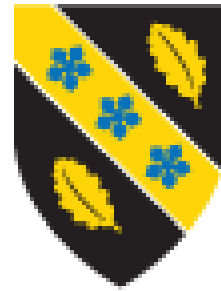


Marsilio Ficino and Astral Magic

Dr. Frances Clynes



Prifysgol Cymru

Y Drindod Dewi Sant

University of Wales

Trinity Saint David

Marsilio Ficino and Astral Magic

The Importance of
Marsilio Ficino

Bio Details

Major Works

Influences

Ficino's Cosmology

Astral Magic

Ficino and Astrology

Legacy

Ficino's Chart



The Importance of Ficino

‘The importance of the work of Marsilio Ficino of Florence (1433-1499) in the awakening, transmission and dissemination of esoteric knowledge in the West cannot be overestimated. By ‘esoteric’, we mean a tradition of religious philosophy which embodies an *initiatic* mode of teaching – a promise of access to hidden meanings deep within the fabric of the world which will eventually lead the searcher to a condition of *gnosis* or unity with the source of all being.’

Angela Voss, *Marsilio Ficino*, p. 1



The Importance of Ficino

‘Ficino played a major role in the rebirth of classical learning we know as the Renaissance, through his commitment to the renewal of Platonic and Hermetic philosophies and his determination to integrate their metaphysics into Christianity, a marriage however problematic which revitalised religious and cultural life and placed a new emphasis on the capacity of the human soul to realise its innate divinity.’

Angela Voss, *Marsilio Ficino*, p. 1



D I C I,

*Atque philosophi celeberrimi,
de Vita Libri tres,*

Recens iam à mendis sitúq; vindicati,
ac summa castigati diligentia,

Q. V. O. R. V. M.

Primus, de Studiosorum sanitate tuenda.

Secundus, de Vita producenda.

Tertius, de Vita cœlitus comparanda.



Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499)

Bio Details

Born in 1433

Learned medicine along with Aristotelian philosophy, from a professor at the University of Florence, where he got most of his formal education.

1451 – Began clerical training

1452 – Hired by Cosimo de Medici as tutor to Lorenzo de Medici

1462 – Given a villa outside Florence by Cosimo to translate rediscovered classical texts and to head the restored Platonic Academy, which was established that year



Platonic Academy (Florence)

Informal meetings to discuss
Ficino's work

Approx 100 people

Aims:

To promote the perennial
wisdom (*prisca theologia*) of
the 'ancient theologians'

To have a direct influence on
the arts as an accessible way
of bringing it to
contemporary humanity

Group dissolved in 1522 in the
aftermath of the plot to
assassinate Giulio de' Medic



Bio Details

1463 – Monk from Macedonia
(Leonardo da Pistoia) visits Florence with
incomplete copy of the *Corpus Hermeticum*

Translated 14 of the treatises

Instructed by Cosimo to prioritise the *Corpus
Hermeticum* which he completed the same year

1464 – Cosimo dies

1471 - *Corpus Hermeticum* printed

There would be 16 re-editions by the end of the
century not counting those where it appears with
other works



Bio Details

1468/69 – Completed the translation of Plato's dialogues (published in 1484)

1473 – ordained as a Dominican priest. Later became a church official at Florence Cathedral. Came under the patronage of Lorenzo de' Medici

