

## CHAPTER TWO: MUSICA HUMANA

### Natural and Spiritual Magic in the Platonic Tradition

#### PART ONE: Philosophical Magic

##### 2.1 Introduction

Ficino, in his Commentary on Plotinus' *Ennead* IV.4.30, says:

"Julian and Iamblichus composed orations to the sun. Plato called the sun the visible off-spring and image of the supreme God; Socrates, whilst greeting the rising sun, often fell into an ecstasy. The Pythagoreans sang to the lyre hymns to the rising sun. Concerning the cult of the sun, let them look to that; but undoubtedly 'God has placed his tabernacle in the sun'.(1)

In chapter one we began to investigate the philosophical importance of the Sun as a symbol of divinity, conceived as both the highest Good, in an impersonal, transcendent sense, and as the immanent, divinely appointed intellectual faculty of man - and especially as the seat of intuitive, even visionary, wisdom. To the outer eye, the Sun is the visible source of light and warmth necessary for generative life itself. To the inner eye, it is the intelligible source of spiritual insight, nourishment and growth, and the divine kernel of each human being. In a remarkably 'alchemical' passage in his *Liber de Sole*(2) Ficino sees the function of the Sun as the purifying and purging fire, refining and dissolving hard, resistant matter and revealing the divine essence within - the true heroic quest for supreme consciousness. The spiritualisation of matter (the 'resurrection' of the body) was the final unifying process of the alchemical *opus*; for Ficino the Sun is the dynamic principle behind the ascent from ignorance to self-knowledge, the very means by which matter and spirit may be brought together in the middle ground of the imagination which exceeds both form and intelligence. The power of the Sun is activated, and union is achieved, through the act of love - the desire to re-connect with the transcendental realm, which is recognised by depth psychology to be synonymous with certain projected unconscious aspects of one's psyche.(3)

It is the function of the alchemical/Hermetic Mercurius to kindle this desire:

"God first sows knowledge of divine things into angelic and blessed minds, and then love. Indeed the mind kindles a love for us believers here which purifies and converts, before it bestows the intelligence of divine things. Thus the Sun illuminates clear and pure natures everywhere, as if they are suddenly become heavenly bodies; indeed first it warms opaque, unsuitable matter, then kindles it, refines it and soon illuminates it. And sometimes it elevates to the heights through heat as well as light this matter which is now light and accessible. Hence Apollo pierces the great Python with the stings of his rays, he purges it, dissolves it and raises it up... Mercurius, as the armsbearer of the Sun, is said to excite sleeping people with a certain wand ..."(4)

Ficino understood the role of the magus to be that of Mercurius, who with his wand sets in motion the active realisation of the correspondence between the outer form and inner psychological process, or 'above with below'. This is the domain of magic and theurgy in its bewildering variety of practices, which I shall be considering in this chapter, paying particular attention to the power of music and rhetoric in hymns and orations. The Pythagorean/Orphic/neo-platonic tradition of musical invocation to religious ends undoubtedly provided the specific inspiration for Ficino's own hymn-singing.

What did Ficino's ancient authorities understand by the sacramental application of techniques and objects, which was not only musical and verbal, but also involved visual image, natural substances, astrological symbols and all manner of observable phenomena? I shall begin by addressing the vast area of theory and practice commonly called 'magic', or 'occult science', with the aim of clarifying some of the underlying metaphysical assumptions implicit in the Hermetic and neo-platonic traditions. I shall refer chiefly to Ficino's own often-acknowledged sources and precedents, namely Plato, Hermes Trismegistus, Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Julian, Proclus and the Chaldaean Oracles. As a Christian Ficino was inevitably confronted with problems in attempting to reconcile syncretically such pagan enthusiasm with traditional Catholicism. He was able to perceive the connective undercurrents linking the 'underworlds' of the two great philosophical and religious systems, unlike

many of his contemporaries in the Catholic Church, for whom the new enthusiasm for Platonism constituted a threat to traditional spiritual training and interpretation of dogma.(5)

## 2.2. Magic and mysticism

Firstly, we must attempt to clarify the various ways and means of practical participation in the unseen or immaterial suprasensory world which range from 'magical' operations through an infinite variety of 'religious' experiences to the transcendental total unity with the Absolute of the mystic. In her exhaustive survey of mystical experience,(6) Evelyn Underhill provides a useful framework for understanding the distinction between magic and mysticism in their most extreme forms, which is essentially a distinction between the faculty of *knowing* and the condition of *being*. Both kinds of 'supernormal' activity hold the conviction that it is possible for man to attain to a spiritual reality beyond that of sensible phenomena; however, whereas "magic at its best extends rather than escapes the boundaries of the phenomenal world"(7) the true mystic has the capacity to fully transcend all such limitations:

"Mysticism, in its pure form, is the science of ultimates, the science of union with the Absolute, and nothing else, and the mystic is the person who attains to this union, not the person who talks about it."(8)

The magician, she suggests, is motivated by a *desire for experiential knowledge of transcendental planes*. Through a deliberate extension and exaltation of his will, using all manner of external ceremonies and rituals, he intends (whether his aims are fundamentally ethical and humanitarian or self-seeking) to manipulate 'unseen' forces - the gods and daemons of the Platonic spiritual hierarchy - to material ends. The mystic however is propelled primarily by a *passionate emotional impulse for unity with his spiritual source, harnessed to a total dedication of the will*. This manifests as a desire to and for love and results in total surrender to a conscious condition of oneness with that which is beyond words, but which we commonly give the name of One, God or Absolute. Of course in between the extreme manifestations of commercial fortune-teller and solitary contemplative we find many stages and varieties of 'occult'

activity: the priests or shamans who mediate between the enlightened and the ignorant and establish schools of spiritual discipline; the mystical philosophers, who expound and interpret the heartfelt intuitions of the mystical temperament and themselves have firsthand experiences of transcendental states of being (such as Plotinus); the philosopher-magicians who use ritual and ceremonial trapping in service to self-ennoblement and spiritual knowledge (such as Iamblichus and his followers); the practical magi such as healers and astrologers who conduct their arts with compassion and integrity in respect to higher authority, and the numerous variety of participators in the ceremonial magic of traditional cults and religions who, to a greater or lesser extent, experience altered states of consciousness as a result of focussing and sublimating the will through ritual activity. The ignorant soothsayer or diviner whose aims are purely selfish and material could be seen as the least nefarious of a whole host of irresponsible dabblers who attempt to control powers beyond their comprehension with intentions ranging from ego-centred curiosity to downright evil.

