

DANCING WITH THE STARS:
A PRELIMINARY EXPLORATION AS TO WHETHER
THE ASTROLOGY IN MARSILIO FICINO'S *DE VITA* IS THEURGICAL

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ABSTRACT Although there has been an immense amount of scholarship on Marsilio Ficino, his life and writings, much of it excellent, an area that I would argue is fundamental for understanding both him and his work – astrology – has received much more problematic attention. In this essay, I will indicate some of my first and still coalescing thoughts on one central facet of this issue by asking whether Ficino's astrology in *De vita* has a significant theurgical dimension, and by exploring what this might mean.

KEYWORDS: Marsilio Ficino, Astrology, Theurgy, Iamblichus, Proclus

INTRODUCTION

ALTHOUGH there has been an immense amount of scholarship on Marsilio Ficino, his life and writings, much of it excellent, an area that I would argue is fundamental for understanding both him and his work – astrology – has received much more problematic attention. We can see this immediately in the overall introduction to Kaske and Clark's otherwise very useful critical edition and English translation of Ficino's vastly influential *De vita libri tres*.² The aim in this essay – as of volume II, Part 2 of my monograph – is to clarify the basic structures of Ficino's knowledge and uses of astrology, by focusing primarily on this seminal text published in 1489, which sets it out most fully.

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¹ I would like to acknowledge that this article was conceived, composed and completed as part of a project that has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme (GA n. 725883 EarlyModernCosmology), and as an Honorary Associate in History of Science in the School of History and Philosophy of Science, University of Sydney. I would also like to dedicate this essay to the memory of my friend Zeke Mazur, who died far too young.

² For the Latin text and an English translation, introduction and notes, see MARSILIO FICINO, *Three Books on Life*, ed. and trans. C. V. Kaske and J. R. Clark, Binghamton, NY, Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1989. They discuss astrology in their introductory section, «Traditional Material and Innovations» (pp. 32-38). Their description of astronomy (pp. 32-34) and the basic structures of astrology (pp. 34-36) are elementary, but fine. More problematic are the divisions and descriptions of the basic types of astrological practice at pp. 36-38. Their most egregious omission in this respect is that they do not realize that talismans (*imagines astronomicæ*) were normally configured as a part of astrological elections. I will discuss this more fully and the other scholarship on Ficino's astrology in vol. II of my monograph, Part 2 of which, on Ficino's astrology, will replace Kaske and Clark's treatment thereof, including on its various practices, its natural and metaphysical foundations, and its medical, magical and theurgical orientations. H. D. RUTKIN, *Sapientia Astrologica: Astrology, Magic and Natural Knowledge, ca. 1250-1800*, Cham, Springer, 3 vols. Volume II, «Renaissance Structures (1450-1500): Continuities and Transformations», in progress. Michael J. B. Allen has made many valuable contributions to our understanding of Ficino's astrology, which are scattered throughout many of his writings, as has Ornella Pompeo Faracovi; see especially her edition with translation into Italian of MARSILIO FICINO, *Scritti sull'astrologia*, Milan, Rizzoli, 1999, which has an extensive introduction. Due to limitations of space here, the references to the vast literature on several relevant topics will be kept to the bare essentials.

In this essay, I will indicate some of my first and still coalescing thoughts on one central facet of this issue by asking whether Ficino's astrology in *De vita* has a significant theurgical dimension, and by exploring what this might mean.³ In order to do so properly, this will require delving, at least in part, into the work of some of Ficino's Neoplatonic sources and inspirations, including Iamblichus and Proclus, two of the most important theurgical Neoplatonists, some of whose works Ficino himself paraphrased, translated and/or commented upon.⁴ In this essay, I will explore a further, essentially religious dimension that I will argue is the ultimately theurgical orientation of this extraordinary text. For better or worse, this essay will end up being more suggestive and evocative than definitive, as I set out the next stage of my research agenda rather than its established results.

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The intuition that I will explore here is that Ficino's justly famous *De vita* – and especially its notorious third book, the *De vita coelitus comparanda* – can be usefully understood as [1] a work of Iamblichean-Proclan theurgy purporting to be [2] an astrologico-magical medical text, that is itself also purporting, at least in part, to be [3] a commentary on Plotinus, a philosopher who embraced neither theurgy nor astrology.⁵ In other words, I will argue [1] that there is both a theurgical core and a deeply theurgical motivation to Ficino's *De vita* overall – especially to its Book III, *On Deriving Life from the Heavens* – and [2] that Ficino added a much more fully-articulated astrological dimension to its Iamblichean-Proclan foundations.

In my view, a major part of Ficino's contribution to more deeply astrologizing this late-antique Neoplatonic theurgy was gained by standing on the by-then strong and solid conceptual and textual shoulders of his medieval Arabic and Latin forebears. This allowed him to add core astrologizing Aristotelian conceptual structures to the Neoplatonic cosmological and theurgical system that centrally included an ensouled, and thereby living cosmos. In fact, Ficino's system

³ Kaske and Clark consider Ficino's magic to be «materialistic» in orientation and explicitly not «theurgic», by which they essentially mean religious, although they note his extensive use of the theurgically-oriented Neoplatonic authors: Iamblichus, Proclus and Synesius of Cyrene; FICINO, *Three Books on Life*, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁴ Guido Giglioli argues convincingly that Ficino's publication of Iamblichus's *De mysteriis* (1497), which he there gives its modern title, is, in fact, an interpretive paraphrase and not a proper translation, although some parts are; G. GIGLIOLI, *Theurgy and Philosophy in Marsilio Ficino's Paraphrase of Iamblichus's De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum*, «Rinascimento», 2nd series, LII, 2012, pp. 3-36 at p. 9. As is well known, Ficino worked on these authors in 1488, the year before composing *De vita* III, even though he did not publish his work on them until 1497; FICINO, *Three Books on Life*, *op. cit.*, p. 28. On Ficino and Iamblichus see also REGIER and ROBICHAUD in this volume.

