"NATURAM ARS IMITATUR": MAGICAL IMAGES WITHIN MARSILIO FICINO'S *DE VITA LIBRI TRES*[*]

Susanne K. Beiweis
Sun Yat-Sen University
susanne.beiweis@gmx.at

> "… human arts make on their own whatever nature itself makes: it is as if we were not her slaves but her rivals."
>
> (Marsilio Ficino: "Platonic Theology", Lib.18.3,1)

Between the fifteenth, sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, a revival of magic took place in European intellectual history. Magic underwent a highly philosophical rebirth through Marsilio Ficino's *De Vita Libri Tres* ('Three Books on Life' or simply *De Vita*)[1] published in 1489. With more than twenty-six editions between 1489 and 1647, *De Vita* became a "bestseller" of its time.[2] Followed by writings such as Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa's *De Occulta Philosophia Libri Tres* (1531), Giambattista Della Porta's *Magia Naturalis* (1558) and Tommaso Campanella's *De Sensu Rerum et Magia* (1637).[3] Under the pretext of "natural magic" (*magia naturalis*), Ficino and his successors were exploring, studying, and describing nature's invisible qualities (*qualitates* or *virtutes occultae*). Her hidden

[*] I wish to thank Stephané Toussaint, Nicolas Weill-Parot, and Lauri Ockenström for their insightful comments and thought-provoking impulses.

[1] M. Ficino: *Three Books on Life*. A Critical Edition and Translation with Introduction and Notes by Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark, Binghamton/New York: The Renaissance Society of America, 1989.

[2] *Ibid*.: Kaske's Introduction to Ficino: 3.

[3] A considerable amount of literature has been published on Renaissance magic in recent decades, amongst others: F. A. Yates: *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964; D. P. Walker: *Spiritual & Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000 (first published at the Warburg Institute, University of London, 1958); P. Zambelli: *White Magic, Black Magic in the European Renaissance. From Ficino, Pico, Della Porta to Trithemius, Agrippa, Bruno*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007; B. P. Copenhaver: *Magic in Western Culture: From the Antiquity to the Enlightenment*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

causal interactions, and marvelous phenomena: From the deadly glance of the Basilisk, through the attraction between iron and loadstone over a distance, to the influence of the planets and stars on terrestrial things, including human being.[4]

Broadly speaking, "natural magic" overlapped with natural philosophy. Thus, from a Christian perspective it was "licit."[5] As we will see below, Renaissance debates on magic were far less uniform, one-dimensional or even unproblematic for Ficino and his successors than might appear at first sight. In fact, Ficino and his contemporaries in their scholarly debates on magic combined well-known Greek, Latin, and Arabic sources with newly discovered text materials. They also included artistic, mathematical and technical achievements of their times.[6] This involves the idea that the artisan-like *magus* – an expert in magical theory – operates with heaven's mysterious powers, thereby cultivating, manipulating, correcting, and changing nature's work and its effects rather than imitating it.

In *De Vita*, Ficino confronts the claim that the artisan-like *magus* could change, by his art (or, according to Aristotle, his *τέχνη*)[7] the *substantial* or *specific form* of a material object, namely the *hylomorphic* composite of matter and form that constitutes what natural objects are made of in the Aristotelian-Scholastic sense.[8] The idea that the *magus* could manipulate or even recreate divine cosmic powers and immaterial forces through human-made *images*, contradicted Aristotelian-Scholastic doctrines, according to which art only imitates nature (*naturam ars imitatur*). The learned and skilled *magus* is not through his magical art able to act intrinsically on the *substantial forms* of objects, as God – the *artifex* of nature –

[4] See B. P. Copenhaver: 'Natural Magic, Hermetism, and Occultism in Early Modern Science', in: D. C. Lindberg & R. S. Westman (eds.): *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution: Humanists, Scholars, Craftsmen and Natural Philosophers in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990: 261–301; L. Daston & K. Park: *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150–1750*, New York: Zone Books, 1998: 126–128.

[5] The term *magia naturalis* was first used by the theologian Wilhelm of Auvergne. See Guilielmi Alverni: *Opera Omnia*, Tomus 1, Frankfurt/Main: MINERVA, 1963 (first published in Paris 1674): I.I.43, 648.

[6] See, for instance, Della Porta's discussion of lenses and mirrors in *Magia Naturalis*. On this, see, e.g., W. Eamon: 'A Theater of Experiments: Giambattista Della Porta and the Scientific Culture', in: A. Borelli, G. Hon & Y. Zik (eds.): *The Optics of Giambattista Della Porta (ca. 1535–1615): A Reassessment*: Springer, 2017: 11–38.

[7] In Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle distinguishes between *ἐπιστήμη* and *τέχνη*. Generally speaking, the first can be understood in the modern sense as general knowledge or as *theory*, whereas the latter means *praxis*. Aristotle: *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2 Vols., ed. by J. Barnes, Princeton/New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984: *Nicomachean Ethics*: VI.1, 1139a5–15, 1798.

[8] *Ibid.*: *Physics* II.1, 192b9–19, 329, 193a30–193b5, 330.

did. He can act through his art only on the *accidental forms*, the properties of material objects such as the visible *figura*, the shape or outline of the surface.[9]

In his ground-breaking article (1984), Brian P. Copenhaver showed that the terms *figura* and *forma substantialis* are rather overlapping than entirely distinct in Ficino's *De Vita*. According to Copenhaver, this results from Ficino's mix of divergent and inherent ancient and medieval doctrines of forms, as can be found for instance in Thomas Aquinas's writings.[10] Hence, or precisely because of this, Ficino connoted *figures* partly as "quasi-substantial."[11] Copenhaver summarizes, that

> In order to give figure a natural, non-demonic relationship with matter, he [Ficino] had to rely on the difficult notion that figures are accidents that resemble substances, thereby establishing the grounds for some natural, causal relationship between figures and the heavens, the source of the substantial forms of sublunar, material entities.[12]

Despite these important remarks, some questions remain unclear beneath the textual surface: What does this material disposition caused by artificial *figures* mean exactly in terms of the metaphysical opposition of nature and art? What does this mean with respect to the creative capacity of the artisan-like *magus* who might act rather demiurgically than mimetically?

To answer these questions, we should take a closer look at Ficino's theories of art and nature in his *Theologia Platonica* ('Platonic Theology', *TP* hereafter), followed by his theories of magic in *De Vita*. Therein, Ficino even tells the reader "How to construct a Figure of the Universe."[13] By comparing a secret chamber in the centre of a house, full of artificial and scientific objects, with a supertalisman, the entanglement of nature and art enters into the picture. A number

[9] See T. Aquinas: *Summa contra gentiles*, ed. by K. Albert et al., Darmstadt: WGB, 2009 (first published in 2001): III.104, 120.

[10] *Ibid.*: III.105, 124–129; T. Aquinas: *Summa Theologia: Secunda Pars*, ed. by P. Caramello, Taurini/Romae: Marietti Editori Ltd, 1962: 96.2,3, 461.

[11] See B. P. Copenhaver: 'Scholastic Philosophy and Renaissance Magic in the De vita of Marsilio Ficino', *Renaissance Quarterly* 37, 1984: 523–554; B. P. Copenhaver: 'How to do magic, and why: philosophical prescriptions', in: J. Hankins (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007: 137–169, p. 160.

[12] B. P. Copenhaver: 'Scholastic Philosophy…', *op.cit.*: 550.

[13] M. Ficino: *Three Books*…, *op.cit.*: III.19, 342–343.

of scholars, among others, Andre Chastel,[14] Michael J. B. Allen,[15] Paul Richard Blum,[16] Sergius Kodera,[17] Nicolas Weill-Parot,[18] and Stéphane Toussaint,[19] allude to the striking similarities between human art and nature's work in Ficino's philosophical and magical thought. This article provides some additional and valuable insights into Ficino's magic theories, by arguing that Ficino's discussions of human-made astrological talismans (*imagines*) and magical objects not only expounded his ambivalent metaphysical theories but also eroded the traditional disciplinary boundaries separating theory and practice, nature and art.

This article begins with an introduction to Marsilio Ficino, a philosopher who wrote between different cultural and intellectual traditions. The second section focuses on two key themes in *De Vita*: The concept of *figura,* and Ficino's ambiguous view of magic and its discursive shifts between philosophical theory and actual practices. In the third section, passages of Ficino's *TP* on the relationship between nature and art which are essential for the understanding of astrological *images* will be closely read and discussed. The final section examines the *cubiculum*, as described in *De Vita* (Lib.III.19), and the implications for the formula of *naturam ars imitatur*.

[14] See A. Chastel: *Marsile Ficin et l'art* (Travaux d'humanisme et renaissance, XIV), Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1954.

