

## CHAPTER THREE: FICINO AND ASTROLOGY

### PART ONE: On the Knowledge of Divine Things

#### 3.1. Notio

"A mind apt in knowledge will discover truth more readily than one practiced in the highest branches of science."(1)

I shall begin this chapter with a direct connection between the mode of knowing emphasised by the neo-platonic theurgists and Ficino's own thoughts on the matter, as expressed in various key passages in his Commentary on Iamblichus' *De mysteriis*.(2) This will provide the context from which a clearer perspective on his particular attitude towards astrology may emerge. Ficino's translations of and commentaries on Plotinus, Iamblichus, Porphyry and Proclus have been generally neglected by modern scholars in favour of his letters, Platonic commentaries and theological works - but it is in these very texts, written towards the end of his life, that we find Ficino formulating the basis for the practical, experiential wisdom and 'occult' awareness on which his own natural magic depended, and which was to find final expression in the controversial but extremely popular *Liber de vita* of 1489.

At the beginning of the Commentary, Ficino elaborates on Iamblichus' reply to Porphyry that knowledge of divine things cannot be attained through rational argument and discourse.(3) In his own attempt to explain the mode of understanding required, he distinguishes between *notio*, or a pre-eminent, intuitive sense innate to the soul, and *notitia*, or conceptual mental activity. As this is one of Ficino's most succinct interpretations of 'qualitative' as opposed to 'quantitative' apprehension it is worthy of detailed examination. He begins by stating the belief that preceding all human faculties of reasoning (*ratio*) the gods implanted in the soul an experiential faculty of knowing (*usus*), which he describes as "a certain touch of divinity (*tactus quidam divinitatis*) rather than the workings of mental conception (*notitia*)."(4) This innate, immediate grasping of divine things through that part of the soul "touched by the gods" will stir, says

Ficino, a natural appetite for that to which it is akin - the Good - and foster a capacity for careful consideration (*ratiocinatio*) and wise judgement. *Notio* is perpetually available, within the soul, to be drawn on and experienced - it is concerned with the perception of the essentiality of things, and is of quite a different order from the quantifiable knowledge referred to as *notitia*. The nature of *notio* is "a certain essential contact", (5) not linear discourse. In other words, it is not concerned with developing gifts for speculating on and quantifying an experience, it is that experience. Ficino's use of earthy, tactile terminology (*tactus, contactus*) brings the intellectual and spiritual impulsion of fire and the theoretical abstraction of air (the two elements which motivate Greek transcendental philosophy(6)) into harmony with concrete, sensual experience: *notio* embraces the qualities of mind, soul and the senses in a single act of apprehension. For we must continually bear in mind that Ficino was no Plotinus - his intellectual activities were balanced by daily practical ministering to the physical and spiritual needs of his community. His ideal of unity involved the natural congruity of an action with its internal impulse, which itself arose from a deep sense of connection with higher principles.

In our struggle to attain unity of being, we can only make a "particular and effective contact" (*contiguitatem tam propriam et efficacem*) with such principles (the gods) through a corresponding unity of our own soul, and this must of its very nature transcend the particular distinctions implied by the use of different words for 'mind' and 'soul', and by the event-oriented measurement of 'linear' time - for Ficino stresses that such a process of knowing is a continuous one (*actu perpetuo*), effective through simultaneous affinity rather than 'cause and effect' thinking.

He continues with the common Platonic notion that essence of the soul - that which is unified - is divine in that it partakes of divine Intellect in all its simplicity and unchanging, eternally revolving harmony. The essential being of the soul is therefore expressed via its intellectual perception, where subject and object merge in an awareness of the divinity of self as God:

"Our being is to know God, because the chief essence of the soul is its intellect, in which exists the same essence which comprehends divine things by perpetual action."(7)

The intellect embraces at its very centre this faculty of unceasing intuitive perception, from which the intelligible powers of the soul derive. This process of *adaequatio*, or similitude of knower with known, is seen by Ficino to be accomplished in a single act of conformity in which the intellect remains complete in itself as in God: "The intellect, maker of all things, always approaches most fully all the gods through one act, remaining in itself."(8) In a letter to the Cardinal of Aragon in 1478 Ficino had described such a process using the image of a sphere, a powerful evocation of the internalisation of the macrocosm:

"Now Ferdinand, leaving behind the senses, turn your mind back onto itself, by a complete observation of itself. Having dismissed the body you will at once see your mind, when it is turned in on itself, to be an incorporeal sphere, of which the circumference, that is intelligence and will, is revolved through incorporeal things. And the centre, that is life and essential being, is independent; it does not pivot around any corporeal thing."(9)

It is through the powers of the circumference that "the habitual discourse of human reason" may be transcended and access gained to the intermediate spiritual hierarchies, the "servants of the gods", namely daemons, heroes and pure souls.(10) Ficino supposes that, after *notio* has been activated (as a direct intuition of contact with the eternal realm in general), the lower echelons of *numina* are the first spirits to be reached when the soul leaves behind "a mobile manner of understanding" (*modus cognitionis mobilem*) and contemplates the *potentiam rationalem*, or intellect applied as direct, enlightened intelligence (*intellectum adeptum*). Conceptual thinking, or *notitia* is the fundamental mode of 'knowing' and stems from the active intellect. However, it lacks the fertilisation of true divine intelligence and is incapable, because not united to the intuition, of *adaequatio* or the sense of affinity with divine knowledge. It is only through *notio* that the smallest glimpse (according to our individual human capacity) of the eternal realm may be had - since such a mode of knowing partakes in sufficient measure of those same immutable qualities.(11)

All this has profound implications for a 'psychological' application of astrology, for incorporating the manifold constraints on one's individual temperament (as symbolised by particular astrological configurations) into one's own motivation - accepting limitations and taking them into account while fully embracing them, at a radically subjective level, allows the individual to transcend them, or at least, not to suffer their imposition as an arbitrary operation of external 'fate'. There is the possibility of 'negotiation' with the gods - which is of course the basis of all divinatory practices. But this will be explored more fully later.