⁵ Much ink has been spilled as to which lemmata in Plotinus Ficino based his Book III on. Kaske and Clark discuss this usefully at FICINO, *Three Books on Life*, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-28. Denis J.-J. Robichaud has now clarified and settled many of these issues; D. J.-J. ROBICHAUD, *Ficino on Force, Magic, and Prayers: Neoplatonic and Hermetic Influences in Ficino's Three Books on Life*, «Renaissance Quarterly», LXX, 2017, pp. 44-87. In his seminal and revisionist *Unio Magica, Part I: On the Magical Origins of Plotinus's Mysticism*, and *Unio Magica, Part II: Plotinus, Theurgy, and the Question of Ritual*, Zeke Mazur argues persuasively for the significance of a hitherto underappreciated ritual dimension in Plotinus's thought. Both are published respectively in «Dionysius», XXI, 2003, pp. 23-52 and XXII, 2004, pp. 29-56. Crystal Addey draws on and valuably develops Mazur's arguments; C. ADDEY, *Divination and Theurgy in Neoplatonism: Oracles of the Gods*, London, Routledge, 2014.

could not have become properly theurgical without first ensouling the highly developed astrologizing Aristotelian system he had inherited, in which the cosmos was decidedly *not* alive. Thus, Ficino brought the planetary subset of pagan gods back to life in a decisively Renaissance manner!⁶

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The redemption/salvation of embodied human souls, and thereby of the physical world at large, by means of theurgical rites, is central to the soteriological dimension of Iamblichus's system as revealed in the *De mysteriis* and other works.⁷ In my reading, for Ficino, the main theurgical rites in *De vita* Book III seem to revolve around the making of talismans and associated practices, to which he devotes fully ten of its 26 chapters (i.e. chapters 13 to 22).⁸ In the ritual he presents for making talismans in Book III, chapter 20, he even seems to encourage the reader to prepare him or herself thereby to become one's own talisman, and thus optimally receive the two-fold '*spiritus stellarum*' to be discussed below. The ultimate theurgical aim of Ficino's deeply astrological system seems to be effecting a person's 'henosis' or union with the relevant celestial

⁶ I reconstruct the medieval astrologizing Aristotelian system that Ficino inherited and adapted in volume I of my monograph, *Sapientia Astrologica, op. cit.* Volume I, «Medieval Structures (1250-1500): Conceptual, Institutional, Socio-Political, Theologico-Religious and Cultural», 2019. Volume II is dedicated to exploring Renaissance developments – both continuities and transformations – primarily in the work of Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. For some preliminary indications of Ficino's contributions, see my *The Physics and Metaphysics of Talismans (Imagines Astronomicae): A Case Study in (Neo)Platonism, Aristotelianism and the Esoteric Tradition*, in *Platonismus und Esoterik in Byzantinischem Mittelalter und Italienischer Renaissance*, ed. H. Seng, Heidelberg, Winter, 2013, pp. 149-173.

⁷ Here is an extremely brief selection of the vast, increasingly rich and ever growing bibliography on Iamblican and Proclean theurgy on which I have drawn for this essay. The main work that initially inspired and continues to inform this essay is G. SHAW, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, 2nd ed., Kettering, OH, Angelico Press, 2014 (1st ed. 1995). For a marvelous English translation, a Greek text and a very informative introduction, see IAMBlichus, *On the Mysteries*, trans. E. C. Clarke, J. M. Dillon and J. P. Hershbell, Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2003; E. C. CLARKE, *Iamblichus De Mysteriis: A Manifesto of the Miraculous*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2001; R. M. VAN DEN BERG, *Proclus' Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary*, Leiden, Brill, 2001; P. T. STRUCK, *Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of Their Texts*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004, and I. TANASEANU-DOEBLER, *Theurgy in Late Antiquity: The Invention of a Ritual Tradition*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013. Two valuable recent treatments with up-to-date bibliographies are S. I. JOHNSTON, *Magic and Theurgy*, in *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic*, ed. D. Frankfurter, Leiden, Brill, 2019, pp. 694-719, and cap. 10 on theurgy of R. G. EDMUNDS III, *Drawing Down the Moon: Magic in the Ancient Greco-Roman World*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2019, pp. 314-377. See also *Invoking Angels: Theurgic Ideas and Practices, Thirteenth to Sixteenth Centuries*, ed. C. Fanger, University Park, PA, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012. I will mention other scholarship where relevant.

⁸ Making and animating statues is also relevant to Ficino's full position, but I cannot treat this here. In the meantime, see S. I. JOHNSTON, *Animating Statues: A Case Study in Ritual*, «*Arethusa*», XLI, 2008, pp. 445-477; W. J. HANEGRAFF, *Sympathy or the Devil: Renaissance Magic and the Ambivalence of Idols*, «*Esoterica*», II, 2000, pp. 1-44, and several of BRIAN P. COPENHAVER's works that treat Ficino explicitly. All of Copenhaver's relevant works, especially four classic works from the 1980s (esp. 1984, 1986, 1987a and 1988), are listed in the extensive bibliography to his magnum opus, *Magic in Western Culture: From Antiquity to the Enlightenment*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015.

gods, namely, the ensouled planets, and especially the ruling planets of one's own nativity or birth horoscope.

Since Iamblichus himself does not describe the specifics of any theurgic rituals in his *De mysteriis*, my reconstruction is necessarily speculative. We do, however, have closely related supporting evidence, namely, from Proclus's Πρόκλου περὶ τῆς καθ' Ἑλληνας ἱερατικῆς τέχνης or «Proclus, On the Priestly [read 'Theurgical'] Art According to the Greeks», which Ficino translated into Latin with the title *De sacrificio et magia*, and later published in 1497 with Aldus Manutius in Venice.⁹ Also in this Aldine edition was Ficino's interpretive paraphrase-translation of Iamblichus's *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians, Chaldaeans and Assyrians*, which he had renamed from its originally more prosaic title: *Master Abamon's Response to a Letter from Anebo*, a pseudonym for Iamblichus's teacher Porphyry, with his probing series of questions.¹⁰

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Although I am persuaded that Ficino is a profoundly systematic thinker, he does not always present his views and the deeper structures of his thought in a straightforwardly systematic manner, especially in *De vita*. Rather, given the often controversial nature of these conceptual structures and the various practices he describes, Ficino discusses different essential parts of his system in different places throughout his text. In this way, he leaves it to his readers as interpretive exegetes to reconstruct his deeper views by gathering the different parts back together and reorganizing them, thus reconstituting his '*dispersa intentio*', so that his secret teachings are not defiled or misused by the uninitiated.