[15] See M. J. B. Allen: *Icastes. Marsilio Ficino's Interpretation of Plato's Sophist: Five Studies and a Critical Edition with Translation*, Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984.

[16] See P. R. Blum: 'Qualitates occultae: Zur philosophischen Vorgeschichte eines Schlüsselbegriffs zwischen Okkultismus und Wissenschaft', in: A. Buck (ed.): *Die okkulten Wissenschaften in der Renaissance*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992: 45–64.

[17] See S. Kodera: '*Ingenium*: Marsilio Ficino über die menschliche Kreativität', in: M.-C. Leitgeb et al. (eds.): *Platon, Plotin und Marsilio Ficino. Studien zu den Vorläufern und zur Rezeption des Florentiner Neuplatonismus*, Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaft, 2009: 155–172; S. Kodera: *Disreputable Bodies: Magic, Medicine, and Gender in Renaissance Natural Philosophy*, Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2010.

[18] See N. Weill-Parot: 'Pénombre ficinienne: le renouveau de la théorie de la magie talismanique et ses ambiguïtés', in: S. Toussaint (ed.): *Marsile Ficin ou les mystères platoniciens*, Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2002: 71–90; N. Weill-Parot: *Les « images astrologiques » au Moyen Âge et à la Renaissance. Spéculations intellectuelles et pratiques magiques (XII^{e}–XV^{e} siècle)*, Paris: Honoré Champion, 2002.

[19] See S. Toussaint: 'Magie und Humanismus (Ficino, Pico, Paolini und Galluci)', in: J. Eming & M. Dallapiazza (eds.): *Marsilio Ficino in Deutschland und Italien: Renaissance-Magie zwischen Wissenschaft und Literatur*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2017: 19–34; S. Toussaint: 'L'ars de Marsile Ficin, entre esthétique et magie', in: P. Morel (ed.): *L'art de la Renaissance entre science et magie*, Rome/Paris: Somogy, 2006: 453–467.

Marsilio Ficino: The panderer

Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) was one of the key figures of the Italian *Quattrocento*, which the Florentine philosopher, priest, and physician over-enthusiastically declared, recalling Greek mythology, to be a revival of the *Golden Age* itself.[20] Between the mid-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries arose the *studia humanitatis* that led to the intellectual movement of what today might be called Renaissance-Humanism. In contrast to the medieval scholastic curriculum, this educational program contained disciplines such as grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and moral philosophy. It offered new, alternative methods of text analysis and interpretation. Among others, the texts of Homer, Pindar, Sophocles, Cicero, and Ovid were carefully studied by Renaissance humanists such as Leonardo Bruni and Lorenzo Valla, in order that they could imitate and incorporate their linguistic style and rhetorical figures.[21] That is: "The study of Greek was reborn."[22]

While Plato was overshadowed by Aristotle during the Middle Ages, he now returned to the Latin West. This turn had been initiated by – to paraphrase James Hankins – the key figure of Renaissance Platonism: Marsilio Ficino. Having been given several Greek manuscripts of Plato's works by his patron Cosimo de' Medici in 1462, Ficino translated and commented on the entire Platonic *Corpus* until 1469 and made it accessible to the Latin readership (by its printing in 1484).[23] In addition to the Platonic canon, Ficino also translated several Neo-Platonic writings of Plotinus, Iamblichus, Synesius, Proclus, Porphyry, and Psellus, hitherto unpublished before 1497 but which echoed in his philosophical theories of magic.[24]

[20] See M. Ficino: *Opera Omnia*, 2 vols., Basel: Heinrich Petri, 1576 (rpt. Turin: Bottega d'Erasmo, 1962): Epistolarum, Lib. XI, Laudes seculi nostri tanquam aurei ingeniis Auerrois, 944 [974].

[21] On this, see P. O. Kristeller: *Humanismus und Renaissance*, 2 vols., München: Fink, 1974–1976; B. Copenhaver & C. B. Schmitt: *A History of Western Philosophy, III: Renaissance Philosophy*, Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1992: 24–29, 139; J. Hankins: *Humanism and Platonism in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols., Rome: Edizioni di storia letteratura, 2004: 273–291.

[22] J. Hankins: *Humanism and Platonism…* I, *op.cit.*: 274.

[23] See J. Hankins: *Humanism and Platonism…* II, *op.cit.*: 16–23, 187–194; B. P. Copenhaver & C. P. Schmitt: *Renaissance Philosophy…*, *op.cit.*: 143–145, 159–160.

[24] See, e.g. B. P. Copenhaver: 'Hermes Trismegistus, Proclus, and the Question of a Philosophy of Magic in the Renaissance', in: I. Merkel & A. Debus (eds.): *Hermeticism and the Renaissance. Intellectual History and the Occult in Early Modern Europe*, Washington D.C.: Folger Books, 1988: 79–110; B. P. Copenhaver & C. B. Schmitt: *Renaissance Philosophy…*, *op.cit.*: 161.

For Ficino, historical and semi-mythological figures like Zoroaster and the Egyptian sage Hermes Trismegistus, ancient *magi*, were representatives of a *prisca theologia* ('ancient theology') that ended with Plato and found its reverberation in the writings of the Neo-Platonists. Until the seventeenth century, when Isaac Casaubon post-dated the Hermetic texts to the Hellenistic age, Hermes Trismegistus was wrongly understood to be contemporary with Moses. Therefore, Ficino could not disregard the divine knowledge he found in their writings. Moreover, he and his contemporaries tried to decipher their secret wisdom and to assimilate it into Christian teachings.[25] Ficino did not only translate and interpret these authors; he produced a pious version of them related to the cultural environment of his time. To create chains of continuities, he combined their ideas with a broad range of subjects current in astrology, medicine, and optics, as we will see below. In other words: Ficino was a panderer of different cultural and intellectual traditions, who wrote between rediscovery and interpretation of the past and the belief in the progress of his time.[26] Ficino's syncretism of conflicting philosophical traditions and their inherent methodological problems, however, produced paradoxes, particularly in his discussion of magic.

The Magus "introduces the celestial into the earthly by particular lures…"

Ficino conceived *De Vita* as a medical treatise, for the intellectuals of his time. The first two books, *De Vita Sana* ('On a Healthy Life') and *De Vita Longa* ('On a Long Life', completed late 1480),[27] treat the balance and imbalance of the four humours. Specifically, they treat how their combined temperaments, i.e., the phlegmatic, melancholic, choleric, and sanguine, affect the *spiritus*. This is the hot, lucid, and transparent vapour which connects body to soul. As a go-between, the *spiritus*

[25] See M. Ficino: *Platonic Theology*, J. Hankins & W. Bowen (eds.), M. J. B. Allen & J. Warden (trans.), 6 vols., Cambridge/London: The I Tatti Renaissance Library/Harvard University Press, 2001–2006: XVII.1,2, 6–9; B. P. Copenhaver & C. B. Schmitt: *Renaissance Philosophy…*, *op.cit.*: 146.

[26] Hence, or precisely because of Ficino's many facets, he can also be labelled by various names, as Michael J. B. Allen suggests: "Translator from the Greek and commentator; Christian apologist, theologian, teacher, exegete, priest; […]; mythologist, metaphysician, lapsed astrologer; […]; mystic, mage, humanist, wit; […]" (M. J. B. Allen: *Marsilio Ficino and the Phaedran Charioteer,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981: 2).

[27] Ficino originally composed three separate treatises, which he finally combined in one, published under the name De Vita Libri Tres in 1489. See Kaske's and Clarke's "Introduction" in M. Ficino: *Three Books…*, *op.cit.*: 6–8.

also mediates motion to the body and works for the soul as an instrument of the imagination (*imaginatio* or *phantasia*).[28] Besides his philosophical-medical analysis, linked to traditional Aristotelian natural philosophy as well as Galen's medical concepts, Ficino gave the reader practical advice on how one can preserve health and prolong life through diets, remedies like unguents, syrups, pills, exercise and the right lifestyle.[29]

So far so good. Shortly after the publication of *De Vita* in 1489, Ficino released the *Apologia*, a defence of his magical ideas. During this time, the Church became increasingly wary of magic. In 1487, another book on magic was published, Heinrich Kramer's *Malleus Maleficarum* ('Hammer of Witches'). This became the standard work for witch persecution in early-modern Europe,[30] and might have sharpened awareness of everything that could come into conflict with dogmatic theology and established religious practice.[31] At the time witch-hunting intensified, the Roman *Curia* condemned Pico della Mirandola's *Conclusiones* (1486) as heretical. Pico syncretised classical, especially Cabalist ideas, with Christian doctrines, and magic as a form of 'science' played a part therein.[32] In Ficino's case, who was a networker *par excellence*, the support of the Florentine elite helped him bypass the accusation that *De Vita* contains unorthodox, heretical ideas about magic.[33]

The cause of Ficino's troubles with the Roman *Curia* is rooted in *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda* ('On Obtaining Life from the Heavens'). More precisely, in his

[28] *Ibid.*: I.2, 110–111, III.3, 256–257; M. Ficino: *Platonic Theology…, op.cit.*: VII.6, 234–235.