1477 – Wrote *Disputatio contra iudicium astrologorum*

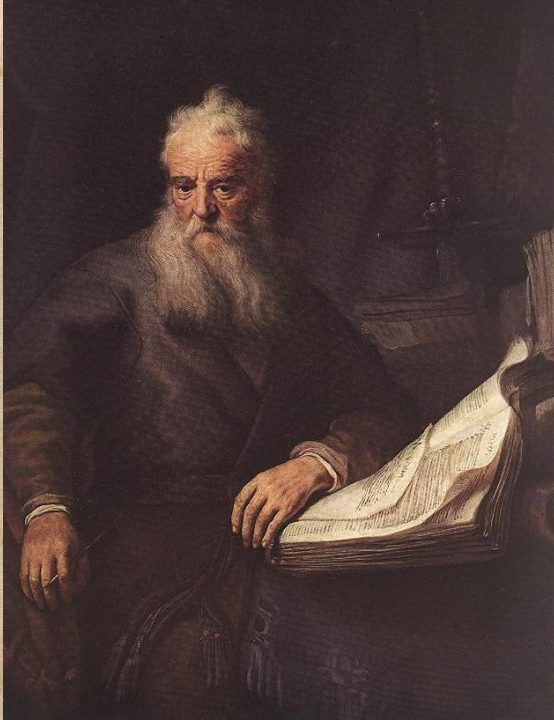
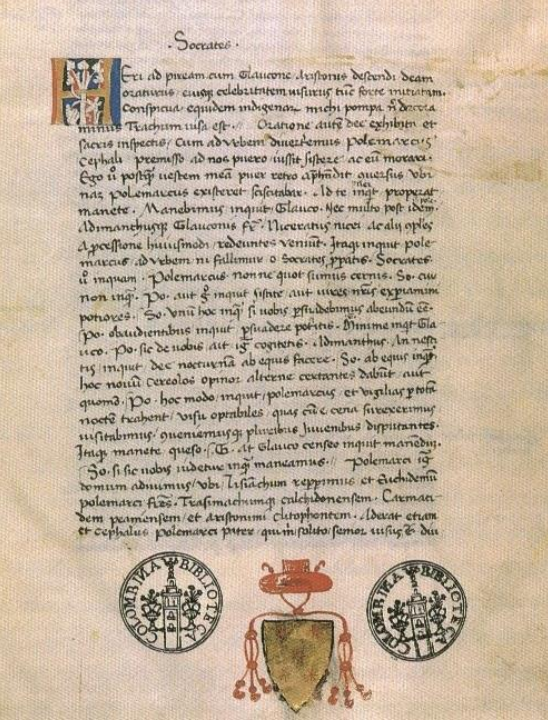
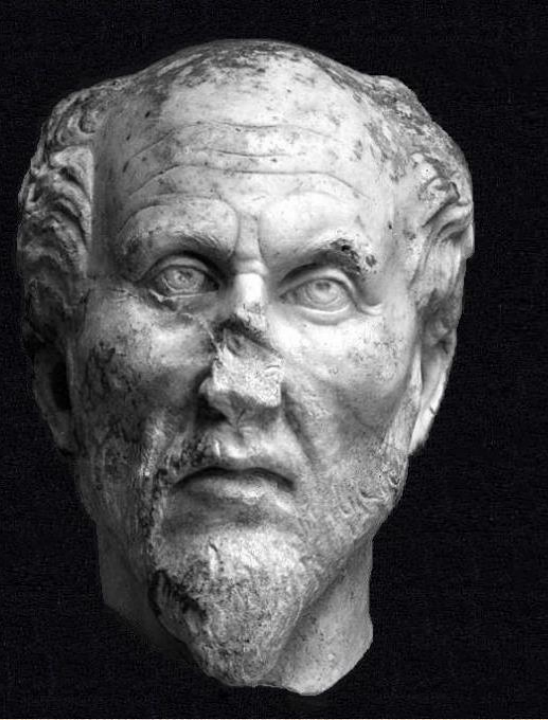
1489 – Completed the translation of Proclus, Porphyry and Iamblichus. Finished writing the *Book of Life*.