As is well known, Ficino is an absolute master of a complex yet playful writing style rich in misdirection ploys and strategies, deliberately designed to throw his more ordinary or orthodox readers off the scent of discovering his true intentions, which thereby permits him to plausibly deny whatever he might be accused of. This is all the more important given some of the extremely controversial themes that he simply presents in *De vita* and related texts, albeit often under the guise of commenting on another author's views. Some examples of such controversial positions are [1] his deeply Platonic and utterly radical (re)animation of the heavens; [2] teaching his readers how to make and use talismans, and [3] using daemons as a central part of his system,

⁹ See BRIAN P. COPENHAVER's valuable study, republication of the Greek text, edition of the Latin text of Ficino's translation, and his own translation into English: *Hermes Trismegistus, Proclus, and the Question of a Philosophy of Magic in the Renaissance*, in *Hermeticism and the Renaissance: Intellectual History and the Occult in Early Modern Europe*, ed. I. Merkel and A. Debus, Washington, D.C., Folger Shakespeare Library, 1988, pp. 79-110. Van den Berg calls this work and his work on the philosophy of the Chaldaeans, Proclus's two most important texts, both fragmentary, for his views on theurgy: VAN DEN BERG, *Proclus' Hymns, op. cit.*, p. 76. Ficino valuably develops some of these foundational Proclan structures in *De vita* III.14.

¹⁰ For a valuable discussion of the text, see the introduction to IAMBlichus, *On the Mysteries, op. cit.* Crystal Addey has argued persuasively that the *De mysteriis* with its dialogical back-and-forth between Porphyry's probing questions and Iamblichus's insightful answers should be read as just that, dialogues, in the typically Platonic genre of problems and solutions; C. ADDEY, *Divination and Theurgy, op. cit.*, cap. 4.

any of which individually (let alone collectively) would set off resounding alarms in many of his readers' minds.¹¹

The explicitly astrological dimensions in *De vita*, on the other hand, were perfectly normal for the time, especially in a medical context. If he did not go beyond or subvert the by-his-time well-established medieval safeguards that both protected human free will and obviated necessity in nature, they would have been entirely acceptable. In this profoundly Renaissance reconfiguration, however, Ficino's astrologico-magical system towards a medical and ultimately theurgical end was anything but timid, as Frances Yates characterized it in her still influential interpretation, as I also hope to persuade you in what follows, as we explore some of Ficino's more radically subversive formations under cover of philosophical exegesis and medical instruction.¹²

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In my reading, Ficino thus presents a wholly Renaissance and deeply astrologizing synthesis composed of [1] an astrologizing Aristotelian physical core transformed by [2] a Platonic/Neoplatonic cosmological and metaphysical superstructure within [3] a Plotinian metaphysical framework as [4] refocused and reoriented towards ritual praxis by Iamblichus and Proclus.¹³ Within his deeply Platonic living universe, Ficino's ultimate goal is nothing less than to reconnect people – scholars in particular – in a revivifying manner into this living universe both material and divine, as he states precisely at the beginning of *De vita*, Book III, chapter 11: «All of these discussions are for this purpose: that by means of stellar rays (*per radios stellarum*) received in a timely manner (*opportune*), our spirit – properly prepared and purified through natural things – may receive the most from the spirit of cosmic life (*ab ipso vitae mundanae spiritu*)», which I will here call «cosmic spirit» (289).¹⁴

¹¹ As is also well known, after the publication of his *De vita* – for which, of course, he wrote two pre-emptive *Apologiae* – Ficino was investigated but not prosecuted by the Roman curia. See Kaske and Clark's introductory section, «Repercussions», with further bibliography, including a foundational essay by Paul Oskar Kristeller; FICINO, *Three Books on Life, op. cit.*, pp. 55-70. On Ficino's playful writing style see also ROBICHAUD in this volume.

¹² F. A. YATES, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1964, p. 60. J. HANKINS also argues against Ficino's timidity in his *Ficino, Avicenna and the Occult Powers of the Rational Soul*, in *Tra antica sapienza e filosofia naturale: La magia nell'Europa moderna*, ed. F. Meri with E. Scapparone, 2 vols., Florence, Olschki, I: pp. 35-52.

¹³ The astrologizing Aristotelian physical core significantly includes the stellar rays ultimately derived from al-Kindi's *De radiis stellarum* that we will see more of below. I reconstruct this system in detail in the work of Albertus Magnus and Roger Bacon with reference to al-Kindi in cap. 1 and 2 of volume 1 of my monograph; *Sapientia Astrologica* I, *op. cit.* Kaske and Clark valuably discuss Ficino's actual use of Plotinus; FICINO, *Three Books on Life, op. cit.*, pp. 25-28.

¹⁴ FICINO, *De vita*, III.11.1-3: «Huc vero tendunt haec omnia ut spiritus noster rite per naturalia praeparatus atque purgatus accipiat ab ipso vitae mundanae spiritu plurimum per radios stellarum opportune susceptus». When I present translations (sometimes slightly modified) from Kaske and Clark's edition of Ficino's *De vita*, I put the page number of the translation with the translation, and the proper reference to the book, chapter and line numbers with the Latin text. In the discussion of mediators in their section on Ficino's «Habits of Thought», although they

III.20

In what follows, I will focus on a central part of Ficino's theory and practice that I believe is deeply theurgical (although he does not explicitly refer to it as such), namely, his ritual for making *imagines astronomicae* or talismans. These compound magical and ritual objects are composed of specifically designed combinations of material objects – including metals, stones/gems, plant and animal parts – which seem to function as 'σύμβολα-σύνθηματα' in the particular and extremely interesting sense articulated by Gregory Shaw, Peter Struck, Crystal Addey, Robbert Van den Berg, Sarah Johnston and others.¹⁵

Towards the beginning of Book III, chapter 20, Ficino turns from presenting his own mild views on statues and talismans to the very different views of the Arabs and Egyptians. In the process, he offers a deeper and surprising understanding of the phrase '*spiritus stellarum*':

Yet the Arabs and the Egyptians ascribe so much power to statues and talismans fashioned by astrological and magical art (*statuis imaginibusque attribuunt arte astronomica et magica fabricatis*) that they think that the spirits of the stars (*spiritus stellarum*) are enclosed in them. Now [1] some understand the spirits of the stars as wondrous celestial forces (*mirabiles coelestium vires*), while [2] others regard them as daemons (*daemonas*) attendant upon this or that star. They think that the spirits of the stars – whatever they may be – are introduced into statues and talismans in the same way that daemons customarily use, on the occasions when they take possession of human bodies and speak, move themselves or other things, and work wonders (*mirabilia*) through them. They think the spirits of the stars do similar things through talismans (*per imagines*, 351).¹⁶

usefully distinguish and discuss both human-biomedical and cosmic *spiritus*, Kaske and Clark do not at all discuss the fact that these two essential features of Ficino's system are joined, that is, mediated themselves by stellar rays, even though [1] they discuss al-Kindi's *De radiis stellarum* in other contexts, and [2] Ficino himself explicitly states that this is the case here in III.11, as well as in III.16 and elsewhere. In fact, stellar rays provide a central structure of the physics of Ficino's system in *De vita* III as I argue in my *Physics and Metaphysics of Talismans*, *art. cit.* On the basis of indisputable manuscript evidence, Robichaud also establishes that Ficino explicitly used al-Kindi's *De radiis stellarum* along with Proclus's *De sacrificio et magia* and the *Picatrix* to interpret Plotinus's views on prayers, and that this was central to his overall views in *De vita*; ROBICHAUD, *Ficino on Force, Magic, and Prayers*, *art. cit.*