[29] See M. Ficino: *Three Books…*, *op.cit.*: I.7, 122–129.

[30] See H. Kramer: *The Malleus maleficarum of Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger*, transl. by M. Summers, New York: Dover, 1971 (first published in 1928); W. Stephens: *Demon Lovers. Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief*, London/Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002: 32–34, 55–57.

[31] See P. Zambelli: *White Magic…, op.cit.*: 55–56.

[32] "Magia est pars practica scientia naturalis" (S. ,A. Farmer & G. Pico della Mirandola: *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486): The Evolution of Traditional, Religious, and Philosophical Systems: With Text, Translation, and Commentary*, Tempe: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1998: 9>3, 494–495)

[33] In September 1489, Ficino wrote an *Apology*, addressed in the form of two letters to important intellectual figures of his cultural environment like the well-known Dante-commentator Cristoforo Landino or the poet Angelo Poliziano. Other important people like Rinaldo Orsini, the archbishop of Florence, intervened for him in Rome together with Lorenzo de' Medici (the third generation of Medici, which patronized Ficino). See M. Ficino: *Three Books…*, *op.cit.*: 394–405. See R. Marcel: *Marsile Ficin* (1433–1499), Paris: Les Belles-Lettres, 1958: 496–503; P. O. P. Kristeller: 'Marsilio Ficino and the Roman Curia', in: *Humanistica Lovaniensia. Journal of Neo-Latin Studies* XXXIVA-1985: 83–98.

discussion of astrological-based medicine, planetary demons, and astrological *images* (or talismans).[34] According to Ficino, the last book of *De Vita* was written as a commentary on the *Liber Plotini* (Enn. IV.3,11 and IV.4,26–44).[35] In fact, Plotinus did not say much about magic, therefore Ficino's *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda* was less a commentary than a compendium of antique and medieval theories of magic, medicine, and astrology. As Kaske and Clark put it, "Ficino is more of a synthesizer than a fine discriminator."[36] The debate is still ongoing in the literature about the relative importance of each of these divergent traditions on which Ficino's theories of magic relied.[37]

That is, Ficino unfolded a potpourri of thinkers and sources, such as the Chaldeans, Hermes Trismegistus, Iamblichus, Proclus, Al-Kindi, Thabit ibn Qurra, Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, Pietro d'Abano, and the *Picatrix*, a Latin textmanual of Arabic origin on astrology and magic, "between the lines" of *De Vita* (to use a Straussian term).[38] To avoid suspicion, Ficino used the rhetorical *figure* (or pattern) of narration and dissociation, claiming that he was "[…] not approving magic and images but recounting them in the course of an interpretation of Plotinus."[39]

Scholastic philosophers such as Thomas Aquinas and Albert the Great affirmed that planets and stars have an *occult* effect on natural objects. Besides

[34] On this, see also C. V. Kaske & J. R. Clark's 'Introduction', in M. Ficino: *Three Books*…, *op.cit.*: 55–70.

[35] As Ficino argued in the *Proemium* and the *Apologia*, see M. Ficino: *Three Books*…, *op.cit.*: 236–237, 396–397. On the specific chapters of Plotinus's *Enneads*, see, e.g., D. P. Walker: *Spiritual & Demonic Magic*…, *op.cit.*: 41; B. P. Copenhaver: 'Renaissance Magic and Neoplatonic Philosophy: «Ennead» 4, 3–5 in Ficino's "De vita coelitus comparanda"', in: G. C. Garfagnini (ed.): *Ficino e il ritorno di Platone – Studi e documenti*, Florence: Olschki, 1984: 351–369.

[36] C. V. Kaske & J. R. Clark's 'Introduction', in: M. Ficino: *Three Books…, op.cit.*: 39.

[37] On this, see Denis J.-J. Robichaud's recently published article (2017), in which he also outlined the different positions – Hermetic (e.g., Yates), Neoplatonic (e.g., Copenhaver) or Oriental philosophy (e.g., Toussaint) – regarding Ficino's primary used sources in *De Vita*. Robichaud emphasises Plotinus's discussion of statues and images in *Enn*. IV.3, 11, combined with Ficino's translation of Iamblichus's *De mysteriis* that "influenced the performative nature of philosophy and the understanding of power and symbol in *De Vita 3*" (D. J.-J. Robichaud: 'Ficino on Force, Magic, and Prayers: Neoplatonic and Hermetic Influences in Ficino's *Three Books on Life*', in: *Renaissance Quarterly* 70, 2017: 44–87, p. 46).

[38] See L. Strauss: *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1952: 24.

[39] "Surge post haec et tu, Guicciardine vehemens, atque curiosis ingeniis respondeto magiam vel imagines non probari quidem a Marsilio, sed narrari, Plotinum ipsum interpretante […]" (Ficino: *Three Books*…, *op.cit.*: 396–397).

the "manifest" properties of substances (according to Aristotelian categories, the four qualities, and those of their combined elements),[40] stones, plants, animals, and the lowest part of the human soul, sensation, also contain the cosmic power of the heavens. This means they are not perceptible by the senses and rarely known by reason.[41] The classical and often-quoted example was the attraction between the loadstone and iron over distance. Following Galenic and Aristotelian conceptions, these medieval philosophers discussed the *occult qualities* of natural substances in relation to the term of the *substantial* or *specific form* (the composite of matter and form constituting what natural objects are made of in the Aristotelian sense).[42] Ficino assumed these ideas further within a partly Neo-Platonic framework and provides the scholarly reader with an explanatory model of these "certain properties engrafted in things from the heavens […] hidden from our senses, and […] with difficulty known to our reason."[43]

In *De Vita*, this entanglement of *occult* powers within the world-machine (*machina mundi*) is explained by an abstract ontological-cosmological structure. In recent decades, a considerable literature has been published on Ficino's complex metaphysical speculations. As previous studies have shown, Ficino conceptualized an ontological hierarchy. He combined Plato's theory of forms with Plotinus's system of hierarchical emanating hypostasis, i.e., the One (*ἕν*), the Intellect (*νοῦς*), and the Soul (*ψυχή*). God and the Angelic Mind are at the top whereas the Quality (or Nature), and the Body (or Matter) constitute the base of the Ficinian universe. The World-Soul as the intermediary bond (or "medium") connects Being with Becoming, i.e., the intelligible and the sensible realm. God *creates* the *ideae* in the Mind. Such ideas or archetypes in the Mind are connected to the *rationes seminales* in the World-Soul and with the corporeal forms or

[40] See Aristotle: *The Complete Works…, op.cit., On Generation and Corruption*, II.3, 330a30–330b7, 540.

[41] See T. Aquinas: *Summa Theologia…, op.cit.*: II.96,2, 460–461; T. Aquinas: *Summa contra gentiles…, op.cit.*: III.84, 4; M. Ficino: *Three Books…, op.cit.*: I II.12, 298–301.

[42] For more, see N. Weill-Parot: 'Astrology, Astral Influences, and Occult Properties in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries', *Traditio* 65, 2010: 201–230; Copenhaver: 'Scholastic Philosophy…', *op.cit.*: 524–525; B. P. Copenhaver: 'Astrology and Magic', in: C. S. Schmitt (ed.): *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987: 264–300, pp. 283–284; L. Daston & K. Park: *Wonders…, op.cit.*: 126–129; P. R. Blum: 'Qualitates occultae…', *op.cit.*: 50–56.

[43] "[…], sed etiam multoque magis per proprietates quasdam rebus coelitus insitas et sensibus nostris occultas, rationi vix denique notas" (M. Ficino: *Three Books…*, *op.cit.*: III.12, pp. 298–301).

s*pecies* in Nature.[44] From Neo-Platonic authors, some scholars might also say from medieval and oriental mysticism, magic, and astrology,[45] Ficino learned about the similarities, sympathies, and antipathies that linked the animated cosmos together. Like clockwork, every single stage of being is gradually geared with the other by its similarities and participation. Each part has its ontological-cosmological place and function; is interrelated with the other by its sympathies and antipathies and communicates through mutual chains (in Greek *σειρά* or *τάξις*). These connect the immaterial with the material realms.[46]

The World-Soul is the intermediary between the Mind and the Body, related to the latter through the cosmic *spiritus*: The medium and communication channel between macro- and microcosm, heaven and human being. She is also the *primum mobile* that generates, moves, and arranges the celestial *figures* in the heavens, the spatial and temporal configurations of the living planets and stars. In this context, Ficino understands the term *figura* as geometrical shapes and patterns of the planets and stars; ordered through lines, proportions, and light which is in Ficino's words "the image of the Intellect."[47] Simultaneously, the celestial *figures* – based on the traditional geocentric model – contain all the species of terrestrial things and their properties. The light and mathematically-structured numbers and *figures* in the heavens are very powerful and form-giving, because, thus Ficino, they "constitute what things are made of [*quasi-substantialis*]."[48]

[44] See, e.g., M. Ficino: *Platonic Theology…, op.cit.*: I.1,3, 16–17, III.1,9, 220–221, III.2,1, 230–233. On Ficino's metaphysical system, see e.g. P. O. Kristeller: *Die Philosophie des Marsilio Ficino*, Frankfurt/Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1972; M. J. B. Allen: 'Ficino's theory of the five substances and the Neoplatonists' *Parmenides*', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 12, 1982: 19–44.

