulla che governa tutte le cose.'

[93]   Ibid. p. 113. In his *Theology*, Campanella does not return to the idea of Christian law as universal, but he asserts that the divine law of charity is the foundation of Christian mission, after which 'judicial law' and ritual prescripts may be instituted according to the need of the nations: *De dictis Christi* (Campanella 1949 sqq., lib 23), pp. 96–100.

From this follows that all humans, as long as they live reasonably, that is, according to divine reason, are 'implicitly Christians' whereas who as a Christian distances himself from reason ceases to be an 'explicit Christian'.[94] To this intriguing idea we may ask whether Christianity is only secondary to natural moral attitude. As a matter of fact Campanella seems to downplay the importance of specific commandments of the Church, especially the sacraments. Sacraments, indeed, are considered no medicine without which no one can live; Christ rather instituted them as aids that help living according to the natural law,[95] unless we would take the notion of 'sacrament' broadly as signifying the sacred. But then every being would be a sacrament as testifying for divine wisdom.[96] They are symbols that are germane and appropriate to the moral institutes in a similar way as a new adept to the military or a school renounces his former life and pledges allegiance to the prince or principal.[97] Since we have already seen that the concept of the trinitarian God is suggested by the triadic structure of being as such and thus communicating this structure to every thing, it comes as no surprise that Christianity does not found morality and politics positively; rather the other way round, Christianity is the logical consequence of the principle that love or charity is what should govern—or is governing implicitly—human activity.

Implicit Christianity appears to be a variation of the theory of presupposed truth we encountered in Cusanus. The difference is that Cusanus's approach is—so to say—hermeneutic and analytical: he wanted to uncover hidden truth in any honest religious belief, thus opening religious dialogue with non-Christians. For him the coexistence of faith and peace remained an aim that should guide such dialogue. As such it remained purely theoretical. Campanella's agenda, on the other hand, was a political one. Both thinkers also seem to anticipate Karl Rahner's theory of the 'anonymous Christian', but the twentieth-century theologian worked in a secularist environment that fundamentally challenged the idea of Christian mission. To that Rahner answered that spreading the Gospel is only possible and legitimate, that is, not violating the right of non-believers to believe what their traditions and insights taught them, if the word of God encounters an understanding or religious feeling in the subjects of mission that is essentially suitable to the Gospel, and the reason for that can only be that all humans are the creations of that God the Gospel

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[94]   Campanella 2004, Chapter 3, p. 100 f.: 'Dissi poi: dunque le nationi tutte son christiane implicitamente, perché tutte fan professione di vivere con ragione, … e così noi christiani espliciti non siamo christiani in quelli atti in che dissorbitamo dalla ragione.' Cf. p. 117: 'Dunque tutti gl'huomini del Mondo, quando fan resolutione di vivere secondo la ragion divina, benché non sappino che questa ragione si sia incarnata, s'intendeno battizarsi in voto non esplicito … ma implicito in natura buona.'

[95]   Ibid. p. 115. Cf. his *Apologeticum* (Ernst 1992, pp. 581 f.) on salvation before the arrival of Christianity and 'implicit faith'.

[96]   *Theology*, Campanella 1949 sqq., lib. 24, vol. 1, p. 28.

[97]   Campanella 2004, Chapter 10, p. 116.

preaches.[98] In the first place Rahner's is an apology of evangelizing, and as such it is compatible with Campanella's theory because both assume that the world could (or should) be entirely Christian. Still Rahner's is not a political theory, as Campanella's is. In addition to that in calling non-Christians 'anonymous' Rahner concedes anonymity to every one of them, leaving a theoretical space of unspokenness that protects the rights of the anonymous. Curiously the content of the Gospel—even though it is supposedly present in an unspoken way in the non-believer—deserves and requires the apostolate precisely because it is not accessible by mere reasoning—and this is the major difference from Campanella.

The 'triumph over atheism' argues that Christianity as a moral and political system is founded on nature and reason, even though its origin is ultimately supernatural. So if humans are Christians, willingly and knowingly or not, then all positive laws are applications of the natural law. If charity should reign and if distributive justice only serves egotism, then all unrest in the world derives from the distribution of goods.[99] Communal possession of riches is the postulate that follows logically, which Campanella supports with many arguments from the Bible, Plato and the Church Fathers. Distributive justice is reinterpreted as the equal distribution of offices, burdens and goods among all members of the society as a political application of charity.[100] This would automatically make punitive justice unnecessary, which for Campanella is desirable because punishment tends to taint those who execute it. With a thought similar to René Girard's theory of *mimesis*, Campanella suggests condescending with love even to evil people because otherwise: 'If you compete with him, you do as he did, thus imitating him, and you lose by endorsing the laws from the victor; but if you give in he gives up.'[101] The most effective example of Christian community life is to the Dominican friar the life of religious orders, in which true sense of a liberal life is realized: liberality intended not as the freedom to gain power or advantages but taken in the sense of generosity. The latter is not referring to monetary alms but to dedicating one's life to the community. In this perspective communitarianism and liberalism are the same idea. Given the fact that in real life there are offenders of the natural law, with the communitarian practice of charity 'all the world will be the Church, the peace and victory of saints, so that one will live a sacred time, which eventually will be elevated to the heaven'.[102]

If that is the vision then the objective of politics must be the government of souls, of bodies and of fortunes, in that order. States can be categorized accordingly:

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[98] Rahner 1999, pp. 172, 296–305 [*Grundkurs des Glaubens*, 6, introduction, and 6,10; English: Rahner 1978], and p. 541 f. (interview).

[99] Campanella 2004, Chapter 10, p. 103.

[100] Ibid. p. 104.

[101] Ibid.: 'Però se tu contendi, fai come egli fa, dunque imiti lui, dunque pigli la lui leggi, dunque sei tu vinto che pigli leggi dal vincitore; ma se tu cedi, esso lascia di contendere.' Cf. Girard 2001.

[102] Ibid. p. 112.

To conquer only goods is piracy and cannot found a society. Government over goods and bodies is weak. So only when souls, bodies and goods are under command a government is stable, as can be seen with Mohammed, Caesar and others. However, first to conquer the souls with divine doctrine, despite being arduous, guarantees a long and lasting state, which is the exterior expression of Christian government. This is why, as already quoted, religion is the unifying soul that unites the citizens and consequently their bodies and fortunes.[103] Moreover if the axiom holds true that unity is the elementary function of politics, it is manifest in the experience that most political systems claim some kind of religion—even if leaders like Mohammed are false prophets. Rather the existence of fake priests speaks for the principle.[104] The law and religion of Christ, including Christian morality, is identical with the untainted natural law, which naturally unfolds as the triad of power–wisdom–love, which also constitutes every republic. If it is ruined, it deteriorates to tyranny, sophism and hypocrisy, but it can be restored by Christian love to brotherhood, sense and charity.[105]

Consequently the decay of society can be caused by insistence on secondary virtues, adapted to the human horizon, like justice, force, prudence—and this is said to mark Plato's *Republic*.[106] This kind of law aims at the surface and earthly interest. A more important case is the Roman law because it entirely relies upon glory, which inevitably expresses itself in the rush to arms. In observing that Campanella obviously attacks Machiavelli, who had analyzed the Roman constitution and power, it should be noted that Campanella competes with him in structurally laying out what constitutes political entities. Equally obvious is why Machiavelli must be wrong, in Campanella's view, and paramount of atheism. For the Florentine had concluded that religion is one means of domination and as such part of the art of government.[107] Therefore Machiavellism does not represent reason but slyness.[108] 'The prince's prudence is the slave's slyness,' Campanella said elsewhere advocating prudence as the view on truth writ large that reaches up to the primalities.[109] Political systems that aim at lower virtues and mundane interests at best instrumentalize God for these aims.[110] The priority of the political

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[103]   Ibid. p. 127 f. See above, note 24.

[104]   Ibid. p. 128 f.

[105]   Ibid. p. 106.

[106]   Ibid. p. 107.

[107]   Ibid. p. 120.

[108]   Ibid. p. 125: 'astutia'.

[109]   *Monarchia di Spagna*, Chapter 5 (Campanella 1997), p. 38: 'La prudenza è di Cesare, l'astuzia è di Davo.' (Davus was a name for a typical slave in ancient comedies.). *Philosophia realis*, pars 3: *De Politica*, cap. 9 (Campanella 1975, vol. 2), p. 395: 'Prudentia est principalis, et Caesaris: astutia est servilis, et Davi.' The same in *Politica* (Campanella 1941), p. 199, with reference to the *primalitates.*

[110]   Campanella 2004, Chapter 10, p. 107: '… par che mirino a Dio solo per rispetto di beni mondani.'

over the religious—Machiavelli's *ragion di stato*—expresses, then, the perversion of the true reason of politics and is founded, instead of charity, on self-love.[111]

Is it necessary, after all that, to talk about the *City of the Sun*, Campanella's best known work? I do not think so, except for pointing out that it epitomizes his philosophical theology. The City is governed by Sole (sun), 'translated' as *Metaphysicus*, and his three 'collateral princes' Pon, Sin and Mor, explained as Power, Wisdom and Love.[112] Obviously the metaphysical principle of government unfolds in the three primalities *potentia–sapientia–amor*, of which the names are mere contractions. These leaders run the government of the City in all its parts and constituencies. This society combines egalitarian with theocratic elements, which—for the purpose of this chapter—illustrate best Campanella's metaphysics. Since the treatment of love and sex relationships is the most conspicuous part of the constitution, it serves well to explain how theology bears upon politics and ethics.