The essential characteristic of *notio* is unity - overall unity of parts of the soul naturally drawing together gifts ultimately derived from the unity of the divine realm. Unity of perception enables a correct overview and interpretation based on insight which is neither distorted by emotion nor confused by the proliferation of detail. It is concerned less with the study of separate things through comparing and opposing their particular distinctions, than with referring their common qualities to a higher level of discrimination, and thus understanding them as parts of a greater whole. The false and the true can only be known, says Ficino, through the similitude of such knowledge to the innate, natural faculty of intellect and achieved through the processes of attraction and affinity together with an alchemical operation of distillation, not through arbitrary quantification:

"moreover it is acquired by a certain study of the power of reason, not so much by comparison and conjecture as by the operation of differentiation (*separationis*) and purification."(12)

The very manner of opposing and analysing in quantifiable terms, (for example considering whether the gods are temporal or eternal), Ficino suggests is in itself fundamentally opposed to the nature of unchanging things, since it is changeable or inconstant in its methods of "comparison and conjecture". When a philosopher is firmly embedded in such an attitude (as Porphyry reveals himself to be in his bewildered incomprehension of divine action and his demands for rational explanations), unity of mind and soul is unobtainable and the individual remains stuck in the unreliable realm of *doxa*. Ficino is of course struggling to explain a very complex and subtle distinction in rigorous philosophical terms; but it is typical

of his constant desire to transcend the limitations of 'mobile' thought and move towards unity that elsewhere we find the same notion presented not as a philosophical definition but as a sensuous image.

In the *Liber de Sole*(13) (written about six years later), a work which he specifically tells us is "allegorical and anagogic rather than dogmatic", (14) Ficino appeals directly to the reader's imagination to convey the meaning of *notio*. Here he abandons "rational arguments" for "certain comparisons deduced from the light", (15) using the metaphor of light and illumination to convey the same qualities of immeasurability and all-pervasiveness evoked by *notio*, and to suggest that affinity with the divine is achieved through a qualitative leap of direct apprehension, not tortuous investigation:

"Whenever in your studies you make a serious attempt to postulate that there are many angelic minds beyond heaven, like lights ... what then will be the use of pursuing your investigations down long winding paths? Look up at heaven.. O citizen of the heavenly realm..."(16)

Later in the same work Ficino attempts to find words to describe the nature of this subjective insight and the experience of transcending the boundaries of temporality, in a passage reminiscent of Plato:(17)

"you .. must abandon a definite quantity, and, moreover, the potency of the light. Then there will remain the light itself, cleansed by miraculous power, defined neither by a definite quantity nor by any definite shape, and this light itself filling with its presence a space immense with respect to the imagination. This pure light exceeds the intelligence just as in itself sunlight surpasses the acuity of the eyes. In this way, in proportion to the strength you receive from the Sun, you will almost seem to have found God ..."(18)

We are reminded, in Ficino's appeal to the faculty of the imagination as the 'middle ground' in which the quality of the divine may be humanly experienced, of Jung's conception of the power of the archetypal image (the Sun being a prime example):

"The use of these [images] requires at any rate an alert and lively fantasy, and this is not an attribute of those who are inclined by temperament to purely intellectual concepts. These offer us something finished and complete, whereas an archetypal image has nothing but its naked fullness, which

seems inapprehensible by the intellect. Concepts are coined and negotiable values; images are life."(19)

It must of course be remembered that for the Renaissance Platonist the 'real being' of the spiritual realm - understood by depth psychology to be a projection of the unconscious - could never be in question.

A second passage in the Commentary on Iamblichus deals more specifically with the powers of magical operations,(20) restating Iamblichus' insistence that divine operations are not accomplished technically through any human power but by disclosing the inherent gifts and qualities of the gods as revealed in all things, and that the realisation of such properties requires a purity and intent of soul (namely *notio*) which precedes all thought-processes:

"For universal causes are not moved by particular effects: whence divine things are not originally moved to operate by our intelligence, but it is necessary that the greatest disposition and purity precedes thoughts, just as with certain causes. Indeed those things which primarily summon divine will are themselves divine sacraments, and so divine things are invoked by themselves and do not receive the origin of their action from anything inferior."(21)

No merely human invention (however boldly directed) may hold any sway in the face of the gods' decrees, for even if we do attempt to intervene by forming our own conclusions or fabricating results we will suddenly find ourselves conforming to their will whether we like it or not.(22) This is because the inscrutable power at work is beyond human knowledge; it is "superior to thought", a "purified purity"(23) and not brought about by anything in us (or perhaps we should add, by any *conscious* intention on our part). When the priest constructs symbols and uses sacramental objects in religious rituals, he knows how to prepare and dedicate them to be most effective lures, in the Plotinian sense - but finally it is God alone who "seals the effective force of the sacrament".(24) We can take this to refer to *adaequatio* of microcosm and macrocosm, a reaching down past all arbitrary opinion and judgement to that sense of *notio* which connects with what we have described as the eternal realm and infuses another dimension into so-called reality. Ficino himself realised the psychological potential of such a synchronous moment of coincidence in his ritual

singing, which, he assures us, depended on a combination of diligent preparation and *divina sorte* for its therapeutic effectiveness.(25)

The third passage to be considered before addressing more specifically Ficino's attitude towards astrology itself concerns statue-magic and the presence of the gods in specific locations and materials, for this has direct bearing on his own practical magic as demonstrated in the *Liber de vita*. Again he uses the powerful metaphor of light to convey the subtle quality of divine essences which pervade a particular receptacle:

"When the gods are said to choose their own various places, towns, buildings and statues, understand that their essence and power flourishes everywhere in those places, illuminating most powerfully here and there; and just as light, remaining uniform in itself (*in se manens*), shines in different places without different mixtures and divisions of its light, likewise [do] the gods."(26)

The light of the gods is thus uniform and all-pervasive; it is the varying mixtures and qualities of earthly things (whether in material objects or human beings) which determine the strength or weakness of the divine power which can be perceived in them, not any variation in intensity of the light itself as it emanates from its one source; for the capacity to receive and respond to it will vary considerably according to how each thing is most accommodated to it. For Ficino, light serves as a metaphor for the intelligible principle which transcends all opposites and unites them (*unitque cum extremis extrema*).(27) It stands for the clarity of insight which transcends and unites pure intellect and depth of intuition as represented by the 'masculine' and 'feminine' principles of mind and soul (*animus, anima*). Light is the medium in and through which all the elements of the cosmos work together to produce *musica mundana*:

"it accomplishes all things and unites extreme parts with each other, through a medium including all things in itself, and thus reflecting itself to itself completely united. Indeed which function is imitated too by the circular motion of the world, and by the connection of the parts in the whole, and by a certain uniting of elements to elements in turn, and by virtue of higher things sending forth to lower things."(28)

It is the linking of these unified motions with the motions of the human soul, or *musica humana*, that constitutes the art of attunement to the

heavens (which Ficino was to call *De vita coelitus comparanda*), and we shall see in chapter four that he considered this astrological or magical art of self-adjustment to be therapeutically helped by the correct use of *musica instrumentalis*.