[45] See S. Toussaint: 'Ficino's Orphic Magic or Jewish Astrology and Oriental Philosophy? A Note on *spiritus*, the *Three Books on Life*, Ibn Tufayl and Ibn Zarza', *Accademia, Revue de la Société Marsile Ficin* 2, 2000: 19–31.

[46] See M. Ficino: *Three Books…, op.cit.*: III.1–2, 242–255; Plotinus: *Enneads IV.1-9*, transl. by A.,H. Armstrong, Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press/William Heinemann LTD, 1984: Enn. IV.4,32, 232–239; Proclus: *The Elements of Theology*, A Revised text with Translation, Introduction, and Commentary by E. R. Doods, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1963 (first published in 1933): Prop.21, 24–25; M. Ficino: *Opera Omnia…, op.cit., Proclus De sacreficio de magia*, 1928–1929 [928–929]. Several articles emphasize the importance of Neo-Platonic concepts for Ficino's theory of magic. See, e.g., B. P. Copenhaver: 'Iamblichus, Synesius and the Chaldaean Oracles in Marsilio Ficino's *De Vita Libri Tres*: Hermetic Magic or Neoplatonic Magic?', in: J. Hankins et al. (eds.): *Supplementum Festivum. Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, New York: MRTS, 1987, 441–455.

[47] See M. Ficino: *Three Books…, op.cit.*: III.1, 242–243; "De lumine vero quid dicam? Est enim actus intelligentiae vel imago" (*ibid.*: III.17, 330–331).

[48] "Sic enim figurae, numeri, radii, cum non alia substineantur ibi materia, quasi substantiales esse videntur" (*ibid.*: III.17, 328–331, III.18, 328–331).

To recapitulate: As Copenhaver demonstrates, Ficino combined Plato's theory of forms with Aristotelian-Scholastic doctrines of form. In this sense, the term *figura* overlaps with the term *forma substantialis*.[49] Celestial *figures* are not only the visual shapes of the planets and stars, but they also have a *form*-giving function. Through their rays, the *celestial figures*, these higher forms, penetrate material objects, becoming embodied in the lower forms. Thus they become members of a chain that reaches up to the ineffable *One*.[50] Using the concept of the similarities and universal sympathies, Ficino ordered and visualized nature's mysterious and invisible manifestations, making them rationally understandable, explainable, and operable. In the *Apology*, Ficino claims that

> […] there are two kinds of magic. The first is practiced by those who unite themselves to daemons by a specific religious rite […] the other kind of magic is practiced by those who seasonably subject natural materials to causes to be formed in a wondrous way.[51]

Natural objects, for example gold, saffron or the hawk, contain the hidden and unseen qualities of the Sun, and they can, for Ficino, absorb more solar qualities when they are subjected to it at the right time and place. The consumption of these solar objects, whether pure or combined into medical drugs, enriches man's body and spirit with solar qualities.[52] This magic, noted as "natural," is an integral component of Ficino's discussions of astrologically based medicine.

To begin with, "natural magic" (or "spiritual magic") was a rather insecure, vague and nebulous term. Ficino's usage, distinct from its counterpart, the so-called profane or "demonic magic" (as suggested by D. P. Walker), was neither static, linear nor always clear.[53] As the word implies, "demonic magic" deals with

[49] See B. P. Copenhaver: 'How to do magic…', *op.cit.*: 156.

[50] See M. Ficino: *Three Books…, op.cit.*: III.1, 244–247, III.16, 322–323, III.17, 328–331; M. Ficino: *Platonic Theology…*, *op.cit.*: III.2,1, 230–233.

[51] "Denique duo sunt magiae genera. Unum quidem eorum, qui certo quodam cultu daemonas sibi conciliant […] Alterum vero eorum qui naturales materias opportune causis subiciunt naturalibus mira quadam ratione formandas" (M. Ficino: *Three Books…, op.cit.*: 389–399).

[52] *Ibid.*: III.1, 246–247.

[53] It is worth noting that current scholarship speaks more about natural magic, image magic and ritual magic (divided sometimes into angelic and demonic magic). On this, see, e.g., B. Láng: *Unlocked Books: Manuscripts of Learned Magic in the Medieval Libraries of Central Europe*, University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008; C. Fanger: *Invoking Angels: Theurgic Ideas and Practices, Thirteenth to Sixteenth Centuries*, University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012.

demons (often related to the old gods of the Greek pantheon.) According to Augustine, these demons are sly, elusive and manipulative – a danger for the pious soul.[54] Because of the fear of summoning demons, Augustine also condemned the use of fabricated *images* such as statues infused with the powers of the god they represent, as had been described in the Hermetic *Asclepius*. The god-making passages of the Hermetic *Asclepius* also became the standard example of bad magic during the Middles Ages.[55] In short: Because magical *images* were seen as idolatrous and as material containers to address invisible entities such as demons, it also became problematic for Ficino to discuss them – even though astrological talismans (or *images*) might rather belong to the realm of natural astral magic, a "non-addressative" magic, a term coined by Weill-Parot.[56]

Apart from the conflicts with Christian orthodoxy, there were also metaphysical problems concerning the relation between the theoretical and practical realms. In the foreword to *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda*, Ficino states that he is reporting not approving these astrological *images*.[57] Since ancient and medieval authorities such as Iamblichus, Synesius, Proclus, Ptolemy, Haly, Pietro d'Abano or Thomas Aquinas and Albert the Great (to whom Ficino wrongly ascribed the *Speculum astronomiae*) confirmed the efficacy of artificial magical objects such as talismans, Ficino could not disregard these textual sources in his medical analysis. The *spiritus*, the medium between body and soul, could be manipulated through these magical objects and influenced positively.[58] According to Ficino, ancient *magi*, like Zoroaster and his disciples, in his words "doctors of the soul and

[54] See, e.g., Augustine: *The City of God against the Pagans*, edited and transl. by R. W. Dyson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998: VIII.18–19, 338–341.

[55] *Ibid.*: VIII.23, 345–346; T. Aquinas: *Summa contra gentiles…, op.cit.*: III.104, 122 –123. For the two god-making passages in the Hermetic *Asclepius*, see: *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius*, in a new English translation with notes and introduction by B. P. Copenhaver, Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1992: Asclepius, Cap. 24, 81, Cap. 37, 89–90.

[56] According to Weill-Parot, "A magical 'addressative' act can be defined as an act by means of which the magician addresses as sign to a separate intelligence (a demon, an angel or some other spirit or intelligence) in order to obtain its help to perform the magical operation." In contrast, astrological images which derive their powers from the natural influences of the stars (as described in the anonymous *Speculum astronomiae*) might be understood as 'non-addressative'; and "if it is viewed as a cause in a naturalistic process, then it can be considered as licit" (N. Weill-Parot: 'Astral Magic and Intellectual Changes (Twelfth-Fifteenth Centuries): 'Astrological Images' and the Concept of 'Addressative' Magic', in: J. Bremmer & J. R. Veenstra (eds.): *The Metamorphosis of Magic From Late Antiquity to Early Modern Period*, Louvain: Peeters, 2002: 167–187, p. 169, p. 176).

[57] See M. Ficino: *Three Books…, op.cit.*: 238–239.