Unsurprisingly the principal Love manages procreation in the City. He does so in cooperation with Wisdom and his magistrates who apply astrology and medicine. In terms of social technology sexual relationships are handled as breeding for the sake of public health. Politically speaking, 'the rules governing procreation are religiously observed for public, not private ends.'[113] Natural theology and natural law make individual endeavors instantiations of the trinitarian essence of men that leads from self-reference to the creator, which in politics is the government. For God, the First Mind, and the Lord of lords, conjoined all men into one body for the sake of self-preservation and their ultimate end.[114] Although the author shows realistic awareness of sexual urge and of courtship, he advocates 'only loving friendship, rather than concupiscent ardor'.[115] The natural bond between individuals is transferred to the love for the community, so that human relationships are treated in the same way as any ownership that is given up to the City. Family ties endanger charity by fostering selfishness, but 'as soon as one lets go of selfish love the community remains,' which is why the Citizens of the Sun have a great love for their fatherland, since they are 'un-owned'; and again Campanella offers the parallel of monastic life.[116] In the *City of the Sun* Campanella offers the abolishment of family structures as the best protection against political unrest,

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[111]   Ibid. p. 130. For a comparison of Machiavelli's and Campanella's political philosophies see Headley 1988 and 1997, Chapter 5.

[112]   *Città del Sole* (Campanella 1997), p. 7, cf. 'Introduzione' pp. XXXVI f.; Campanella 1981, p. 32.

[113]   *Città*, Campanella 1997, p. 22; Campanella 1981, p. 61. For a social technological interpretation see Blum 2004, Chapter 10.

[114]   *Philosophia realis*, pars 3: *De Politica*, cap. 1 (Campanella 1975, vol. 2), p. 167, the very first aphorism.

[115]   *Città*, Campanella 1997, p. 18, 20 and 23; p. 23: 'Però non si conosce tra loro se non amor d'amicizia per lo più, non di concupiscenza ardente.' Campanella 1981, p. 63.

[116]   Ibid. p. 11: 'più spropriati e santi, caritativi con tutti.'

which, as we have seen, has its roots in egotism. 'By communality of children, siblings, fathers and mothers excessive self-love is restrained and common love enlarged, which is charity.'[117] In his *Theology* he could not possibly defend this position; he nevertheless maintained that polygamy did not offend nature but custom.[118]

Among all his abundant writings and re-writings, often Campanella condensed his thought occasionally in poems, of which this one[119] seems to capture most the motive and thrust of his philosophy:

> A Love Song, According to the True Philosophy
> Madrigal I
> Hear, Lovers, my song. Always was
> Love universal, since he urged God
> To make the world, rather than force or need.
> His Power engaged him in so great a work,
> For within his infinite sphere
> The first Wisdom, whence I explain this,
> Foresaw that there may be the essence
> Of the finite beings, and said—as I report—
> That Love—to whom all being is goodness
> As to Sense is truth
> Life to Potency—
> Loved the anticipated existence
> Instantly: Thus what is, what depends
> On Sense and Power, that reverts to them:
> For they know not nor can
> What they don't will. Hence jointly I adore
> Power, Sense, Love, First Being and Lord.

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[117]   *Questione quarta sull'ottima repubblica*, in Campanella 1996, p. 160.

[118]   Ibid. p. 150, and *I sacri segni*, Campanella 1949 sqq., lib. 24, vol. 6, pp. 160–172. In the *Oeconomica*, the part that follows the *City of the Sun* in the *Philosophia realis*, Campanella takes the family as a constitutive part of society, with the same goals as the *civitas*, and matrimony seems to be monogamous, however arranged by considerations of public health: Campanella 1623, pp. 465 f. and 472–472.

[119]   Campanella 1998, pp. 113 f.: 'Canzon d'Amor secondo la vera filosofia // Madrigale I // Udite, amanti, il mio cantar. Sempr'era / l'Amor universal, s'egli Dio spinse / a far il mondo, e non forza o bisogno. / La sua Possanza a tanta opra l'accinse, / però che dentro a sua infinita spera / la prima Sapienza, ond'io ciò espogno, / previde che potea starvi l'essenza / de' finiti enti, e disse: - Or vi repogno. - / Ché Amor, a cui ogni essere è bontate /ch'al Senno è veritate, / vita alla Potestate, / l'antevista possibile esistenza / repente amò: tal ch'e', c'ha dipendenza / dal Senno e dal Poter, la volve a loro: / ché poter e saper essi non ponno / quel che non vonno. Dunque insieme adoro / Possanza, Senno, Amor, Primo Ente e Donno.'

The reader will observe ambiguities as to subject and object, prior and posterior—this is part of Campanella's message. Therefore by way of conclusion it may be summarized that Campanella transformed the Renaissance approaches to God, mostly fostered by versions of Platonism, to a strictly theological philosophy of nature, man and politics. In him theology, the speculation of the beyond of human experience, becomes irrevocably metaphysics of the human world and gnoseology of the conditions of reality. He re-integrated the scholastic tradition of transcendentals into a philosophy that in a proper sense of the word becomes a system. Thus trinity is seen as the essence of what there is, to the effect that one might conclude the trinitarian God of Christianity appears to be the highest instantiation of being. Even if it may be the case, which is not here the place to ponder, that Campanella left behind the Christian notion of God as an object of adoration and ultimate transcendence, he certainly managed to capture the metaphysical and methodical potential of the tension between divinity and finitude and of the triadic structure of the world, and perhaps in a more perfect and definitely in a more ambitious way than all his Renaissance predecessors.

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Chapter 10
Francisco Suárez—Scholastic and Platonic Ideas of God

'The word *Idea* is of the number of those words which are so clear, that they need not to be explain'd by any other; there being no other more clear and simple.'[1] If that were actually the case there would be no idealism of whatever incarnation. If it is furthermore true that *idea* cannot be explained by any other word then it must be a supreme genus that cannot be subsumed under any higher genus. Obviously there is an ambiguity when referring to 'idea' as a word, for it seems that language cannot capture 'idea' without employing words that are inadequate. Probably it is the case that in and of itself an idea is simple and clear to the effect that it cannot be related to something more simple and clear. Considerations like these employ Aristotelian and Platonic, as well as linguistic, methods in order to question the definition of 'idea' as offered by the handbook of logic of Port Royal, *The Art of Thinking* by Antoine Arnauld (1612–1694) and Pierre Nicole (1625–1695). It is appropriate to refer to this handbook when dealing with the concept of God, for the authors present 'God' as one such idea, as though that were obvious from the notion of idea itself: 'But had we not the *Idea* of God, upon what could we ground all that we say of God? As that he is *One*, that he is *Eternal*, *Omnipotent*, all *Mercy*, and all *Wisdom*.'[2] As always, speaking about God involves epistemological problems that sometimes seem to take priority over proper philosophico–theological aims. The authors of Port Royal, being Cartesians, need to fend off anything that smacks of sensualism. Therefore they teach:

> It is therefore false that all our Ideas proceed from the Sense: rather it may be affirmed on the other side, that none of those Ideas that enter our Minds, deduce their Original from the Senses unless by accident, that is when the motions stirr'd up in the Brain, which is all the Senses can do, give an occasion to the Soul to produce true Ideas, which it would not otherwise do; tho' for the most part those Ideas are nothing like the other that are form'd in the Sence [sic] and in the Brain; and besides the greatest number of Ideas being such, as not having

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[1]   Arnauld/Nicole 1993, I 1, p. 39: 'Le mot d'*idee* est du nombre de ceux qui sont si clairs qu'on ne les peut expliquer par d'autres, parcequ'il n'y en a point de plus clairs et de plus simples.' Arnauld/Nicole 1685, p. 45. All italics in quotations from this work are in the original.

[2]   Ibid. English, p. 50.

any mixture of Corporeal form, cannot without a most manifest absurdity, be referred to the Sense.[3]

It might be surprising, but it is of high philosophical importance to observe that those Cartesians are obviously and unapologetically employing Neoplatonic epistemology. In this chapter it will become clear that rationalist epistemology stems from a combination of Platonic notions of ideas with Aristotelian metaphysics, as it is personified in the Jesuit Francisco Suárez (1548–1617). Nevertheless this will be only a byproduct of our study; for its major aim is to understand that the Jesuit mediated between the two major strains of sixteenth-century philosophical theology, namely, medieval scholasticism and Neoplatonism of the Renaissance.