Outside this grouping of empirical experimenters fall the transcendental philosophers, whose allegorical maps and symbolic cosmologies may kindle latent mystical faculties but who do not necessarily reveal a direct personal experience of them. One may or may not agree with Evelyn Underhill that Plato himself, although a poetic philosopher, was not a mystic.(9) Although he regarded the irrational apprehensions of the mystical temperament as invaluable, he nevertheless submitted all such experiences to the scrutiny of Reason; intuitive feeling was never exalted to the rank of intelligible knowledge. Evelyn Underhill regards Platonism as "the reaction of the intellectualist upon mystical truth", (10) and such philosophers in the Platonic tradition as

"our stepping stones to higher things; they interpret to our dull minds, entangled in the sense world, the ardent vision of those who speak to us from the dimension of Reality"(11)

but in their highly developed capacity for intellectual scrutiny they stop short at their vision of truth, not allowing the 'movement of desire' to flow naturally from the heights of their knowledge(12); they "know but cannot be".(13) The most important exception she acknowledges to be

Plotinus, who reveals himself as a mystic of the highest order whilst maintaining the ability to communicate his experience in the most rigorous and lucid philosophical terms.(14)

It is of course the communication of the inexpressible which is the domain of artists, poets and musicians, and which leads mystics to resort to the imagery and symbols of the sensory world to convey something of the heightened awareness they experience. As Plotinus stresses,(15) all human beings have the latent potential for some degree of transcendental revelation, but they cannot make the leap from everyday consciousness to apprehension of 'the divine' without a medium which partakes of both worlds. They must be 'bewitched'(16) by the inner, hidden content of an art or language whose outer form is easily assimilated by the senses or the rational mind yet whose reflection of a more intensely 'real' world is subliminally perceived by the corresponding 'hidden' or Platonically speaking intelligible faculty of the human soul. In this view, the artist, musician or poet who does not have an "intuition of the Real lying at the root of the visible world"(17) would not move the viewer or listener from his habitual, sense-bound condition and indeed, as Plato warned(18) could even inhibit his spiritual development by keeping him bound there.

Similarly, the use of poetic, symbolic and metaphorical language enables the intellect to make a qualitative leap to an intuitive perception of heightened reality through the power of suggestion:

"The mystic, as a rule, cannot wholly do without symbol and image, inadequate to his vision though they must always be: for his experience must be expressed if it is to be communicated, and its actuality is inexpressible except in some side-long way, some hint or parallel which will stimulate the dormant intuition of the reader, and convey, as all poetic language does, something beyond its surface sense."(19)

It is important to consider this in relation to the significance of words in magical operations, ranging from the mumbo-jumbo of the charlatan who may use exotic language to invoke a particular emotion in his victim, to the exalted intentions of incantatory prayers and Plato's philosophical 'charms'. But I shall return to this in the context of neo-platonic theurgy.

The Greeks had three words to distinguish the different levels of participation in the supernatural; *goēteia* signified the lowest, base wizardry and superstitious soothsaying; *magia* (a word derived from *magoi*, a Persian tribe with particular religious rites foreign to the Greeks) came to refer to all forms of exploitation of higher forces to gain advantages on a lower level by practitioners who, to a greater or lesser extent, had an understanding of cosmic sympathy; and *theourgia* or philosophical/religious magic, where the aim was to elevate the lower towards the higher, to align one's will with that of the cosmos through the agency of intermediary spirits, from daemons to angels and the gods themselves. The magus aimed to gain power and control over the invisible presences in the world - the theurgist strived for self-knowledge through surrender to them. At either end of this scale, one could add the perverted and willfully malevolent exploitation of forces known as black magic and the pious intent for direct contact with super-cosmic deities or God Himself demonstrated by the sacraments of religion, such as the Christian Mass.

The philosopher-magician's ultimate aim with his theurgic practices was the freeing of the soul from its material bonds, to be achieved through rigorous self-discipline and focussing of the will. To this end, external 'props' such as repetitive, quasi-hypnotic rhythmical incantations and repeated sacred words as mantras could strengthen and concentrate the powers of the imagination, to bring the wayward will into alignment with a higher realm by opening up a channel of communication between them:

"The uprushes of thought, the abrupt intuitions which reach us from the subliminal region, are developed, ordered and controlled by rhythms and symbols which have become traditional, ... and powers of apprehension which normally lie below the threshold may thus be liberated and enabled to report their discoveries."(20)

Thus the magician is endeavouring to raise his own spiritual energy when he calls upon super-terrestrial gods and spirits, using a wide variety of artificial means. For the famous 'occultist' A.E. Waite the term 'ceremonial magic' embraced all the means by which this energy was stimulated, "which in effect was a tremendous forcing house of the latent faculties of man's spiritual nature."(21) In other words, occult rituals can be seen as 'containers' for powerful psychological operations. Once a

permanent raising of the energy level, or alignment with the cosmic will, has been achieved, then of course the magus would have no further need for helpful images, sounds or words as he then approaches the condition of the mystic. As we shall see when we consider Plotinus in more detail, it is while he has glimpses of an order of things beyond normal human awareness that the superior magician may perceive the analogies and correspondences between all creation and know future outcomes, make oracular predictions or divinatory pronouncements. The lesser magician would work purely from an assumption of which he had no direct experience. We can see why Plato set such high standards for the musicians, artists and rhetoricians whose work was to be used in educating the young, for their quality of being was directly reflected in their creation, and only those having reached this level of perception could fuse knowledge with inspiration, and thus guide others effectively. He also recognised the necessity for popular religious cults and rituals involving ceremonial magic amongst the citizens, with their potential, but again only if operated by the wise, to open and extend levels of perception according to individual capacity, as we shall be considering in more detail below.

It cannot be stressed too highly that despite the useful distinction between magical-philosophical and mystical modes of expression, the infinite number of gradations in the discrete hierarchies of spiritual development (each nominally involving a qualitative leap) in no way allow limited or restrictive categorisations of experience. For it is possible to achieve both divine knowledge and cosmic awareness combined with a truly mystical rapture of the heart, and for the most enlightened souls to fully understand the usefulness and psychological necessity of all manner of 'magical' ritual and symbolic art and to put it into practice. The effectiveness of such action is dependent on a state of being where knowledge and love can no longer be differentiated, but fuse in a wisdom of the heart whose ultimate vocation is a selfless concern for the spiritual education of humanity. Ficino was indeed one of those rare souls.