[58] *Ibid.*: III.1, 244–245, III.13, 304–309, III.18, 340–341.

body,"[59] knew how to attract cosmic divinities to earth with the help of artificial "baits" and "divine lures."[60] In Book 3, Chapter 26 it becomes apparent that the learned *magus* being discussed is no less than the philosopher himself. Both have the theoretical knowledge (astronomical and astrological) of the right time and modalities and the practical skills to "introduce the celestial into the earthly by particular lures."[61]

Ficino provides plenty of historical and empirical examples of how talismans could work (Lib.III.13–20). For example, an ancient *image*, engraved with a Lion, helped cast away the malevolent influence of Saturn, the planetary patron of melancholy. Giovanni Marliani, a mathematician, and contemporary of Ficino, was healed of his fear of thunder by the physician Mengo Bianchelli da Faenza through a magical *image*. Another example is Ficino himself, who once started to create a talisman, a loadstone engraved with the figure of the Bear. Finally, he explains, he could not finish it because he feared drawing maleficial, not beneficial, forces down to earth.[62] This attests to the impossibility of differentiating in practice between "demonic" and "natural" magic. The distinction may be purely rhetorical (to avoid prosecution by the Church). In his famous book *Spiritual & Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (1958), D. P. Walker emphasized that Ficino also played the lyre to invoke celestial spirits.[63] These examples illustrate two things: Firstly, philosophical theory merges with practice in Ficino's magic. Secondly, magic in *De Vita* does not only remain at a textual level. Renaissance thinkers like Ficino explored and even experimentally tested the effects of magical objects. This involves the idea that the philosopher, as well as understanding and observing the immaterial forces within the cosmos, also tried to disrupt, correct and control universal affinities and even to reproduce Nature's powers through art, encompassing the idea of illusion and manipulation.[64]

[59] *Ibid.*: Apology, 396–397; M. Ficino: *Platonic Theology*: XIII.1,4, 116–117. On this, see also S. Toussaint: 'Magie und …', *op.cit.*: 23–24.

[60] See M. Ficino: *Three Books on Life*: III.1, 244–245.

[61] "[…], certis quibusdam illecebris coelestia terrenis quidem nec aliter inserens […]" (*ibid.*: III.26, 386–387).

[62] *Ibid.*: III.15, 316–317, III.18, 336–337. See, also S. Kodera: *Disreputable Bodies…, op.cit.*: 276–278.

[63] See D. P. Walker: *Spiritual & Demonic Magic…, op.cit*: 12–24.

[64] M. Ficino: *Three Books…, op.cit.*: III.1, 244–245, III.16, 322–323, III.17, 328–329.

Therefore, it is relevant to ask how the *philosopher-magus* worked through his art. As Ficino mentions, he

> […] used to manufacture certain images when the planets were entering similar faces of the heavens, the faces being as it were exemplars of things below.[65]

That is, he engraved visible signs and *created* artificial *figures* in material receptacles, a human-made copy to capture and absorb the *occult* powers of the celestial *figures* like natural objects do. In Book 3, Chapter 15 of *De Vita*, Ficino claims that a "metal or gem when it is engraved in a moment does not seem to receive a new quality, only a new shape," i.e., a *figura*.[66] In this passage Ficino resolved the problem that art could intrinsically change nature by denying any metaphysical efficacy or power of artificial *figures* on material objects. This contrasts with Chapter 18, where Ficino mentions:

> Therefore you should not doubt, they say, that the material for making an image, if it is in other respects entirely consonant with the heavens, once it is received by art a figure similar to the heavens, both conceives in itself the celestial gift and gives it again to someone who is in the vicinity or wearing it.[67]

This suggests that the artificial *figure* has a *quasi-substantial* effect on material objects, and might not only artificially represent the innermost of nature but also change their entire substance. Why? Precisely because magical objects like talismans possess a magical meaning derived from the reciprocal references, participation, and resonances by which Ficino gave new context. This then leads us to ask what this material disposition caused by artificial *figures* means regarding the metaphysical opposition of nature and art? What does it say about a human's empowerment to *create* within divine structures?

[65] "[…], antiquosque sapientes solitos certas tunc imagines fabricare, quando planetae similes in coelo facies quasi exemplaria inferiorum ingrediebantur" (M. Ficino: *Three Books…, op.cit.*: III.13, 304–305).

[66] "Metallum vero vel lapillus quando momento sculpitur, non videtur novam accipere qualitatem, sed figuram; […]" (*ibid.*: III.15, 318–319).

[67] "Ergo ne dubites, dicent, quin materia quaedam imaginis faciendae, alioquin valde congrua coelo, per figuram coelo similem arte datam coeleste munus tum in se ipsa concipiat, tum reddat in proximum aliquem vel gestantem" (*ibid.*: III.18, 332–333).

Rivalries: Nature and Art

Before answering the question, it is illuminating to look into Ficino's *opus magnum*, the *Theologia Platonica de immortalitate animorum*, to see how he described therein the antinomic realms of nature and art. In the first sentences of Book 5, Chapter 4, Ficino points out that:

> Art produces its artifacts in the following order: it imprints some or other forms in the material at hand, none of which the material has as its own. For clay does not possess the shape at all of any particular vase, but assumes different shapes one after another from the potter; and when the vases break, the clay remains, and other vases can be made out of it again. Therefore nature herself, the craftsman of the world, has subject to it a matter that is lacking all forms, but is equally ready to receive all forms. Just as God at the highest level of things is pure act, is in need of nothing, is the creator of all forms, so there must be something at the lowest level which is pure potentiality, which needs everything, and which in itself is without form yet capable of taking on all forms.[68]

Here, Ficino addresses *naturam ars imitatur*. On the one hand, Ficino refers to the Aristotelian formulation of sensible substances, the compound of matter (*ὕλη*) and form (*μορφή*) that constitutes natural objects of the physical world.[69] Hence nature or "the craftsman of the world," organizes matter from within,[70] as Ficino then points out:

[68] "Ars opera sua hoc facit ordine, videlicet in subiecta quadam materia formas alias et alias imprimit, quarum nullam sibi propriam habet materia. Nullam enim propriam vasis alicuius formam habet lutum, sed varias vicissim capit a figulo et fractis vasis superest lutum, ex quo alia reparentur. Ergo et ipsa natura, rerum artifex, subiectam quandam sibi materiam habet omnium expertem formarum, ad omnes suscipiendas pariter praeparatam. Quia sicut in gradu rerum summo deus est actus purus, nullius indigus, formarum omnium effector, ita in infimo esse aliquid debet quod sit pura potentia, omnium egena, et ipsa per se informis sit formarum omnium susceptiva. Sic universali artifici atque naturae subset universalis materia, formarum quarumlibet indifferens susceptaculum" (M. Ficino: *Platonic Theology…, op.cit.*: V.4,2, 18–19).

[69] See Aristotle: *The Complete Works…, op.cit., Metaphysics*: VIII.1, 1042a24–32, 1645.

[70] In chapter 1 of Book 4, Ficino asks: "And what is nature? It is art molding matter from within, as though the carpenter were in the wood." "Quid natura? Ars intrinsecus materiam temperans, ac si faber lignarius esset in ligno" (M. Ficino: *Platonic Theology…, op.cit.*: IV.1,5, 252–253).

> What we call prime matter is subject equally to the forms of elements and of other bodies, taking on one form after another by a natural power, but not possessing any form of its own in its own nature.[71]

On the other hand, in these passages, Aristotelian ideas are combined with Plato's myth of the *Demiurge* in the *Timaeus*. Plato describes the *Demiurge* as an artisan-like figure, an anthropomorphic craftsman (like a carpenter),[72] who according to an eternal and unchanging *model* (*παράδειγμα*) imprinted the visible and tangible form (*εἶδος, forma*) in the unstructured and inert material.[73] Following Plato's concept of *chora* (*χώρα*),[74] Ficino identifies matter with an empty space or passive receptacle of the active forms,[75] given by God. For Ficino, the higher intelligible forms, i.e., the eternal and divine archetypes, are related to the physical forms on an ontological stage beneath:[76] This is nature, which is "molding matter from within, as though the carpenter were in the wood."[77]

From these passages, it becomes evident that nature is superior to art: Nature understood as *instrumentum Dei* or as an *artifex rerum* generates the "substantial forms," whereas art "only dispose[s] matter by a sort of accidental preparation."[78] Nonetheless, these lines open up various windows (to use Leon Battista Alberti's term *finestra aperta*)[79] or *perspectives* on the ambiguous relationship between matter and form. Both matter and form appear distinct and combined in Ficino. A recent study (2010) by Kodera demonstrated that Ficino's conception of matter is a "complex melange." According to Kodera, "Ficino's thoughts on

[71] "Haec prima vocatur materia, quae elementorum aliorumque corporum formis aeque subiicitur, et modo hanc a vi naturali accipit, modo illam, neque ullam natura sua habet propriam" (*ibid.*: V.4,2, 18–19).

[72] See Plato: *Plato Complete Works*, ed. by J. M. Cooper & D. S. Hutchinson, Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997: *Republic* X, 596b–c, 1200.

[73] *Ibid.*: Plato: *Timaeus*, 29a, 1235, 30d–31a, 1236–1237.

[74] *Ibid.*: 50d–51a, 1253–1254.