Marsilio Ficino, whose metaphysics of the One was at the center of a previous chapter, proved the non-corporeality of ideas by addressing the simple question: '(…) how will an image (which is also called a phantasm) create something that is freer and more extensive than itself?'[4] If a thought is 'abstract' in the sense of bodiless, how can it be generated by a derivative of the body like an image? Consequently, bodily objects that are external to the senses and to the mind cannot have a direct impact upon them in the process of cognition. In order to make that plausible, Ficino reminds his readers of the traditional biology according to which the vital power and the seed work from inside, since similarly

> neither the mind, nor even the sense (…), in order to perceive anything is formed by external bodies. But just as the life-giving part [of the soul] brings about change, generates, nourishes, and causes growth by means of inborn seeds, so the internal sense and the mind make all their judgments by means of innate formulae, and yet aroused (excitatas) by external objects.[5]

The simile is to suggest that cognition is a movement from inside the soul towards the outside, driven by its internal power. The essential operation of cognition takes place within the soul as a processing of its internal ideas when 'the soul's

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[3]   Ibid. p. 46: '… on peut dire au-contraire, que nulle idée qui est dans notre esprit ne tire son origine des sens, sinon par occasion, en ce que les mouvemens, qui se font dans notre cerveau, qui est tout ce que peuvent faire nos sens, donnent occasion à l'ame de se former diverses idées qu'elle ne se formeroit pas sans cela, quoique presque toûjours ces idées n'ayent rien de semblable à ce qui se fait dans les sens et dans le cerveau, et qu'il y ait de plus un très-grand nombre d'idées, qui ne tenant rien du-tout d'aucune image corporelle, ne peuvent sans une absurdité visible être rapportées à nos sens.' English, p. 57.

[4]   Ficino, *Platonic Theology* (Ficino 2001–2006), vol. 3, lib. 11, cap. 3, p. 215. The immortality of the soul, which presupposes incorporality, is not at stake in this chapter; on this cf. Blum 2007.

[5]   Ficino 2001–2006, vol. 3, lib. 11, cap. 3, p. 213.

eternal rational principles [that] recount indeed the eternal ideas above the soul'.[6] Consequently, the commonly known operation of abstraction is not anymore portrayed as gathering concepts from sensual objects but, rather, as a production of concepts triggered by external senses but essentially operated by means of ideas inborn in the soul. Those ideas enable the soul not only to cognize the universal nature but also particular objects: 'One must remember that the intellect has knowledge not only of the universal nature but of the particular as well; otherwise it would not be able to make comparisons between them or to know all the faculties inferior to itself and their functions when it compares them all to itself.'[7] That is to say: cognition is an intellectual work of comparison, in a similar way as Nicholas of Cusa had stated. In this sense a proposition such as 'Socrates is a man' operates by comparing the concept (idea) of man with that thing, the particular person Socrates that triggered thinking of man. This operation is different from abstraction in that it does not collect sense data in order to process them through forming an idea that had not been in the mind before; rather, the encounter with external reality leads to self-referentiality within the understanding, in which not only objects are related to concepts but even the operations of sensation and understanding are subject to comparison. According to Ficino Aristotelian and Platonic epistemology have in common that the particular thing is perceived or intuited through a 'second and reflexive act' inasmuch as the mind has seen 'the universal through the species' in an immediate and direct way.[8] The image of the species in the sensible body is the trigger that 'incites' understanding such that 'by the prompting of [the image] the species had been conceived.'[9] In other terms, abstraction is the vision of the universal as occasioned by sensual reality. At this point Ficino starts speaking about the one idea that truly is the supreme genus, the idea that is in God: that 'rational principle (*ratio*), which exists above all space and time and which Plato calls an idea'.[10] Ideas in this context are the 'paradigms of the natural species' in the sense that they are the species of species of natural things.[11]

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[6] Ibid., p. 212/213: '… species illae, si nascuntur, a rationibus animi perpetuis pariuntur et ideas super animum referunt sempiternas.' I changed the translation because it is inconvenient to translate 'referunt' (literally: 'bring back') as 'refer to' (ibid., p. 213); more correct is a transitive verb with an immediate object like 'relate' or 'recount'.

[7] Ibid., vol. 2, lib. 8, cap. 1, p. 270/271: 'Meminisse vero oportet intellectum non universalem modo naturam, sed particularem quoque cognoscere; alioquin non posset utramque invicem comparare, cognoscere insuper vires infra se omnes actusque ispsarum, quando omnes comparat ad se ipsum.'

[8] Ibid. pp. 270–272/271–273: '… particulare ab intellectu solum secundo quodam actu atque reflexo prospici, tum Platonici tum Peripatetici plurimum arbitrantur, quatenus intellectus postquam subito rectaque via per speciem universale intuitus est.'

[9] Ibid. p. 272/273: 'Inde discursu quodam per actum speciemque in simulacrum, quo incitante species concepta fuerat, sese reflectens, particulare iam prospicit.'

[10] Ibid. p. 269.

[11] Ibid. p. 268/269: 'species specierum naturalium exemplaria'.

This is consistent with any Neoplatonic tradition and hence not surprising. However an important consequence of this approach to epistemology through ideas is that cognition is nothing but recognition of internal ideas in the human mind, which ultimately amounts to paralleling the human mind to the divine mind. In Ficino, as well as in Campanella, we also can observe that the idea *of* God and the ideas *in* God are closely related to the Scholastic notion of transcendentals. The reason is that on the absolute level in God transcendentals make it metaphysically possible for finite beings to share transcendentals like unity, being, truth, etc. Therefore the (divine) idea of oneness is at the same time the transcendental 'one'. But, as we have also had occasion to observe in the case of Ficino, this interpretation oscillates between transcendentals in terms of being and of predication. This Renaissance Platonic approach to transcendentals in part followed the critique elaborated by Lorenzo Valla who insisted that in terms of predication 'thing' is the only transcendental that transcends every being, finite or absolute. Therefore it is appropriate to investigate how Suárez as a representative of the so-called Second Scholasticism taught about transcendentals and ideas.

Suárez approaches the problem of the transcendentals by delineating the conditions for a transcendental as a 'passion' of a being. First, a property has to be something (*aliqua res*); second, it must be distinct from the holder of that property; third, it must be convergent with that being; fourth and finally, the holder of the property may not be essentially identical with that property.[12] Implicitly or explicitly he is responding to violations of these rules in Ficino, Campanella and Valla. Ficino had identified the transcendental 'one' with God, whereas Campanella had the transcendentals antecede every being, even God; and Valla had denied that transcendentals are something at all and maintained that 'something' or 'thing' is the only transcendental. All three positions must appear erroneous from Suárez's point of view. His approach is obviously to see the transcendentals as relationships of convergence and distinction between a subject and its properties. From this point of view some attributes cannot be factually distinguished from the subject, namely, the attributes and perfections of God. In this case there is only a 'distinction of reason' (*distinctio rationis*).[13] Here the reality of transcendentals becomes questionable because they might be nothing but contrivances of reason,

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[12]	Suarez 1861, disp. 3, sect. 1, nr. 1: 'Ratio dubitandi est, quia, ut aliqua sit vera et realis proprietas alterius, quatuor conditiones ut minimum requirit. Prima est, ut ipsa proprietas sit aliqua res, nam si sit nihil, quomodo esse poterit realis proprietas? Secunda, ut distinguatur aliquo modo ex natura rei ab illo cuius est proprietas, nam si sit omnino idem cum illo, potius erit essentia, vel de essentia eius, quam proprietas. Tertia, ut adaequate illi conveniat seu cum illo convertatur; agimus enim de proprietate, quae per se secundo alicui convenit; nam haec sola est quae sub scientiam cadit et demonstrari potest. Quarta denique est, ut subiectum seu id cuius est proprietas non sit de intrinseca ratione et essentia talis proprietatis …' Occasionally I will quote the *Disputationes metaphysicae* from the digitized version at http://homepage.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/Michael.Renemann/suarez/index.html.

[13]	Ibid. nr. 5.

which is contrary to Ficino's epistemology and to Campanella's constitutive role of divine properties in the creation of the world. Valla, of course, would protest that distinctions of reason might be modes of signification, which have no place when talking of God. Suárez seems to know that argument, for he occasionally operates with two meanings of being (*ens*): *entitas rei*, which could be translated as essentiality of a thing, and *ens* as a derivative of the verb of action *esse*, which makes the predicate 'being' (*ens*) a statement of action rather than a transcendental.[14] However, he does not conclude, as Valla had done, that 'thing' has precedence over other transcendentals nor that 'being' has only a verbal meaning as opposed to referring to substance or essence.

