

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Astrology (1486–1493): From *Scientia Naturalis* to the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam*

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE astrological ideas of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–94) still remains one of the most intriguing aspects of his legacy.¹ Although Pico explicitly dedicated only his last philosophical treatise, the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* (1493–94), to the study of astrology, his views on the subject can be found in nearly all his texts.² The current article aims to show the evolution of Pico’s philosophical outlook from 1486 to 1493, the year in which he started writing the *Disputationes*. This focus on Giovanni Pico’s astrological views will illustrate the development of his *itinéraire philosophique* from early Neoplatonic writings and ambitious theological projects to the later biblical commentaries. While at an early stage of his career Pico was fascinated by recently discovered sources such as the Kabbalah, Plato, and Neoplatonic writings as a means of interpreting astrology, he would eventually deviate from them. Between 1489 and 1491 he posited for the first time the question of the communication of two essential as-

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1. On Pico’s biography, see Louis Valcke, *Pic de la Mirandole: Un itinéraire philosophique* (Paris, 2005).

2. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*, 2 vols., ed. Eugenio Garin (Turin, 2004). Originally published in 1946–52, this is the sole modern edition of the *Disputationes*. On its structure, see Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 8 vols. (New York, 1923–58), 4:529–43; Giancarlo Zanier, “Struttura e significato delle *Disputationes pichiane*,” *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana* 1, no. 1 (1981): 54–86.

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trological and philosophical categories, light and matter. For Pico, the problem in question was a part of his major philosophical project on the reconciliation of Plato and Aristotle, an issue that was central for fifteenth-century Italian Renaissance thought. It is also worth noting that his treatise *De Ente et Uno*, devoted specifically to the Plato-Aristotle question, appeared in the same period. However, Pico did not succeed in combining the notion of celestial light interpreted within a Neoplatonic framework with Aristotelian physics. The failure ended his reconciliation attempts, while the *De Ente et Uno* marked the reconsideration of his philosophical method, which from that moment on addressed his intention to purify major figures such as Plato and Aristotle from subsequent interpretations and to go *ad fontes*. His return to Aristotle and other classical authors in the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* had clear philosophical implications, as this essay will show, while the development of his astrological views from 1486 through 1493 sheds light on the evolution of his philosophical itinerary.³

Pico's comments on astrology in his earlier works before the *Disputationes*—a work characterized as “the most extensive and incisive attack on astrology that the world had yet seen”⁴—have been studied by several scholars over the years, but their conclusions often seem to be in conflict with one another. Eugenio Garin, the author of a fundamental biography of Pico and the editor of the *Disputationes*, claimed that the Count of Mirandola never supported astrological speculation. According to Garin, Pico's attack on astrology in the *Disputationes* strongly influenced the future scientific revolution and the revision of ancient notions of cosmography.⁵ Daniel Walker and then Frances A. Yates tried to show that, on the contrary, Pico never criticized magic and astrology and that even in the *Disputationes* he had intended to distinguish *magia naturalis* from occult influences.⁶ Giancarlo Zanier's

3. I here echo Valcke's title, “Un itinéraire philosophique.”

4. Steven vanden Broecke, *The Limits of Influence: Pico, Louvain, and the Crisis of Renaissance Astrology* (Leiden, 2003), 55.

5. Eugenio Garin, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: Vita e dottrina* (Florence, 1937), 169–93. However, Garin did not confirm his views with sufficient arguments. The potential influence of Pico on new astronomical ideas is now hotly discussed because of Robert Westman's study *The Copernican Question: Prognostication, Skepticism, and Celestial Order* (Berkeley, 2011).

6. Daniel P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (University Park, PA, 2000), 54–59; Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London, 1964), 114–15. Moreover, in one of his articles on the subject, Walker supposed that Pico's treatise was motivated by Ficino's unfinished *Disputatio contra iudicium astrologorum*; Daniel P. Walker, “Ficino and Astrology,” in *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone: Studi e documenti*, 2 vols., ed. Giancarlo Garfagnini (Florence, 1986), 1:341–49. Having noted the similarity of the titles of Ficino's and Pico's treatises and the Count of Mirandola's statement that it was Ficino who had advised him to attack astrological predictions (*Disputationes*, vol. 1, bk. 1, 60), Walker presumed that the *Disputatio contra iudicium astrologorum* could have been written around 1493 and that consequently it had influenced Pico. How-

and Paola Zambelli's attempts to analyze Pico's early views on astrology were limited to the *Conclusiones*,⁷ while several scholars clearly revealed Pico's orientation toward Aristotle's physical ideas in the *Disputationes* but did not explain what motivated his shift from Plato to Aristotle in his late treatise.⁸

More recently, Louis Valcke has called attention to some interesting aspects of astrological polemics in the context of Pico's criticism of Neoplatonic Orphism, suggesting that the *De Ente et Uno* was the peak of Pico's *itinéraire philosophique*.⁹ He concludes his book with a chapter on the agreement between Plato and Aristotle as the central point of Pico's *modus philosophandi*. For Valcke, the *Disputationes* is not significant for a consideration of Pico's philosophical legacy—a conclusion with which I will disagree in the following pages. Finally, Darrel Rutkin has urged scholars to reconsider Frances Yates's theses on Pico and astrology.¹⁰ He argues for the innovative and revolutionary aspects of Pico's *vera astrologia*, particularly in regard to his use of the Kabbalah, making him the first so-called Christian Kabbalist.¹¹

ever, P. O. Kristeller, using some indirect proofs, argued that Ficino had worked on these anti-astrological notes around 1477, an opinion now generally accepted. For the history of the dating of the *Disputatio* and its context, see Ornella Pompeo Faracovi, "Introduzione a Marsilio Ficino," in Marsilio Ficino, *Scritti sull'astrologia*, ed. Ornella Pompeo Faracovi (Milan, 1999), 5–36.

7. Giancarlo Zanier, "Il problema astrologico nelle prime opere di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola," *La Cultura* 8 (1970): 524–51; Paola Zambelli, *L'apprendista stregone. Astrologia, cabala e arte lulliana in Pico della Mirandola e seguaci* (Venice, 1995), 31–53.

8. Brian Vickers, "Critical Reactions to the Occult Sciences during the Renaissance," in *Scientific Enterprise: The Bar-Hillel Colloquium; Studies in History, Philosophy, and Sociology of Science*, vol. 4, ed. Edna Ullmann-Margalit (Dordrecht, 1992), 43–92; Ornella Pompeo Faracovi, *Scritto negli astri: L'astrologia nella cultura dell'Occidente* (Venice, 1996), 224–33; vanden Broecke, *Limits of Influence*, 55–80. Other recent studies on the *Disputationes*, its authorship, and Pico's astrology include Sheila Rabin, "Pico on Magic and Astrology," in *Pico della Mirandola: New Essays*, ed. Michael V. Dougherty (Cambridge, 2008), 152–78; Brian Copenhaver, "Studied as an Oration: Readers of Pico's Letters, Ancient and Modern," in *Laus Platonici Philosophi: Marsilio Ficino and His Influence*, ed. Stephen Clucas, Peter J. Forshaw, and Valery Rees (Leiden, 2011), 155–98.

9. Valcke, *Pic de la Mirandole*, 295–319. Valcke's idea to connect the first Pico-Ficino controversy related to the *Commento alla Canzona d'amore*, and Pico's further attack on astrology seems doubtful, for these texts were written at different stages of Pico's intellectual career, while the problems they deal with are not related to each other.