[75] See M. Ficino: *Platonic Theology…, op.cit.*: I.3,6–7, 32–33.

[76] See, also *ibid.*: I.3,13, 38–41, V.13,13, 88–91.

[77] "Quid natura? Ars intrinsecus materiam temperans, ac si faber lignarius esset in lingo" (*ibid.*: IV.1,5, 252–253).

[78] "[…], sed materiam dumtaxat accidentali quadam praeparatione disponere" (*ibid.*: IV.1,3, 250–251).

[79] See L. Battista Alberti: *Della Pittura. Über die Malkunst*, ed. by O. Bätschmann & S. Gianfreda, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002: Cap.19, 93–95.

matter serve different purposes, are highly eclectic and elusive, and often blatantly contradictory."[80]

What remains at this point is the craftsman-metaphor. As mentioned before, God is the "creator of all forms," who shaped the formless clay. Elsewhere, He is described as the supreme architect of the world, who composed, *created* and animated the world-machine.[81] These analogies deriving from manual activities were common in texts of classical Antiquity. Renaissance intellectuals such as Ficino transferred these aesthetic metaphors to visualize the metaphysical process of the divine creation, as well to illustrate the image of the world (*imago mundi*).[82] It was Chastel who showed Ficino turning the Plotinian notion of intellectual beauty (Enn. 1.6) into a creative impetus linked to human art and magic.[83]

This draws our attention to the connection between the supreme creator and the skilled human artist, who *creates* something *new*. Book 13, Chapter 3, therefore opens up a new perspective: Here, men become nature's rivals. The anecdotal examples offered by Ficino are among others:[84] Zeuxis's painted grapes, which deceived birds;[85] Praxiteles's marble statue of Venus, which produced lust in its beholder. As we read in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Pygmalion fell in love with beauty he had carved himself, "more perfect than that of any woman ever born."[86] As well as Hermes Trismegistus's animated god-like statues of the *Asclepius*, and

[80] S. Kodera: *Disreputable Bodies…, op.cit*: 50. According to Kodera, Ficino distinguished three types of matter: "[…]: primordial chaos, which is yet unformed and totally inert, midway between being and non-being; the matter in the universe, which is already endowed with primary forms; and already seeded matter, which will bring forth the myriad forms" (*ibid.*: 56–57). On this, see also J. G. Snyder: 'The theory of *prima materia* in Marsilio Ficino's *Platonic Theology*', *Vivarium* 46, 2008: 192–221.

[81] See M. Ficino: *Platonic Theology…, op.cit*: XVIII.1,8, 72–73, XVIII.1,10, 76–77.

[82] See F. Solmsen: 'Nature as Craftsman in Greek Thought', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24, 1963: 473–496; M. J. B. Allen: *Plato's Third Eye: Studies in Marsilio Ficino's Metaphysics and its Sources*, Aldershot: Variorum, 1995: 413–414. André Chastel pointed out that "La spéculation antique et surtout médiévale avait souvent exprimé les rapports métaphysiques par des images empruntées au monde de l'art; mais Ficin reprend ici exactement la définition du beau dans l'art donnée par Alberti, pour l'appliquer au Cosmos; on ne saurait mieux affirmer que son rapport á Dieu est celui d'une œvre d'art á son auteur, et rendre plus manifeste sa qualité esthétique" (A. Chastel: *Marsile Ficin…, op.cit.*: 57).

[83] On this, see S. Toussaint: '"My Friend Ficino". Art History and Neoplatonism: From Intellectual to Material Beauty', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* LIX-2, 2017: 147–173.

[84] See M. Ficino: *Platonic Theology…, op.cit.*: XIII.3, 168–171.

[85] See Plinius: *Natural History*, edited by T. E. Page et al., Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press/William Heinemann LTD, 1961: Lib.XXXV.36, 65–66, 308–310.

[86] See Ovid: *Metamorphoses*, 2 vols., transl. by F. J. Miller, London/New York: William Heinemann/G. P. Putnam's Son, 1916: X.240–269, 80–83.

Archimedes's bronze model of the heavens: A self-moving object that copied perfectly the heavenly world above.[87]

The implications behind these narratives and conglomerates of different ideas and traditions are that men far less imitate than actively intervene in and reorganize nature's work through their practical crafts,[88] as expressed in the Mannerism of sixteenth century art.[89] Thus, the skilled man is able to generate optical illusions and emotional and mental affections by his art.[90] By the human hand, inorganic material is animated, and nature becomes enhanced:

> […] man imitates all the works of divine nature, and perfects all the works of lower nature, correcting and emending them. Man's power is very like the power of divine nature, since man rules himself through himself, that is, through his own counsel and art: uncircumscribed by the limits of corporeal nature, he emulates the works of higher nature.[91]

From this passage, it becomes evident that art is linked to agency. A very modern vision: think of Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* or the *Cyborgs* of popular fiction, half organic, half mechanical creatures; an idea which Ficino embraced at the end of *De vita* in discussing artificial anthropoids.[92]

[87] See Cicero: *De re publica*. *Vom Gemeinwesen*, transl. by K. Büchner, Stuttgart: Reclam, 1995: I.14, 108–110; Cicero: *Tusculanae disputationes*. *Gespräche in Tusculum*, edited and translated by Olof Gigon, München: Heimeran, 1970: I.63, 60–61.

[88] In the context of Book 13, Chapter 4, Lauri Ockenström shows that Ficino's view on man's position in the universe was not only shaped by the biblical source of Genesis as well as by the writings of Cicero, Petrarch, and Manetti, but also by theoretical Hermetic treatises. See L. Ockenström: 'Hermetic Roots of Marsilio Ficino's Anthropocentric Thought', J@RGONIA ELEKTRONINEN JULKAISU 22, 2013: 37–56 (https://jyx.jyu.fi/dspace/handle/123456789/42537).

[89] See. I. L. Zupnick, 'The 'Aesthetics' of the Early Mannerists', *Art Bulletin* 35, 1953: 302–306.

[90] This also encloses the complex status of *imaginatio* or rather *phantasia*, according to Ficino a chameleon or a shape shifter like the mythical figure of *Protheus*, which is – only this – able to transform not only its own but also other bodies from within. See M. Ficino: *Opera Omnia…, op.cit.*: 1825 [825].

[91] Denique homo omnia divinae naturae opera imitatur et naturae inferioris opera perficit, corrigit et emendat. Similis ergo ferme vis hominis est naturae divinae, quandoquidem homo per se ipsum, id est per suum consilium atque artem, regit se ipsum a corporalis naturae limitibus minime circumscriptum, et singula naturae altioris opera aemulatur" (M. Ficino: *Platonic Theology…, op.cit.*: XIII.3,1–2, 170–171).

[92] See M. Ficino: *Three Books…, op.cit.*: III.26, 388–391.

However, Ficino considered only a small elitist group as able to fashion forms (*formae*) and figures (*figurae*),[93] with the *philosopher-magus* leading the way.[94] The latter uses "the supernal and celestial beings for instruction and for the wonders of magic."[95] Simultaneously, both closely interwoven figures are described as highly gifted melancholics granted divine ingenuity, linked to their imaginative and superior rational abilities. According to Ficino, a melancholic, their specific natural abilities and divine talents, resulting in their melancholic temperament (black bile), were caused by the planet-demon Saturn, see Book 1 of *De Vita*.[96] Ficino reverts, therein, to the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata* XXX.1, combining it with the Platonic idea of *μανία* (divine madness or frenzy), by which men, melancholic by nature "seem to be not human but rather divine," and might transform an analogue to nature into an *instrumentum divinorum*.[97] This melancholic status is not only connected with hidden wisdom, intellectual contemplation and the soul's ascent towards God but also with men's demiurgic capacity to act within nature. That is, man is

> […] a kind of god […] He is also manifestly god of the elements since he lives in and cultivates each one; and finally he is god of all materials since he handles, changes, and forms them all.[98]

[93] See M. Ficino: *Platonic Theology…, op.cit.*: XIII.3,1–2, 172–173.

[94] As Allen points out: "It is possible to align the two paradigms and to suggest a third synthetic possibility, the philosopher-artist. Ficino could certainly turn to ancient magus figures like Zoroaster and Hermes Trismegistus for such a possibility, since the magic 'art' as they had reputedly practiced it was only achievable by the sublime philosopher" (M. J. B. Allen: *Icastes…, op.cit.*: 156).

[95] "[…], supernis caelestibus ad doctrinam magicaeque miracula" (M. Ficino: *Platonic Theology…, op.cit.*: XIII.3, 172–173); see, also M. J. B. Allen: *Icastes…, op.cit.*: 156.

[96] See M. Ficino: *Three Books…, op.cit.*: I.1–6, 108–123.