It has been claimed by that most humane and perceptive of classical scholars, A.H. Armstrong, that the Greeks did not understand the 'the occult' in the same way as we do.(22) There is no indication that closed esoteric groups existed with special and exclusive knowledge of 'secret

things' which they passed on to fellow initiates. The rites of mystery religions were in service to heightened spiritual awareness, which was in principle accessible to all who had the capacity to embrace it. In an 'open' community seeking spiritual enlightenment, the self-professed 'magician' would have been a highly suspect character; certainly not credited with wisdom, and probably condemned as a charlatan by any respectable philosopher. The manifestation of any 'hidden powers' in the world in the form of the chance or unpredictable event was attributed to divine intervention, but there was no group of people who had special access to the gods' world:

"The gods did indeed give signs and omens and oracles, and there were religious craftsmen with professional skills in interpreting them. But the interpretation of the signs was always considered to be a tricky business, and it was recognised that the interpreters, even if skilled and honest, might be wrong."(23)

The Pythagorean 'secret doctrine' was a practical philosophy based on enlightening spiritual principles of cosmic harmony and transmitted by Plato as a public tradition. If we are to consider the idea of 'hidden knowledge' at all, it must be in relation to that which is indeed concealed from most men, the ability to use the forms of ritual (*telestikē*), specific daily practices (*akesis*), dreams and omens to activate Plotinus' 'different way of seeing' and lead towards the apprehension of higher realities. For Plato, both the discriminating use of music and the practice of contemplative astrology were the most powerful tools - far from being superstitious magic, they could evoke the inscrutable yet vital affects on the soul necessary for the virtue (*aretē*) of the citizens under cover of the rational composition of music and traditional ritual observance of cult.(24) The combination of astronomy as a respectable natural science with an acknowledgement of the stars as visible, divine minds forges a powerful bond embracing both exoteric and esoteric disciplines which for Plato provided the key to the only true wisdom. As we have seen in chapter one, this is the central conclusion of the *Epinomis*.



### 2.3. Plato and magic

What conclusions may be reached concerning Plato's attitude to what we would now call magical practices? It has been suggested by E.R. Dodds that Plato's personal contact with the Pythagoreans of West Greece in around 390 B.C. sowed the seed of his unique philosophical synthesis of reason and metaphysics: "Plato in effect cross-fertilised the tradition of Greek rationalism with magico-religious ideas whose remoter origins belong to the northern shamanistic culture".(25) Shamans, through rigorous training, have the ability to dissociate from their bodies and transcend the normal state of human awareness, becoming adept in divination, dream-prophecy, 'magical' healing and religious teaching. In his capacity as a shaman, Pythagoras would have been concerned with the purification of man's 'occult self', the purgation and tempering of the irrational forces of the *psyche* through catharsis, using rituals in which music and incantation played an important part. Such enlightened men, Dodds points out,(26) transcended all limiting boundaries of scientific, magical or philosophical knowledge in a personal synthesis directly dependent on their quality of being. The mythical Orpheus too reveals shamanistic gifts, and amongst the proliferation of 'Orphic' cults it was a central tenet that absolution could be obtained through ritual. Dodds proposes that it was contact with such traditions which made such a "fateful contribution" to Greek religious experience - that of a puritanical belief in an "occult self of divine origin" which set the "soul and body at odds", (27) in a world where before Plato *psyche* was not associated with Reason, but was more akin to the Homeric *thumos*, the irrational self or vital life-principle, the seat of emotion and appetite and intuitive or instinctual apprehension which dictated one's actions and inhibited rational decision-making. It was "perfectly at home" in the body.(28)

With the interpretation of this intuitive life-force as in part divine and separable from its irrational elements, Plato raised the level of 'religious' experience from that of the unquestioning acceptance of revelation (whether as an authentic experience or on some religious authority) to that of a rigorous and discriminating exercise in self-examination and awareness, involving an intellectual and moral sensitivity

to all nuances of experience.(29) As Dodds suggests, in Plato's ideal state the Guardians could be seen as "rationalised shamans".(30)

For Plato, all intuitive, irrational experiences must be brought under the scrutiny of the intellect. This is not to devalue their significance as genuine insight, but is a result of the conviction that knowledge acquired by rational argument could lead to the resolution of inner conflict, which was seen as the cause of moral evil.(31) Plato recognised that the passionate element of the soul, that "contentious and combative element which frequently causes shipwreck by its headstrong violence"(32) released an erotic energy which could be harnessed towards this resolution through rigorous philosophical training,(33) and which, paradoxically, could itself provide the impulse to transcend earthly experience. That Socrates himself took irrational intuition very seriously is evident, for example, from the attention he paid to his own dreams.(34) For him, 'occult' experiences were rich food for rational speculation, which could be called on to interpret their significance. One is reminded of Plato's advocating of an inner act of connection or prayer (a Plotinian 'tension of the soul'(35)) before any intellectual activity: "we should always appeal to the gods when we set about speaking or reflecting".(36)

Nevertheless, we have many examples of Socrates' acknowledgement of the benefits of irrational activities and practice of legitimate 'magic'. He implies that he himself received initiation into the Corybantic rites which involved frenzied ritual dancing.(37) In such ceremonies, rites of purification and supplication involving 'possession' were conducted, presumably led by a priest or priestess whose condition of frenzy inspired the followers. This homoeopathic cure of 'madness with madness', Dodds suggests, designed to provide an outlet for "infectious irrational impulses",(38) has its prototype in the Dionysiac mountain dancing, where orgiastic dancing and music produce an ecstasis which liberates the soul from overpowering anxieties. In the Classical Age such rituals were adopted by the cults of Hecate, Cybele or the Corybantes - Plato refers to the "sacred rage" of the Corybant(39) and the trance induced by frenzied dancing.(40)

Socrates also recognises the powers of midwives with their ability to alleviate labour pains with 'drugs and incantations' and even to intuitively match-make with an eye to healthy offspring(41) and mentions his own apparent ability to "charm away" the fear of death by saying magic spells.(42) Such a gift, he suggests, is the hallmark of a true magician and rarely to be found - indeed Simmias fears that after Socrates' death they will be hard put to find another who "understands these spells". In *Charmides* 157a-b, a passage of startling relevance to holistic medical practice and much reiterated by Ficino himself,(43) Socrates suggests a certain leaf together with a 'charm' as a remedy for a headache, and implies that the power of such charms lies in their words:

"... if the head and body are to be well, you must begin by curing the soul - that is the first and essential thing. And the cure of the soul ... has to be effected by the use of certain charms, and these charms are fair words, and by them temperance is implanted in the soul ... the great error of our day in the treatment of human beings [is] that men try to be physicians of health and temperance separately."