¹⁵ For Ficino's view of talismans, in addition to my *Physics and Metaphysics of Talismans*, see also M. QUINLAN-MCGRATH, *Influences: Art, Optics and Astrology in the Italian Renaissance*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2013, and especially, N. WEILL-PAROT's virtually comprehensive *Les «Images astrologiques» au Moyen Âge et à la Renaissance: Spéculations intellectuelles et pratiques magiques (XIIe-XVe siècle)*, Paris, Champion, 2002, which treats Ficino towards the end (pp. 639-675). I will not properly develop the 'sumbola-sunthemata' dimension of the picture here, but will do so much more fully in my vol. II. Johnston specifically identifies the «Jovial things (*Iovialibus*)» as symbols in the properly Neoplatonic sense in *De vita* III.1.110-118, although Ficino himself does not use that terminology himself; *Animating Statues*, *art. cit.*, pp. 455-456.

¹⁶ FICINO, *De vita*, III.20.21-28: «Quanquam Arabes et Aegyptii tantum statuis imaginibusque attribuunt arte astronomica et magica fabricatis, ut spiritus stellarum in eis includi putent. Spiritus autem stellarum intelligunt alii quidem mirabiles coelestium vires, alii vero daemonas etiam stellae huius illiusve pedissequos. Spiritus igitur stellarum qualescunque sint, inseri statuis et imaginibus arbitrantur, non aliter ac daemones soleant humana nonnunquam corpora occupare, perque illa loqui, moveri, movere, mirabilia perpetrare. Similia quaedam per

The *spiritus stellarum*, whatever it is exactly, thus enters a talisman or a statue, and then uses it as an instrument.

Ficino then explains why the Arabs and Egyptians think this can be done by daemons:

They think [1] that the daemons who inhabit the cosmic fire are insinuated into our bodies through fiery or ignited humors, and likewise through ignited spirits and emotions (*affectus*). Similarly, [2] they think that through [sc. stellar] rays received at the right time (*per radios opportune susceptos*) and through incense (*suffumigationes*), lights and loud tones, the spirits of the stars can be introduced into the compatible materials of talismans, and can work wonders on the wearer or a bystander. This could indeed be done, I believe, by daemons (*per daemones*), but not so much because they have been constrained by a particular material as because they rejoice in being worshipped (*cultu gaudentes*). But I deal with these things more exhaustively elsewhere (351).¹⁷

According to Ficino, daemons can act this way not because they have been constrained somehow in matter, but rather because they enjoy being worshipped, with a clear gesture towards both the theurgical and the potentially idolatrous nature of such a transaction. In *De vita* III.14, Ficino explicitly indicates that '*daemones*' are the intermediaries between the planets (i.e. the celestial gods) and human beings in a metaphysical structure derived and systematized from Proclus's *De sacrificio et magia*.¹⁸

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imagines facere stellarum spiritus arbitrantur». Ficino had already discussed two distinct but related types of *spiritus* in Book III that I distinguish (borrowing James J. Bono's phraseology) as «human-biomedical» *spiritus*, which links the body and soul in people and is responsible for many essential functions and activities, including digestion, perception and mentation, as he also discusses in Books I and II. The other type, introduced in Book III, is «cosmic» *spiritus* that links the *anima mundi* with the physical cosmos. Kaske and Clark are useful on this (FICINO, *Three Books on Life, op. cit.*, pp. 42-44), as is D. P. Walker in his classic treatment in *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*, London, Warburg Institute, 1958. I cannot go more deeply into this rich and complex topic here. I will only focus on talismans here, and much more briefly on the closely related but equally interesting topic of statues and their animation, which has received much more scholarly attention.

¹⁷ FICINO, *De vita*, III.20.28-35: «Putant daemonas, mundani ignis habitatores, per igneos humores vel ignitos similiterque per ignitos spiritus et affectus eiusmodi nostris insinuari corporibus. Similiter stellarum spiritus per radios opportune susceptos suffumigationesque et lumina tonosque vehementes competentibus imaginum materiis inseri, mirabiliaque in gestantem vel propinquantem efficere posse. Quae quidem nos per daemonas fieri posse putamus, non tam materia certa cohibitos quam cultu gaudentes. Sed haec alibi diligentius».

¹⁸ M. J. B. ALLEN presents fascinating and directly relevant material on fumigations and daemons in the context of Ficino's Orphic singing in his *Summoning Plotinus: Ficino, Smoke, and the Strangled Chickens*, in IDEM, *Plato's Third Eye: Studies in Marsilio Ficino's Metaphysics and its Sources*, Aldershot, Variorum, 1995, xv (pp. 63-87), (original pub., 1992), esp. pp. 79-87.

In the next section of this rich chapter (III.20.36 ff), Ficino discusses the Arabs' views of a properly made talisman, in the process giving us a deeper understanding of his own views. As he notes in the title for this chapter, he is concerned with how talismans affect our spirits, and how our spirits in turn affect them.¹⁹ Here Ficino also offers more insight into our psychological attitude and its importance in making and using talismans, while not explicitly endorsing these views. Instead, he attributes them to the Arabs (as he had also just done with the *spiritus stellarum*, along with the Egyptians), thus distancing himself from these views, and at the very least allowing plausible «deniability», one of Ficino's principal rhetorical strategies in this text, especially when discussing controversial topics:

The Arabs say that when we fabricate talismans properly (*rite*), [1] our spirit – if it has been intent (*attentissimus*) upon the work (*ad opus*) and upon the stars (*ad stellas*) through imagination and emotion (*affectus*) – is joined together (*coniungi*) with [2] the very spirit of the world – i.e. with cosmic spirit (*cum ipso mundi spiritu*) – and with [3] the rays of the stars (*cum stellarum radiis*), through which the world-spirit acts (351, 353).²⁰

Here Ficino describes the linking of the the talisman-maker's spirit to both the cosmic spirit and the stellar rays at a fundamental stage in the proper making of a talisman. In fact, this represents an essential moment in theurgy when the ritual practitioner is literally joined to the gods.