Among the conclusions offered by Suárez as his own teaching he suggests that attributes explain a real and positive perfection of a being. His reasoning harkens back to the initial observation that properties cannot be synonymous with 'being' for, otherwise, it would be meaningless to attribute 'one' or 'good' to a being.[15] Again we might remember that Lorenzo Valla found that very way of predicating— 'this being is good'—ridiculous. The convergence of the transcendentals 'being' and 'good' insinuates that they are—although distinct—on the same ontological level, but this is not the case if they are seen as predications. For in Valla's approach 'being' is not a property, whereas the other transcendentals are. On the other hand Ficino's and Campanella's Platonic approaches are consistent with Suárez because he implies that the transcendentals, besides 'being', are perfections to the extent that they may precede being. As for the number of transcendentals, Suárez keeps only four of them: *ens* and *unum*, *bonum, verum*. He eliminates *res* and *aliquid* as indicating only formally that a thing is 'something' and criticizes those who prefer *res* because they assume erroneously that 'thing' refers to the real essence of the being.[16] This remark is most likely directed against Valla. But the Jesuit does not refrain from employing linguistic arguments when he maintains that 'being' and 'thing' are substantives and therefore cannot be connected in a proposition in a way that one noun would predicate a property of the other.[17] He even makes use

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[14] Ibid. nr. 7: '*ens* proprie et in rigore significare entitatem rei, quomodo hactenus de illo locuti sumus; interdum vero dici *ens* quidquid simpliciter de aliquo affirmari potest; nam quia affirmatio fit per verbum essendi, quidquid simpliciter attribuitur rebus, quamvis in eis nullam entitatem ponat, dici solet ens seu esse …'

[15] Ibid. nr. 11: '… per ea tamen explicatur realis positiva perfectio entis, non secundum aliquid reale superadditum ipsi enti, sed secundum ipsammet formalem seu essentialem rationem entis. … Ratio autem huius conclusionis est, quia haec attributa non sunt synonyma ipsi enti; alias nullo modo dici possent proprietates seu attributa, essetque nugatio dicere ens esse unum aut bonum …'

[16] Ibid. sect. 2, nr. 1: '… res solum dicit de formali rei quidditatem, et ratam seu realem essentiam entis; unde multi censent magis essentiale praedicatum esse rem quam ipsum ens.'

[17] Ibid. nr. 4: '… ens autem et res substantiva sunt, neque possunt eo modo coniungi; signum est ergo unum non esse passionem alterius.

of the verbal meaning of *ens* when he needs to underscore the difference between 'thing' and 'being': they are distinct 'in so far as the latter is derived from "to be", the former from the real quiddity.'[18]

The purpose of our excursus concerning transcendentals was to argue that the Jesuit philosopher was fully aware of the humanistic and the Neoplatonic implications of transcendentals that—conceptually—mediate between ideas and predications. With that we are equipped to interpret his theological take on divine ideas, which will lead us to the realm where epistemology and metaphysics meet.

The text of reference for the divine operation with ideas was the *quaestio* 15 of Thomas Aquinas's *Summa I*. When commenting upon this piece Francisco Suárez defined idea as the paradigm or exemplar (*exemplar*), like that of an artisan who makes an artifact conform to an exemplar.[19] He explains that God cannot direct his view on something outside of Himself that could serve as a model for copying. Therefore artisanship, paradigm and production lie entirely in Himself. Furthermore ideas are true and hence distinct from that which is produced only potentially. But to God's mind the possible thing, that is, the object qua represented and qua potential product, is nothing that is real outside God's mind, and not even really distinct from the thing that is about to be produced. Consequently God's idea of a thing and the future thing are indiscernible. On the other hand, the creature that is represented possesses none of the attributes of divine ideas since it is not eternal, unchangeable, etc. Therefore Suárez concludes that the idea is in God not only as a mere representation but truly and really.[20] If it helps to employ other terminology, still that of Suárez: God's ideas of creatures are not beings of reason (*entia rationis*), that is, not objects whose being is limited to being-represented-in-the-mind and for whom it remains undetermined whether they are representations of any real thing.[21] In his *Disputationes metaphysicae* Suárez explains the notion of ideas according to *Summa Theologiae* I 15 in comparison to

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[18]   Ibid. nr. 10. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 1 a. 1 co.: 'ens sumitur ab actu essendi, sed nomen rei exprimit quidditatem vel essentiam entis.'

[19]   Suarez 1865, lib. 3, c. 5, n. 6, p. 211: Idea is 'ipsumet Verbum divinum, seu formalem conceptum essentialem, quam Deus habet de creaturis, ut possibilibus. [reference to STh I 15] (…) quia idea nihil aliud est quam exemplar artificis, cui opus suum facit conforme. Deus autem non intuetur extra se aliquid, ut ad illius imitationem operetur, sed in se habet totam rationem efficiendi, sive exemplarem, sive productivam. Item per ideas omnes intelligunt aliquam veram rem, distinctam ab ea, quae fit, res autem ut possibilis obiecta menti Dei, extra Deum non est aliquid reale actuale, neque aliquid distinctum vere a creatura, quae fit.' Cf. Darge 2004, pp. 291–293. In the case of Suarez I offer many quotations in Latin because the terminology is important in scholasticism, and texts are not always easily available.

[20]   Ibid.: 'Denique creatura, ut sic obiecta, non potest dici aeterna, immutabilis et alia quae divinis Ideis attribuntur. Non est ergo idea tantum obiective in Deo, sed vere, ac realiter.'

[21]   The standard example is a chimera, a concept that does not represent any real being.

entia rationis and explains that God does not form this kind of *entia rationis* but, rather, such beings of reason that He cognizes perfectly as what they are.[22] 'Idea' in the meaning of form that is somehow represented and then realized—as the simile of artisanship and paradigm suggests—can be supposed on the level of the divine to mean representing and realizing the formal concept that God possesses of His creatures. Suárez's next inference is that this formal concept (*conceptus formalis*) is the idea of things in so far as these things are defined as able to be created (*factibiles*).[23] Since the word he uses at this point: *factibiles*, is utterly unusual, it is important to see that the possibility of being created is what makes the ideas divine, according to Suárez. It is his peculiar method of conceiving of finite things as eternally present in the divine mind.

Accordingly it needs to be explained what kind of knowledge it is that makes ideas in the divine mind real and true forms of finite things that are about to come into existence. In a way it is a practical knowledge, as Aquinas had already established (*STh*, I 15 a 3c). To know means to have a formal concept that has been formed upon the object known, for the concept formally represents the thing that is known by it. In God the idea is the formal concept in the sense that it refers to this or that created object, but at the same time this concept is identical with God's knowledge.[24] Again, divine knowledge refers to the creature as created or potentially created. This is why theology interprets divine knowledge as artisanship (*ars*) that crafts things and views such knowledge as practical and productive; ideas are in God's knowledge in so far as this knowledge is creative.[25]

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[22] Suarez 1861, disp. 54, sect. 2, n. 23, end: '(…) quanquam Deus per se et immediate non intelligat formando entia rationis, nihilominus tamen perfectissime cognoscere ipsa entia rationis, et ea ratione dici posse huiusmodi entia habere aliquod esse ex vi divinae cognitionis. Quia esse eorum est esse obiective in intellectu; si autem a Deo cognoscuntur, sunt obiective in intellectu divino, ergo habent esse sibi proportionatum ex vi divinae intellectionis.' Suárez 1995, p. 83: 'Although God does not directly (*per se*) and immediately know by forming beings of reason, nevertheless he does most perfectly know those beings of reason (…) as objects in the divine intellect.'

[23] Suarez, *Commentaria*, lib. 3, c. 5, n. 6, p. 211: 'Rursus per ideam omnes intelligunt formam, quae repraesentet aliquo modo et fit per modum imaginis, hoc autem non convenit proprie essentiae divinae, nisi ratione formalis conceptus, quem habet de creaturis, ille ergo conceptus, ut repraesentat creaturas factibiles, est idea.'

[24] Suarez, *Commentaria*, lib. 3, cap. 5, n. 7, p. 211: 'Atque hinc constat, ideas propriissime pertinere ad scientiam practicam, quam Deus habet de creaturis. Quae nihil magis ad scientiam pertinet quam conceptus ille formalis, qui de re scita formatur, nam per illum formaliter repraesentatur et cognoscitur. Sed in hoc conceptu sunt ideae, vel potius hic conceptus, ut est de tali, vel tali creatura, est idea, ergo idea in divina scientia, vel potius, est ipsa scientia.'

[25] Ibid.: 'Rursus illa scientia est de creatura quatenus a Deo fieri potest et est velut ars, per quam fit, est ergo scientia practica, ergo ideae in scientia Dei sunt, ut habet rationem artis, seu scientiae practicae factivae.'