10. Darrel Rutkin, "Astrology, Natural Philosophy and the History of Science, c. 1250–1700: Studies toward an Interpretation of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2002), "Magia, cabala, vera astrologia: Le prime considerazioni sull'astrologia di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola," in *Nello specchio del cielo. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola e le "Disputationes contro l'astrologia divinatoria,"* ed. Marco Bertozzi (Florence, 2008), 31–45, and "The Use and Abuse of Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* in Renaissance and Early Modern Europe: Two Case Studies (Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Filippo Fantoni)," in *Ptolemy in Perspective: Use and Criticism of His Work from Antiquity to the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Alexander Jones (Dordrecht, 2010), 135–49.

11. I prefer to use the spelling "Kabbalah" rather than any other variant, as it better conforms with the Hebrew pronunciation. For the history of the concept of Christian Kabbalah, see François Secret, *I cabbalisti cristiani del Rinascimento* (Rome, 2001), originally published in French in 1964. An ambi-

Rutkin's analysis of Pico's astrology in his early works and in the *Disputationes* contains some interesting details. He successfully situates the *Disputationes* within medieval and Renaissance astrological literature, and as a result his studies are useful for a better understanding of the development of astrological speculation from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. He has justly placed Pico's *Disputationes* at the center of this movement.

However, some of Rutkin's conclusions seem to be questionable, such as his major claim that Pico's *Disputationes* were directed against Marsilio Ficino and specifically against his *De vita libri tres* written in 1489. He even calls it the "third Pico-Ficino controversy."¹² But Rutkin does not pay special attention to Ficino's texts written during those five years (especially *De sole* and *De lumine*) and disregards some of Pico's own works, including the *Expositiones in Psalmos*. He neglected the development of Pico's and Ficino's philosophical outlooks around 1490, even though the period in question was crucial for both of them. Pico's motivation for attacking Ficino and allegedly responding to the *De vita* also remains unclear.

While much scholarly literature on Pico has suggested that he altered his original views because of the influence of Savonarola—who arrived in Florence in 1490 precisely at Pico's request¹³—this essay will instead argue that he recognized on his own that astrology was ultimately incompatible with the combination of Aristotelianism and Platonism that he eventually embraced in his later writings. In tracing his earlier views on astrology before the *Disputationes*, I will show how Pico moved from strong attachments to the doctrines of Neoplatonism and Kabbalah to a deep

tious project on the Kabbalistic library of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola is currently being directed by Giulio Busi, with the following volumes already published: Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada, *The Great Parchment: Flavius Mithridates' Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text, and an English Version*, ed. Giulio Busi, Simonetta Bondoni, and Saverio Campanini (Turin, 2004); *The Book of Bahir: Flavius Mithridates' Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text, and an English Version*, ed. Saverio Campanini (Turin, 2005); and *The Gate of Heaven: Flavius Mithridates' Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text, and an English Version*, ed. Susanne Jurgan and Saverio Campanini (Turin, 2012). On the problem of Giovanni Pico's Kabbalistic library, see Giulio Busi, "Chi non 'ammirerà il nostro camaleonte?' La biblioteca cabbalistica di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola," in his *L'enigma dell'ebraico nel Rinascimento* (Turin, 2007), 25–45.

12. Rutkin, "Astrology, Natural Philosophy and the History of Science," 337–38, 357–91. Pico attacked Ficino twice. In the *Commento* and later in the *De Ente et Uno*, he criticized Ficino's approach to interpreting Plato and Platonic tradition. For Rutkin, the *Disputationes* thus marked the third Pico-Ficino controversy.

13. This fact has been described even in fiction, an interesting example of which is Thomas Mann's play *Fiorenza* (1905). The idea that Savonarola influenced Pico's anti-astrological attack was debated immediately after Pico's death. Among its supporters were two of the most significant opponents of the *Disputationes*, Lucio Bellanti and Giovanni Pontano. See Ornella Pompeo Faracovi, "In difesa dell'astrologia: Risposte a Pico in Bellanti e Pontano," in Bertozzi, *Nello specchio del cielo*, 47–66. See also Giovanni Pontano, *De fortuna*, ed. Francesco Tateo (Naples, 2012), 290–94.

interest in the “natural science” of Aristotle. I intend to demonstrate that around 1490, as he attempted to combine Aristotelian physics and the Neoplatonic doctrine of light, Giovanni Pico found himself in a difficult position, one that would later cause him to revise his natural philosophical views in the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*.

In what follows, I address Pico’s remarks on astrology in six of his treatises. Four are from the first period, that is, before and during his thwarted dispute in Rome in 1486. Pico wrote the *Commento alla Canzona d’amore di Girolamo Benivieni* in Italian before arriving in Rome.¹⁴ The *Conclusiones*, the *Oratio de hominis dignitate* (often referred to as “the great Renaissance proclamation of a modern ideal of human dignity and freedom”), and the *Apologia* formed a single project, the Roman dispute,¹⁵ which never took place because of the accusation of heresy.¹⁶ I then turn to two exegetical works of the second period, written in Florence: the *Heptaplus* (1489) in which Pico attempted to comment on Creation using the Hebrew Kabbalistic tradition rather than relying on classical exegesis,¹⁷ and fragments of Pico’s unfinished *Commentaries on Psalms* (1491/92), collected from various manuscripts into a single book and published in 1997 by Antonio Raspanti.¹⁸ Although the sty-

14. Pico probably decided to write his *Commento* in Italian since the original work by Benivieni was written in Italian as well. For the text of Pico as well of that of Benivieni, see Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, “Commento alla Canzona d’amore,” in *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno e scritti vari*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Turin, 2004), 445–581.

15. For *Conclusiones*, see Stephen A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West: Pico’s “900 Theses” (1486); The Evolution of Traditional Religious and Philosophical Systems* (Tempe, AZ, 1998). I have used the classical edition of *Oratio de hominis dignitate*: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, “De hominis dignitate,” in Garin, *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno e scritti vari*, 102–65. See also Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Discorso sulla dignità dell’uomo*, ed. Francesco Bausi (Parma, 2003). For the recent English translation, see Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man: A New Translation and Commentary*, ed. Francesco Borghesi et al. (Cambridge, 2012). In-text quotation is from Brian P. Copenhaver, “The Secret of Pico’s Oration: Cabala and Renaissance Philosophy,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 26 (2002): 58. For *Apologia*, see Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Apologia: L’autodifesa di Pico di fronte al Tribunale dell’Inquisizione*, ed. Paolo Edoardo Fornaciari (Florence, 2010).

16. In Rome, Pico intended to present his project of religious and philosophical synthesis. However, the *Conclusiones* were condemned by the Inquisition. After his unsuccessful attempt to escape from Rome, Pico spent several months in prison. In 1488 Lorenzo de’ Medici managed to persuade Pope Innocent VIII to release Pico from prison. On the documents regarding Pico’s trial, see Léon Dorez and Léon Thuasne, *Pic de la Mirandole en France (1485–1488)* (Paris, 1897).

17. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, “Heptaplus,” in Garin, *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno e scritti vari*, 168–382. This text was first published by Garin in 1942. For an analysis of the *Heptaplus*, see Crofton Black, *Pico’s “Heptaplus” and Biblical Hermeneutics* (Leiden, 2006); Brian Ogren, “The Forty-Nine Gates of Wisdom as Forty-Nine Ways to Christ: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s *Heptaplus* and Nahmanidean Kabbalah,” *Rinascimento* 49 (2009): 27–43.

18. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Ioannis Pici Mirandulae expositiones in Psalmos*, ed. Antonio Raspanti (Florence, 1997).

listic features and purposes of these works are quite different, my analysis will show that Pico missed few opportunities to clarify his position on astrology and magic in his writings.