1492 – Completed the translation of Plotinus

1494 – Retired to Tuscan countryside after expulsion of the Medici from Florence

Died 1499





Major Works

Translation of the Orphic Hymns

Platonic Institutiones, 1456

Corpus Hermeticum, 1463

Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love, 1469

Liber de Christiana religione (Book on the Christian Religion), 1474

Theologia Platonica de immortalitate animae (Platonic Theology), written 1469-1474, published 1484

Commentaries on Plato, finished ca. 1470, published 1484

Translations of Proclus, Porphyry and Iamblichus, 1489

De vita libri tres (Three Books on Life), 1489

In Epistolas Pauli commentaria, Venice, 1491; Florence, 1497

Translation of Plotinus, 1492

Letters – 1474-1494

Christian Influence

Sought to replace the teachings of Aristotle with those of Plato, as the philosophy most in keeping with Christianity

‘Let us by no means ever attempt anything forbidden by the holy religion. Moreover, in performing any work let us hope for and seek the fruit of the work principally from Him who made both the celestials and those things which are contained in the heavens, who gave them their power, and who always moves and preserves them.’

Ficino, *On Obtaining Life from the Heavens*, p. 281

‘In all things which I discuss here or elsewhere, I intend to assert only so much as is approved by the Church’.

Ficino, *On Obtaining Life from the Heavens*, p. 241



15th Century Florence

‘The medieval subjection of human will to Divine Law was about to give way to the triumph of human reason in the Enlightenment, and in many ways the very strength of the Renaissance movement lies in the tension created by its straddling and holding together two worlds which were about to break asunder. Thus a dominant motif of the ‘new’ religious sensibility was the union of opposites tradition and innovation, Christianity and paganism, theology and poetry, and most critically, philosophy and religion whose divorce Ficino saw as being at the root of human ignorance and impiety.’

Voss, ‘Introduction’, p. 2



15th Century Florence

Dominican monk Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498) railed against both philosophers and astrologers, instigating a puritan regime in Florence

The Inquisition was gaining strength

The Catholic Church was about to face its most serious challenges in the upheavals of the Reformation and the new scientific discoveries of Copernicus



15th Century Florence

‘If you do not approve of astronomical images, albeit invented for the health of mortals – which even I do not so much approve as report – dismiss them with my complete permission and even, if you will, by my advice.’

On Obtaining Life from the Heavens, p. 239



D I C I,
*Atque philosophi celeberrimi,
de Vita Libri tres,*
Recens iam à mendis sitúq; vindicati,
ac summa castigati diligentia,
Q V O R V M.
*Primus, de Studiosorum sanitate tuenda.
Secundus, de Vita producenda.
Tertius, de Vita cœlitus comparanda.*