As part of the *circuitus spiritualis*, the divine light, or intelligible principle, will be present in objects specifically designed to receive and reflect it - such as statues of particular gods - as a 'power point' of spiritual energy. Again it is stressed that the power itself is uniform; the degree to which it is present will depend on the suitability of the material, the knowledge and skill of the operator or inventor, and above all on the quality of perception of the participator. "It is necessary", says Ficino, "to be totally reverent to perceive the causes of the mundane gods in places [normally by nature] foreign to them."(29) This recognition and use of *notio* is the only way in which the essence, strength and action of the gods in the world will be experienced and so understood, and is an act of intuitive comprehension, not a quantitative analysis of distinction and separation. By "determination of how much pertains to distribution according to place" and differentiation according to species and types, the possibility of apprehending reciprocal and mutual qualities and powers of occult properties in relation to their one source is severely inhibited.(30) In other words, the qualitative richness of the external world is dependent upon a unifying act of imaginative perception, not 'scientific' analysis. Any part of the world, says Ficino, receives something from God, according to its natural propensity; we can understand that people, in the same way as places, receive varying degrees and proportions of 'divine light' as it is refracted down through the elements and material world - the horoscope in this sense becomes a symbolic representation of strengths and weaknesses according to the manner in which a particular individual, like a prism, reflects the original light of God. Ficino believed that this divine element could be made more wholly present and beneficently harmonised ("the gifts of the gods naturally attracted") through purposeful invocations and material adaptations(31) - and particularly through music composed in specific accordance with the astrological 'signature' of the individual in a continuous process of tempering and refining his soul.



### 3.2. Divinatory and 'scientific' astrology

Astrology is in a unique position to bridge and thus to unite the eternal and the temporal; the empirical observation of universal motions and celestial phenomena and the mathematical calculation of the laws of regulation which arise, provide a framework within which the subjective imagination may freely range and find meaning. In fact, as Garin observes, it is precisely the impossibility of detaching the theories from the experiential effects which gives astrology such potential as a tool for attaining a holistic vision of the unity of heaven with earth - for it becomes "the translation of reality into celestial language."<sup>(32)</sup> In achieving this insight, a human being may become master of his fate as he realises the union of the opposites within his own soul and ceases to be thrown off course by 'fated' external events.

In his *Etymology* the seventh century encyclopedist Isidore of Seville attempted to clarify the classical Ptolemaic tradition of astrology, distinguishing between *astronomia* and *astrologia* as follows:

"There is some difference between Astronomy and Astrology. For Astronomy is confined to the changing of the heavens, the rising, orbits and movements of the stars, or why they are so placed. Astrology is partly natural, partly superstitious. Natural, when it follows the courses of the sun and moon, or definite stations/placings of the planets' revolutions (*temporum*). The superstitious kind is that followed by the mathematicians, who augur from the stars, and distribute twelve signs of the heavens to particular souls or members of the body, and strive to predict by the movements of the stars the births and customs of men."<sup>(33)</sup>

According to this definition, the astronomer measures phenomena and traces their movements back to a first cause; the 'natural astrologer' considers the movements of the heavenly bodies in time and their reciprocal aspects, and the 'superstitious astrologer' adds meaning to such movements by relating them to the microcosm of the human being and making assumptions about the future from such observations of correspondence. However, in regarding as 'superstitious' all astrology which relates to the condition of the individual Isidore is smoothing over a distinction which is fundamental to the neo-platonic approach to the subject - that between true 'divinatory' astrology and the attempt to reduce the 'superstitious'

variety to a natural science. For the kind of astrological awareness demonstrated by the neo-platonic philosopher/magician in his symbolic cosmology of spiritual hierarchies reflected within the soul of the individual is essentially divinatory, and of quite a different order from the traditional 'natural scientific' model of predictive and deterministic astrological judgement. We are dealing with two positions here which derive from the fundamental dichotomy in human nature between rational objectivity and intuitive, subjective insight. We might also view this distinction in relation to what we have termed temporal and eternal time, or quantitative as opposed to qualitative modes of comprehension. We have suggested that it is the possibility of a moment of fusion of the two orders which gives rise to the experience of unity of being and perception (the *unus mundus* of the alchemists) by fully embracing the underlying paradox inherent in the two conditions of 'being' and 'becoming'.

Much of the confusion surrounding Ficino's apparently ambivalent attitude towards the value of astrological techniques and judgement may be clarified by bearing this in mind. He was a human being prey to all the inner tensions and confusions of an extremely melancholic temperament, which he understood to be signified by the presence of Saturn rising on his ascendant. He acknowledged the constant, inevitable fluctuation of human intellectual prowess, remarking "we are not always the same with respect to knowledge", (34) and it is surely unfair to attempt to evaluate his experience of meaningful symbolic correspondence with an expectation of rational consistency. 'Magical' activity of any sort, in its complexity and radical subjectivity, will of necessity elude all attempts at final categorisation and analysis. We should surely regard Kristeller's opinion that Ficino's position is "ambiguous and full of contradictions" (35) not as a criticism of an inconsistent philosophical stance, but as an indication of the richness and subtlety of his astrological experience and the difficulties involved in both his expression of it and our clear understanding of what he means.

Eugenio Garin has effectively summarised the complex nature of the astrological 'dilemma' which faced the humanist thinkers from Petrarch onwards. The two ways of approaching astrology, as a theoretical science or an occult art (that is, as an experiential 'moment') provided material

for a debate which was to reach polemical proportions by the 1490s with Pico's massive outcry against a divinatory astrology based on pseudo-scientific assumptions.(36) In the words of Garin:

"[one way of interpreting astrology] is conceptual and mathematical and reduces the heavenly intelligences and the souls of things to necessary principles of rationality inherent in the picture of an absolute, completely predetermined. The other instead accentuates the personality of the divine and underlines the free individuality of souls, and gives life and humanity to everything, and is expressed in terms which are fantastic and emotive, imaginative and poetic. In the first case one risks losing human initiative and freedom; in the second the trap is the destruction of rationality and a nature which is regulated by laws. A continual tension emerges from this in the oscillations of the thinkers ... an ambiguity which is so deep that it is useless to think it can be resolved by the commonplace of the oppositions between astrology and magic."

It is useless, I would emphasise, because within each way of approach lie as many modes of understanding as there are individuals, and because ultimately both the objective and subjective viewpoints converge in a sense of personal awe and wonder when the unchanging laws of cosmic working are revealed. At the apex, the precision of 'scientific' examination and determination of natural law should, according to Platonic thought, give rise to true religious experience and intuition of the numinous.(37) But as the strands diverge and separate myriad positions may be tenanted, from blind adherence to rational 'scientific' norms to the hysteria of religious fanaticism; from the Apollonine clarity of exact perception to the enchanting images of poetic approximations and musical analogies. For both Ficino and Pico astrology was "not so much a technique of prediction as a general conception of reality"(38) in which man as *magnus miraculum* triumphed in his self-determined freedom. In a letter to Poliziano concerning his astrological views(39) Ficino congratulates both him and Pico for disputing against the astrologers who "in the manner of giants, as vainly as wickedly struggle to tear away Zeus' heaven from him" - in other words, who attempt to de-mythologise and reduce to a quantifiable system an art which must depend on a symbolic, open-ended imaginative response for its effectiveness.