COMMENTO ALLA CANZONA D'AMORE

The *Commento alla Canzona d'amore* is Pico's first essay that depends on (Neo) Platonic interpretation. Directed against his friend and colleague Ficino, the *Commento* is often referred to in the context of the first Pico-Ficino controversy.¹⁹ Objecting to his elder contemporary, Pico created his own Neoplatonic system of the world, strongly inspired by astrological interpretations. In the center of mankind Pico places God, the principle and the cause of every divine being.²⁰ As Pico claims, Hermes, Zoroaster, and the "Platonists" identified the first creation of such a God as "the Son of God, the Wisdom, the Mind of God," which had nothing in common with the Christian God. The first creation, also called the first reason and not to be confused with Jesus, had, in turn, created the rational soul.²¹ Warning against such comparisons with Jesus Christ, Pico also criticized Ficino's interpretation of Platonic supposition about the creation of the human soul by God.²²

In Pico's doctrine, astrology is strongly related to three substances. As Pico claims, ancient theologians attributed to God, to the First Reason, and to the rational soul the virtues of Caelus, Saturn, and Jupiter, respectively.²³ This structure corresponds to the traditional Neoplatonic triad. Pico's decision to include Caelus (Uranus) in his triad may be explained by two reasons. First, he probably knew the legend described in Cicero's *De natura deorum* about Kronos (replaced by Saturn in the Roman tradition) castrating his father Caelus, from whose genitals, as from *semina rerum*, Venus (Aphrodite) was born.²⁴ Moreover, in his *Divinarum*

19. On the Pico-Ficino controversies, see Michael J. B. Allen, "The Second Ficino-Pico Controversy: Parmenidean Poetry, Eristic and the One," in Garfagnini, *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, 2:418–55; Maude Vanhaelen, "The Pico-Ficino Controversy: New Evidence in Ficino's Commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*," *Rinascimento* 49 (2009): 1–39; Unn Aasdalen, "The First Pico-Ficino Controversy," in Clucas, Forshaw, and Rees, *Laus Platonici Philosophi*, 67–88.

20. Pico della Mirandola, *Commento alla Canzona d'amore*, bk. 1, chap. 3, 464.

21. *Ibid.*, bk. 1, chap. 5, 466.

22. *Ibid.*, bk. 1, chap. 4, 466.

23. *Ibid.*, bk. 1, chap. 8, 470.

24. Cicero, *De natura deorum libri tres*, 3 vols., ed. Joseph B. Mayor and J. H. Swainson (Cambridge, 2010), vol. 2, bk. 25, 64. On Caelus's *semina rerum*, see Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 3 vols., ed. and trans. Robert A. Kaster (Cambridge, MA, 2011), vol. 1, bk. 1, chap. 8, 6–9. The concept of seeds or, according to Plotinus, *logoi spermatikoi*, in the Renaissance, especially in Ficino's *De vita*, has been studied by Brian Copenhaver, "Renaissance Magic and Neoplatonic Philosophy: 'Ennead' 4.3–5 in Ficino's 'De vita coelitus comparanda,'" in Garfagnini, *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, 2:351–69; Hiro Hirai, "Concepts of Seeds and Nature in the Work of Marsilio Ficino," in *Marsilio Ficino*:

institutionum libri, Lactantius described some of Plotinus's ideas, referring to three divine hypostases and calling them, as Pico would do, Caelus (the First), Saturn (or Kronos, Intellect) and Jupiter (Soul).²⁵ In the *Commento*, however, only Saturn and Jupiter receive astrological characteristics: Pico follows tradition and identifies Jupiter as the rational soul who exerts a positive influence on politicians and active people, while Saturn, according to the well-known astrological practice, has an impact on more meditative types.²⁶ Moreover, following the Neoplatonic tradition, Pico regarded the eight celestial spheres as animated substances.²⁷ This idea means that each planet has a character of its own, and Pico specifies that Venus is situated near Mars in order to balance the destructive influence of her husband with her positive energy; almost the same effect takes place between "positive" Jupiter and "negative" Saturn.²⁸

Pico also shows how the animated spheres operate. He states, in addition to the eight spheres—the stars and the seven planets—there is a ninth (the rational soul) and a tenth sphere (the immovable first reason) that govern the sublunar world. This structure allowed Pico to combine classical astronomical techniques with the Neoplatonic trinity, placing the immovable Neoplatonic God beyond physical and even metaphysical reality. In order to reconcile the Neoplatonic structure of the world with classical astrology, Pico uses ten spheres in his system—seven planets and the Neoplatonic trinity.²⁹ In the later *Disputationes*, however, he refused to support any planetary doctrine (i.e., the doctrine of eight, nine, or ten spheres) and even cited contradictions among astrologers on this subject to show the incompatibility of astrology with physical data and, consequently, the falsity of predictions as such.³⁰ But in the early *Commento*, where he leans toward Neoplato-

His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy, ed. Michael J. B. Allen and Valery Rees (Leiden, 2002), 257–84, and *Le concept de semence dans les théories de la matière à la Renaissance: De Marsile Ficin à Pierre Gassendi* (Turnhout, 2005).

25. Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, "Religion, Law and the Roman Polity: The Era of the Great Persecution," in *Religion and Law in Classical and Christian Rome*, ed. Clifford Ando and Jörg Rüpke (Stuttgart, 2006), 78–79.

26. Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art* (London, 1964).

27. Pico della Mirandola, *Commento alla Canzona d'amore*, vol. 1, bk. 11, 477–78.

28. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, bk. 8, 496.

29. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, bk. 15, 506. On the history of the spheres, see the fundamental work by Michel-Pierre Lerner, *Le monde des sphères*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1996–97). In the late Middle Ages, it was quite common to admit the existence of more than eight spheres (seven planets and a sphere of stars) to explain motion associated not directly with planets or stars.

30. On this subject, see Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*, vol. 2, bk. 8, 228–32. See also Ovanes Akopyan, "Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Ptolemy and the 'Astrological Tradition,'" *Accademia (Revue de la Société Marsile Ficin)* 12 (2010): 43–45.

nism, Pico explains that divine light penetrates everything and can be found everywhere, although he does not offer further explanation as to how this light combines with sublunar matter.³¹ Pico limits himself instead to traditional Neoplatonic interpretations, linking them to widely circulating medieval astrological concepts, such as the significance of Jupiter and Saturn. Nor does he explain the process of the direct influence of heaven on earth. The *Commento* thus seems to be a very general introduction to the question of astrology. Pico would clarify most of these preliminary ideas in his subsequent writings.

TRILLOGY

Although the central treatise of the *Trilogy* is the *900 Conclusiones*, it would be better to begin the analysis of Pico's relatively early (1486–87) views on magic with the *Oratio de hominis dignitate*. The *Oratio*, one of the best known works of the Renaissance, was conceived as an introduction to the Roman dispute of 1486. In this text, Pico intended to set out his ideas in a general way, with a view to further developing them in the *Conclusiones*. Given that the text of the *900 Conclusiones* is rather too complicated for a detailed analysis—a fact well illustrated by the lack of satisfactory editions³²—the *Oratio* may serve as a useful preface to Pico's main philosophical text of that period.