Works and Influences

Influences

Plato

Neoplatonism

Plotinus

Corpus Hermeticum

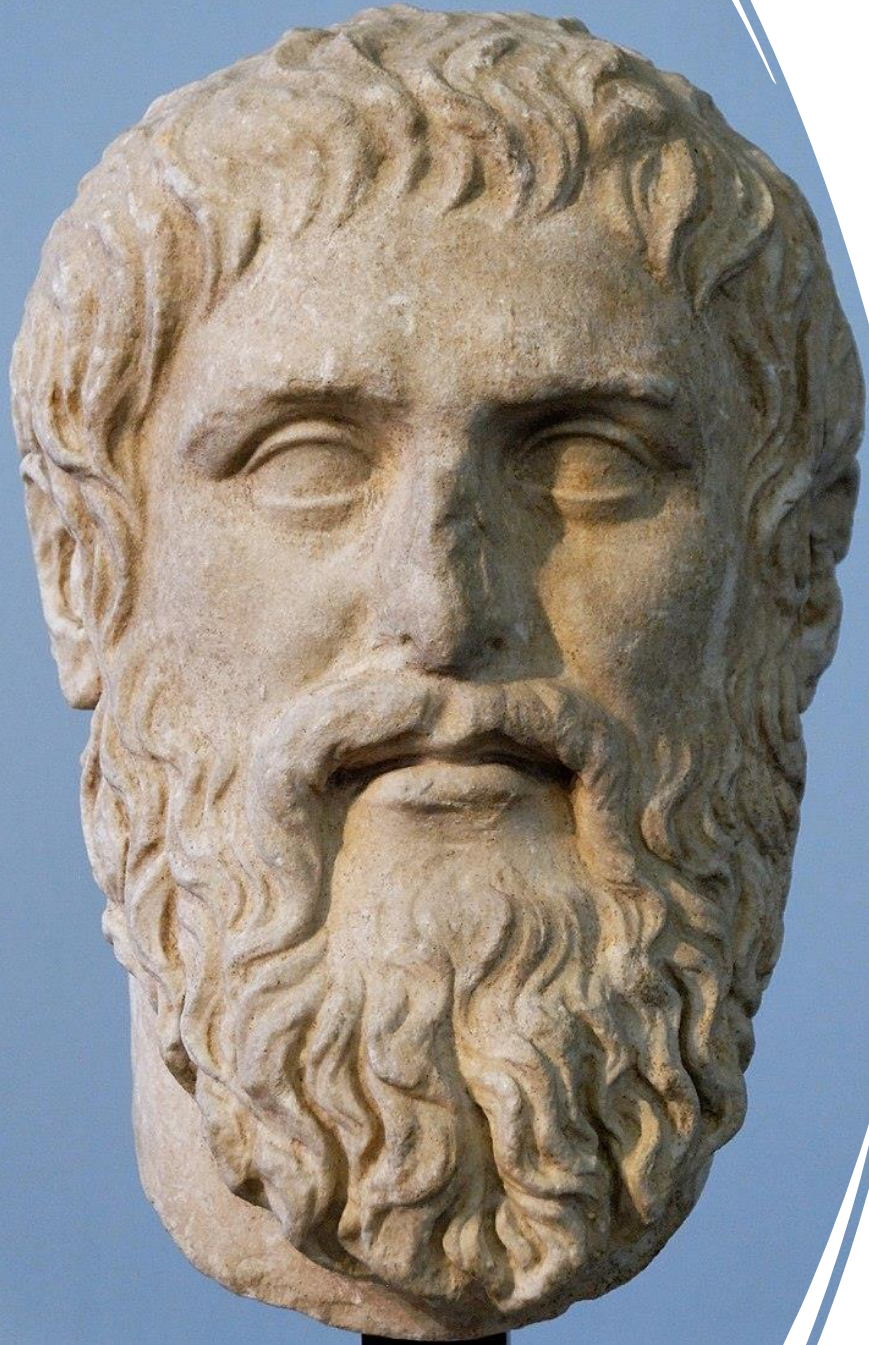
Gnosticism

Christianity

St. Augustine

St. Thomas Aquinas