[97] *Ibid.*: "[…], ut non humani sed divini potius videantur," I.5, 116–117, I.6, 122–123. For the primary sources, see Aristotle: *The Complete Works…, op.cit.: Problems* XXX.1, 953a10–955a40, 1489–1502; Plato: *Plato Complete Works…*, op.cit.*: Phaedrus*, 244a–245c, 522–523. See also R. Klibansky, E. Panofsky & F. Saxl: *Saturn and Melancholy. Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion, and Art*, Nendeln/Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1979: 256–274. This reading may have been influenced Renaissance artists who did not "forget their saturnine birthright, the prerogative of exalted creators" (R. M. Wittkower: *Born under Saturn: The Character and Conduct of Artists: A Documented History from Antiquity to the French Revolution,* London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1963: 104).

[98] "Homo igitur […] est quidam deus […] Deum quoque esse constitit elementorum qui habitat colitque omnia. Deum denique omnium materiarum qui tractat omnes, vertit et format" (M. Ficino: *Platonic Theology…, op.cit.*: XIII.3,2, 174–175).

With regard to these passages, Allen points out that "man can become a divine being, a god in the Platonic sense, but not […] a God Himself."[99] However, for him, Ficino's characterization of the human artist comes as a "fleeting moment" very close to that of God Himself.[100] This moment is the timeless and disembodied state of inner contemplation, when the individual soul turns inward and vertically ascends towards the intelligible realm, which we shall discuss in the last section.[101]

Taken together, it becomes apparent from the *TP* that Ficino's view on the rivalries between nature and art is permanently shifting. This section showed a double *perspective* on Ficino's representation of matter and form. In spite of the Aristotelian-Scholastic formula of *naturam ars imitatur*, we can state that the *TP* also involves the idea of cultivating and mastering nature by the human hand, through which the borders between art and nature start to burst. It is not only the wide range of the newly discovered texts that underpin these shifts. They are also related to artistic and scientific developments in the liberal and mechanical arts of his time.[102] To sum up: Besides the vertical movement of the *magus* towards God, there is still a horizontal comparison between the divine and the human creator. Under certain circumstances, the individual might appear as a 'god', as 'creator' in nature, which art transmutes from a mimetic into a demiurgic capacity that might explode the idea that the unalterable *form* is literally untouchable.

"How to Construct a Figure of the Universe"

This idea finds its apex in Chapter 19, "How to Construct a Figure of the Universe," in which Ficino radically undermines the claim of nature over art by comparing a whole room (*cubiculum*) with a universal *figure* (*universi figura*), "an image of the very universe itself."[103] In a few lines, Ficino says:

> They [astrologers] … judge it useful to look at these particular colors above all, in order to capture the gifts of the celestial graces and, in the model of the world which you are making, to insert the blue color of the world in the spheres

[99] M. J. B. Allen: *Icastes*, *op.cit.*: 111, 152.

[100] *Ibid.*: 156.

[101] See, e.g., M. Ficino: *Three Books…*, *op.cit.*: I.4, 112–115.

[102] See M. Ficino: *Platonic Theology…*, *op.cit.*: XIII.3,3, 172–173; M. J. B. Allen: *Icastes…*, *op.cit.*: 156–157.

[103] See M. Ficino: *Three Books…*, *op.cit.*: III.19, 342–343.

> […] They think it worthwhile to add to the spheres, for a true imitation of the heavens, golden stars, and to clothe Vesta herself or Ceres, that is, the earth. The adherent of those things should either carry about with him a model of this kind or should place it opposite him and gaze at it. But it will be useful to look at a sphere equipped with its own motions; Archimedes once constructed one and a Florentine friend of ours named Lorenzo did so just recently. Nor should one simply look at it but reflect upon it in the mind. *Proinde in ipsis*, in the very depth of his house, he should construct a chamber (*cubiculum*), vaulted and marked with these figures (*figuris*) and colors, and he should spend most of his waking hours there and also sleep. And when he has emerged from his house, he will not note with so much attention the spectacle of individual things as the figures of the universe and its colors.[104]

In context, it is obvious that the above-mentioned objects – planetary clock, movable armillary sphere, ceiling frescoes – are discussed as talismans. Eugenio Garin labelled this revealing chapter as symbolic, insofar as it illustrates the exceptional state of magic itself. According to Toussaint, Ficino established here a "technical mysticism," wherein the artist not only becomes a "celestial messenger" but also expresses "the first step […] towards creating our own heaven".[105] Or, as Ficino says: "[…] with heavenly power he ascends and measures the heavens; and with his superheavenly mind he transcends the heavens."[106]

The narrative of the *cubiculum* (Latin for bedroom or chamber) is framed by a reference to Archimedes's spherical model and Lorenzo della Volpaia's ground-

[104] "Expedire igitur iudicabunt ad Gratiarum coelestium munera capessenda tres potissimum hos colores frequentissime contueri, atque in formula mundi quam fabricas sapphyrinum colorem mundi spheris inserere. Operae pretium fore putabunt aurea spheris ad ipsam coeli similitudinem addere sidera, atque ipsam Vestam sive Cererem, id est terram, viridem induere vestem. Eiusmodi formulam sectator illorum vel ipse gestabit, vel oppositam intuebitur. Utile vero fore spectare spheram motibus suis praeditam, qualem Archimedes quondam et nuper Florentinus quidam noster, Laurentius nomine, fabricavit. Neque spectare solum, sed etiam animo reputare. Proinde in ipsis suae domus penetralibus cubiculum construet in fornicem actum figuris eiusmodi et coloribus insignitum, ubi plurimum vigilet atque dormiat. Et egressus domo non tanta attentione singularum rerum spectacula, quanta universi figuram coloresque perspiciet" (*ibid.*: III.19, 346–347).

[105] See E. Garin: *Lo zodiaco della vita. La polemica sull'astrologia dal Trecento al Cinquecento*, Roma/Bari: Laterza, 1976: 85; S. Toussaint: 'Ficino, Archimedes and the Celestial Arts', in: M. J. B. Allen et al. (eds.): *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, Leiden: Brill, 2002: 307–326, pp. 312, 321, 323.

[106] "[…]; caelesti virtute ascendit caelum atque metitur. Supercaelesti mente transcendit caelum." M. Ficino: *Platonic Theology…, op.cit.*: XIII.3,3, 172–173.

breaking planetary clock. Through these, past time was brought by Ficino into the present. The former, as also mentioned in the *TP*, had fabricated a portable, movable spherical astrolabe: "a true imitation of the heavens."[107] The latter, a Florentine clockmaker, goldsmith and "monster of nature"[108] – according to Benvenuto Cellini – constructed a self-moving planetary clock, though which the astrological houses, for example, could be calculated.[109] This reading implies that in both automatons, astronomical and geometrical-mathematical knowledge converges with human or rather divine art. As I have shown, this is a crucial issue for Ficino, who partly compares the highly gifted and skilled artisan with the Creator Himself in a horizontal manner.[110]

We know from the letter to Paul of Middelburg that Ficino knew the prototype of della Volpaia's multi-zodiac clock (1484), completed in 1510.[111] Archimedes, as well as della Volpaia, made the celestial world and its causal-effectual relationships not only measurable and understandable, but also recognizable through their scientific instruments. They artificially visualized, imitated, and embodied the hidden divine-cosmic movements of the World-Soul, a *primum mobile* itself. Thus, these perpetual motion machines become in Ficino's work, as Toussaint suggested, *Seelenmaschiene(n)*.[112] They possessed a magical meaning derived from the sign system by which Ficino gave them new context. Archimedes's model and Volpaia's clock were treated by Ficino as perfectly sculpted copies of universal *figures*: The "archetypal form[s] of the whole world."[113]

Whereas in the *TP*, Ficino's different perspective on the relation between matter and form, and nature and art might be puzzling, it becomes much clearer in his description of the *cubiculum*. That is, the ancient *cubiculum* was understood either as a small room inside a house, used as a private sleeping as well as a public

[107] See M. Ficino: *Three Books…, op.cit.*: III.19, 346–347.

[108] Quoted from M. Rosen: *The Mapping of Power in Renaissance Italy: Painted Cartographic Cycles in Social and Intellectual Context*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, 104.

[109] *Ibid.*: 103–106; S. Toussaint: 'Ficino, Archimedes…', *op.cit.*: 308.

[110] See M. Ficino: *Platonic Theology…, op.cit.*: XIII.3,6, 176–177.

[111] See M. Ficino: *Opera Omnia…, op.cit.*: Epistolarum, Lib. XI, Laudes seculi nostri tanquam aurei ingeniis Auerrois, 944 [974]; A. Chastel: *Marsile Ficin…, op.cit.*: 95. Angelo Poliziano also discussed Volpaia's clock in a letter (1484) to Francesco della Casa. See S. Toussaint: 'Ficino, Archimedes…', *op.cit.*: 307–313.