Insofar as magic was thought to have two dimensions, Pico begins the *Oratio* by contrasting magic's illicit form based on demonic incantations—now commonly referred to as “black magic”—to natural magic.³³ In his view, the latter is strongly related to philosophical and theological matters and was founded in the East by the *prisci theologi*, whose legacy derives from Zoroaster and Hermes Trismegistus. In

31. Pico della Mirandola, *Commento alla Canzona d'amore*, vol. 1, bk. 10, 476.

32. With the exception of Farmer's aforementioned edition, other editions—in French and in Italian—have no commentary, while Bohdan Kieszkowski's contains numerous errors. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Conclusiones sive theses DCCCC Romee anno 1486 publice disputandae, sed non admissae. Texte établi d'après le MS. d'Erlangen (E) et l'editio princeps (P), collationné avec les manuscrits de Vienne (V et W) et de Munich (M)*, ed. Bohdan Kieszkowski (Geneva, 1973), and *Conclusiones nongentae: Le novecento tesi dell'anno 1486*, ed. Albano Biondi (Florence, 1995); Jean Pic de la Mirandole, *900 conclusions philosophiques, cabalistiques et théologiques*, ed. Bertrand Schefer (Paris, 2006). On Kieszkowski's textual and grammatical errors, see Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 104, 185–86.

33. “The other is, when keenly examined, nothing but the absolute perfection of natural philosophy. . . . We have also proposed some theses about magic, in which I have shown that there are two forms of magic, one of which depends entirely on the work and powers of demons and is, in my faith, an execrable and monstrous thing” (*Altera nihil est aliud, cum bene exploratur, quam naturalis philosophiae absoluta consumatio. . . . Proposuimus et magica theoremata, in quibus duplicem esse magiam significavimus, quarum altera demonum tota opere et auctoritate constat, res medius fidius execranda et portentosa; Pico della Mirandola, De hominis dignitate*, 148). Hereinafter, the English translation of the *Oratio* is by Francesco Borghesi et al. (see n. 15).

Pico's terms, their magic is synonymous with studies of the divine. In this context, the word *magus* seems to suggest an interpreter and worshipper of celestial influences and a person who can channel such influences to help mankind. Ficino expresses almost the same doctrine in his various works with special emphasis on the priestly character of the *magus*—a concept the Italian scholar Paola Zambelli has called *magus cum sacerdos*.³⁴ Thanks to Ficino's influence, the role of the *magus* was accepted in most intellectual circles in Italy and Europe; Pico's interpretation should, therefore, be placed within the larger philosophical context of his time. To prove the elevated position of the *magus*, Pico mentions Porphyry (whose legacy he would later reject),³⁵ who had asserted that magic is related to the study of the divine.³⁶ In the later *Disputationes*, however, Pico would severely criticize these apologists for magical speculation, indicating that this magical doctrine could have been created only by societies infected by superstitious beliefs.³⁷

Among those whom Pico mentions in the *Oratio* as supporting magical speculations are Pythagoras, Plato, and especially Empedocles and Democritus. Neither Empedocles nor Democritus ranked among the *prisci theologi* in Ficino's works. This proves that already in the late fifteenth century the doctrine of *prisca theologia* had changed. Sixteenth-century historiographers typically made additions to the general list of *prisci theologi*. In his *De perenni philosophia*, for instance, Agostino Steuco da Gubbio supplemented the *prisci theologi* with Armenians.³⁸ Pico also added to the list two more recent philosophers, Al-Kindi and Roger Bacon, who would become his *bêtes noires* in the *Disputationes*.³⁹ He would deprive Al-Kindi,

34. Paola Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic in the European Renaissance* (Leiden, 2007), 131.

35. Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*, vol. 2, bk. 12, 526.

36. "As a matter fact, as Porphyry says, in the Persian language magus means the same as expert and interpreter of divine things with us. . . . The latter is approved and embraced by all wise men and all peoples devoted to heavenly and divine things" (Idem enim, ut ait Porphyrius, Persarum lingua magus sonat quod apud nos divinarum interpretis et cultor. . . . Hanc omnes sapientes, omnes caelestium et divinarum rerum studiosae nationes, approbant et amplectuntur; Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate*, 148).

37. Book 12 of the *Disputationes* is dedicated to this question.

38. Maria Muccillo, *Platonismo, ermetismo e "prisca theologia": Ricerche di storiografia filosofica rinascimentale* (Florence, 1996), 17–19.

39. "No philosopher nor man eager to learn good arts has ever been a student of the former [black magic], but to learn the latter [white magic] Pythagoras, Empedocles, Plato and Democritus crossed the seas, taught it when they returned and held it chief among the arcane doctrines. . . . Eudoxus and Hermippus persevered. . . . Among the later philosophers, then, I find three who have sniffed it, the Arabian Al-Kindi, Roger Bacon and William of Paris" (Illius nemo unquam studiosus fuit vir philosophus et cupidus discendi bonas artes; ad hanc Pythagoras, Empedocles, Democritus, Plato, discendam navigavere, hanc predicarunt reversi, et in archanis precipuam habuerunt. . . . Perstiterunt Eudoxus et Hermippus. . . . Ex iunioribus autem, qui eam olfecerint tres reperio, Alchindum Arabem, Rogerium Baconem et Guilielmum Parisensem; Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate*, 150–52).

author of *De radiis stellarum*, one of the most influential medieval treatises on magic, astrology, and optics,⁴⁰ of his place as an adherent of “true magic,” while he would accuse Roger Bacon and Pierre d’Ailly of distorting the essence of Christian dogmas by using astrological techniques.⁴¹ The analysis of these fragments shows that throughout his career Pico’s attitude to astrology and its most prominent apologists was inconsistent at best.

In his *Conclusiones* (1486), Giovanni Pico repeats several ideas already expressed in the *Oratio de hominis dignitate*.⁴² For instance, he develops his preliminary considerations on two forms of magic, saying: “All magic that is in use among the moderns, and which the Church justly suppresses, has no solidity, no foundation, and no basis for truth, because it depends on the enemies of the first truth, those powers of darkness that pour the darkness of falsehood over poorly disposed intellects.”⁴³ To this magical dark side, he opposes something more elevated, which he calls natural magic: “Natural magic is permitted and not prohibited, and concerning the universal theoretical foundations of this science, I propose the following conclusions according to my own opinion.”⁴⁴ Pico admits that natural magic might be considered to be a “practical and the noblest part” of the large body of philosophical doctrine known as *scientia naturalis* (natural science).⁴⁵ Proclaiming that the aim of *scientia naturalis* is to discover the invisible and to unite what is separate,⁴⁶ he derives its origin from *prisci theologi* and compares the harmony

40. Al-Kindi, “De radiis,” ed. Marie-Thérèse d’Alverny and François Hudry, *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 41 (1974): 139–260. On al-Kindi’s theory of rays, see Pinella Travaglia, *Magic, Causality and Intentionality. The Doctrine of Rays in al-Kindi* (Florence, 1999). On the history of optics in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, see David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago, 1976).

41. On medieval sources of Giovanni Pico, see Stefano Caroti, “Note sulle fonti medievali di Pico della Mirandola,” *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana* 84 (2005): 60–92, and “Le fonti medievali delle *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*,” in Bertozzi, *Nello specchio del cielo*, 67–93.

42. Hereinafter, the text of the *Conclusiones* and its English translation will be reproduced (with some corrections) according to the edition of Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*. I will only indicate the section of the text and the ordinal number of the conclusions.

43. “Tota Magia, quae in usu est apud Modernos, et quam merito exterminat ecclesia, nullam habet firmitatem, nullum fundamentum, nullam ueritatem, quia pendet ex manu hostium primae ueritatis, potestatum harum tenebrarum, quae tenebras falsitatis male dispositis intellectibus obfundunt” (*Conclusiones Magicae*, 1).

44. “Magia naturalis licita est, et non prohibita, et de huius scientiae uniuersalibus theoreticis fundamentis pono infrascriptas conclusiones secundum propriam opinionem” (ibid., 2).

45. “Magia est pars practica scientiae naturalis. Ex ista conclusione et conclusione paradoxa dogmatizante XLVII sequitur, quod magia sit nobilissima pars scientiae naturalis” (ibid., 3–4).