Plato's Cosmology

The World of Being

Perfect and unchanging

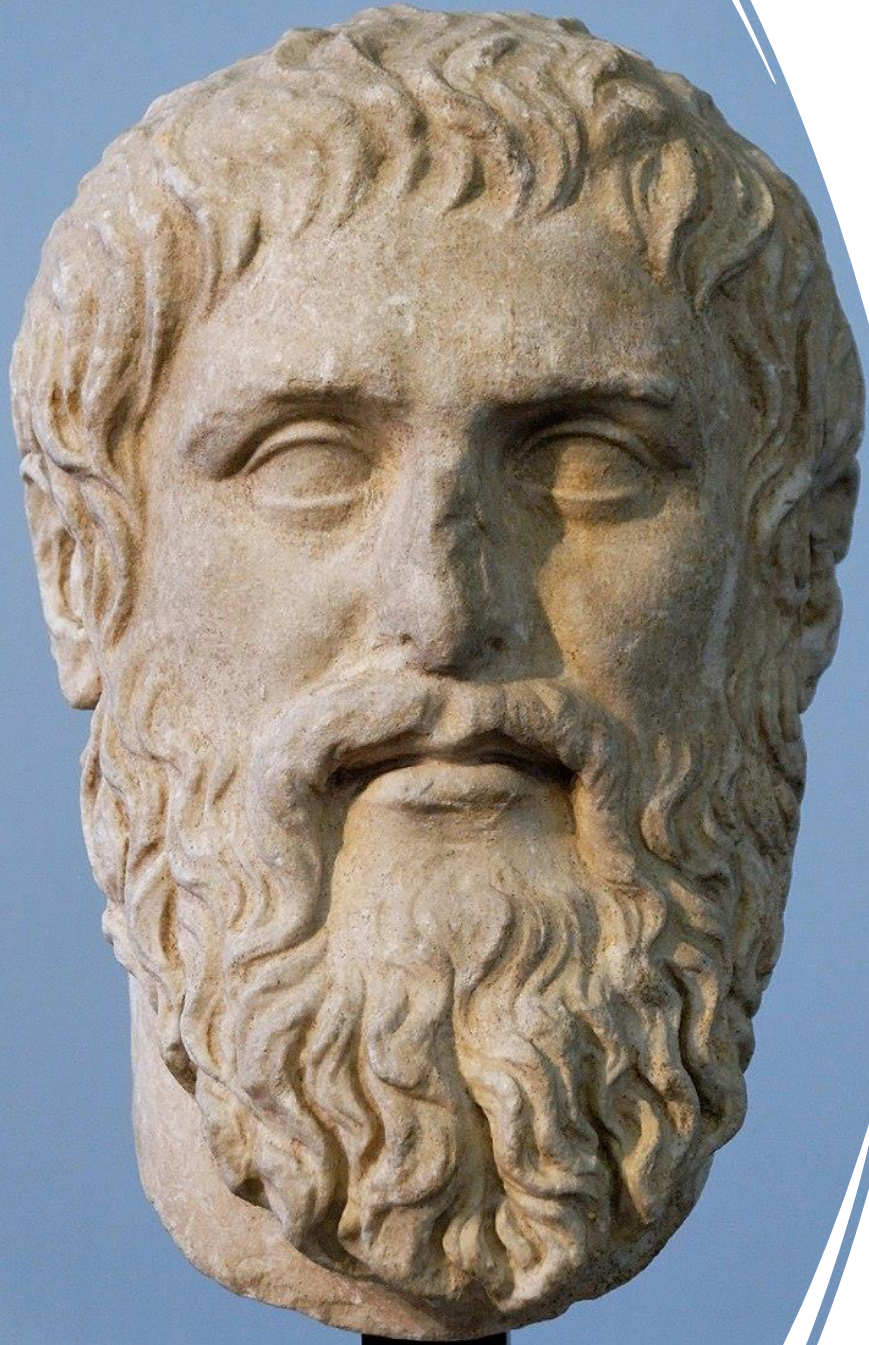
An intelligible, incorporeal world
of Ideas - which was inhabited by
a creator God