Although it might lead us astray from Suárez, for the sake of understanding his philosophical achievement it is in order to refute an interpretation of Aquinas's teaching on divine ideas as 'photo-exemplarism' that had been brought forward in the 1990s. This interpretation holds that Aquinas taught divine ideas as exemplars for every single, potential or real, object.[26] The discussion implicitly assumed that potential beings may be objects of thought, as though Aquinas or Suárez had suggested that God referred to 'possibles'. It is crucial to be aware of the fact that *possibile/possibilia* are not terms to be found in either author. To think of potential creatures of God in terms of possibles (as distinct from reals?) amounts to a misplaced concreteness, chastised by Whitehead. Furthermore, this debate presupposes that according to Aquinas any creature exists in God's idea as a potential copy—and in no other ontological or epistemic status. Therefore we may observe in this debate a contradictory misinterpretation: first, potential beings in God are debated as concrete; then, creatures are reduced to copies to the effect that their being-copy ontologically diminishes the status of ideas as paradigm. Suárez reminds us of the fact that Platonic ideas, in God and according to Aquinas, are prolific in and of themselves. A third fruit may be harvested from this detour, namely, that in the context of scholasticism and Renaissance metaphysics it is not opportune to render the Greek word 'idea/eidos' as Form, as is customary in translating Plato into English, since the Latin authors had free choice between *forma* and *idea*. Only *idea* allows for the connotation of being and thinking, epistemology and metaphysics, or gnoseology.[27]

To resume the main thread, Suárez interprets Platonic ideas as forms that are destined towards realization. God's ideas are not idle; they are, rather, creativity and createdness as such on the highest level of abstraction. Furthermore, Suárez's approach opens the option to think of finite things in the framework of 'being created by God'. That is to say, the ideas are the principles-of-coming-to-be of finite things, and at the same time ideas are concepts of creation and thus epistemological principles for conceiving of finite things. It is therefore necessary to conceive of properties of real things as pre-thought in the creator. When Suárez takes ideas to be principles of both creation and cognition, then he takes an idea to be the formal concept of a finite being qua finite, whereby 'finite' means subject to coming to be and passing away. If God's ideas are interpreted as practical and productive knowledge, then the ontological principles of finite beings appear to be principles of createdness.

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[26]　Ross 1990; Maurer 1991; Dewan 1991; Ross 1991. Cf. Doolan 2007, specifically pp. 165 and 168: 'The cognitive significance of Thomas's doctrine thus implies the ontological significance: to dismiss the multiplicity of divine ideas is to dismiss the diversity all finite beings. (…) Unlike the exemplarism of the divine attributes, the exemplarism of the divine ideas includes the notion of God's intentionality.' Unfortunately Speer 2004 treats the knowability of God but not the knowledge in God.

[27]　Gnoseology is epistemology and metaphysics at the same time.

   Aquinas had reported that Aristotle found ideas in the sense of forms external to things to be superfluous for the understanding of things and for the existence of a single being, as well as for the production of sensual objects, and that is what Suárez also reported approvingly.[28] However this debate is about ideas of things in God, which seems to be an epistemologically inescapable postulate. Such interpretation of the divine ideas comes very close to a transcendental definition of finite beings. If it is correct that all things are necessarily potential and realizable/realized, then everything that is or potentially is postulates a concept that captures not the essence alone (for this essence were nonexistent before or after the actual existence) but, rather, it postulates a concept that encompasses nonexistence of the essence as potentially realized. Then, and only then, ideas serve their purpose. It is justified to call this a transcendental definition because it includes the mode of being and the condition of the possibility of being and non-being within the concept and without reference to causality whatsoever. If someone were to ask whether Suárez is a realist, the answer would have to be that realism in the sense of a plain correlation between concepts and real things has been transcended by Aquinas and definitely left behind by Suárez. For—at least in Suárez's approach—'concept' qua divine idea transcends this very correlation and makes it an object of metaphysics and epistemological speculation, which factually leads directly to the modern understanding of transcendental philosophy.[29] In terms of philosophical theology the result is:

- To understand the potentiality of real beings enables us to understand the spirit that transcends the finitude inherent in potentiality.
- God is the name for that science that is absolute in so far as it is independent of reality because it encompasses potentiality and realization.
- Theology is gnoseology.

Therefore in his *Metaphysics*, Suárez deals explicitly with God first as the cause before proving His existence. He explains:

   Metaphysics treats God in two ways, namely, as First Cause and as first being. Although the latter has priority in and of itself, the former has to be treated beforehand with regard to ourselves and to the order of teaching that we follow, for it is through the effect that we arrive at the cognition of God. (…) Therefore here we presuppose as proven that there is a highest most perfect being, as we

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[28]   Aquinas, *In duodecim libros Metapysicorum Aristotelis expositio* (Aquinas 1950), lib. 7, lect. 6, § 1381, p. 342; Suárez, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, 2004: Metaph. 7, cap. 4, pp. 122 and 312.

[29]   On the transition from the meaning of 'transcendent' to 'transcendental' from the Middle Ages to modernity see Aertsen 2004, particularly p. 145.

will prove later not from creation—for that were begging the question—but by other means.[30]

If we know God as the cause to the effect, we need to understand His effectiveness in causing. When God is treated first as the creator it implies that the power of the proof of God's existence does not depend on His being manifest in the finite world, and the opposite would be a circular procedure: first we prove that the creation bespeaks a Creator-God, and then we show how he does it. The correct procedure goes the other way around: first it has to be shown that and in which sense God is a creator; then we can make inferences as to His being manifest in the creation.[31] It is crucial to understand that this scholastic philosopher does not endorse the seemingly easiest way of proving the existence of God by concluding from the effects to the ultimate cause, a method that would be successfully discredited by David Hume;[32] rather, he prefers to establish the epistemological status of causation as entailed in the concept of 'idea'. The argument for the existence of God from effect to cause, best known as the First Way according to Aquinas, depends upon the avoidance of the infinite regress. Suárez circumvents the infinite regress by showing that arguments that depend upon breaking the infinite regress are valid even if the chain of dependency could continue in infinity: 'Therefore, even if it is imagined that the series of men proceeding one from another is infinite within their own species, nevertheless, taking the whole species, it is necessary to have some superior cause.' [33] Prior to David Hume Suárez discovered that the avoidance of the infinite regress, expressed as the requirement to stop that infinite chain of dependency, is an expression of the operation of the understanding to transcend and leave behind individual beings and to look at beings as 'the whole species', which is nothing but another terminology for focusing on ideal causation or surmising Platonic ideas in God.

The concepts of God and ideas establish the ontological status of being-created, which manifests itself as the status of being-dependent. Being qua being

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[30]   Suarez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disp. 20, Proem., p. 745: 'De Deo duplex est in metaphysica consideratio, scilicet, quatenus est prima causa, et quatenus est primum ens; et quamquam haec posterior ratio secundum se sit prior, altera tamen quoad nos, et juxta doctrinae ordinem quam prosequamur, venit consideranda prius, tum quia per effectus venimus in cognitionem Dei …' And ibid., sect. 1, n. 9, p. 747, he concludes: 'Sic igitur in praesenti supponimus demonstratum dari unum supremum ens perfectissimum, ut infra probabimus, non ex creatione, ne petamus principium, sed ex aliis mediis.'

[31]   Cf. Blum, 'Gottes Plan', 2002. In this essay I termed the second procedure 'theophysics' as opposed to physico-theology.

[32]   Cf. Blum 2000.

[33]   *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disp. 29, sect. 1, n. 32: '… etiamsi fingatur seriem hominum procedentium inter se esse infinitam intra suam speciem, nihilominus, sumpta tota collectione, necesse est habere causam superiorem.' Suárez, *Metaphysical Demonstration*, 2004, p. 75.

(*ens inquantum ens*) is that very dependency: 'Creation is the peculiar dependency of being as being.'[34] Suárez discusses the meaning of the word 'inquantum' and maintains that it does not refer to being in an abstract sense, for in that case 'being' must include both God and the creation. Hence 'being in so far as being' (being qua being; *ens inquantum ens*) can only mean: being qua finite and potentially created (*factibilis*). For the reduplication of 'being' in those formulas cannot be meant to double things but, rather, to underscore one theoretical and universal aspect (*ratio*) of every being.[35] Here, we are reading the Jesuit's elaboration of traditional Aristotelian ontology. Therefore it is worth noting that he is introducing the same Platonic figure of argument inherited from Aquinas concerning divine ideas, as noted above. The metaphysics of being as such converges with the philosophical theology of creation, for being qua being uncovers the nature of being as dependency from a Creator, who is understood to transcend all experience in His conceiving finite beings. Creation creates creatures. What Suárez achieves is a purely formal determination of the createdness of beings.