The problem lies in the fact that it is impossible for the average ignorant citizen to distinguish between the potency of a 'charm' uttered by a truly enlightened philosopher-magician and that claimed by a wily charlatan. For this reason Plato was in practice highly suspicious of all claims of 'paranormal' activity, recognising both the destructive potential of thought-suggestion when undertaken irresponsibly and with evil intent, and the difficulties in understanding exactly how such effects might occur in order to arm oneself against them (which was of course possible, as we shall see in the case of Plotinus):

"There is another form [of poisoning] which works by art, magic, incantations, and spells, as they are called, and breeds in the minds of the projectors the belief that they possess such powers of doing harm, in those of the victims the conviction that the authors of their suffering can verily bewitch them. Now as to all such matters the true facts are hard to learn, nor, if one could learn them, would it be an easy task to convince another. And it would be labour lost to try to bring conviction to minds beset with such suspicions of each other, to tell them, if they should by perchance see a manikin of wax set up in the doorway, or at the crossroads, or at the grave of a parent, to think nothing of such things, as nothing is known of them for certain."(44)

Any unauthorised 'magical' activity was dangerous because it could destabilise the individual, and by extension the society, by clouding his judgement and inducing false opinion.(45) Plato roundly condemns all "begging priests and soothsayers" who believe they have the power to constrain the gods themselves by means of sacrifices and incantations and to remit sins by various effortless rituals.(46) Such men who do not examine their own consciences can have no access to higher knowledge, and in their hands potentially transforming rites can be at best meaningless and at worst extremely harmful. That such practices were widespread is suggested by the reference to a 'bushel of books' attributed to Musaeus and Orpheus which the soothsayers used as authorities for their dubious ceremonies. Without the ability to discriminate truth from falsehood - and Plato recognised that the average human condition is one of constant struggle, confusion and error in vision - the individual cannot be protected from the perils of mistaking imitations from the real thing; mere imitations of nature in an art which prohibits any visionary glimpses of transcendent reality,(47) or imitations of the true 'charms' of discourse in the extravagant rhetoric of speechmakers(48) are likened to the forms of witchcraft and enchantment which exploit the inherent "weakness of our nature" and beguile through their seeming to be something they are not - reflections of divinity. In a profoundly psychologically perceptive passage in the Laws Plato indicates the precariousness of inner equilibrium, since our soul is by its very nature in a constant state of change and development and may at any moment be tempted into dissolution and chaos by subversive elements, whether externally applied in the misuse of 'magic' or internally generated by warring passions. Such a condition of psychological chaos, he suggests, is what is meant by hell itself:

"all things that have part in soul change, for the cause of change lies within themselves, and as they change they move in accord with the ordinance and law of destiny .. if [their changes of character] are more and in the direction of grave wickedness, they fall into the depths and the so-called underworld, the region known by the name of Hades ..."(49)

So seriously did Plato regard the crimes of those who encouraged such disorder by their subtle and guileful manipulations (manifest not only in self-confessed magicians but also in "dictators, demagogues, generals, contrivers of private Mysteries and ... the so-called Sophist")(50) that

their punishment in the ideal state is harsh indeed. Those who "bewitch the living" with "the supposed sorceries of prayer, sacrifice and incantations"(51) are to be sentenced to solitary imprisonment (presumably for life) and no rites of burial. In the end, the only authentic 'magical' effects Plato recognised and trusted were the psychological transformations brought about by imitation of the immaterial archetypes of the Good, True and Beautiful.

#### 2.4. Daemons

In the Platonic spiritual hierarchy, the energy generated by the life force or world soul as it permeates and connects the various levels is carried by spiritual beings "superior to men but inferior to gods".(52) Unlike the morally neutral world soul, daemons are potentially autonomous beings whose actions may appear arbitrary, willful and unpredictable if not subversive and disruptive to the human psyche which reaches out to them, or which they invade. The co-operation of the various spiritual entities mediating between God and man was central to magical operations. For Plato himself such spirits were essentially well-intentioned; they were created to watch over human affairs(53) and to act as mediators and messengers between the two worlds. Each individual was protected and guided in the after-life by a guardian spirit;(54) Socrates attributed his inner 'prophetic' voice which advised him at all times to his guardian angel or daimon.(55) Our clearest account of the function of spirits occurs in the *Symposium* where Diotima describes Eros as a 'mighty daemon'. She explains:

"Spirits are half-way between god and man ... they are the envoys and interpreters that ply between heaven and earth, flying upward with our worship and our prayers, and descending with the heavenly answers and commandments, and since they are between the two estates they weld both sides together and merge them into one great whole. They form the medium of the prophetic arts, of the priestly rites of sacrifice, initiation, and incantation, of divination and of sorcery, for the divine will not mingle directly with the human, and it is only through the mediation of the spirit world that man can have any intercourse. whether waking or sleeping, with the gods. And the man who is versed in such matters is said to have spiritual powers, as opposed to the mechanical powers of the man who is expert in the more

mundane arts. There are many spirits, and many kinds of spirits, too, and Love is one of them."(56)

The implications of this passage are that 'occult' practices depend on such spirits for their effectiveness, and that Plato had no doubt of man's potential to contact them during ritual or mediumistic activity and bring something of their higher nature into the material world. What he did doubt, however, was his capacity to conduct such operations with wisdom and responsibility.

The later neo-platonists devised an elaborate and complex system of distinction between levels of moral superiority among spiritual beings and the elemental layers they inhabited, which as we shall see came into conflict with the dualist assumptions of Christianity, for whom all daemons must be intrinsically evil. Plotinus' view differs considerably from Platonic theology with its incorporation of individual choice and responsibility into the system of guardian spirits. He maintains that each soul may choose the level of reality on which it lives out a particularly earthly life, with its guardian spirit existing on the level immediately above. He links the allocation of guardian spirits with astrological determinants of character in a passage, often echoed by Ficino, which in its perception of microcosm/macrocosm sympathy suggests a viable framework for the symbolic, 'psychological' astrology practiced by the Florentine magus. After death, Plotinus suggests, souls return to the planet or star akin to their nature

"each according to his rational activity here: for one must think that there is a universe in our soul, not only an intelligible one but an arrangement like in form to that of the soul of the world: so as that, too, is distributed according to its diverse powers into the sphere of the fixed stars and those of the moving stars, the powers in our soul also are of like form to these powers, and there is an activity proceeding from each power, and when the souls are set free they come there to the star which is in harmony with the character and power which lived and worked in them: and each will have a god of this kind as its guardian spirit, either the star itself or the god set above this power."(57)

Gods (spirits who inhabit the intelligible realm) and lesser spirits are for Plotinus products of the *anima mundi* to provide for and sustain it in

its complex totality.(58) Spirits are impelled by desire for their particular attribute, and the individual soul chooses its guardian spirit "according to the corresponding part of that which is active in them, the soul".(59) Plotinus' majestic vision soars past the intricate debates of the theurgists on the classification of disembodied spirits and their ritual invocation. The true magus, for him, is the wise man who knows how the force of love draws everything together in cosmic sympathy, and how to enter into it. I agree with A.H. Armstrong(60) that the episode in Plotinus' life mentioned by Porphyry(61) when he agreed to witness the calling up of his guardian spirit by a visiting Egyptian priest does not merely reveal a superstitious interest in theurgic daemonology, but rather may be given "a rational interpretation in terms of Plotinus' own philosophy" which shows that the rank of our tutelary spirit is determined by our own decision to "live by the higher or lower in us". The fact that the spirit which appeared was no less than a god suggests either that the whole story was invented by Plotinus' disciples to prove his exalted spiritual state, or that the priest had attained an extraordinarily refined level of being; for "no true god could ever be conjured in Plotinus' universe". We cannot discount the possibility that Plotinus discerned an integrity and true spiritual gift in the priest which led him to trust the result of whatever event took place. We shall return to the role of daemons in the theurgy of Iamblichus later in this chapter, and to Ficino's attempt to coherently synthesise philosophical, magical and Christian views in his own attitude towards magic in chapter four.