46. “Nulla est uirtus in coelo et in terra seminaliter et separata, quam et actuare et unire Magus non possit”; “Mirabilia artis Magicae non fiunt nisi per unionem et actuationem eorum, quae seminaliter et separatae sunt in natura” (ibid., 5, 11).

of the knowledge of the world to marriage (by analogy with alchemical art).⁴⁷ He argues that some of the occult sciences can help a *magus* find the hidden elements of nature. The study of numbers and letters widely represented in the Kabbalah, with its mystical attitude toward figures, becomes one of the central elements of Pico's Kabbalistic interpretation.⁴⁸

In Pico's system, the Kabbalah occupies the supreme position among magical practices. Considered almost as worthy as the Kabbalah, astrology for its part becomes one of the most respected elements in the hierarchy of occult sciences. In the seventy-second conclusion, Pico summarizes its importance by saying, "According to my own opinion, just as true astrology teaches us to read in the book of God, so the Kabbalah teaches us to read in the book of the Law."⁴⁹

Pico not only established a close link between astrology and Jewish mysticism but also justified some Christian dogmas using Kabbalistic astrology. For example, he refers to the Arabic practice of using specific astrological images, known as *hylegh*,⁵⁰

47. "Magicam operari non est aliud quam maritare mundum" (ibid., 13). This image of alchemical marriage was used by several alchemists and has become popular thanks to Carl Gustav Jung.

48. "Quilibet numerus praeter ternarium et denarium sunt materiales in Magia, isti formales sunt, et in Magia Arithmetica sunt numeri numerorum. Ex secretioris philosophiae principiis necesse est confiteri, plus posse caracteres et figuras in opere Magico, quam possit, quaecunque qualitas materialis. Sicut caracteres sunt proprii operi Magico, ita numeri sunt proprii operi Cabalae, medio existente inter utrosque, et appropriabili per declinationem ad extrema usu literarum" (Every number besides the ternary and denary are material numbers in magic. Those are formal numbers, and in magical arithmetic are the numbers of numbers. Out of the principles of the more secret philosophy it is necessary to acknowledge that characters and figures are more powerful in a magical work than any material quality. Just as characters are proper to a magical work, so numbers are proper to a work of Kabbalah, with a medium existing between the two, appropriable by declination between the extremes through the use of letters; ibid., 23–25). "Ideo uoces et uerba in Magico opere efficaciam habent, quia illud in quo primum Magicam exercet natura, uox est Dei. Quaelibet uox uirtutem habet in Magia, in quantum Dei uoce formatur. Non significatiuae uoces plus possent in Magia, quam significatiuae, et rationem conclusionis intelligere potest, qui est profundus ex praecedenti conclusione. Nulla nomina ut significatiua, et in quantum nomina sunt, singula et per se sumpta, in Magico opere uirtutem habere possunt, nisi sint Hebraicam uel inde proxime deriuata" (Sounds and words have efficacy in a magical work, because in that work in which nature first exercises magic, the voice is God's. Every sound has power in magic insofar as it is shaped by the voice of God. Sounds that mean nothing are more powerful in magic than sounds that mean something. And anyone who is profound can understand the reason for this conclusion from the preceding conclusion. No names that mean something, insofar as those names are singular and taken per se, can have power in a magical work, unless they are Hebrew names, or closely derived from Hebrew; ibid., 19–22).

49. "Sicut vera Astrologia docet nos legere in libro Dei, ita Cabala docet nos legere in libro legis" (*Conclusiones Cabalisticae*, 72).

50. According to astrologers, there are five so-called *hylegh*, or specific astrological elements, that determine human lives: the Sun and the Moon, the Horoscope, the Part of Fortune, and the place of the full Moon or the new Moon immediately preceding the birth. Here the full Moon at the birth of Solomon and the full Sun at the birth of Jesus are the examples of these *hylegh*. Pico examines this theory in the

and to the medieval doctrine of the so-called horoscopes of Christ,⁵¹ from within a Kabbalistic context, saying, “Just as the full Moon was in Solomon, so the full Sun was in the true Messiah, who was Jesus. And anyone can conjecture about the diminished correspondence in Zedekiah, if he is learned in the Kabbalah.”⁵² Moreover, he found evidence of the divinity of Christ in astrological elements: “Because of the eclipse of the sun that occurred at the death of Christ, as can be known following the principles of the Kabbalah, it is clear that the Son of God and the true Messiah suffered.”⁵³ Pico’s attempts to explain core Christian doctrines by means of the Kabbalistic art go far beyond these astrological limits. Thus, he finds evidence for the Trinitarian dogma with the help of “Kabbalistic science” and finds proof of the divinity of Christ in the tetragrammaton.⁵⁴ According to this theological doctrine, there is a secret and sacred name of God that cannot be pronounced and is designated by the abbreviation of four holy letters: יהוהי, or YHWH. It is quite understandable that Giovanni Pico and other Christian Kabbalists, such as Johann Reuchlin, Francesco Zorzi, and Egidio of Viterbo, sought to use the tetragrammaton concept in their Christological disputes.⁵⁵ Pico confirms the usefulness of Kabbalistic ideas for proving the truth of Christian dogmas in the *Apologia*, claiming that only with the assistance of the Kabbalah was it possible to explain the marvels produced by Jesus Christ.⁵⁶

In the eighteenth Kabbalistic conclusion, Pico brings in an astrological reason for celebrating the Sabbath on Sunday instead of Saturday, as is the norm in Jewish religious communities, although he does not make any further comment concerning this suggestion: “Whoever joins astrology to Kabbalah will see that following the era of Christ it is more appropriate to take the Sabbath and to rest on the Lord’s day rather than on the day of the Sabbath.”⁵⁷ Finally, in two other theses Pico combines the Kabbalistic doctrine of the ten sephirot (revelations or emanations of God’s will) with that of the ten celestial spheres. While in the *Commento alla Canzona d’amore* he had placed the notion of ten spheres within a Neopla-

Disputationes; Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*, vol. 1, bk. 2, 146–48. See also Akopyan, “Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Ptolemy and the ‘Astrological Tradition,’” 42–43.

51. On this theory, see Ornella Pompeo Faracovi, *Gli oroscopi di Cristo* (Venice, 1999).

52. “Sicut fuit luna plena in Salomone, ita fuit plenus Sol in uero Messia qui fuit Iesus. Et de correspondencia ad diminutionem in Sedechia potest quis coniectare, si profundat in cabala” (*Conclusiones Cabalisticæ*, 51).

53. “Per eclipsationem solis quae accidit in morte Christi sciri potest secundum fundamenta cabalae quod tunc passus est filius dei et uerus messias” (ibid., 46).

54. Ibid., 5–6, 14–15.

55. For a brief description of this idea, see Secret, *I cabbalisti cristiani*, 60, 77–78, 137–39.

56. Pico della Mirandola, *Apologia*, 155–93.

57. “Qui coniurixerit Astrologiam Cabale, videbit quod sabbatizare et quiescere conuenientius fit post Christum die dominico, quam die sabbati” (*Conclusiones Cabalisticæ*, 18).

tonic context, in the *Conclusiones* and again three years later in the *Heptaplus*, Pico reproduces the same structure in a Kabbalistic rather than Neoplatonic version.⁵⁸ This proves that during these two early stages of his philosophical career, Pico remained loyal to the same interpretation of celestial spheres while nevertheless making some important changes.