The pure formality of Suárez's reasoning becomes evident as soon as we become aware of the fact that we as humans cannot really know the ideas of things. Such knowledge would be equivalent to beatific vision (*visio beatifica*). If we could see God, then and only then would we also be able to see the creatures from the point of view 'of the cause and the means of cognition through which and in which other things are seen in a pure intuition and free of discourse'.[36] Since it is the case that being created and createdness as such overlap in God, who knows about things as to-be-created, humans may only achieve knowledge of things that is transcendental, namely, a notion of things as dependent-on-the-creator, which is a non-empirical knowledge of things based on the understanding of their dependence on the divine mind. Nicholas of Cusa would term this understanding hypothetical, conjectural, that is, surmises. Whoever is able to achieve the vision of God is equally able to

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[34] *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disp. 20, Proem., p. 745: 'Dependentia autem in fieri potissimum in creatione consistit, tum quia haec est propria dependentia entis in quantum ens …'

[35] Ibid. sect. 1, n. 29, p. 753: '… propositionem illam, per creationem fit ens inquantum ens, multiplicem sensum habere posse: unum est, si illud, in quantum, reduplicative sumatur, et cadat in Rationem entis abstractissimam, et communem Deo ac creaturis. Et hic sensus est falsus, nam significatur per illum, ens ex vi illius praecisae rationis esse terminum creationis, quod falsum est. … Nam si fiat ens, reduplicando tantum rationem entis finiti seu factibilis, it satis est ad reationem creationis, nam sufficit ut res fiat omnino ex nihilo. … Ex hoc autem sensu non sequitur, omne ens secundum rationem entis, quam in se habet, posse terminare creationem, quia, ut ex dialectica constat, particula *in quantum*, specificative sumpta, non infert universalem sensum seu distributivum, quia non denotat adquaequatem rationem, seu causam praedicati, sed solum designat partem vel rationem secundum quam convenit.'

[36] *Commentaria*, tr. 1, lib. 2, c. 25, n. 20, p. 151: 'Per visionem Dei possunt videri creaturae in Deo tanquam in causa et medio cognito per quod et in quo alia simplici intuitu et sine discursu videntur.' See Goudrian 1999, pp. 38 f. and 165 f.

cognize created beings.[37] In other words, human understanding may know things to the extent that it has a concept of divine ideas: 'if the divine essence is not the medium to understand created beings, then there is either no understanding at all or things are not made that way.'[38] The concept of God and epistemology are mutually dependent.

The critical question that traditionally is raised against Platonic Forms, namely, whether ideas subsist independently of things, is transformed into the problem whether ideas subsist outside of God. Obviously, Aristotle's famous argument of the 'third man' is not applicable because there is no real separation between the created thing and the idea that creates it, the idea being that of the createdness of that thing. But in Suárez's approach the paradox of the 'third man' is only transposed into the concept of God itself, since the relation between things and ideas has been transposed to the inherent creativity of the ideas. There could be an independent mode of existence of ideas only if they would not participate in the eternity of the Creator and, still, they were coeternal with God. This interpretation is traditionally attributed to the heretic John Wyclif, but even John Duns Scotus is suspect of it.[39] Suarez appreciates in these, however erroneous, philosophies the genuine attempt at establishing the relationship between knowledge and creation of created beings in God. Therefore he exhorts to focus on the peculiarity that in God's knowledge to-be-known is nothing distinct from God and consequently also no separate reality. 'The essences of created beings, although they have been known by God since eternity, are nothing and have no true real being before they receive it through the free causation of God.'[40] A thing's being as a divine idea and its being as a finite creature are different in so far as the being of ideas is conjoined

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[37] *Commentaria*, tr. 1, lib. 2, c. 25, n. 7, p. 146: '(…) videntes Deum, eadem visione videre possunt creaturas aliquas, juxta perfectionem suae visionis.'

[38] *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disp. 20, sect. 1, n. 35, p. 156: 'Dico ultimo: si divina essentia non potest esse ratio videndi creaturas in ipsa vel omnino fieri non potest, ut creaturae viderentur eadem indivisibili visione, qua videtur Deus, vel saltem credibile non esset, ita fieri.'

[39] *Disputationes metaphysicae*, disp. 20, sect. 1, n. 30, p. 753: 'At vero Wicleff dixit creationem non esse productionem ex nihilo simpliciter, sed ex esse intelligibili ad esse extra Deum, ut refert Waldensis, tom. 1, c. 17. Scotus item, in n. 2, d. 1, q. 2, ait creationem esse productionem ex nihilo, id est, non de aliquo secundum esse existentiae, nec secundum esse essentiae, non tamen ex nihilo, id est, de nullo ente, nec simpliciter, nec secundum quid …' *Commentaria*, lib. 3, c. 5, n. 5, p. 211: 'Vuiclefius potius errabat vocando creaturas Deum, quia sunt in Deo secundum esse ideale, quod magis pertinet ad ineptum et erroneum modum loquendi, quam ad rem ipsam.' Cf. Blum 2004, pp. 108–110.

[40] *Commentaria*, tr. 1, lib. 3, c. 5, n. 5, p. 211: 'nam … hoc esse cognitum, quod veluti resultat in creaturis ex scientia Dei, non esse in illis aliquod esse reale intrinsecum ipsis, neque esse sufficiens ad fundadam relationem realem, sed rationis tantum … Itaque hoc in parte Scotus nobiscum covenit in pricipio posito, quod essentiae creaturarum, etiamsi a Deo sint congnitae ab aeterno, nihil sunt, nullumque verum esse reale habent, antequam per liberum Dei efficientiam illud recipiant.'

with God's eternal being, whereas that of the being as creature depends on God's free act of creation.

The ontological status of ideas is particularly important with regard to the knowledge of God of future things, known as *futura contingentia*. If it is correct that ideas contain, or refer to, things that are possible objects of creation, this same potentiality can be investigated in temporal terms, namely, as future. Perhaps future things are in God's knowledge in the form of ideas? Perhaps God knows things as objects of his ideas that are different from Him? Suárez reiterates that ideas are nothing outside God and hence cannot be the result of an act of cognition. On the other hand, the act of knowing is God's essence, and this act cannot be explained as a representation (for that would entail a difference between knowledge and known). Rather, as we have seen, ideas are in God in the sense of a formal cognition of creature. This can be explained by saying that God has no propositional knowledge about things ('this is that') but an essential knowledge that does not refer to an external referent 'about which something' is known.

> Idea is nothing but the very act of knowing in so far as it represents a thing as existent (…). Future things are known as upcoming not through ideas as ideas, because knowledge of future things as upcoming is not causing them to be somewhere in the future (causa futuritionis). Therefore they are said to be known in the future through ideas only in the sense that it is the same science, in which the exemplars of things that God produces exist, and that represents them as upcoming, and immediately they are upcoming. Those exemplars represent the same things in and of themselves and in so far as they are possible.[41]

Another way of putting it is to say: idea is the concept that enables divine knowledge to make statements about what lies in the future.[42] 'In so far as ideas are in God do they not contribute to cognition of creatures in the sense that those are objects, but in the sense of an intellectual act through which creatures themselves are represented as an intention.'[43] This highly technical language that conforms with late medieval scholasticism aims at differentiating aspects of metaphysics on

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[41] Franciscus Suarez, *De scientia Dei futurorum contingentium*, (Suarez 1611), cap. 4, p. 429: '…imo Idea nihil aliud est quam ipsemet actus sciendi, ut repraesentans rem existentem … futura ut futura non cognosci per Ideas, ut Ideae sunt: nam … scientia futurorum ut sic non est causa futuritionis eorum. Dicunt ergo haec futura sciri per Ideas, quatenus eadem scientia, in qua sunt exemplaria rerum quas Deus producit, quae repraesentant easdem res secundum se, et ut possibiles: eadem (inquam) repraesentat illas etiam ut futuras, statim ac futurae sunt …'

[42] Ibid. p. 430: 'Dico ergo secundo, Idea … est ratio obiectiva … determinans illam [scientiam divinam] ad certum iudicium de illo ferendum.'

[43] Ibid. p. 431: 'Ideae prout in Deo sunt, non concurrunt ad cognitionem creaturarum per modum obiecti, sed per modum actus intellectualis, quo intentionaliter repraesentantur creaturae ipsae.' Suárez cross-references here his *Metaphysics*, disp 30 (nr. 42) and 25. Craig

the borderline between epistemology and ontology, whereby the status of future beings is not only in itself a problem, it also helps determining the fruitfulness of idealism.