### 2.5. Divine frenzy

For Plato, the only authentic condition of being in which it was possible to make any direct contact with higher intelligences, and thus successfully conduct any 'magical' operation which aimed to divinise the soul, was that of *furor*, manifested in the disturbed and heightened consciousnesses of the prophet, ritual priest, poet and lover. "Our greatest blessings come by way of madness" says Socrates,(62) and Evelyn Underhill calls such 'madness' a mystical "enabration of reality", suggesting that it involves "an intenser degree of vitality ... a more acute degree of perception, a more vivid consciousness, than that which is

enjoyed by other men."(63) Dodds has pointed out that it is a commonly held belief amongst primitive people that all mental disturbances are caused by supernatural intervention(64) and that "the dividing line between common insanity and prophetic madness is hard to draw".(65) For the soul firmly embedded in a material condition, it would seem evident that nothing less than a severe jolt away from a rational sanity, a turning upside down of value systems designed to preserve such a condition would be required to free the soul to glimpse other levels of reality. Whether this is interpreted as contact with God himself or a whole range of lesser deities and spirits must depend on the quality and purity of the individual soul, and the degree of spiritual training undergone in preparation for such an event.

In the *Phaedrus*(66) Socrates distinguishes between human and divine acts of prophecy. Any act of divination or augury which depends purely on human intelligence for interpretation, such as the observance of birds, is the work of a "sane prophet" whose comprehension and advice, however acute, cannot exceed the limits of cosmic sympathies in the natural world. He is not 'plugged in' to receive the vibrations of higher planes, messages of the gods themselves, but relies merely on his own human judgement of external phenomena.(67) The prediction of the future through real supernatural intrusion, or "heaven-sent madness" however, is called by Socrates "that greatest of arts" and acknowledged to be an ancient practice - indeed Dodds suggests(68) that it may be as old as the religion of Apollo, the patron of all prophetic arts. The Pythia at Delphi evidently entered into an 'enthusiastic' trance after careful ritual preparation in which she was possessed by the god in the manner of spirit mediumship. Although the ultimate aim of such mediumship was specific knowledge of future events, the medium herself was merely the instrument of the god and it was the function of the *prophetes* to interpret through the application of wisdom and reason.(69) Plato suggests that any truths which are uttered "with no conscious thought", whether by prophets, priests or statesmen, are fit to be considered of divine origin if the results of their speeches are "repeatedly and outstandingly successful."(70)

Hierophantic madness is described by Plato as a therapeutic, cathartic process involving prayer and ritual to heal hereditary afflictions built up



over generations, originally caused by "some ancient sin".(71) When such inherited guilt eventually erupts in the form of severe psychological disturbance, it may be expiated once and for all in frenzied rites of purification and supplication. Plato particularly refers to the music of flutes in such rituals, which calms irrational, childish fear. Indeed he likens their effect to that of mothers singing to their babies:

"they ... put a spell on their babies just as the priestess does on the distracted in the Dionysiac treatment, by this combination of the movements of dance and song."(72)

Plato's devaluation of the 'irrational' is demonstrated in his rating of the worthiness of types of life according to the criterion of degrees of wisdom attained.(73) The prophet and mystery priest appear fifth, below the level of athlete or physician, since their skills lie in their 'foolishness'(74) or powers of irrational intuition, not their ability to acquire knowledge through rational argument. Poets and imitative artists appear even further down the list, presumably since they represent their glimpses of divinity through a medium accessible to the senses of sight and hearing. This may harmonise, refine and impose order on the chaos and confusion exhibited in the utterances of direct oracular possession, but therefore also may distract from or dilute the impact of the original inspiration.

Ficino, as we shall see(75) elevates the role of poetic frenzy to the status of that of the lover, and emphasises the equal potential of both visible and audible beauty to arouse the longing of the soul to return to its divine origin. Indeed the inspired musician-poet embodies the gifts of both prophet and priest, functioning as a seer possessed by a Muse, composing under the influence of "a kind of instinct or inspiration" without conscious knowledge of what he is doing(76) or the ability to discriminate logically:

"When a poet takes his seat on the Muse's tripod, his judgement takes leave of him. He is like a fountain which gives free course to the rush of its waters, and since representation is of the essence of his art, must often contradict his own utterances in his presentations of contrasted characters, without knowing whether the truth is on the side of this speaker or of that."(77)

He is "out of his senses" like a Corybantic dancer, says Plato in his most eloquent description of the inspired lyric poet.(78) In such a condition the poet can enhance and transform ordinary reality through listening to his imagination which is a gift of the Muse:

"a poet is a light and winged thing, and holy, and never able to compose until he has become inspired, and is beside himself, and reason is no longer in him. So long as he has this in his possession, no man is able to make poetry or to chant in prophecy."(79)

Socrates' analogy of the Muse as a loadstone, initiating and connecting a chain of inspiration from poet to interpreter to audience like a series of magnets, drawing and fostering particular talents and affinities (such as Ion's love for Homer) sets the model for the spiritually therapeutic function of 'live' performance, and explains why Plato considered 'bad' or ego-centred art, where the creative artist believes himself to be the generative force, to be so damaging to moral virtue.

Finally, the "best of all forms of divine possession"(80) - that of the lover of wisdom, who is aroused to frenzy through the intimations of divinity reflected in the visible beauty of this world; in particular, through the painful experience of falling in love with another human being. There can be no more vivid portrayal of the struggle of reason over passion than Plato's highly charged metaphors of the sprouting of the lover's wings and the charioteer's taming of the unruly horse. The power of erotic passion, when harnessed, can propel two individuals to self-mastery and the realisation of a mutual love based on the highest principles whose erotic component, although not necessarily without a physical outlet, is primarily an expression of the union of their souls. 'Platonic love' in the true sense of the term does not imply a repression or abnegation of all physical erotic desire, but a condition in which the lover fully enters into his passion, knowing to what end his desire must lead and recognising that its enactment on the physical level is but an experiential image of spiritual union. For Plato, the experience of Eros in sexual love (between men) is an important first stage in the ascent to "the philosophical life", (81) and for Ficino it became the principle on which the intense friendships within the Platonic Academy were founded, and which philosophically justified his

own propensity for the detached intimacy of sublimated homosexual relationships.(82)

The imperfect, or degenerate forms of the four frenzies, as they are dimly perceived and misunderstood by those souls most firmly locked into a material universe (like the outermost ripples of a stone thrown into a pond), manifest as fortune-telling, superstition, 'superficial music' and what Ficino called "that common and completely insane love"(83) inspired by the earthly rather than the heavenly Venus. These shadow-forms, it could be argued, are necessary both as a shield to preserve the pearls from defamation by the swine, and as potential stepping stones towards an awareness of their archetype once the 'itching' of the wings has begun.