However, further analysis of the *900 Conclusiones* demonstrates that Pico's early works do not contain the idea of astrological predestination.⁵⁹ At this stage, astrology was for him only descriptive and not practical in any sense of the word, although his Neoplatonic and Kabbalistic ideas leave some room for astrological speculation. Despite the various parallels made between those occult sciences in the *Commento* and the *Conclusiones*, Pico never dwelled on any practical or naturalistic aspect of celestial influence. The question of astral and divine influences in the sublunar world would be elucidated in detail only in his subsequent works.

THE HEPTAPLUS AND THE EXPOSITIONES IN PSALMOS

Pico's major post-Roman treatises are the *Heptaplus* and the *Expositiones in Psalmos*. Although these texts can be considered examples of Renaissance biblical exegesis, especially in the context of humanistic modes of textual criticism, Pico advanced in them his theory of celestial influence on the terrestrial world.⁶⁰ Both works abound in quotations from various Kabbalistic sources, and Pico's views on the emanation of light are still within the scope of Kabbalistic and Neoplatonic concepts. However, he would make several important changes.

58. "Whatever other Cabalists say, I say that the ten spheres correspond to the ten numerations like this: so that, starting from the edifice, Jupiter corresponds to the fourth. Mars to the fifth, the sun to the sixth, Saturn to the seventh, Venus to the eighth, Mercury to the ninth, the moon the tenth. Then, above the edifice, the firmament to the third, the *primum mobile* to the second, the empyrean heaven to the tenth. Anyone who knows the correspondence of the Ten Commandments through conjunction of astrological truth with theological truth will see from the foundation that I set out in the preceding conclusion, whatever other Cabalists say, that the first commandment corresponds to the first numeration, the second to the second, the third to the third, the fourth to the seventh, the fifth to the fourth, the sixth to the fifth, the seventh to the ninth, the eighth to the eighth, the ninth to the sixth, the tenth to the tenth" (Quicquid dicant ceteri cabaliste, ego decem sphaeras sic decem numeracionibus correspondere dico, ut edificio incipiendo, Iupiter sit quarte, Mars quinte, Sol sexte, Saturnus septime, Venus octaue, Mercurius none, Luna decime, cum supra edificium firmamentum tercia, primum mobile secunda, celum Empyreum prima. Qui sciverit correspondenciam decem preceptorum ad prohibencia per coniunctionem veritatis astrologice cum veritate theologica, videbit ex fundamento nostro precedentis conclusionis, quicquid alii dicant cabaliste, primum preceptum prime numeracioni correspondere, secundum secunde, tertius tercię, quartum septime, quintum quarte, sextum quinte, septimum none, octauum octaue, nonum sexte, decimum decime; *ibid.*, 48–49).

59. Vittoria Perrone Compagni, "Pico sulla magia: Problemi di causalità," in Bertozzi, *Nello specchio del cielo*, 95–115.

60. In both works, Pico sought to make a reconstruction of an "original" biblical language using the Hebrew text of the Genesis and Psalms.

In the introduction to the *Heptaplus*, where Pico's substantial knowledge of Kabbalistic literature and Hebrew becomes evident,⁶¹ Pico claims that despite numerous Christian commentaries on Genesis, including those of Augustine, Ambrose, Origen, Basil of Caesarea, John Chrysostom, and many others,⁶² he is going to focus on the Jewish tradition.⁶³ Pico is sure that elements of Moses's doctrine may be found in the doctrine of the Egyptians, from whom they were transferred to the most prominent Greek philosophers, including Pythagoras, Plato, Empedocles, and Democritus.⁶⁴ By this example, Pico obviously tried to confirm the existence of *prisca theologia* and its transmission from Moses through ancient philosophers to his own time. One of the cases of such a "heritage" is related to the notion of celestial spheres.

As he did some years earlier in the *Commento*, Pico describes the universe, which, according to him, consists of ten spheres—seven planets, the sphere of fixed stars, the ninth sphere that "can be conceived by mind and not by sense and the first among moving bodies," and the tenth, immovable sphere, termed "empyrean."⁶⁵

61. As Chaim Wirszubski has shown, in 1486, i.e., the date of the Roman dispute, Pico's knowledge of Hebrew was rather superficial. Chaim Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism* (Cambridge, MA, 1989), 3–9.

62. Pico includes Philo of Alexandria among Greek and Christian authors.

63. "Whatever, therefore, has been written on this book by holy men like Ambrose and Augustine, Strabo and Bede and Remigius, and among the more recent by Aegidius and Albert, and among the Greeks by Philo, Origen, Basil, Theodoretus, Apollinarius, Didymus, Diodorus, Severus, Eusebius, Josephus, Gennadius, and Chrysostom, we shall leave completely untouched, since it would be both rash and superfluous for a weak man to work in that part of the field where the most robust minds have long been working. We shall make no mention at present of what Ionethes or Anchelos or the venerable Simeon bequeathed in the Chaldean language, or what, among the early Hebrews, Eleazar, Aba, John, Neonias, Isaac, or Joseph wrote, or, among the more recent, Gersonides, Sadias, Abraham, both Moseses, Salomon, or Manaem" (Quae igitur super hoc libro viri sanctissimi, Ambrosius et Augustinus, Strabus item et Beda et Remigius et, ex iunioribus, Aegidius et Albertus; quae item apud Graecos Philon, Origenes, Basilium, Theodoritus, Apollinarius, Didymus, Diodorus, Severus, Eusebius, Iosephus, Gennadius, Chrysostomus, scripserunt, intacta penitus a nobis relinquuntur, cum et temerarium et superfluum sit in ea se agri parte infirmum hominem exercere, ubi se pridem robustissimae mentes exercuerint. De his item quae vel Ionethes vel Anchelos vel Simeon antiquus chaldaice tradiderunt vel, ex Hebraeis, aut veteres: Eleazarus, Aba, Ioannes, Neonias, Isaac, Ioseph; aut iuniores: Gersonides, Sadias, Abraam, uterque Moses, Salomon et Manaem conscripserunt, nullam nos in praesentia mentionem habebimus; Pico della Mirandola, *Heptaplus*, prooemium, 178–80). Hereinafter, the translation of the *Heptaplus* is mine.

64. "We have the weighty authority, moreover, of both Luke and Philo that Moses was deeply learned in all the lore of the Egyptians. All the Greeks who have been considered the most excellent took the Egyptians as teachers: Pythagoras, Plato, Empedocles and Democritus" (Sunt item, quantum attinet ad nostros, et Lucas et Philon auctores gravissimi illum in universa Aegyptiorum doctrina fuisse eruditissimum. Aegyptiis autem usi sunt praeceptoribus Graeci omnes qui habiti fuere diviniore: Pythagoras, Plato, Empedocles et Democritus; *ibid.*, prooemium, 170).

65. "Above the nine spheres of the heavens, that is, the seven planets and the eighth sphere, which is called that of the fixed stars, and the ninth sphere, which is apprehended by reason, not by sense, and which is first among the bodies that move, there is believed to be a tenth heaven, fixed, quiet, and at

While in the *Comento* he proved the existence of this universe using Platonic terms, in the *Heptaplus* Pico appeals to several Hebrew sources, nevertheless affirming that such an idea was supported by some among “our” (i.e., Christian) thinkers, such as Bede.⁶⁶ Pico also referred to “Abraham of Spain” (most probably having in mind Abraham ibn Ezra) and “Isaac the Philosopher” who may be identified as Abraham ben Isaac of Narbonne, already mentioned in Pico’s Kabbalistic theses.⁶⁷ Moreover, Pico insists on the parallels between the structure of the universe and the shape of the menorah used for religious purposes in Jewish communities.⁶⁸ The ten spheres in the context of Kabbalistic metaphorical images also has something in common with the idea of ten sephirot, described by Pico in the *900 Conclusiones*.