When the positions of heavenly bodies are observed and annotated at any given moment one is conducting a 'scientific' or astronomical, operation. When the result is taken up imaginatively in the act of divination, when the operator participates in a meaningful relationship with the quality of that moment, astrology becomes 'magic' - the wise astrologer observes, interprets and uses operative magic to 'negotiate with the gods' and transcend 'bad' fate; thus the formal structure provides the framework for the content of the experience. Unfortunately it is all too easy to lose the kernel of that irrational experience within a strict tradition which upholds rational objectivity and thus becomes bound within the view of structure as an end in itself. Ficino succeeded in maintaining a divinatory attitude within the craft of astrological procedure, together with a respect for disciplined interpretation which he found in Ptolemy and the Arabic astrological writers. But he reacted against the tyranny of a purely formal approach, and his criticism fell heavily on both the rule-bound determinism and superstitious, fanciful soothsaying of ignorant practitioners, never on the potential of astrology itself, in the hands of the wise, as a tool for self-knowledge and, ultimately, for an experience of unity of religious breadth and intensity.

### 3.3. Ptolemaic astrology

Before considering in some detail Ficino's condemnation of what he regarded as ignorant astrology, we should look briefly at the tradition of astrology as a natural science which Ficino would have inherited through medieval Aristotelianism. Although he respected such a view (Ptolemaic astrological theory unquestioningly formed the basis of his own practice) he recognised that it could, if it were allowed to impose its own hegemony, negate the possibility of a transcendental, 'eternal' order which would thus deny any possibility of final psychological unity.

Ptolemy and Hermes Trismegistus can perhaps be viewed as the clearest upholders of 'rational' and 'mystical' approaches to astrology. We have considered in chapter two the Hermetic tradition in terms of its emphasis on 'eternal time' and the implications of this on magical operations. Apart from Manilius' didactic poem *Astronomica*(40) (in which he

specifically presents astrology as a gift of Hermes - Tu princeps auctorque sacri, Cyllenie, tanti) 'Hermetic astrology' is to be found chiefly in the treatises of philosophers. In contrast, the traditional Ptolemaic model of 'scientific' astrology is represented by a series of astrological 'text books', beginning with Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* in the late Hellenistic period (c.150 AD).(41) The formulation of a purely 'scientific' astrology was concerned with the correlation of effects from the heavens in 'objective time' which leads to the inevitable, concrete outcomes of future events. Ptolemy's work provides us with a definitive exposition of the conceptual framework of astrology; an approach which developed simultaneously with the enthusiasm for astral and solar cults and for the deep subjectivism of experiential theurgic ritual in the early centuries A.D. Geoffrey Cornelius has pointed out(42) that before Ptolemy astrology was essentially katarthic in that it was inextricably linked to the practices of auspices and augury - divinations and oracles which sought to clarify the relationship of human conduct with the will of the gods at any given moment of significance. He suggests that with Ptolemy, the katarthic elements became suppressed in favour of a rationalistic model - a 'protective overmantle' of natural-scientific rationalism(43) was superimposed on this core of divinatory practice; a mantle which, I would add, is always in danger of stifling rather than protecting its vulnerable content.

Ptolemaic astrology firmly upholds a natural process of causation, following Aristotle,(44) but introduces an original concept of an ambient or ether, whose quality depends on the heavenly bodies and which is suffused throughout creation(45) (a 'scientific' equivalent of *anima mundi*?). Ptolemy promised man the ability to understand human temperament and predict events "both scientifically and by successful conjecture" through examining the quality of this airy, all-pervading substance. Of utmost importance is the 'seed' moment, or moment of origin - which may be that of birth itself or any moment in life from which predictions may be made - at which time the heavens stamp an impression which impregnates and marks, indelibly, the characteristics of the person or event:

"For the cause both of universal and of particular events is the motion of the planets, sun, and moon: and the prognostic art is the scientific observation of the precisely the change in the subject natures which correspond to parallel movements of the heavenly bodies through the surrounding heavens, except that universal conditions are greater and

independent, and particular ones not similarly so ... The general characteristics of the temperament are determined from the first starting point, while by means of the others we predict events that will come about at specific times and vary in degree ..." (46)

Here there is no room for negotiation with the gods. Ptolemy regards any form of participatory divination using astrology as merely deceitful and profiteering soothsaying, (47) and rejects an intuitive, comprehensive 'ancient' form of prediction which takes all the stars into account (practised by "those who make their enquiries directly from nature") (48) as too difficult. He is much more concerned with "theorising on the basis of the traditions" (49) than attempting to account for what actually happens in the astrologer's experience. Neo-platonic or Hermetic astrology fundamentally challenges the determinist stance by observing that the correlation of an event with a particular heavenly configuration is neither necessary or sufficient for the astrological effect to happen - that is, to be experienced. The degree to which a meaningful connection between the two is made will depend not on an empirical observation of external factors, but on the capacity of the individual for insight - which thus depends more on *notio* than *notitia*. This position remains in the realm of the 'possible' and preserves the autonomy of the human will by allowing freedom of choice with regard to the taking up of the symbolism - there is room for manoeuvre, for the play of the imagination, as the responsibility is removed from an invariable 'out there' and placed in the realm of personal experience with its infinite variety of shades and intensities of subjective meaning. (50) Ficino was to continually stress that human beings inhabit a world of contingency. To reduce their experiences to either necessary or impossible outcomes - to adopt a fatalist view of astrology or deny any possible symbolic signification - deprives man of the noblest part of his soul - his divinity - which is expressed through his capacity for creative imagination. As Salutati cried, a hundred years before Ficino's *Disputatio*: "Leave free will to humankind: if you take it away you will destroy both the human and the divine." (51)