#### 2.6. Pythagorean music therapy

As we saw in chapter one, the whole idea of a cosmos held within the tension of order imposed on chaos originated, for the Pythagoreans, in the mathematical laws of musical intervals which regulated and structured the world-soul (expounded by Plato in the *Timaeus*):

"The general principle applied by the Pythagoreans to the construction of a *kosmos* is that of the imposition of limit (*peras*) on the unlimited (*to apeiron*) to make the limited (*to peperasmenon*)."(84)

Quantity is imposed on quality, a harmonious cosmos is created within the confines of the octave or ratio of 1:2. The organising principle (*archē*) actively tends towards unity "but it is only when its work is done that unity is achieved"(85) - the temporal condition can thus be seen as one of continual striving towards a completion which can only culminate in the release of the soul from its embodied condition.

We have already noted that for the Pythagoreans, unlike Plato, the judgement of the ears was considered as of equal importance to that of the mind in the evaluation of musical intervals. For accounts of the importance Pythagoras attached to practical, therapeutic music-making we must rely to a large extent on the legends and anecdotes gathered together by Iamblichus in his *On the Pythagorean Life*.(86) Iamblichus tells us that

Pythagoras spent twenty-two years studying and receiving initiation in Egypt, followed by twelve years with the Magi in Babylon. However exact this information may be, it is generally held as we saw in chapter one that 'Pythagorean' discoveries concerning music and mathematics originated in Babylon, and it is important to bear in mind, particularly in view of the Renaissance enthusiasm for Hermetic texts, that "the Greeks were indeed as children to those venerable but by then quite decadent civilisations."(87)

According to Iamblichus, the first stage of education in the Pythagorean school involved the training of the disciples through refinement of the senses. Music was to take precedence over visual arts,

"through certain melodies and rhythms, from which the remedies of human manners and passions are obtained, together with those harmonies of the powers of the soul which it possessed from the first ... divinely contriving mixtures of certain diatonic, chromatic and enharmonic melodies, through which he easily transferred and circularly led the passions of the soul into a contrary direction ... attempering them through appropriate melodies, as through certain salutary medicines."(88)

Music was used to induce sleep and to purify the intellect, paying attention to specific times, rituals and astrological symbolism. For example, at springtime a lyre player would be surrounded by singers whose behaviour would be 'ordered' by the singing of 'certain paeans' (presumably to Apollo) in a representational ritual symbolising the Sun surrounded by the signs of the zodiac.(89) Iamblichus tells us that Pythagoras alone had developed and refined his 'inner ear' to directly intuit the harmonies of the spheres, which he then determined to reveal to his disciples through the means available to the outward senses - through dance, recital of epic poetry and instrumental music - so that they might "comprehend truly the first and genuine archetypes of things".(90) The overall aim was purification of the soul and its alignment with the macrocosm, as manifested by the movements of the heavenly bodies. This was to be achieved firstly through desire, that is, the inner quickening of the soul which has been afforded a glimpse of its immortality (the longing to 'return to the stars?')(91) and secondly through imitation of the inexorable cosmic laws revealed by the movements and harmonic proportions of the heavens.

Iamblichus, like Plato, understood this therapeutic tempering of psychological imbalances and intentional substitution of various emotional conditions as 'enchantment':

"Sometimes, also, by musical sounds alone, unaccompanied with words, they healed the passions of the soul and certain diseases, enchanting, as they say, in reality. And it is probable that from hence this name epode, i.e. enchantment, came to be generally used."(92)

Iamblichus likens the whole Pythagorean training method to the Delphic oracle; for divine messages cannot be easily accessible to those who do not apply themselves to serious study of the inner, hidden meanings to be found concealed within the language of riddles and puzzles, and within the symbolism of ritual practices.(93) For ritual sets up the conditions for a direct apprehension by the intuitive faculty in a way beyond the power of verbal communication and rational conceptual thinking. Music is such an effective 'charm' because it goes straight to the soul, connecting with its intrinsic proportions and effecting change and adaptation through its likeness to and resonance with the object. Thus the change will be natural and revelatory, beyond any human power to change someone purposively through a direct argument. In this sense, any moment where an alignment of the soul has occurred through artistic stimulation, whether in music or poetry, is an 'enchanted' one.

### 2.7. Ritual and education

Although for Plato the only truly effective catharsis of irrational elements was mental withdrawal and concentration(94) he realised that unlike the philosopher, the common man did not have the self-possession and strength of resolve to achieve such an aim without the aid of some form of external ritual. He saw that it would be detrimental to eliminate cult practice entirely, but that its regulation and authorisation by the wise was essential for the accommodation of common religious impulses and traditional honouring of the gods(95) - as the Athenian pointed out,(96) the need to worship both visible deities and invisible ones by means of images was fundamental to all cultures. However Plato understood that the task of establishing a sanctuary was not to be undertaken lightly and for

that reason forbade individuals to set up shrines in private houses "under the delusion that they are winning the privy favour of heaven by offerings and prayers". At all times the oracle at Delphi was to be the absolute authority,(97) the cult of Apollo providing a traditional, archaic ritual counterpart to the new "rational form of worship"(98) of the philosophers which centred around the symbol of the Sun, deified as Helios. In the *Laws* we see Plato forced into an extreme position in his despair at the superstitious materialism of his society. He is attempting to regulate something essentially unregulatable - the irrational religious impulse - in reaction to the harmful effects of manipulative and ignorant popular 'religious conjurors'. Astrology, from this point of view, provided for all levels of society, from the highest mystical speculations on number (as we saw in the *Epinomis*) to the rituals of popular cults of the planetary gods. The most important thing was a fundamental education in the basic principles of astronomy, so that even if the average citizen remained at the level of the literal or the superstitious, he would not be guilty of misrepresentation and at least the seed for potential spiritual growth would be sown.(99)

In the *Laws* the role of music as a powerful form of 'natural magic' is emphasised as being primary in both the education of children and for the continuing moral health of the citizens. This finds its precedent of course in the musical regime of the Pythagoreans and the supposed teachings of Pythagoras himself.