This ritual and meditative process – where the talisman maker concentrates on both making the talisman and on the stars – thereby joins our spirit *directly* to the *spiritus mundi* and the stellar rays. This theurgical dimension of making talismans results, most importantly, in 'henosis'/union/conjunction with the cosmos in the form of both [1] the cosmic spirit and [2] the stellar rays through which the cosmic spirit acts, precisely the end of Iamblichean and Proclean theurgy. Although Ficino only speaks in general terms here, in making an actual talisman a specific planetary series would be employed, so that the practitioner would conjoin him or herself explicitly with a particular planetary spirit or daemon.

He continues:

And when our spirit has been so joined, it too becomes a cause of why, from the *spiritus mundi*, by means of rays (*per radios*), a spirit of a given star (*stellae alicuius spiritus*), that is, a certain vital power (*vivida quaedam virtus*), is poured into the talisman – especially a power which is consistent (*consentanea*) with the spirit of the operator. They say that a work of this kind is helped also by fumigations fitted to the stars

¹⁹ «Quantum imagines vim habere putentur in spiritum, et spiritus in eas. Et de affectu utentis et operantis»

²⁰ FICINO, *De vita*, III.20.36-39: «Tradunt Arabes spiritum nostrum quando rite fabricamus imagines, si per imaginationem et affectum ad opus attentissimus fuerit et ad stellas, coniungi cum ipso mundi spiritu atque cum stellarum radiis, per quos mundi spiritus agit»[.]

(*suffumigationibus ad stellas accommodatis*) because such fumigations thus directly affect [1] the air, [2] the rays, [3] the spirit of the maker, and [4] the matter of the talisman (353).²¹

The unnamed Arabs – by which he probably refers to both al-Kindi and the *Picatrix* – have thus expressed the view that properly designed incense, that is, incense fitted somehow to the stars, can help in making talismans effective insofar as it affects [1] the air, [2] the stellar rays, [3] the spirit of the craftsman, and [4] the matter of the talisman, that is, every factor relevant for making a talisman, except for astrological timing or «elections», which Ficino adds just below in articulating his own modified position.²²

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After this rich description of «the Arabs'» views, Ficino then tells us what he himself thinks about suffumigations *qua* their being an aroma:

But I think that aromas – being very similar in nature [1] to spirit and [2] to air, and consistent also (*consentaneos*), especially if they are burning, with [3] the rays of the stars (*stellarum [...] radiis*) – if they are Solar or Jovial, strongly influence the air and the spirit towards capturing the gifts of the Sun, or of Jupiter (*dotes Solis aut Iovis [...] capiendas*), whichever is then dominant, when [sc. the work is done] in a timely manner (*opportune*) under its rays (353)[.]²³

²¹ FICINO, *De vita*, III.20.39-44: «[A]tque ita coniunctum esse ipsum quoque in causa, ut a spiritu mundi per radios quidam stellae alicuius spiritus, id est vivida quaedam virtus, infundatur imagini, potissimum hominis tunc operantis spiritui consentanea. Adiuvari quoque suffumigationibus ad stellas accommodatis opus eiusmodi, quatenus suffumigationes tales aerem, radios, spiritum fabri, imaginis materiam sic prorsus afficiunt».

²² Kaske and Clark reasonably attribute these views of the Arabs specifically to those in the *Picatrix* and in al-Kindi's *De radiis stellarum* in their introductory section on magic; FICINO, *Three Books on Life*, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51. L. SAIF has brought our knowledge on both of them more up to date; *From Gayat al-hakim to Sams al-ma'arif: Ways of Knowing and Paths of Power in Medieval Islam*, «Arabica», LXIV, 2017, pp. 297-345. There is now a valuable English translation of the *Picatrix*: *Picatrix: A Medieval Treatise on Astral Magic*, trans. with an intro. by D. Attrell and D. Porreca, University Park, PA, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019. Both have much further bibliography. For the Latin text of al-Kindi's *De radiis stellarum*, see M. T. D'ALVERNEY and F. HUDRY, *Al-Kindi De radiis*, «Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Litteraire du Moyen Âge», XLI, 1975, pp. 139-259. For an English translation of most of it, see P. ADAMSON and P. E. PORMANN, *The Philosophical Works of Al-Kindi*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012; for most of the remaining parts, see C. S. F. BURNETT, *The Theory and Practice of Powerful Words in Medieval Magical Texts*, in *The Word in Medieval Logic, Theology and Philosophy*, ed. T. Shimizu and C. Burnett, Turnhout, Brepols, pp. 215-231. Based on the evidence of Ficino's contemporary marginal annotations to the Paris ms. of Plotinus, Robichaud has recently shown that Ficino explicitly used both al-Kindi and the *Picatrix* along with Proclus to interpret Plotinus's views on prayer, which were deeply influential in his writing of *De vita*: ROBICHAUD, *Ficino on Force, Magic, and Prayers*, *art. cit.* Attrell and Porreca valuably discuss suffumigations in the section of their introduction, «Psychoactive and/or Poisonous Substances in the *Picatrix*»; *Picatrix*, pp. 26-30.

²³ FICINO, *De vita*, III.20.44-48: «Ego vero odores quidem tamquam spiritui aeri que natura persimiles et, cum accensi sunt, stellarum quoque radiis consentaneos arbitror, si Solares vel Iovii sunt, afficere aerem ac spiritum vehementer ad dotes Solis aut Iovis tunc dominantis opportune sub radiis capiendas»[.]

Ficino thus asserts *in propria persona (ego vero [...] arbitror)* that suffumagations or incense can be used profitably to link the heavens to the earth by means of stellar rays to a person's spirit in the making of a talisman. Furthermore, especially if they are Solar and/or Jovial in nature, they can capture the sun's and Jupiter's gifts, particularly if they are made in a timely manner, that is, at an astrologically propitious time as discovered by an astrological election, one of the four canonical types of astrological practice.²⁴ Aromas also play an important role in theurgy. Given that Ficino was himself a priest, the comparison with the use of incense in Catholic ritual seems resonant.

Ficino continues with his own views:

The harder material of a talisman, however, can, I think (*puto*), scarcely catch the least bit from aromas and the imagination of the operator; but the spirit itself can be so influenced by an aroma that the two become one (*ex ambobus unum conficiatur*, 353).²⁵

I believe that Ficino means here that the *spiritus stellarum* and the *spiritus* of the operator become one in this ritual meditative process as mediated by the aroma arising from the astrologically-informed suffumigation at an astrologically propitious moment, thus literally effecting 'henosis' in the talisman maker, the ultimate theurgical goal. As it turns out, the astral body or 'ochema-pneuma' for Iamblichus – namely, the central organ for effecting 'henosis' – is also the seat of the imagination in Ficino's psychology.²⁶

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With this basic structure, Ficino then further articulates his own position about the psychological dimension of making and/or using talismans by turning to the imagination's intention:

For, when either the heat-activated power of the talisman, if there is any such power (at least there is the natural power in its well-chosen material), penetrates the flesh of the person in contact with it, or certainly

²⁴ For the different main branches of practical astrology, see C. S. F. BURNETT, *Astrology*, in *Medieval Latin: An Introduction and Bibliographical Guide*, ed. F. A. C. Mantello and A. G. Rigg, Washington, D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 1996, pp. 369-382, and the excursus to vol. I of my monograph; *Sapientia Astrologica* I, *op. cit.*, pp. lxxix-lxxxiv. The 'καίρός' is also an important concept in theurgical texts.