In Pico’s opinion, the highest (empyrean) sphere is the unique origin and source of light and contains *in se* the potential to diffuse light through the ninth sphere, by which it is spread to all the other elements.⁶⁹ This vivifying, incorporeal light is transmitted to the terrestrial world, filling mankind with its positive influence. It is symptomatic that in looking for analogies, Pico refers to the similar Neoplatonic

rest, which does not participate in motion” (Supra novem caelorum orbis, idest septem planetas et sphaeram octavam, quam vocant inerrantem, nonumque orbem, qui ratione non sensu deprehensus est primusque est inter corpora quae moventur, creditum esse decimum caelum, fixum, manens et quietum, quod motu nullo participet; *ibid.*, bk. 2, chap. 1, 224).

66. “This has been believed not only by Christians, especially recent thinkers like Strabo and Bede, but also by many Hebrews, and by certain philosophers and mathematicians. Let it be enough to bring forward two of these, Abraham the Spaniard, a great astrologer, and Isaac the Philosopher, both of whom confirm this” (Neque hoc tantum creditum a nostris maxime iunioribus, Strabo et Beda, sed a pluribus etiam Hebraeorum praeterea quae philosophis et mathematicis quibusdam. E quibus satis duos sit attulisse, Abraam Hispanum, astrologum maximum, et Isaac philosophum, quorum uterque hoc attestatur; *ibid.*, bk. 2, chap. 1, 224).

67. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 272.

68. “He likewise takes the ten spheres to be what Zachariah represented by the seven-branched golden candlestick, the lamp above it, and the two olive trees above the lamp” (Figuratas item intelligit decem sphaeras a Zacharia per candelabrum aureum distinctum septem lucernas et lampadem super caput eius, tum super lampadem olivas duas; Pico della Mirandola, *Heptaplus*, bk. 2, chap. 1, 224).

69. “But if two primary sources cannot be assigned to the same stream, one of the two highest spheres must be the first principle of all light. If light is to be traced back to one sphere as to its source, that is, to the tenth, which is then the unity of lights, then the ninth sphere may be considered the first to receive light with the whole essence of its substance. In the third stage, the light may arrive thanks to the full participation of the sun, and then from the sun in the fourth and last stage it may be divided among all the stars. Therefore, above the nine heavens let us suppose a tenth, which the theologians call the empyrean” (Verum si non possunt eiusdem aquae duo primi fontes constitui, necesse est ex illis duabus supremis sphaeris alteram esse quae sit principium totius lucis. Quod si ad alteram, ad primam utique, idest ad decimam referendum est, ut sit ipsa quasi unitas luminum, tum proxime lumen tota essentia suae substantiae nona recipiat; inde tertio ad solem plena participatione proveniat, a sole autem quarto iam ideoque postremo gradu in omnes stellas partibiliter dividatur. Supra igitur novem caelos decimum statuamus, quem theologi vocant empyreum; *ibid.*, bk. 2, chap. 1, 226).

notion of the Sun as empyrean (and even quotes a fragment from Emperor Julian's *Oratio de sole*), as well as to the Christian dogma of the indivisible Trinity.⁷⁰ Pico thus supplemented his basically Neoplatonic theory of light with Kabbalistic additions, which seems in some aspects close to the interpretation of Ficino in *De sole* and *De lumine* (both written in 1492).⁷¹ This does not necessarily mean that these writers influenced each other, since the doctrine of emanation was central to Christian mysticism, itself influenced by Neoplatonism.

The most important conclusion we can draw from Pico's representation of this divine light is that the celestial influence coming from the empyrean is permanent because of its divine nature and that through the ninth sphere its power emanates to planets and stars. Pico had no intention of exploring the whole structure of heavenly images and figures in his exegetical treatise, but it is possible to find in the *Heptaplus* some interesting points concerning the influence of planets, the most important of which is Saturn.⁷² It is quite probable that this representation of Saturn was based on an analogy between this planet and the First Mind, as described in the *Commento*. The second place is occupied by the Sun and the Moon, while Jupiter, considered supreme in the *Commento*, is displaced from the very top of this planetary hierarchy.⁷³ This again shows the inconsistency in Pico's interpretation of the celestial spheres.

It is also important that Pico confirms the existence of constellations between celestial images, which are able to complement the effects of each other. Thus, he admits that planets can produce opposite effects, and a negative effect can be balanced by a positive one. The same applies to the position of celestial bodies in the Zodiac.⁷⁴ Without exploring the significance of astrological images, Pico simply recognizes this doctrine, which was extremely popular in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.⁷⁵ At the same time, he severely criticizes astrology as a tool for foreknowledge. In book 5 of the *Heptaplus*, he opposes the idea of the possibility of predicting future events.⁷⁶ It is quite probable that in this passage Pico's attack is directed against the art of divination, described in Cicero's famous treatise *De divinatione*. However, while he mentions that such astrological practices were con-

70. *Ibid.*, bk. 2, chaps. 1–2, 226–28.

71. On Ficino's theory of the Sun and its influences, see Andrea Rabassini, "La concezione del sole secondo Marsilio Ficino: Note sul *Liber de Sole*," *Momus* 5, nos. 7–8 (1997): 115–33.

72. Pico della Mirandola, *Heptaplus*, bk. 2, chap. 3, 232.

73. *Ibid.*, bk. 2, chap. 3, 232–34.

74. *Ibid.*, bk. 2, chap. 3, 234.

75. Nicolas Weill-Parot, *Les 'images astrologiques' au Moyen Âge et à la Renaissance: Spéculations intellectuelles et pratiques magiques (XII–XV siècles)* (Paris, 2002).

76. Pico della Mirandola, *Heptaplus*, bk. 5, chap. 4, 296–98.

demned by prominent philosophers and theologians, he does not provide further arguments for his accusation of *divinatores*.

Although at first glance Pico's astrological views may not seem to have undergone considerable development between the pre- and post-Roman periods under consideration, it is in the *Heptaplus* where for the first time he puts forth the question of celestial influence and the communication of light with matter.⁷⁷ This would become one of the most serious issues that he would try to resolve in his *Expositiones in Psalmos* (1491/92). For an understanding of how he dealt with the issue for the first time and for further exploration of his astrological ideas in general, the most important *expositio* is that of Psalm 18, *Coeli enarrant gloriam Dei*. Significantly, some commentators, such as Pierre d'Ailly in his *Vigintiloquium de concordia astronomice veritatis cum theologia* and then in the *Elucidarium astronomice concordie cum theologica et historica veritate*, used this psalm as a source for legitimizing astrological studies.⁷⁸

In the *expositio* of Psalm 18, Giovanni Pico expanded his views about astrology, replacing the empyrean with two forms of the Sun: the intellectual Sun, or the Good, and the simple Sun, which receives impulses from the intellectual one. Pico claims that they both diffuse rays that penetrate everything and influence every terrestrial object without losing their divinity.⁷⁹ Around the same time, Ficino interpreted the same Neoplatonic doctrine in his *De sole* using identical categories. According to Ficino, just as the light of the Sun, "the purest and most sublime phenomenon among all sensible things," penetrates everything and gives birth to all material effects, so does the intelligible light of the Good spread its vital influence on the world.⁸⁰ Following the tradition of Neoplatonic interpretation of the Sun,⁸¹ Pico at the same time tries to find points of contact between ancient philosophy and Jewish texts, mentioning Abraham ibn Ezra as a supporter of the concept of an intelligible Sun.⁸² Interestingly, in the *Expositiones* Pico refers to Ibn Ezra as a representative of Jewish philosophy, while two years later in the *Disputationes* he will mention Ezra in a negative way and only as an astrologer.

77. *Ibid.*, bk. 1, chap. 5, 218.