Following the Pythagorean tradition, for Plato the specially-composed songs for children were "spells for souls", disguised as play, but with the underlying potential to induce moral virtue and temperance.(100) The 'enchantment' of the children was to be effected through the setting of 'noble doctrines'(101) to carefully chosen rhythms and melodies and performed by experienced singers who themselves had attained a high level of moral discrimination:

"the sexagenarians of the 'chorus of Dionysus' would need to be exceptionally sensitive to rhythmic and melodic structure to ensure their competence to distinguish a good musical imitation of a soul under the stress of its emotions from a bad - competence, that is, to distinguish the counterfeit presentments of a good soul from those of an evil, to reject the second but produce the first publicly in their hymnody,

and thus to put a charm on the youthful mind, challenging one and all to join them in pursuit of virtue by means of these same imitations."(102)

Again, Plato stresses that it is the condition of being of the performer which determines the quality of the musical imitation he produces and thereby will affect most profoundly the impressionable soul. We learn in the Republic(103) that the subtle qualities of the various harmonic modes and careful choice of rhythms must always be in service to the words, and that a strong and noble character will naturally reflect similar qualities in any artistic output.(104) The true musician is someone who understands *musica humana* - the conditions of the human soul as manifested in moral virtues and vices - and can intuitively discern the presence or absence of 'the good' reflected in any activity or image.(105) Plato exalts the musician's role to no less than that of philosopher whose soul is so harmonised that it instinctively vibrates in sympathy with the harmony manifest in the proportions of physical beauty.(106) Because both rhythm and harmony directly penetrate 'the inmost soul'(107) through correspondence in kind, the musician as educator may touch the quick of the listener's psychological equilibrium, and if his own soul is tempered through training to only receive the 'beautiful and good' then he is in a position to foster and nurture similar tendencies in the impressionable souls of children.

## 2.9. Plotinus

Plotinus, perhaps in a rigorous attempt to refine and reform the diffuse 'magical' strands of the neo-platonism of his day with their implicit dangers of encroaching superstition and dilution through the proliferation of cults and rituals (a "spineless syncretism" in the opinion of Dodds),(108) never mentions theurgy as a legitimate practice. Plotinus' magic of natural correspondence was based on firm analogies between the experience of the intelligible realm and intensified sense-perception of the material world, which provided a natural image of it:

"They [the Forms in Intellect] all flow, in a way, from a single spring, not like one particular breath or one warmth, but as if there was one quality which held and kept intact all the qualities in itself, of sweetness along with

fragrance, and was at once the quality of wine and the character of all tastes, the sights of colours and all the awareneses of touch, and all that hearings hear, all tunes and every rhythm."(109)

Plotinus was not concerned with the external trappings and observances of religious experience; as A.H. Armstrong points out,(110) religion for him was "a solitary journey of the mind to God" - which is not to say that he despised or condemned such practices if fellow-philosophers found them useful. In the instance of his refusal to accompany Amelius to certain rituals for the gods in temples with the words "It is for them to come to me, not me to them"(111) he appears to display an attitude of apparent indifference towards association with lower deities; or rather, perhaps, he knew that the presence of a god may be invoked by openness and reverence at all times, and not necessarily through habitual cult procedures or manipulation of paraphernalia. Plotinus' contemplation was aimed directly at union with the One beyond all intelligible realms and their *numina*. Philosophical reflection was in itself a prayerful attitude; a condition of ceaseless contemplation which permeated all 'lower' activities and enhanced their significance. His philosophical formulations and images on the one hand, and the inscrutable content of his mystical experience on the other, were hence two aspects of the same thing. Such practices could, for him, be the only 'charms' worth cultivating.(112) Plotinus' penetrating mind is concerned with stripping away all impediments to an untrammelled, authentic realisation of the autonomy of man's higher soul, the full assumption of individual responsibility for affecting, directing and re-aligning external circumstances. 'Right action' may then "spring spontaneously from (man's) higher self's unbroken contemplation."(113)

The images and actions of external ceremonial, in this sense, could only provide approximations of a true inner experience. They could be seen as a more or less helpful way of strengthening contemplative powers which might be too weak to be harnessed directly towards the vision of the ultimate Good - for, as Plotinus suggests, "who, if he is able to contemplate what is truly real will deliberately go after its image?"(114) He does not deny that images, in reflecting the intelligible world, may aid recollection, but stresses that mere sense-perception of such images can in no way lead to knowledge.(115) It is important to remember Plotinus' distinction



between the higher and lower parts of the soul, for he is never in any doubt that the lower, irrational part, including the body, could be affected by 'magical' practices, and was particularly vulnerable to what we might now term telepathic interference. In the episode of Olympius' attempts to undermine Plotinus by directing 'star magic' at him which resulted in intestinal pains,(116) Plotinus apparently was so possessed of 'soul power' that Olympius' actions were deflected back onto him and he gave up in fear for his own health.(117) According to Porphyry, Plotinus unquestioningly accepted that his pains were happening as a result of Olympius' evil thoughts, but such was his ability to act from his higher, contemplative nature at all times that he was ultimately immune from, and by his very quality of being (in other words, involuntarily) resisted and caused to rebound, such enchantment.(118)

Would Plotinus have maintained that Olympius' evil wish, evidently some sort of rite involving astrological invocation, caused his intestinal complaint? In *Ennead* IV.4.41-2 he describes how the natural powers of the stars may be set in operation by prayer but do not have autonomous wills to be petitioned:

"That which he prays for comes about because one part is in sympathetic connection with another, just as in one tense string; for if the string is plucked at the lower end, it has a vibration at the upper ... But if the vibration can even pass from one lyre to another in so far as a sympathy exists, then there is also one single harmony in the All, even if it is composed of opposites ... nor do [the stars] deliberately choose to attend to prayers, but we must admit that some influence comes from them both with and without prayer in so far as they are parts, and parts of one whole ... one thing is benefited and harmed by another because it is naturally so disposed, and by the arts of physicians and magicians one thing is compelled to give something of its power to another .."