#### 3.4. Arabic astrology

It has been pointed out by David Pingree(52) that a thorough scholarly investigation of the vast amount of Arabic literature concerning astrology has hardly begun. But from the available texts it is clear that the Arabs were the great synthesisers of astrological tradition, translating into Arabic Greek, Sanskrit, Syriac and Persian writings. Persian astrology itself combined both Hellenistic and Indian doctrine. Persian astrologers writing in Arabic began to create a literature based on Persian translations of Greek and Sanskrit texts made in the third century A.D., and from the seventh to eighth centuries A.D. the two branches of divinatory and genethliological astrology are found represented in Arabic treatises. It has been assumed by modern scholarship(53) that Arabic astrologers in general promulgated the Ptolemaic 'machine of destiny' in an attempt to justify their art scientifically. However, it would appear that already divination and horary practices, involving a subjective or 'experiential' dimension, played a large part in Islamic horoscopy in the eighth and ninth centuries. The earliest known Arabic text relating to astrology deals with celestial omens,(54) which were also to predominate in the many Arabic translations of Hermetic texts. A feature of Arabic astrology was that it established and clarified the different branches of astrological practice. One particular source, evidently known to Ficino, is the twelfth century *Liber novem judicium*,(55) a Latin compendium of Arabic astrological writings mostly from the eighth and ninth centuries A.D., some of which were translations of astrological authorities from both Greek and Persian traditions: Aristotle, Ptolemy, Dorotheus, Aomar ('Umar Muhammed ibn al-Farrukhan al-Tabari, died 815), Alkindus (Al-Kindi abu Yusuf Ya'qub ibn Ishaq al-Sabbah c.800-873), Zael (Sahl ibn Bishr ibn Habib ibn Hani, died between 822-850), Albenait (also known as Abu Ali, Albohali, Alchait, Yahya ibn Ghalib Abu Ali al-Khayyat, active c.854), Mesehella (Masha'allah ibn Athari al-Basri, died 815) and Jergis (unidentified).

Mesehella, a Persian Jew working in Iraq from 762 to 815, was the first astrologer to introduce elements of Aristotelian physics into Arabic, and his work on genethliology survives in a Latin translation by Hugo of Santalla.(56) In the text included in the *Liber novem judicium* he distinguishes between six categories of astrological practice: the

astrology of generations and nations, of families and single households, kings and potentates, natal astrology, inceptions and elections, and horary.(57) The divinatory branch of interrogations, which depends on a subjective interrelationship between the condition of the inquirer and that of the heavens, is regarded as a particular application of astrology which may happily co-exist with the 'objective' methods of genethliology, for which Ptolemy and Dorotheus provided the chief models. We know that Mesehella, Aomar and two other astrologers cast the horoscope for the foundation of Baghdad on 30th July 762.(58)

In his *Disputatio* Ficino's most-quoted authority is Ptolemy, whose name springs from almost every page. However, many of his references are to the spurious *Centiloquium* or *Liber fructus*, now believed to be composed by the Arab Haly Abenrudian (Abu Jafar Ahmad b. Yusuf b. al-Dayah c.920) whose Commentary on the work was available in the Renaissance via the translation by Hugo of Santalla.(59) The Arabic astrologer quoted most frequently in the *Disputatio* is Albumasar (Abu Ma'shar, 787-886), who had become a principal authority in the Medieval period through his *Introductorium maius in Astronomiam*, written in Baghdad in 848 A.D. and twice translated into Latin in the 12th century.(60) His justification of astrology as rooted in the principles of natural science carried through the principle of deterministic causation to embrace every aspect of the sublunar world, and Ficino frequently refers disparagingly to what he regards as Albumasar's "silly similitudes" (*pueriles similitudines*) which cannot give any sound basis for judgement.(61)

Albumasar firmly upheld astrological fatalism, establishing astrology as an intellectual discipline which could not in itself be subject to error - any inconsistency or contradiction in judgement was to be attributed to the shortcomings of the practitioner, not to his art. Albumasar's advice is that the astrologer "must have confidence in his science while avoiding to meddle with the unknown or with that which exceeds the power of reason in order not to bring legitimate astrology into disrepute."(62) All human qualities of body and soul Albumasar understood as part of one natural movement, the ultimate source of which is God's will, but which are nevertheless totally determined by virtue of the heavenly bodies. Ficino would agree that, in the world of nature which included human bodies and



emotions, results of planetary activity could be directly observed depending on the type of action and degree of receptivity of the material. But he was to protest indignantly at the assumption that the great variety of effects in this world could all be attributed to planetary movements, aspects and figures - both observable and imagined. Although Albumasar acknowledged man's capacity to deliberate and exercise choice, ultimately even contingency must for him be determined by the stars - for in what has been termed "the ominous inclination toward elimination of contingency so characteristic of Arabian philosophy"(63) his conclusion is that man will choose what is of necessity already implied in planetary motion.(64) If God intervenes in this natural process through an act of providence, it does not disrupt the system of regular cause and effect. Although he professes to allow it, Lemay points out, Albumasar effectively does away with the notion of contingency altogether. No possibility of transformation through transcendence of 'fate' can be incorporated in this system - for the strict rationalist, 'magical' operations claiming to do this would be considered illusory and dangerous, not least because to endow planets with the numinous qualities of divine personifications and to presume to summon them would be polytheistic and reveal a dangerous and presumptive faith in human, rather than divine, power. To this degree, the Ptolemaic attitude would appear to stop short at the very moment when psychic transformation might become possible. By its refusal to enter the domain of the imagination (fearful perhaps of the consequences of an incomplete *notitia*-type knowledge), rationalistic astrology forces man to live in a strait jacket, prey to the infallible prognostications of fallible astrologers.

Even Al-Kindi's *De radiis*,(65) to which Ficino owed much authority for the 'natural' emphasis of his own astrological magic,(66) reduces all occult or mysterious forces at work in so-called magical operations to a rational theory of ray-emanation. For Al-Kindi the process of cosmic sympathy determines and explains all possible phenomena; in the words of his modern editor, "there is no shadow of esotericism in this system; once the premiss has been adopted, that is the fundamental unity of the Cosmos and its harmony, everything unfolds from there according to rational norms."(67) Although Al-Kindi acknowledges the power of imagination, intention and faith of the practitioner to provoke changes in other

elemental things, his theory is that human emotions such as desire, hope and fear emit rays which may act on matter at a distance. Al-Kindi's explanation of ritual magic allows no supernatural agency or theory of occult synchronicity; rather, the *spiritus imaginarius* or seat of the imagination emits rays which conform to cosmic rays. To obtain an effect a mental image must be formed, and the man must desire the realisation of it (Al-Kindi does acknowledge that lack of faith would prevent success) then precise acts such as invocations and prayers may follow, designed to provoke specific movements of celestial rays.(68)

Specifically taken up by Ficino was Al-Kindi's emphasis on the power of words to reinforce the effects of planetary rays.(69) The latter recognised that formulas could act on different kinds of beings according to time and place; and just as prayers recited in conjunction with an intense desire could achieve a more powerful effect, so the potency of astrological formulas was enhanced when they were linked directly to the stars which were themselves linked by sympathy to elemental nature.(70) Al-Kindi's theory of rays and sympathetic resonance provided a rational explanation for the efficacy of talismans, magical mirrors, sacrifice and images. He firmly believed that the success of a magical operation depended on the favourable aspects of the planets and signs which governed its inception, and that their names and characters should be written or spoken to ensure the strongest concordance of cosmic rays for the operation. He was determined to present 'occult' phenomena as the natural consequences to be drawn from the overall principle of cosmic unity, maintaining that what man regards as 'hidden' does not therefore imply origins of an unnatural, or supernatural, kind.(71)