²⁵ FICINO, *De vita*, III.20.51-53: «Materiam vero imaginis duriorem ab odoribus et operantis imaginatione vix minimum quiddam suscipere posse puto; spiritum tamen ipsum ab odore sic affici, ut ex ambobus unum conficiatur».

²⁶ For the 'ochema-pneuma' in Iamblichus, see the classic study by J. F. FINAMORE, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul*, Chico, CA, Scholars Press, 1985, and the more up-to-date treatment focused on Ficino by A. CORRIAS, *Imagination and Memory in Marsilio Ficino's Theory of the Vehicles of the Soul*, «The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition», VI, 2012, pp. 81-114.

when the strength of medicine taken internally flows into the veins and marrow, carrying with it a Jovial property, then the human spirit is transformed (*transfertur*) into a Jovial spirit of this sort by an affect which is love; for love has the power to transform. Faith, too, and unwavering hope now calm the person's spirit which has been so excited by the Jovial spirit inside, and make it firm (353).²⁷

For Ficino, the intention has less of an effect on *making* talismans or medicines than on using, applying or taking them.

Ficino continues, this time invoking major medical authorities – Hippocrates, Galen and Avicenna:

But if, as Hippocrates and Galen teach, the love and faith of the sick person towards the doctor, a lower and external agent, are extremely conducive to health (or rather, as Avicenna says, this faith does more than medicine), how much good for achieving celestial aid should we expect from our passion and faith in a celestial influence already implanted within us, working within and penetrating our vitals? Now the same love and faith toward a celestial gift are often the cause of celestial aid; and love and faith in their turn perhaps sometimes get their start from this fact – that the kindness of the heavens is already befriending us for this very gift (353, 355).²⁸

In these deeply spiritual passages, Ficino affirms that the practitioner's (or patient's) love, hope and faith in the celestial powers – and, more generally, the emotional state of the user of both medicines and talismans – are essential to the fullest reception of these fervently desired celestial gifts, which thereby effect 'henosis' with the heavens, the ultimate end of Ficino's magico-medical and deeply astrological theurgy. There also seems to be a significant resonance here with Iamblichus's views of 'φιλία' in theurgy.

III.22

²⁷ FICINO, *De vita*, III.20.61-67: «Nam ubi vel virtus imaginis, si qua est, tangentis carnem penetrat calefacta, saltem virtus in electa eius materia naturalis, vel certe medicinae vigor intus assumptae venis ac medullis illabitur, Ioviam secum ferens proprietatem, spiritus hominis in spiritum eiusmodi Iovium affectu, id est amore, transfertur; vis enim amoris est transferre. Fides autem spesque non dubia spiritum hominis iam ita percitum sistit in spiritu Iovio penitus atque firmat».

²⁸ FICINO, *De vita*, III.20.67-75: «Quod si, quemadmodum Hippocrates et Galienus docent, aegrotantis amor fidesque erga medicum inferiorem exterioremque ad sanitatem plurimum conferunt (immo vero fiduciam hanc Avicenna plus inquit efficere quam medicinam), quantum ad coelestem opem conducere putandum est affectum fidemque nobis erga coelestem influxum iam nobis insitum, agentem intus, viscera penetrantem? Iam vero amor ipse fidesque erga coeleste donum saepe coelestis adminiculi causa est, atque vicissim amor et fides hinc aliquando forsitan proficiscitur, quod ad hoc ipsum iam nobis faveat clementia coeli».

Ficino develops these ideas further in chapter III.22, which has a three-part title. The third is most relevant for us: «How the heavens (*coelum*) act on the spirit, the body and the soul». ²⁹ Towards the beginning, Ficino discusses light and heat – the normal bases of celestial influences, along with motion – in relation to occult powers:

For just as we expose [1] the body in a timely manner (*opportune*) to the light and heat of the Sun through its daily harmony, that is, through its location, position and shape, so also [sc. we expose] [2] [sc. our] spirit in order to obtain the occult [sc. or hidden] forces of the stars (*occultis stellarum viribus comparandis* – as in the title of Book III: *De vita coelitus comparanda*) through a similar harmony of their own, obtained by talismans, as *they* believe, and certainly by medicines, and by aromas harmonically composed. ³⁰ Finally, we expose [3] [sc. our] soul and [1] our body to the same [sc. occult forces of the stars] through [2] the spirit so prepared for things above (as I have often said) – yes, [sc. our] soul (*anima*), insofar as it is inclined by its desire to the spirit and the body (my emphasis, 363, 365). ³¹

Ficino here emphasizes the influence of the occult or hidden powers of the stars directly on our souls – as well as on our bodies and spirit – by means of a properly prepared spirit along with the soul's desire. He says so here forcefully and *in propria persona*. This is a major flouting of medieval astrological safeguards in that, in the medieval period, that is, *without* an ensouled cosmos, the influences from the celestial *bodies* by means of their stellar rays – which were also there, but were not alive, another major transformation in Ficino's system – only acted *directly* on a person's *body* and only indirectly, if at all, on their mind, and thus on their souls. ³² In Ficino's case, the individual soul's desire is also an essential factor in this process.

Ficino then discusses fate and further articulates his views:

The Chaldaeans, Egyptians and Platonists – [and thus Ficino: this is precisely his genealogy, and most of the lineup in the title to his own paraphrase-translation-interpretation of Iamblichus's *De mysteriis*] – think that by this method one can avoid the malice of fate (*malignitas fati*). For since they do not wish that the celestials be empty bodies (*corpora vana*), but bodies divinely ensouled (*divinitus animata* [as Ficino also does!]), and directed moreover by divine minds (*mentibus recta divinis*), no wonder they

²⁹ «Quomodo septem modis nos coelestibus accomodare possumus, et quibus Saturnus sit maleficus, quibus propitius; quos Iuppiter a Saturno defendat. Quomodo coelum agat in spiritum et corpus et animam»

³⁰ Ficino's theory of how to make compound medicaments and how they work – which he articulates in detail in III.12 – provides his model for how to make talismans and how they work in III.13-22. They also include both manifest and occult powers, and have a four-fold astrological structure, as I will analyze in detail in my volume II.