Suárez employs the notion of ideas for a gnoseology of finite beings for the sake of differentiating the philosophical concept of God. He underscores the act of the intellect in the process of creation to the extent that createdness becomes the fundamental transcendental of being as such—a postulate of the finite understanding. This is also transparent in his usage of the principle that plurality of ideas does not exact plurality in God, a problem that has also been addressed by Campanella. Suárez's gnoseological turn explains that to surmise a plurality of ideas in God is both unavoidable on the human-epistemological plane and inappropriate because plurality 'corresponds to our inadequate concepts that we contrive when thinking of a divine idea.'[44] This explanation also confirms that his main interest is the question of how ideas may be in God of such nature that they enable Him to be the creator of the finite world.

If this is correct then we may state that Suárez solves some of the problems uncovered by Valla, Ficino, and Campanella. Campanella's almost headstrong theories of the Trinity and the transcendentals may now be read as an attempt at delineating the formal conditions of meaningfully interpreting reality, whereas Ficino's adaptation of Plotinus opened the way to theologizing epistemologically, which was possible thanks to Valla's achievements in disenchanting naïve conceptual realism through postulating concepts that are nothing but clear and simple.

1988, p. 212, doubts that contingent future is dealt with in the terminology of divine ideas; Craig's main interest, however, is the Jesuit debate on free will and 'middle knowledge'.

[44]   *Commentaria*, tr. 1, lib. 3, c. 5, n. 15, p. 213: 'Nam ex eodem habetur, per illam numerationem [idearum], vel pluralitatem non significari pluralitatem rerum, sed rationum obiectivarum, quae correspondet nostris conceptibus inadaequatis, quos de illa idea Divina formamus.'

Epilogue
Conflicting Truth Claims

One of the interests in writing this book was the observation that most thinkers of the Renaissance labored to enhance Christian belief by means of philosophical arguments. From an epistemological point of view, but also in historical fact, they were confronted with competing theories without having been given instruments to deal with such competition. Aristotelianism, Platonism, Epicureanism—those would be the expected catchwords. But in a more literal sense Renaissance philosophers dealt with competing religious claims. This fact offers itself for an epilogue because it leads into modernity. To cope with conflicting truth claims the main strategies were: (1) an overarching rationality that overcomes diversity; (2) some kind of presupposition theory that claims mutual inclusion of opposed faiths and thus blames the nature of truth for the conflict; (3) historical and geographical multitude of truth; (4) skepticism and relativism.[1]

It is a common assumption in present-day philosophy of religion that the variety of religious beliefs is a case of conflicting truth claims.[2] Truth claims are in the first place questions of epistemology that can be addressed by means of logic and ascertaining facts: Truth can only be asserted if it has been obtained by means of proper reasoning and/or if there are facts to which a truth claim actually refers. The peculiarity of truth claims in religion stems from the fact that—even if the rational operations are flawless—there are hardly any facts that can be obtained or scrutinized in any way known in epistemology in general. The facts of religion are transcendent. Therefore philosophers of religion follow various strategies: They refer to the contingency of culture and biography, that is, a Christian born will claim Christian truth, a Muslim born his Muslim truth. This statement is culturally and sociologically correct, but it implies a paradox, if one looks at the truth of that claim. Again sociologically, if these people happen to meet or to know of each other they will have to come to terms with their conflict. Historically we know that the options were subversion or conversion. A more subtle solution is reference to an objective arbiter, who by the nature of the object of belief is God, or more precisely, one common god, implied in both truth claims. This leads to another solution, namely to a putative unity or identity of all truth claims that,

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[1]   Merely psychological or moral explanations for the origin and dissent of religions are derivatives of nr. 4.

[2]   On religious pluralism and conflicting truth claims see Hick 1999 and Plantinga 2009 (cf. Plantinga 2000, pp. 437–457), who defends 'religious exclusivism'; cf. Yandell 1999, p. 56–63. For a historical perspective see Frank 2003 and Fritsch 2004.

consequently, only apparently are at variance. Under this hypothesis the factual existence of diverse religions and religious beliefs is suspended under some transcendental regulative idea of truth, as far as epistemology is concerned. But the same variety and variance of religions requires an explanation, the reason being that the content of religious belief can only be described as transcendental vs. transcendent, in other words, as a fine hypothesis without reality claim that can be endorsed by any nonbeliever vs. truth itself. If the variety of religions is explained as to their contents by way of moving them to the status of something hypothetical, then the very contents are deferred from reality to epistemology. From this follows that kind of putative unity of religious beliefs that defeats the truth claim—and that was the problem. For, the content of religious belief is by its own nature true, real and transcendent so that it does not lie in the whim and will of the believer or irreligious. So it turns out that the problem of truth claims lies less in the claimed truth than in the truth of the claim. Any subjectivist approach to conflicting religious truth claims reaches the paradox that the subjective conviction or experience is irrefutable, but that it is also incommunicable. If there remains any reasonability in subjective religious belief, by dint of epistemology it also can be shared. However by dint of its content, which is irrefutable transcendent truth, it is compelling to the extent that it compels to share it, that is, to go on mission: 'If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For Christ's love compels us,' as the Apostle Paul described the urge to mission (2 Corinthians 5:13–14).

These considerations originated from the reading experience of the works treated in this book. The most fervent missionary of the late Middle Ages or early Renaissance was Raymond Lull. His strategy was subversion and conversion or mission and submission. Raised in the multicultural environment of the island of Mallorca with Saracens and Jewish sages, he learned Arabic, founded a school for oriental languages and lobbied both for a crusade and for embedded preachers who would be able to convince and convert the schismatic Eastern Christians, the Jews and especially the Muslims. Inspired by some aspects of formal logic and by some numerological speculations, he devised propositions as combinations of terms in which the recurring structure of arrangement ideally permitted producing propositions of any kind. Thanks to the universality of the logical structure such propositions would be equivalent and mutually enhancing and confirming. Truth is, this combinatory worked only with absolute predicates, that is, when God and his relation to the world are at stake. In an easy example the propositional pattern 'A is B equals A is C' works only if A stands for God and B and C for predicates or names, or dignities, as Lull calls them: God is good equals God is mighty. Predicates are only interchangeable, and yet distinct, if they are absolute predicates. Consequently, in Lullian logic absolute predicates are 'prolific' because on the divine level they tend of themselves to spread into dependent predicates: God is good and powerful—therefore He creates the world that is good and empowered on a lower level of predication. Lull's sword to fight the Muslims was double-edged. On the one hand it assumed that the human mind works according to the

same structure in all men. This is a promising start for approaching conflicting religious tenets. On the other hand it presupposed that the truth of Christian belief is expressed in the same universal logic. From that would follow that the missionary has to learn the contingent language of the opponent, then he has to demonstrate analytically that the tenets of Christianity are implied in natural logic and that the Muslim, previously unbeknownst to him, but now consciously, held the same belief as the Christian.

There are two flaws in this system. The minor flaw is that it makes the idea of God seemingly dependent on human reasoning. Lull was unaware of his implicit rationalism because his claim was that human reasoning is an expression of God's pervasiveness, which goes so far—and this was the second, maybe dogmatically greater, flaw—that there was no metaphysical gap between God and world, divine ideas and human thoughts, and so on. All we have is repetition of the identical structure on various levels and in all areas, and this structure is absolute truth. Lull's combinatory, then, acknowledged multiplicity of expressions only as manifestations of one truth that did not allow for conflicting claims. The fact that neither the Arabs were converted nor the Popes convinced shows that the problem of conflicting truth claims is not truth but the way claims come about. Sabundus, Montaigne and Cusanus developed three different options to face the relationship of truth and claim.

Raymond Sabunde (Sabundus, Sebond, Sibiuda), the Catalan in Toulouse, can be said to have founded the method of natural theology that over the centuries would morph into philosophy of religion. His *Liber creaturarum* or *Theologia naturalis* confronts the truth claims of the Bible and of the world with man in the mediating position. Due to the fact that he declares man to be able to understand God in the world with the help of the Bible, he makes revelation in Scripture a means of interpretation of the world. However he is not at all on the way towards the conflict between science and the Bible that dominated the era of Galileo. In the eyes of Sabundus the world as the 'book of creatures' tells a story not about the world but about man. Hence a twofold possible interpretation of Sabundus: rationalist or anthropological. It is humanly possible to grasp the meaning of the world and of the Bible. There is little grace and little faith necessary. For the good news is that none other than God revealed himself—twice. That should be sufficient. Sabundus's approach puts all his trust in the veracity of God's utterances. Therefore truth and truth claim—unsurprisingly—coincide. It is however the frailty of human understanding that made the second revelation, the other book, necessary for man. The quasi-philosophical necessity of God to pour Himself out into a world (which was presupposed in Lull and his method of mission) is doubled according to Sabundus because God cannot leave his first book, nature, unread. God's readership is blind for the book of creatures, perhaps because the readers are part of that book. But they are not blind to the second revelation. Therefore in order to read nature man received the additional revelation that man can read himself in that book of nature as something special. Human dignity is literacy. Literacy is self-referential. By way of understanding the world

as God's creation, man, as a participant that is set apart, positions himself in the hierarchy of beings. From an hermeneutic point of view the interesting effect is that each and every truth claim man can ever make is deferred to and confirmed by the only one who ever made a claim, and, to be sure—twice. Obviously this weakens and strengthens truth claims at the same time. Whenever humanity is positioned as the chosen creature, dignified to understand God, every claim is true. Whenever humanity is interpreted as fallible or fallen, any truth is just a claim. This is how Michel de Montaigne, towards the end of the Renaissance and between the millstones of competing confessions, turned the *Natural Theology* upside down. He found it monstrous to even aspire to search for confirmation of belief. Epistemologically, that was skepticism, a skepticism that brazenly undoes its own presuppositions: Sabundus's achievement to describe the gnoseological conundrum as a quadrangle with one author of two books and one reader is turned against the reader, the author and truth.