Al-Kindi's natural-scientific theoretical position is often belied by the implications of what he approved of in practice. For example, his realisation that the 'meaning' of a ritual invocation is constituted from a dual source - a combination of cosmic harmony and human custom (*musica mundana* and *musica humana*) - would not seem totally divorced from the intuitive notion of the theurgists, that the gods perfect the work of humans:

"Moreover when in any invocation the attribution of meaning from the harmony [already] created and from men concurs, the virtue of meaning of this invocation is doubled. For if

this name, man, by its harmonic disposition may contain the meaning of man, just as it has been agreed by the Latins, it will operate through its rays in matter since it will be amplified by a double virtue, that is natural and accidental, and thus the effect will appear more strongly ..."(72)

In the *Liber de vita* Ficino refers to Albumasar, Al-Kindi, Haly Abenrudian, Haly Albohazen(73) and most frequently simply to the *Arabes*.(74) Carol Kaske suggests that when he refers to these latter writers, Ficino means the authors of *Picatrix*, a treatise on sympathetic astral magic dating from the twelfth century with a strong Hermetic content.(75) Ficino would have been familiar with the Latin translation which, as is the case with the *Liber novem judicum*, differs somewhat from the Arabic original.(76) In this work he found a system of practical magic set in the context of Hermetic philosophical religion, with an emphasis on talismans, alchemy, statue-magic and daemonology. For example, in a remarkable passage in *De vita coelitus comparanda*(77) Ficino quotes "the Arabs" as saying that in the fashioning of images, the human spirit "if it has been intent on the work and upon the stars through imagination and emotion" is joined with the spirit of the world and the rays of the stars through which the *spiritus mundi* acts. This notion was to form the basis of his astrological music therapy, as we shall explore in the next chapter.

It is important to realise that the Latin translations of Arabic texts available in the Medieval and Renaissance periods were generally overlaid with interpretations and elaborations by the translators - Hermann of Carinthia's version of Albumasar and the *Liber novem judicum* being only two examples.(78) It would appear that the Arabic trend was towards concretisation and the significance of particulars in both natal and horary branches of astrology - a trend which was easily obscured by the Platonic convictions of twelfth century translators and commentators.(79)

PART TWO: Ficino and Determinism

3.5. 'The affinity of nature'(1)

To begin a consideration of Ficino's personal and innovative attitude towards and use of astrology and music in such a fostering of divine power through ritual, here is a letter, written in September 1462 when Ficino as a young man of twenty-nine had just received news of Cosimo de' Medici's patronage.(2) He was now enabled to embark on his career with the founding of the Platonic Academy and the translations of Plato - to enjoy a country house and a revenue which would remove all material and financial worries. In appreciation, Ficino writes to Cosimo, saying that the other day he had been singing a hymn of Orpheus to the Cosmos (*ad Cosmum*, which also means 'to Cosimo'), and he quotes the text of the hymn which ends "Hear our prayers, *Cosmus*, and grant a quiet life to a pious youth."(3) He continues:

"When I was celebrating that same hymn in an Orphic rite a few days ago, letters were delivered to me from my father [i.e. Cosimo, his 'spiritual' father], in which the wise *Cosmio de' Medici*, most worthy doctor of my life, said that he would reflect on my studies, that he would generously provide for me, kindly help me, and hospitably and piously receive me into his sacred dwelling. This thing came about not only through your magnificence, which indeed I admire greatly, but also through the ancient prophecy of Orpheus. Because it seemed that he [Orpheus] directed at you the hymn which he dedicated to the Cosmos, indeed to be asking on my behalf those things which he asked for in the purpose of the prayer. Moreover, you being moved by a certain heavenly instinct seem to have heard the hymn at the same time at which I was singing it and favourably to have granted those things which the entreaty earnestly requested ... "(my italics)(4)

This example of 'meaningful coincidence' in everyday life tells us much about Ficino's readiness to fully grasp, on a personal level, the implications of ritual invocation. Through his instinctive sense of *notio* he half seriously, half playfully connects his appeal to the Cosmos with Cosimo's granting of his request - nearly thirty years before commenting on Plotinus and Iamblichus, Ficino gives us a beautifully simple example of his belief in the power of the union of words and music to attract

beneficial heavenly influences and effect change in the material realm. In the true Plotinian spirit of disinterested participation in the cosmic play of forces and purity of intention, the intensity of Ficino's desire was directed upwards and not aimed directly at the person of his benefactor.

In his Preface to the Commentary on Plotinus addressed to Cosimo's grandson Lorenzo, Ficino makes a direct connection with this episode. He suggests that at the same time as his translations of Plato are being made available, the spirit of Cosimo (now dead) inspired Pico della Mirandola to come to Florence, who was born the same year that he embarked on the Platonic opus and who was in some way sent to lead him on, as Cosimo had wished, to Plotinus:

"By divine providence the outcome certainly seems to have been that while Plato was as it were being reborn, the hero Pico, who was born under Saturn the ruler of Aquarius, (under which I similarly had been born thirty years earlier), came to Florence on the very day that our Plato was published, and miraculously breathed into me that ancient wish of the hero Cosimo concerning Plotinus, a wish totally hidden from me but breathed into Pico from heaven."(5)

It was deeply significant for Ficino that Pico, "*sublimis Saturni filium*"(6) was also born under Saturn in Aquarius, and the two men's correspondence is full of allusions to the Saturnine wisdom which drew them together in a 'Platonic bond'.(7) Ficino's continual awareness of the cycles of Saturn, its connection with his vocation, relationships and temperament, is playful and imaginative and in no way bound by determinism. The meaningful significance of correlations between the heavens and everyday life excites and delights him, but always serves as a guide to 'right action' and never as an irrevocable limitation. We find him writing to his friend Giovanni Cavalcanti despite adverse planetary indications, because true friendship depends ultimately on God's decree, not the stars';(8) to the Archbishop of Florence he uses the symbolism of a horary chart to negotiate a profitable outcome to an adverse situation;(9) to Lorenzo de Medici he warns of difficult transits but only at the last moment, in order to save Lorenzo needless worry "for we are often accustomed to constantly anticipate evil or distant things by our predictions or occasionally to fabricate the present."(10) To Zoenobius Romanus Ficino is reluctant to

make any judgement on a horoscope with traditionally 'malefic' aspects since "it is of use neither to presage evil things nor is it appropriate to believe much by those things."(11) The constant reference to friends' horoscopes, planetary significations of events, transits, portents, synastry and elections together with an acute sensitivity to the implications of his own natal chart reveal Ficino to be deeply immersed in a symbolic attitude towards life(12) - an attitude which finds its finest expression in the incorporation of astrology into natural magic in *De vita coelitus comparanda*, to be discussed in chapter four.