[112] As suggested by Toussaint. See S. Toussaint: 'Magie und …', *op.cit.*: 29.

[113] "[…] formam quandam mundi totius archetypam […]" (M. Ficino: *Three Books…, op.cit.*: III.19, 342–345).

meeting place, or a carved room, a tomb or shrine in the catacombs.[114] There are similarities between the ancient *cubiculum* and the Renaissance *studio*. Both are small rooms, linked to secret, sacred elements. Both are visible only to selected guests. Two famous *studioli* of the *Quattrocento* can be found at Federico da Montefeltro's (1422–1482) Palazzo in Urbino and Gubbio (constructed between 1474 and 1483). It is worth noting that Ficino, who dedicated the second book of his *Epistolarum* to the Duke of Urbino, might have inspired together with others, "much of the iconographical scheme that underlies the decoration."[115] Both *studioli* contain, among others, paintings of extraordinary books (e.g. Homer, Vergil, Cicero), illustrations of scientific instruments (such as the spherical astrolabe and armillary sphere), and visualizations of the virtues (Hope, Faith, Charity). According to Robert Kirkbride, these images "might be interpreted as encyclopedic containers of universal knowledge."[116] This is related to another room that is dedicated to study and spectacular marvelous *naturalia*, *artificia*, and *scientifica*, i.e., the *Wunderkammern* (chambers of wonders) of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, which finally blurred the distinction between nature and art.[117]

It is still puzzling, what kind of room Ficino had before his eyes, when he was writing about the *cubiculum*. In my understanding, in Ficino's description of the *cubiculum*, some previously described elements merge into each other. It is a bed- and study room, in which artificial and scientific objects are linked to sense-perception and cognition (something similar is found later in Athanasius Kircher's *cubiculum*).[118] In a sense, the *cubiculum* of *De Vita* transforms itself into a symbolic place of the Universe itself, in which the correlatives inside/outside,

[114] See *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968: 463–464.

[115] M. Ficino: *Opera Omnia…*, *op.cit.*: 673 [703]; J. Haar: 'The Vatican Manuscript Urb. Lat. 1411: An Undervalued Source?', in: M. Gozzi (ed.): *Manoscritti di polifonia nel quattrocento Europeo: atti del Convegno internazionale di studi: Trento, Castello del Buoconsiglio, 18–19 ottobre 2002*, Trent: Provincia autonoma die Trento, Soprintendenza per i beni library e archivistici, 2004: 65–91, p. 73.

[116] R. Kirkbride: *Architecture and Memory: The Renaissance Studioli of Federico da Montefeltro*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2008; in: http://www.gutenberg-e.org/kirkbride/chapter1.html#note5; http://www.gutenberg-e.org/kirkbride/chapter2.html.

[117] On this, see L. Daston & K. Park: *Wonders…, op.cit.*: 260; H. Bredekamp: *Antikensehnsucht und Maschinenglauben: Die Geschichte der Kunstkammer und die Zukunft der Kunstgeschichte*, Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, ^{4}2012: 33–39.

[118] See A. Mayer-Deutsch: ''Quasi-Optical Palingenesis': The Circulation of Portraits and the Image of Kircher', in: P. Findlein: *Athanasius Kircher: The Last Man Who Knew Everything*, New York/London: Routledge, 2004: 105–132, pp. 111–112.

hidden/manifest, universal/individual, nature/art/science, and theory/practice converge with magic.

The *cubiculum* also contains another visual representation of the universe: Colorful ceiling-frescos "marked with these figures (*figuris*) and colors," which probably illustrate the personification of the heavenly Graces.[119] Even if the passage of the *cubiculum* does not explicitly mention this triad of Jupiter, Venus, and the Sun, Ficino still gave us clues a few passages previously:

> There are, indeed, three colors of the world, at once universal and peculiar: green, gold, and sapphire-blue, dedicated to the three heavenly Graces.[120]

The artisan-like *philosopher-magus* has to physically and mentally reflect upon these materialized universal *figures*, day and night. When Ficino refers to the state of sleep, he probably had Iamblichus's *De Mysteriis* and Synesius's *De insomniis* in mind. According to them, being asleep is an in-between state of visions, prophecy as well as of communications with spiritual entities, such as dæmons. The physical and mental contemplation of these three- and two-dimensional objects, awake or asleep, links the individual to the universal *spiritus*, and can initiate the soul's vertical ascent towards the intelligible forms, and finally to God Himself; the "fleeting moment" of closeness between the *philosopher-magus* and the Creator. This magic is labelled *theurgic*.[121]

As we can see, the *cubiculum* becomes a celestial gift shop, which could open up to the *magus* a new epistemological approach to reality. Ficino's narration ends very vaguely and puzzlingly. He concludes that when the magical operator

[119] Those *trias* have the power, e.g., to temper the negative aspects of melancholy. Under their influence, the individual *spiritus* can become, in Ficino's words, "in the highest degree celestial" and "an instrument of the divine." See: "Atque ita ex hoc spiritu tanquam in nobis medio coelestia bona imprimis insita sibi in nostrum tum corpus, tum animum exundabunt […]" (M. Ficino: *Three Books…, op.cit.*: III.4, 258–259; see, also III.19, 346–347).

[120] "Optimum vero fore putabunt praetor liniamenta opificio colores inserere. Sunt vero tres universales simul et singulares mundi colores: viridis, aureus, sapphyrinus, tribus coeli Gratiis dedicati" (*ibid.*: III.19, 344–345).

[121] When a man is asleep and dreaming, he is able to communicate and operate through the *spiritus phantasticus* with invisible entities, such as demons. See, e.g., 'Spiritus phantasticus est primum animae vehiculum' (M. Ficino: *Opera Omnia…, op.cit.*: Synesius De Somniis […]: 1971 [971]); see, also: M. Ficino: *Platonic Theology…, op.cit.*: XIII.2,30–31, 156–161.

> has emerged from his house, he will not note with so much attention the spectacle of individual things as the figure of the universe and its colors.[122]

Does Ficino mean that the *magus* finally transforms himself into a powerful, effective magical instrument after he has perceived the true essence of everything? Without any artificial additives, always ready to *create* within the cosmos?

Although this chapter does not indicate if the World-Soul might be trapped through human-made *figures*, it may be said that they represent, contain, and concentrate "celestial gifts" in material receptacles and two-dimensional surfaces. Thus, the *philosopher-magus* operates, absorbs and charges himself inside the room with cosmic powers by the help of man-made *images*. Not only is he a "celestial messenger," and translator of cosmic forces, but also an imitator, creator, and operator, who fashions through his demiurgic capacities matter from within.

It becomes evident from the passages on the *cubiculum* that artificial *figures* are not merely shaping the material surface, but the human-made *figures* are *form*-giving and powerful (*quasi-substantial)*. In this sense, by fabricating a *figure*, based on knowledge combined with human skills and the right talents or *genius*, matter gets a new form, establishing a new correspondence between below and above. Ficino, who here entwines different theories of matter and form, identifies the artificial *figure* with the lower form that reached up to the intelligible and super-celestial ideas. And, one figure perfects the other. Therefore, the talisman is able to capture the objects it reflects, like a mirror.[123] Thus, the skilled and highly gifted *philosopher-magus* can explore and experiment with nature's hidden powers and can manipulate both matter and forms playfully.

Conclusion

This article has shown that Ficino's amalgamation of divergent metaphysical and natural philosophical ideas produced paradoxes in his discussions of magic. Simultaneously, it has opened up different perspectives on his theories of matter and form, nature and art. Even if Ficino's positions on the power and efficacy of magical *images* are not always clear, the entwining of philosophical theory and actual practice, and nature and art is manifest. As with the *cubiculum*, the material

[122] "Et egressus domo non tanta attentione singularum rerum spectacula, quanta universi figuram coloresque perspiciet" (M. Ficino: *Three Books…, op.cit.*: III.19, 346–347).

[123] *Ibid.*: III.17, 328–331, III.26, 388–389.

can be formed by a skillful gifted *philosopher-magus* with the help of an artificial *figure*. An implication of this is not only the possibility of making nature's mysterious manifestations visible and rationally understandable, but also to materialize, create, and even manipulate her powers, through which men moved from the periphery to the center of the picture. Therefore, Ficino's *De Vita* provided an impulse for a new cultural and scientific self-understanding of the individual as *artifex* of nature, in which the recognition of nature's hidden laws is linked to the intention of its domination. Thus, Ficino eroded the hierarchical distinction between nature, as changing the *substantial forms*, and art as modifying the accidentals, the perceptible shapes of objects.