³¹ FICINO, *De vita*, III.22.11-17: «Sicut enim [1] corpus per harmoniam quotidie suam, id est per situm et habitum et figuram opportune lumini calori que Solis exponimus, sic et [2] spiritum occultis stellarum viribus comparandis per suam quandam similem harmoniam imaginibus (ut opinantur) et certe medicinis, odoribus harmonice compositis comparatam. Et denique [3] per spiritum superis ita paratum, ut saepe iam diximus, animam eisdem exponimus atque corpus – animam, inquam, quatenus affectu ad spiritum inclinatur et corpus».

³² I discuss these medieval safeguards in Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas and Roger Bacon at length in cap. 4 and 5 of my *Sapientia Astrologica* I, *op. cit.*

believe that as many good things as possible come forth from thence for men, goods pertaining not only to our body and spirit, but also overflowing somewhat into our soul (*in animam redundantia*); and not into our soul from [sc. their] *bodies*, but from [sc. their] *souls*. And they believe too that the same sorts of things and more flow out from those minds which are above the heavens (my emphases, 367).³³

In this passage articulating structures that are absolutely essential to his astrologico-medico-magical system, Ficino indicates clearly how human beings with their bodies, spirits and souls fit into this divinely fabricated cosmic structure – that is, the metaphysically inflected cosmology described in III.1 as made by the ‘*anima mundi*’, and with the deeply astrological human physiology articulated in III.11.³⁴ These may all be used to fill in the picture here, and thereby reconnect major features of the *disiecta membra* of Ficino’s richly articulated system.

If I am correct in my interpretation, they also show clearly how Ficino understood theurgical ‘henosis’, where the divinely animated planets – Iamblichus’s encosmic or celestial gods – could fill a person’s properly prepared body and spirit, along with their desirous soul, by means of intensive heavenly to human, body to spirit to soul contact. In this ritual for making talismans, the theurgist could thus effect ‘henosis’ with the celestial gods, precisely the aim of Ficino’s overall medico-spiritual endeavor, which thereby embraces, imitates and in part transforms by more fully astrologizing central Iamblichean and Proclan theurgical structures and orientations. We should note that Ficino also refers to the Noetic gods here too.

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To complete III.22 (108-19), Ficino offers a valuable recapitulation, in which he clarifies this entire discussion, including the roles of living stellar rays and of planetary and human souls. Here he does so, significantly, *in propria persona*, as he had also done at the beginning of III.11, as we saw:

Finally, wherever we say «celestial goods descend to us (*coelestium ad nos dona descendere*)», understand: [1] [with respect to bodies] that gifts of the celestial *bodies* come into our *bodies* through our rightly prepared spirit. [2] [With respect to spirits] that even before that, through their rays these same [sc. gifts] flow into a spirit exposed to them naturally, or by whatever means [that is, by art, namely, by

³³ FICINO, *De vita*, III.22.83-90: «Hoc enim pacto malignitatem fati devitari posse Chaldaei et Aegyptii atque Platonici putant. Cum enim coelestia nolint esse corpora vana, sed divinitus animata atque insuper mentibus recta divinis, nimirum illinc ad homines non solum quam plurima ad corpus et spiritum pertinentia, sed multa etiam bona quodammodo in animam redundantia proficisci volunt, non a corporibus in animam sed ab animis. Magis autem haec pluraque eiusmodi a mentibus superioribus coelo profluere». Iamblichus himself in *De mysteriis* embodies all three: as a Platonist under the guise of an Egyptian priest who himself cites the Chaldaean Oracles. Regarding *redundantia*, Hankins also discusses this material, albeit differently, in his *Ficino, Avicenna, art. cit.*

³⁴ I will discuss these more fully in my vol. II.

talismans and medicines].³⁵ And [3] [with respect to souls] that the goods of the celestial *souls* (*animarum coelestium bona*) partly [a] leap forth into this our spirit [literally, «the same spirit»] through rays, and from there overflow into our souls (*hinc in nostros animos redundare*), and partly [b] come straight from their souls or from angels into the souls of human beings exposed to them – exposed, I say, not so much by some natural means as by the choice of free will or by desire [sc. on the part of the receiving person’s soul] (369, my emphasis).³⁶

Here precisely is the culminating «theurgical moment», in which the person literally becomes celestial – by means of both direct and indirect, occult and manifest body to body, spirit to spirit, and especially soul to soul contact – celestial to human – in a divine celestial ‘henosis’ focused on a particular planetary series, although Ficino only describes it in general terms here.³⁷

Ficino continues, completing the passage:

In sum, consider that those who by prayer, by study, by [sc. their manner of] life, and their conduct imitate the beneficence, action and order of the celestials [i.e. the celestial gods in theurgy], since they are more similar to the gods (*supernis similiores*), receive fuller gifts from there. Moreover, consider too that men artificially made dissimilar and discordant to the disposition of the celestials are secretly miserable and in the end become openly unhappy (369).³⁸

By thus choosing to imitate the celestials, human beings make themselves happy and healthy by fully connecting themselves by opening themselves up – body, spirit and soul – to the divine by means of cosmic spirit, stellar rays and planetary souls. I believe that we should call this

³⁵ Hankins considers the other means here to be possibly either grace or ascetic practices; *Ficino, Avicenna, art. cit.* He also brings Ficino’s commentary on Plato’s *Laws* VI to bear on these matters, but I cannot go any further into his interesting and provocative interpretation here. I will discuss his article further in my vol. II.

³⁶ FICINO, *De vita*, III.22.108-115: «Denique ubicunque dicimus coelestium ad nos dona descendere, intellige tum corporum coelestium dotes in corpora nostra venire per spiritum nostrum rite paratum, tum eadem prius etiam per radios suos influere in spiritum naturaliter vel quomodocunque illis expositum, tum etiam animarum coelestium bona partim in eundem spiritum per radios prosilire atque hinc in nostros animos redundare, partim ab animis eorum vel ab angelis in animos hominum illis expositos pervenire – expositos, inquam, non tam naturali quodam pacto quam electione arbitrii liberi vel affectu».

³⁷ Ficino discusses the celestial series in detail in *De vita* III.14 as drawn in large measure and developed from Proclus’s *De sacrificio et magia*, which Ficino had himself translated.