If this is effected with harmful intent by the 'magician', it does not presume any evil property in the part itself:

"if the man who prays is evil, there is no need to be surprised; for the wicked draw water from the streams and that which gives does not know itself to what it gives, but only gives; ... if someone takes what he ought not from what lies at the disposal of all, justice pursues him by an inevitable law."(119)

From this one could assume that Plotinus, being so in-tune with the apt and just flowing of such 'inevitable laws' through the subduing and moulding of his own will, became an unwitting instrument for such retribution to flow back to the perpetrator. In *Ennead III.1*, 'On Destiny' Plotinus rejects all neatly cut-and-dried theories of causation, held by Epicureans, Stoics and astrologers, in favour of a free-ranging potential of human will to acknowledge its own participation in its destiny. By likening the role of the wise astrologer to that of the soothsayer or diviner, in that he is contemplating the possible significance of a given set of signs by subjecting them to a personal interpretation and not regarding them as definite objective causes, (120) Plotinus sets a philosophical precedent for all 'magical' rites as experiential, non-quantifiable moments of meaningful and significant connection between the participator and his chosen set of cosmic 'mirroring' devices, whether they be observed as stars, birds or entrails. Such operations work, he says in *Ennead IV*,

"by sympathy and by the fact that there is a natural concord of things that are alike and opposition of things that are different, and by the rich variety of the many powers which go to make up the life of the one living creature." (121)

In such an inter-connected cosmic system it is not surprising that an intentional 'invasion' for manipulative ends by a particular individual would cause reverberations of equal intensity, for this, for Plotinus, would simply be in accordance with natural law - a perversion of the natural state of conditioned tension and reverberation present in creation, in which we continually and inevitably participate.

However, the treasures yielded by 'knowing participation' in cosmic forces are only available to those who are able to make the necessary connections. For example, with regard to 'occult' astrology, he says:

"We must rather say that the movement of the stars is for the preservation of the universe, but that they perform in addition another service; this is that those who know how to read this sort of writing can, by looking at them as if they were letters, read the future from their patterns, discovering what is signified by the systematic use of analogy." (122)

The degree of such ability, according to Plotinus, varies according to the quality of the human soul, which in its nobler form acts from the impulse of free-will and exercises total control over bodily passions. Instead of being at the mercy of external circumstances and internal temptations, the "self-directed" man is possessed of himself, and when moved by "irrational impulses" holds his own and remains free to move in any direction, maintaining the power to change the outer circumstance or influence rather than be changed by it.(123) This ability to discriminate and sift with regard to involvement in life and use of resources was of course of paramount importance to Ficino in his attempts to regulate and balance his outer life with his temperamental melancholic tendencies. As I mentioned earlier, it was the intention of the neo-platonic magician to use his practices, whether those of direct contemplation (in the case of Plotinus) or theurgy (as favoured by Iamblichus and Proclus) as a means of self-clarification and alignment so that his desires and those of the World Soul become one, achieving a degree of self-possession and direction which enhances individual freedom of action and liberates from the limiting shackles of deterministic assumption:

"It is perhaps correct to say that the soul acts unthinkingly according to destiny, at least for people who think that destiny is an external cause; but the best actions come from ourselves; for this is the nature we are of, when we are alone."(124)

We have already mentioned how Plotinus believed the higher part of the soul to be immune from the effects of all artificial intervention on the part of the magician. He explains(125) that this is because the rational soul is self-directed, and may choose whether or not to consciously enter into the natural enchantment of the world. For all worldly, practical action is enchantment for Plotinus - we are constantly moved towards that which charms us, and often caught by it. Nature herself is full of 'magic draughts'(126) which bring illusion and misdirect or attract our energies sideways instead of upwards. Plotinus particularly stresses the danger of musical incantations, for when they are produced with a specific attitude and intent on the part of the magician they exert a wholly natural power over the irrational part of the soul and so may, by the unscrupulous manipulator, be misdirected to confuse rather than harmonise:

"And there is a natural draving power in spells wrought by the tune and the particular intonation and posture of the magician - for these things attract, as pitiable figures and voices attract; for it is the irrational soul - not the power of choice or the reason - which is charmed by music, and this kind of magic causes no surprise: people even like being enchanted, even if this is not exactly what they demand from the musicians."(127)

In order to free oneself from such enslavement, Plotinus suggests, we must so strengthen the higher part of the soul with philosophy that it will "dissolve the powers on the other side."(128) Then an upward shift of emphasis may take place; all practical activities may be approached from an inner condition of contemplation. For Plotinus, contemplation is not confined to a few solitary mystics. It is the common gift of an inner vision which "all have and few use."(129) As such, it may be brought constantly to all activities, to 'ennoble' them, for necessary natural impulses and compassionate actions are not inherently 'noble'(130) but become so by their continual, intentional relation to a higher purposive design through the medium of the inner eye, which 'sees' with connective, symbolic insight. The opening of this eye is aided or prompted, in the Platonic sense, by intimations of the divine pattern perceived by our senses as Beauty, visible or audible. It is an operation that must be continually renewed experientially, to preserve and strengthen the soul, and can be seen as Ficino's fundamental aim in his emphasis on active imagination throughout Book three of the *Liber de vita*, as we shall see in chapter four.

Plotinus would see that self-examination, understood as self-contemplation, can alone ennoble every-day life without losing self-possession. We will find a direct echo of his words "that which [the self-directed man] contemplates is himself"(131) in Ficino's exhortation to a young member of the Medici family(132) to turn his attention to the planetary energies mirrored within his soul and "temper within himself" the heavenly gifts. In the end, engagement in practical activity without losing a higher self-awareness is a question of attitude and participation, a willingness to renounce habitual, objective thought processes. Paradoxically, for Plotinus, to be "actively occupied" with the concerns of so-called everyday reality, without having recourse to a contemplative

perspective, is to be enchanted and deluded by the semblance of truth. True 'reality' is only to be found in subjective inner experience:

"The man ... is alone free from enchantment who when his other parts are trying to draw him says that none of the things are good which they declare to be so, but only that which he knows himself, not deluded or pursuing, but possessing it. So he would not be drawn in any direction."(133)

We can perhaps sum up this brief survey of Plotinus' conception of the magician's role as follows: the natural process of ebb and flow in the cosmos is consciously, but disinterestedly, entered into and dynamically caught by the magician through his inclination and disposition - what Giovanni Pico was to call his 'intent of soul' (*animi intentio*)(134) - to move towards that which he desires, which is to enter the play of forces for the sake of harmonising his own soul. The natural astrological benefits which he draws to himself via the 'occult' properties of the stars and their effluxes are thus signs, symptoms or by-products, which incline towards him through a sympathetic resonating. The wilful and deliberate attempt to harness these forces for the manipulation of events or the artificial realisation of particular objectives, is illegitimate and presumptuous and will receive, in the natural balance of cosmic justice, its deserved retribution.

#### 2.10. Images (*synthēata*)

"Things here are signs; they show therefore to the wiser teachers how the supreme God is known; the instructed priest reading the sign may enter the holy place and make real the vision of the inaccessible."(135)

A.H. Armstrong in his article 'Platonic Mirrors'(136) gives a vivid and succinct analysis of the distinction between 'natural' and 'artificial' images and Plotinus' own evaluation of their specific derivations and functions. He quotes a passage from *Ennead VI 4-5* where Plotinus clearly differentiates between the image produced by an artist and that to be found in the natural world:

"... if one is talking about the likeness made by the painter, we shall affirm that it is not the original which made the the likeness but the painter, since even if some painter makes a self-portrait it is not alikeness of