78. On Pierre d'Ailly's astrological speculations, see Laura Ackerman Smoller, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars: The Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly (1350–1420)* (Princeton, NJ, 1994). A thorough study is still needed of how biblical passages, particularly from Genesis and the book of Job, were used to legitimize astrology in the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

79. Pico della Mirandola, *Expositiones in Psalmos*, 178, 182.

80. Marsilio Ficino, *Opera omnia*, 2 vols. (Basel, 1576), 1:966. The translation is mine.

81. In the *De sole*, Ficino added an excerpt from the *De mysteriis* by Iamblichus (*ibid.*). Also see Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, trans. with an introduction and notes by Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell (Atlanta, 2003), 1:9.

82. Pico della Mirandola, *Expositiones in Psalmos*, 178.

One important aspect of Pico's interpretation of solar philosophy is that he presumes the existence of the natural Sun as an *imago* of the intellectual Sun/Good.⁸³ By this supposition, Pico seeks to explain the essence of natural influence on the terrestrial world. Thus, in his opinion the real Sun, which accumulates all the possible virtues of its intellectual prototype, must be regarded as *mediator* of the divinity and the agent intellect (*intellectus agens*), to use the terminology of the scholastics.⁸⁴ Hence, in contrast to Ficino, who limited himself only to philosophical aspects of this solar theory, Pico strives to clarify the mechanism of heavenly dominance over the material world. But he failed to resolve the question as to how intelligible light is combined with matter and found himself in a very difficult situation. As he attempted to reconcile Plato and Aristotle while working on the *Expositiones in Psalmos*, Pico realized that the Neoplatonic doctrine of light contradicted the Aristotelian physics, which postulated the transformation of every influence received by matter.⁸⁵ As is well known, Pico's attempt to reconcile two fundamental ancient philosophical systems suffered from his unrestricted manipulation of sources and terms. The best known example concerns the fragment from chapter 2 of *De Ente et Uno*, where Pico, trying to prove the identity of these two concepts in Aristotle's and Plato's works, purposely quotes the text of Plato's dialogue *Sophist* in a modified way.⁸⁶ Although he introduces the concept of matter in both the *Heptaplus* and the *Expositiones in Psalmos* to explain the process of the emanation of light, because of the incompatibility of Neoplatonic light with Aristotelian physical "materialism" he could not go beyond some preliminary notes on the naturalistic aspects of heavenly impulses.

Thus, despite his apparent orientation toward Neoplatonism in the *Heptaplus* and *Expositiones in Psalmos*, in Pico's astrological interpretation the question of the reconciliation of Neoplatonic light with matter understood within an Aristotelian framework became crucial. Related to a larger and more ambitious project to which Pico devoted his *De Ente et Uno* in the same period, this issue finally led him to a deadlock, since he failed to reconcile the two concepts. Moreover, even without references to determinism, Pico's doctrine as expressed in the *Heptaplus* and the *Expositiones in Psalmos* left much room for further astrological specu-

83. *Ibid.*, 178, 182.

84. *Ibid.*, 180.

85. A letter to Angelo Poliziano entitled *De Ente et Uno* was written in 1491 and conceived as part of a more fundamental treatise on the concordance between Plato and Aristotle; Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Dell'Ente e dell'Uno*, ed. Raphael Ebgi and Franco Bacchelli (Milan, 2010).

86. *Ibid.*, 212–14. Pico's arguments are discussed in Ovanes Акоруап, "Платон и Ренессанс: 'ревняя теология' и примирение с Аристотелем," in *Платоновский сборник (Приложение к Вестнику Русской христианской гуманитарной академии)*, т. 14), 2 vols. (Moscow, 2013), 2:320–40.

lation, while the proposed agreement between the Platonic and Aristotelian notions would have given more credibility to the naturalistic and nondeterministic grounds of astrological influence on the terrestrial world.⁸⁷ But Pico did not succeed in doing so: after realizing the failure of this reconciliation project and after reconsidering the notions of tradition and philosophical authorities in his polemic with Ficino in the *De Ente et Uno*, he drastically changed his philosophical orientation.⁸⁸ Hence, Pico's future attack on astrology in the *Disputationes*, apart from theological motivations conditioned by the influence of Savonarola, would seem to be grounded in these philosophical reasons that forced him to revise his theory of astrology.

CONCLUSION

The evolution of Pico's attitude toward astrology illustrates the development of his *itinéraire philosophique*. In the *Commento alla Canzona d'amore*, completed in 1486, Giovanni Pico combined astrological elements with Neoplatonic ideas. Pico had discovered and explored the Kabbalah before the Roman dispute and thus sought in his early works to connect Kabbalistic ideas with astrology and magic. The culmination of his Kabbalistic interpretation was the *Heptaplus*, published in 1489. In the *Heptaplus* and the *Expositiones in Psalmos*, however, he faced an important problem when trying to reconcile the Neoplatonic doctrine of light with Aristotelian physics. The two were ultimately irreconcilable. This caused him to radically transform his natural philosophical views, as expressed in the *Disputationes*.

Pico's *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem* remained unfinished because of his sudden death in 1494 and was published posthumously by his nephew Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola in 1496. Although this large treatise, which consists of twelve books, is stylistically less than perfect, Pico is consistent in his attempts to reject astrology as a dangerous superstition.

Pico's polemic against astrology consists of two main points. The first concerns the textual and "historiographic" criticism of astrology; Pico shows that no great

87. For instance, on antideterministic aspects of Ficino's astrology, see Ornella Pompeo Faracovi, "Destino e fato nelle pagine astrologiche di Marsilio Ficino," in *Nella luce degli astri: L'astrologia nella cultura del Rinascimento*, ed. Ornella Pompeo Faracovi (Sarzana, 2004), 1–24.

88. On Pico's deconstruction of the notion of tradition, which was at the center of his philosophical investigation in the *De Ente et Uno* and later in the *Disputationes*, see Ovanes Akopyan, "'Princeps aliorum' and His Followers: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola on the 'Astrological Tradition' in the *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*," *Renaissance Studies* (forthcoming), <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/rest.12335/abstract>, and "'Me quoque adolescentem olim fallebat': Giovanni (or Gianfrancesco?) Pico della Mirandola versus *prisca theologia*," *Accademia (Revue de la Société Marsile Ficini)* (forthcoming).

philosopher or theologian had ever supported the idea of predictions. The second is the incompatibility of astrological prognostications with physical reality. This point is discussed in book 3 of the *Disputationes*, where Pico makes an important revision to his cosmological and physical ideas. Trying to eliminate the possibility of all astral influences, admitted in his early works, he chooses Aristotle as his major authority instead of Plato. As shown above, the Neoplatonic philosophical matrix, with its very specific representation of light, left a large space for magical speculations. Pico's change of the paradigm is understandable: using an Aristotelean philosophical matrix, he tries to prove the distortion of every celestial influence by natural reasons. That would become one of the most important messages of the third book of the *Disputationes*. Here he scrutinizes the main philosophical points related to the subject, such as light, motion, and warmth in Aristotelean terms, referring to the *Metaphysics*, the *Physics*, and the *De Caelo*. Of even greater importance is the fact that he finally enriches his philosophical discourse with a full analysis of the notion of matter, excluding any chance of direct astral influence, although he allows for the influences of certain physical phenomena (such as high and low tide). Such a shift from Neoplatonism toward Aristotelianism can be regarded as conclusive proof of Pico's deviation from Hermetic, Kabbalistic, Neoplatonic, and other occult sources. Thus, over the course of seven years Giovanni Pico's views on philosophy and astrology underwent a radical modification. The essence and features of his intellectual transformation are still to be studied in depth.