Nicolas of Cusa was immediately engaged in conflicting truth claims of his time, because he took the fall of Constantinople to heart. He therefore described in his *De pace fidei* of 1453 the vision of a universal council in Heaven where men complain about religious persecution and wars and representatives of various sects and religions converse with one another. The bulk of the text consists in explanation of basic doctrines of Christianity to nonbelievers, or rather believers of competing religions. Needless to say, the Christians win; St Peter and Christ intervene personally, after all. But this is not the message of the book. It rather takes the objections from all sides—not for the lowly purpose of ridiculing them but in order to illustrate the meaning of each other's teachings. For example: the plurality of gods in pagan religions is paralleled to the angels of Christian belief. That is to say, we agree in admitting lower level spiritual beings that are closer to God than men but still not identical with him. The expressly stated program of this conversation is, to find the 'one religion in the variety of rites'.[3] And the immediate result is expressed as a common presupposition, in literary terms expressed as a proposal submitted by a messenger to God: 'If so, then at least let there be one religion—just as You are one—and one true worship of You as Sovereign.'[4] A close analysis of any given religious belief, as long as it is the belief in a transcendent reality beyond human perspective, demonstrates that any religious belief does, indeed, aim at some transcendence that by definition is ultimately one and admits for plurality. The truth of Christian belief is, consciously or not, presupposed in the variety of religious experiences. Is this cultural relativism, subjectivism or transcendentalism? If the various truths do not conflict, the claims must be clashing, yet not for unwarranted reasons but because the Creator willed it so. God himself created a plurality of men and peoples and empires and preachers and prophets, who by their human nature tend to fight. Thus far Cusanus's vision.[5]

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[3] Cusanus, *De pace fidei* I 6, in Cusanus 2001, p. 635.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Cf. Blum 2004, Chapter 9.2; Riedenauer 2007, specifically Chapter 6.

Giordano Bruno as a student of Cusanus returned to analyzing religious truth claims from that double perspective, namely, that God must have chosen to manifest Himself to the people on earth and that people must behave as though they knew what God had chosen and decreed. In terms of theology he analyzed the conditions under which God may be present in the world; therefore he devised his monadology in which every atom encompasses the full power of the divine. In his art of memory he also explained the conditions of understanding God and the world as fulfilled in the creativity of the human mind: 'All respect is due to this attempt to represent the logical system of the inward artist, the producing thought, in such a way that the forms of external Nature correspond thereto.'[6] In contrast to such metaphysical and epistemological considerations, religion separated itself from philosophical theology. The historic and geographic manifestations of religion in rites or cults is subject to the same vicissitude of all finite beings, including human societies, so that no religion can claim any truth, except for its social and political functioning. So merged, at the end of the sixteenth century, strong Neoplatonic truths with Reformation skepticism.

This could happen after theologians attempted to unify and solidify Christianity by advocating a single authority. In the eyes of Lorenzo Valla and of Giovanni Battista Spagnoli Mantovano that was the case with Thomism. Both stressed that no single theologian can ever have grasped the fullness of truth, and therefore no human being may claim to know and to teach it. While Valla attacked rational theology, Mantovano historicized it. Implicitly both installed some sort of relativism, although certainly not intentionally. Valla's reduced truth claim converges with the absolutism of divine inspiration, which was given only to St Paul and perhaps a few Church Fathers. Full revelation is not at hand for everyone—a consequence that both forestalls and makes desirable private inspiration, as favored by Montaigne. Mantovano's relativism of truth that unfolds over time is more obvious and probably also less dangerous. Any conflict about truth can be discussed as a historical phenomenon—a thought that has its origin in humanist learning. It was the humanists who first developed a sense of the historical differences of language and learning, first in secular fields like grammar and rhetoric, then also in matters that were essential to Christian life. Lorenzo Valla had sought to put things in a chronological order and even to relate them to ancient sources, which were deemed closer to truth.

At the same time in the early fifteenth century there were two religious conflicts that disturbed Europe: the imminent danger of Islam and the schism between the Byzantine and the Roman Churches. The Eastern Church hoped to defend itself against the Turks by reuniting with Rome. The truth conflicts among the Christians needed to be overcome. In this tense atmosphere Gemistos Plethon threw in his neopaganism. That was a paradoxical move, as though it helped in facing

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[6]   G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, part 2, section 3 B 3, (trans.) E S Haldane 1892–6 (http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hp/hprevival. htm).

Christian infighting and external pressure. Plethon seemed to favor a historical approach to religion by inviting a return to ancient wisdom, but he factually gave momentum to two apparently independent tendencies: paganizing Christianity and philosophical theology. Humanism, as represented in Coluccio Salutati, applied the arsenal of spiritual interpretation of the Bible to pagan mythology in order to have it bear fruits in humanist culture. The effect was that Christian teaching could be seen from a scholarly vantage point as a variant of mythology. Thus mythology ascended to the rank of a philosophical tool, as already skillfully handled by Dante and Boccaccio. Reading myths not only enlightened about the human condition, it also explained how (pagan) religions were construed. With Gemistos Plethon mythology took on the meaning of re-creating or creating religious certainty with philosophical means. When Salutati tried to uncover the truth hidden in Greek pagan mythology it was a herculean work that consisted in putting order in chaotic narratives, which in epistemological terms amounted to restoring truth to stories. After Gemistos Plethon, what needed to be done was to restore plausibility, not anymore to some mythology, but to Christianity by the means of ancient philosophy. From an 'enlightened' humanist perspective, Christianity, like any religion, was just fables. Ficino worked on claiming truth in advertising the spirit of Neoplatonism in revelation. In so doing he ran the risk, pointed out by Pico, of over-rationalizing revelation so that the paradox of any truth claim in religion became apparent: religion claims that truth that is transcendent, that is, beyond all claims.

Two more exits out of this problem were discussed in this book: political criteria and epistemological criteria. Campanella, in heeding the lessons of historicism and relativism, advocated the ideal of the state of the true religion, his *City of the Sun*. In the ideal state everything human and natural went in unison with the triune God. This kind of theocracy was probably Campanella's hope for Europe of the seventeenth century. In reality Campanella established a number of criteria as to the truth of religion: miracles, prophecies and above all continuity in time and space. From a theoretical point of view it is not important whether there is any religion in the world that matches those criteria. What counts is that Campanella calls for criteria at all. Although he seems to tell a story, again, by proclaiming theocratic projects, a story not better than Plethon's Chaldean Oracles, in reality he is in search of rules that make a religion operable in real society. This is one possible meaning of his claim that Christianity is the natural religion. Not anymore, as it had been for Lull and Sabundus, an evident truth but a truth that is natural if and as long as it works. The reasons why Christianity with its complicated doctrines of miracles, incarnation, Trinity, creation and so on, is true are taken from the Scholastic and the Neoplatonist toolboxes. Ever since Renaissance Platonism philosophy has offered a variety of tools that help to construe or undo claims in theology. Therefore in Bruno and Campanella faith is transformed into fidelity, and truth claims are not anymore measured with epistemology or metaphysics but with sincerity.

In this narrative it is fitting that Francisco Suárez as a representative of the new early modern scholasticism, utilizes the Platonic element in Thomistic doctrine to describe the transcendent truth of God in order to stress the epistemological implications of speaking about God. Every theologian has to come to terms, literally, with transcendence. One extreme position was that of Valla who claimed that all human speech refers to something to the extent that reference is the only thing that can be named, whereas God is transcendent in the full sense and therefore not an object of reference. The other positions typically preferred to internalize the transcendent in the human mind that is capable of transcending itself. Under these preconditions Suárez discovers that the reality of the transcendent is the condition of the possibility of referring to non-transcendent reality. This in a nutshell is a philosophical theology that relies upon the intersubjective identity of claims about truly transcendent truth; such truth is necessarily the one which every discourse on God presupposes, even when questioning it. It shifts the attention from the hermeneutics of words and things to the operation of the mind and accounts for the frailty and historicity of human understanding.

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