### 3.6. The *Disputatio contra iudicium astrologorum*

I shall now consider Ficino's 'anti-astrological' texts in some detail, for a re-appraisal of his often mis-represented position towards astrology in general is an essential prelude to our understanding of his own personal incorporation of the art into a system of natural magic, as he so describes it in the *Liber de vita*. Garin's statement that Ficino, in the *Disputatio* "attacks the whole of divinatory astrology, destroying it down to its roots"(13) needs to be clarified - for the use of astrology as a basis for divination was, on the contrary, upheld by Ficino as its most legitimate application. His attack fell on those who abused the transformative potential of the divinatory moment by wanting to reduce it to a pseudo-scientific rational norm.

In June 1477, Ficino wrote to Francesco Marescalchi that he was working on a book on "the Providence of God and the freedom of human judgement, in which a case is moved against the predestination of the stars and the prophetic utterances of the astrologers".(14) He succinctly summarises for his friend the overriding message of the *Disputatio*, that the limitations experienced by a 'fate-bound' conception of universal law can be overcome by the potential of human free-will to see, understand and co-operate with personal destiny, which is determined by a higher (or more hidden) will than ours:

"I practise philosophy chiefly for this reason: since events themselves do not otherwise follow my will, at least I by my will shall follow events, for it is to a will which follows them that events conform ... But perhaps someone may say it

is foolish to wish to contend against unassailable fate. I, however, reply that it can be opposed as easily as one may wish to oppose it, since by that very opposition one may immediately overcome what one wishes. Surely the movement of the heavenly spheres is never able to raise the mind to a level higher than the spheres. But he who puts them under examination seems already to have transcended them, to have come near to God Himself and the free decision of the will ... Furthermore, although any adverse and, as I might say, fatal action habitually proceeds from one contrary position of the stars to another, no one dares to assert that will itself and reason, resisting the assumed force of the stars, arise from the force of the stars; but rather we understand that they flow from providence and freedom itself ..."(15)

To another correspondent, Francesco Ippoliti,(16) Ficino writes "I have written a book opposing the empty pronouncements of the astrologers" and he goes on to specify how such ignorant, 'petty ogres' deceive both themselves and the public at large by assuming astral causation; for in doing so, they deny the Providence of God, the justice of the angels, and the free-will of man. Their concrete predictions make people either complacent and lazy, or else terrified through anticipating imaginary evils - all of which is unnecessary since "if the Fates cannot be avoided, they are foreseen and foretold to no purpose."(17) Ficino condemns a totally deterministic attitude which denies the humanist ideal of man as master of himself; for human will, strengthened through philosophy, has "the power of something contrary and even superior in virtue" to fate. He acutely observes that

"if we consider the matter more carefully, we are moved not so much by the Fates themselves as by the foolish advocates of the Fates. Believe me, you will not yield to the Fates provided you do not believe these fools who veil in obscurity not the truth ... but falsehoods."(18)

Ficino's invective against these "word-mongers" (*homines loquacissimi*) is ruthless indeed, and he urges philosophers to wage war against such ignorance with the arms of wisdom, so that "those who aspire with such arrogance to climb to the world of the gods will in humiliation be cast down headlong to the infernal regions."(19) He appeals to God for strength in this battle, and ends by exhorting the human race to preserve its freedom and peace by triumphing over the "diviners .. who have for so long been shackling us to their illusions."(20) We find an explicit differentiation between such arrogant, "vulgar astrologers" (*plebei*) and

the "excellent authors of astrology" (praecipui) at the beginning of Ficino's Commentary on Plotinus' *Ennead* II.(21) He is at pains here to point out that not all astrologers are the ignorant variety, who concede far too much to the forces of the stars and know nothing of astronomy (and we must remember that, following the *Epinomis*, for the Platonic astrologer measurement and observation must provide raw material for the intuitive, applied skill of interpretation). The wise astrologers, Ficino understood from Plotinus, would refrain from imposing systems or making cut-and-dried prognostications through a humble recognition of the sheer complexity of causation involved, but would nevertheless be open to all the possible significations, inferences and incidental correspondences between heavenly patterns and sublunar events, actions or personal tendencies of character.

To Bernardo Bembo, Ficino emphasises again that in his *Disputatio* he is not condemning astrology in itself, but refuting "those pronouncements of the astrologers which remove providence and freedom."(22) No insight may be gained into the tangled web of human affairs without the ability to view them from a higher vantage point - and many astrologers, then as now, are as trapped in the world of opinion as those they attempt to advise: "Indeed, as carefully as true astronomers measure the heavens, so do vain astrologers misrepresent human affairs."(23)

### 3.7. Fate and free-will

We can only guess at Ficino's motivation for writing, but not publishing, a treatise which, to all but his closest circle, would suggest his firm opposition to astrological practices. It is as if, adopting an Aristotelian model of rational argument and writing in clear, exegetical prose, he wishes to sweep away all the deadwood of fatalistic attitudes by a common-sense critique of rigid and arbitrary astrological systems. Yet in his very approach, 'playing the game' of the rationalist and ridiculing a 'superstitious', literalist interpretation, he is in fact making the point that the meaningfulness and experience of astrology is not to be found by approaching it with such a linear, restricted logical viewpoint. To attempt to reduce it to a natural-scientific system will inevitably relegate its sphere of influence to the confines of the natural world and



the realm of temporality - and in Ficino's fervent humanism the human reason may potentially, and freely, attain to universal knowledge through transcendence of such a limitation. As he stresses in his detailed consideration of the parts of the soul in the *Theologia Platonica*, (24) in order to achieve true revelation even the condition of the philosophical enquirer, "given to the investigation of divine and natural questions" must be surpassed since it involves separation and measurement; the "dubious mind of natural philosophers" still remains embedded in worldly considerations. Level of being and level of insight are interdependent - as Trinkaus says, Ficino is continually trying to show "how man is the measure according to how he experiences." (25) Only non-action and purgation of the mind from earthly concerns may induce true prophetic insight - and astrological symbolism understood and taken up from this more unified perspective becomes a divinatory tool rather than a pseudo-rational 'science'. Ficino confirms this in his commentary on Iamblichus, echoing the first aphorism of the pseudo-Ptolemaic *Centiloquium*:

"I am of the opinion firstly that most certain truth in respect to the stars can be had through divine prophecy: and we can find out the whole [truth] neither by an enumeration of rules, nor by skilful declarations; and moreover I add that you cannot show definitively the impossible idea of how much pertains to mathematical knowledge, because opinions differ amongst themselves ... Astronomy, and other arts given by certain gods a long time ago, are confused by human opinion, and now indeed retain a tiny amount of divinity and truth ... it is impossible to give judgements for definite events, since we are unable to understand the confluence of all causes, *unless we grasp it through divine inspiration.*" (my italics) (26)

The ability of the human reason to align itself with the will of God Himself - to become divine in the very act of knowing the divine - implies a complete transcendence of 'fate' in the liberation of the essential part of the soul from the determination of natural law, for the soul is capable of being freed from the common impulsion of fate and fortune by being endowed with intelligence. (27) It is this intelligence, affirms Jung, which leads the individual on his journey towards greater consciousness symbolised in the progressive differentiation and refinement of the zodiacal sign-qualities:

"the journey through the planetary houses boils down to becoming conscious of the good and the bad qualities in our

character, and the apotheosis means no more than maximum consciousness, which amounts to maximal freedom of the will."(28)

Once liberated, the soul can then exercise free choice and willingly 'choose' the life-pattern which appears, in some way, to be pre-ordained; if such a pattern is seen to be meaningful, it can no longer be termed 'fate' for the workings of divine Providence, experienced as fateful intrusions in the natural world, manifest as destiny on the intellectual level of the soul. In a short section of his Plotinus commentary, included in the *Disputatio*(29) Ficino calls on the authorities of Alexander of Aphrodisias, Enomaus, Diogenes and Ptolemy to substantiate his belief in the power of human will to counteract 'fate'. Through the exercise of philosophy the soul may become strengthened to resist the adverse influence of natural occurrences, so that the individual may be able to deliberate and use his mature judgement to make a choice of action: "By using reason man can examine what happens in his imagination and if he approves of it can then decide to act accordingly."(30) Ficino emphasises that in the working out of the natural order events cannot all be traced back to a divine origin - some things happen through natural causation, others through a fortuitous meeting of random elements (what we would call a 'chance occurrence' like the finding of a treasure-trove), some through human free decision and others through the direct will of the gods. Divine will is experienced as 'fate' in the realm of nature because there appears to be no alternative option on this level. Since no human action can be fated due to man's capacity for responsible decision, it follows that if such actions are experienced as 'bad fate' (such as, one might assume, robbery or murder), the fault is entirely due to a human moral defect. Ficino points out in his *Disputatio* that "Nothing disagreeable reaches us, without us finding amongst ourselves its manifest and sufficient cause, whether this concerns the body or the soul"(31) - a view echoed concisely by Jung:

"Much that proves to be abysmally evil in its ultimate effects does not come from man's wickedness but from his stupidity and unconsciousness."(32)

The 'evil' effects of natural disasters, seen as acts of God, may be accepted as part of the necessary workings of a harmonious universe, even if they appear discordant to our distorted perspective. Ficino would seem

to insist on a view of freewill which stretches the human intellectual potential to truly staggering heights, but he also acknowledges the presence of deeply-rooted, instinctual motivating forces which lie far beyond the domain of conscious choice, forces which might be termed 'unconscious complexes' in the language of depth psychology:

"We are motivated by the dispositions which descend to us from the universal natures in a long chain, through the intermediary of our nature, and we are completely unaware of them because they urge us on from within."(33)

Or, as Liz Greene observes,(34) "There are aspects to our motivations which go beyond 'free-will' - they are transpersonal, autonomous, even infernal and divine", starkly adding (with a pragmatic realism alien to Renaissance idealism) "sometimes compliance with the order of nature may be beyond the individual's resources."

It is certainly beyond the scope of this thesis to study in depth the huge question of the extent to which human motivations and actions are in some way determined by a force beyond our conscious control. But in the light of Ficino's intuitive apprehension of *kairos*, or the 'right moment' for freeing man's divine element and thus enabling him to overcome 'fate' or materiality, it is important to consider the philosophical and religious premises which underlay his imaginative response to such psychological transformation. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that Ficino's work with astrological music-therapy begins to heal the split in human experience between the dark, pitiless, irrational intrusions of *heimarmene* and the clear, purposeful sense of a personal destiny.

In his fervent defence of free-will, Ficino followed in the footsteps of St. Augustine and the early humanists Dante, Petrarch, Salutati and Lorenzo Valla.(35) Charles Trinkaus vividly and succinctly sums up the essential innovation of the Renaissance humanists - the emphasis on man as an *imago Dei*:

"Beginning with Petrarch, the humanists broke free from the bonds of religious externalism and objectivism that resulted from the application of the dialectical procedures of scholastic philosophy and theology to ordinary Christian life. The humanist turned back to man as a living, feeling subject ... God Himself had to be viewed by Petrarch as majestically free and moved more by his outpouring of love

or anger than by any attempt to sit down and make precise calculations. And man in his image and likeness would share these qualities on a lesser and weaker scale ... aware of the limitations of his capacity and the strength of the vicissitudes with which his life was beset, but equally aware of his position within the creation and encouraged by it, created in the image an likeness of God, destined to be master of all the world, and the replica in this of God and the universe .. Man's dignity lies in his acting in a providential way as he believed his God was doing, but not as though he were not a subordinate part of the divine providence itself and subject to it."(36)

Valla, in extolling the passionate side of human nature, justifying the force of man's emotional responses to "sweep him beyond the intellect"(37) through the power of images mediated by language and words, broke new ground with his "profound and magnificent insight" into the individual's potential for enriching and deepening his creativity with the fertilisation of a fully-experienced emotional life. The essential message in his *De libero arbitrio* of 1439 was that God has foreknowledge of men's actions but that this does not imply their necessity - for man can change his mind. This implication that within a determined pattern man can choose *how*, on what level, his particular 'fate' will be manifest - that he has the option of 'negotiating' and freely working within the confines of his personal destiny - was to be developed by Ficino into a system of practical magic not reserved solely for the high-minded theurgist, but accessible to all those sincerely seeking to improve their quality of life. In an early letter to Giovanni Rucellai on the nature of fortune,(38) Ficino advises his friend that the blows of ill-fortune may be overcome through exercising the gift of wisdom, which is not acquired through human effort but is a product of the outflow of the Good throughout the cosmic system, stemming from the first principle:

"This substance (intelligible life) in a circular movement begins and ends in itself, and all the movements of the circle return to the centre from where they move out to the circumference ... and because there must be harmonious proportions between the agent and that which is acted upon, Nature moves that in us which is natural, and the origin of nature moves that in us which is vital and intellectual and has the form of the Good."(39)

Human nature becomes the instrument of the Good, not disconnected and polarised, but far enough removed in the intricate web of creation from the