³⁸ FICINO, *De vita*, III.22.115-119: «Summatim vero quicunque voto, studia, vita, moribus beneficentiam, actionem, ordinem coelestium imitantur, eos existimato tanquam supernis similiores ampliores illinc dotes accipere. Homines autem artificiose coelestium dispositioni dissimiles atque discordes et clam esse miseros et denique palam infelices evadere».

foundational choosing a decisive free-will action of astrologically-mediated ‘epistrophe’, a deliberate and conscious turning towards the heavens, and thereby to the celestial gods therein.³⁹

In fact, Ficino is being very precise and explicit here, speaking as he is *in propria persona*. This is uncharacteristic for him, especially in the *De vita*, and despite the undoubtedly controversial nature of his claims. Here Ficino states explicitly that the goods of celestial bodies and their *souls* – together with the *spiritus mundi* that the stellar rays mediate – act directly on *our* bodies, spirits *and* souls. There is, however, no talk here of the daemons that mediate between the planets and human beings, but only of celestial souls and angels. Perhaps discussing daemons here would have been too provocative, but they are certainly implied by his ‘*disiecta membra*’ from the title of III.1, from III.14, and from the discussion just above in III.20. Precisely here arises the great religio-spiritual – i.e. theurgical – value in having a Platonic ensouled universe.

CONCLUSION

I would like to complete this essay by citing *in extenso* the final passage on making statues from *De vita*’s final chapter, Book III, chapter 26:

But now let us get back to Hermes, or rather to Plotinus. Hermes says that the priests received an appropriate power from the nature of the cosmos and mixed it [i.e. with the materials in the statues]. Plotinus follows him [i.e. Hermes] and thinks that everything can be easily accomplished with the intermediation of the *anima mundi*, the soul of the world, since she generates and moves the forms of natural things by means of certain seminal reasons implanted in her from the divine. *These reasons he also calls gods*, since they are never cut off from the ideas of the supreme mind.⁴⁰ [Sc. He thinks], therefore, that by means of reasons of this sort, the *anima mundi* can easily apply herself to matter, which she has formed in the beginning (*ab initio*) by means of these same [sc. seminal reasons], when a Magus or a priest brings to bear (*adhibuerit*) at the right times (*opportunitis temporibus*) the forms of things gathered properly – [sc. forms] which properly aim towards one reason or another, as the lodestone toward iron, rhubarb toward choler, saffron toward the heart, agrimony and spodium toward the liver, spikenard and musk toward the brain. But, sometimes it can happen that when you bring seminal reasons to bear on forms, higher gifts too may descend (*sublimiora quoque dona descendant*), since reasons in the *anima mundi* are conjoined to the intellectual forms in her, and through these to the ideas of the divine mind. Iamblichus too approves this when he deals with sacrifices [i.e. theurgy] (*ubi de sacrificiis agit*), on which subject we will dispute more seasonably at another place, where also it will appear how impure was the superstition of the heathen but how pure was the piety of the Gospel – which for the most part we have already done in our book *De religione Christiana* (my emphasis, 391, 393; III.26.122-39).⁴¹

³⁹ For a basic general knowledge of Neoplatonism, including such fundamental concepts as ‘epistrophe’ (= ‘Reversion’ in the index), see (e.g.) R. T. WALLIS, *Neoplatonism*, 2nd ed. with a foreword and updated bibliography by L. Gerson, London, Duckworth, 1995 (1st ed, 1972).

⁴⁰ Ficino described this fundamental structure in detail at the very beginning of Book III in cap. 1.

⁴¹ Giglioni discusses Ficino’s terminology for the theurgist as a Magus, philosopher or priest (*sacerdos*); GIGLIONI, *Theurgy and Philosophy*, art. cit. pp. 6-7. *Opportunitis temporibus* refers to the right astrologically determined time, as so often in *De vita*.

As Robichaud emphasizes in a recent article, the last authorities mentioned in the main text of the *De vita*, i.e. before the two pre-emptive and apparently successful Apologies, are, in this order: Hermes/Mercurius, Plotinus and Iamblichus. That Ficino ends with Iamblichus is significant, and points directly to his theurgically-inflected and thus essentially post-Plotinian Neoplatonic philosophico-spiritual agenda with its proper genealogy.⁴²

In this final chapter, Ficino also famously describes nature as a *maga*, and explains that the philosopher-*magus* – who is also a priest – thoroughly understands both nature and the heavens, including human beings. In this view, Ficino’s deeply astrological medico-magical theurgy reaches up through the daemons, to the planets and the stars, and beyond, including to the souls of the planets and to the ideas in the divine mind (which he explicitly refers to as «gods» here), precisely where people thus connected may be renewed in body, spirit and soul.

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I have presented a mere sketch here for a broader interpretation of Ficino’s richly complex system by bringing together – i.e. by reconnecting – some of the major *disiecta membra* in *De vita* that had been split up according to Ficino’s ‘*dispersa intentio*’. In the *De vita*, Ficino presents a system of astrologico-magical medicine towards the valuable ends of physical and mental health, but also, ultimately, for the greater good of spiritual renewal that is nothing less than a mode of self-divinization by means of theurgical ritual and meditative practices. These practices are centrally concerned with connecting peoples’ embodied souls via their human-biomedical *spiritus* to the ensouled living celestial gods – and their respective two-fold *spiritus stellarum* – by means of al-Kindi’s now-living stellar rays. In this way, the central theurgic aim of ‘henosis theo’, «union with God», is effected precisely by means of Iamblichean ‘henosis kosmo’, as Gregory Shaw has persuasively argued.

On these and other relevant bases, I have argued that Ficino’s *De vita* should be understood, at least in part, as a manual of theurgy under the two-fold guises of an astrologico-magical medical text and a commentary on Plotinus. This represents Ficino’s particular astrologizing take on the subject of theurgical theory and practice, although he does not explicitly identify it as such. If we know anything at all about this brilliantly creative and eclectic scholar-philosopher, however, it is that he had manuscripts collected for him, primarily in Greek, of all the available relevant sources, many of which he himself translated and/or paraphrased into Latin – often with commentaries and/or interpretations – and later published. He then integrated them in his own inimitable and insightful manner, transforming them ultimately into his own uniquely creative – and distinctively Renaissance – literary and philosophical amalgam.

⁴² See C. S. CELENZA, *Late Antiquity and Florentine Platonism: The ‘Post-Plotinian’ Ficino*, in *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, ed. M. J. B. Allen, V. Rees and M. Davies, Leiden, Brill, 2002, pp. 71-97. Celenza’s insightful and influential article touches on many issues relevant to my essay, esp. at pp. 92-97. For a discussion of Ficino’s *De christiana religione*, see REGIER’s contribution to this volume.