Grasped by Reason

Creates the physical universe

Ineffable

Timaeus, 28d



Plato's Cosmology

The World of Becoming

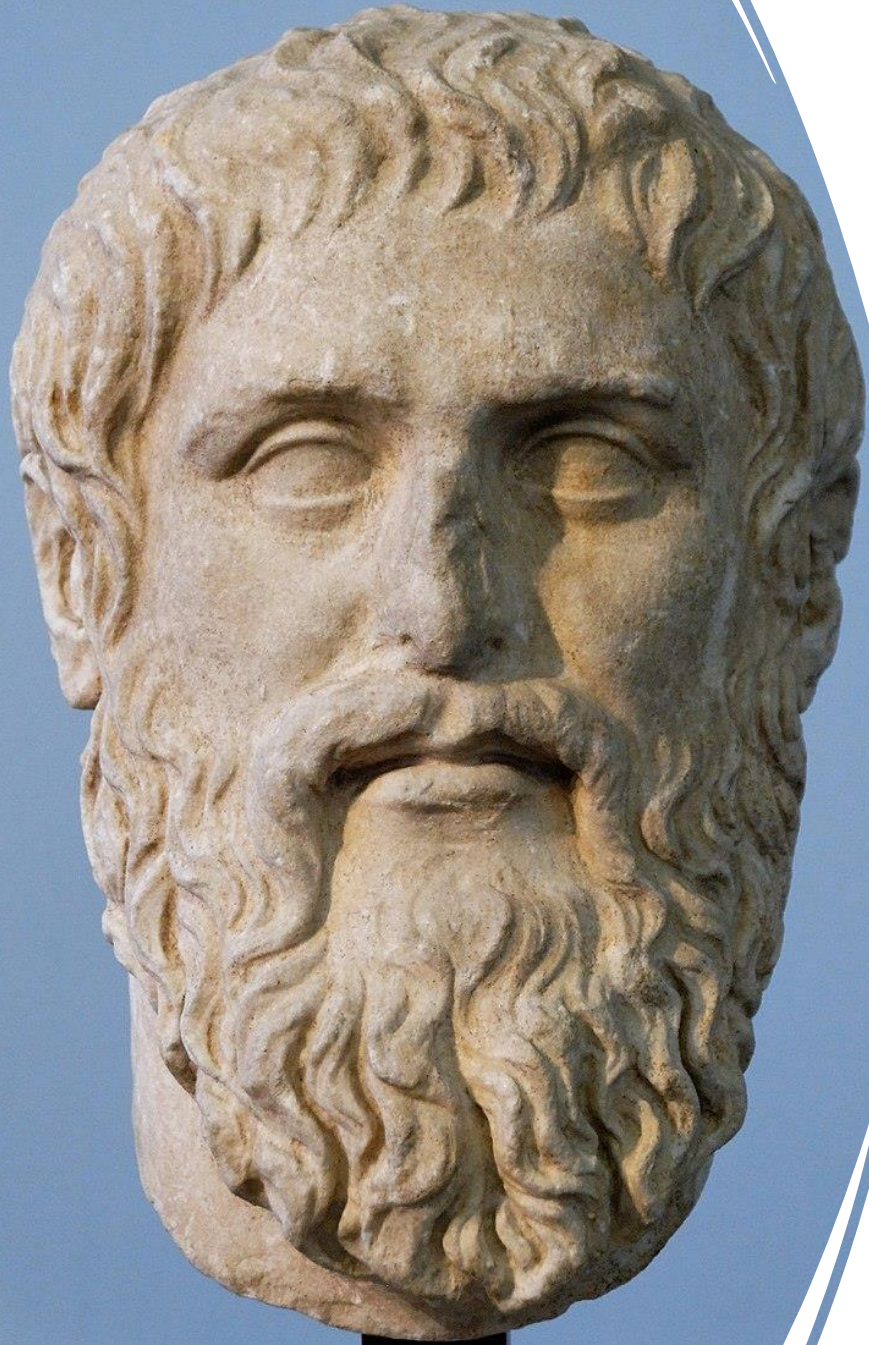
Imperfect and unstable

A visible, corporeal reality - that contained the visible universe, including the Earth.

Everything on Earth is in a constant state of decline but even the corrupt matter was beautiful because God created it and modelled it on the eternal

Grasped by opinion, which he associated with the body and the physical senses

Timaeus 28b-d



The World Soul

The universe has a body and a soul – the world soul

World Soul – mixed in a bowl by the Demiurge

A mixture of Being and Becoming blended with the souls of humans

Each human had a soul and each soul was assigned to a star

Universe held together by the world soul

The world soul is the source of all the motion in the heavens and all life in the universe

Composed according to mathematical principles

Timeaus, 35b



Human Soul in *Phaedo*

An immortal soul

Incorporeal and invisible

Trapped in the mortal body

Associated with all that is divine and unchanging

Associated with the world of Being

A mortal body

Corporeal, visible and perishable

Associated with all that is mortal and constantly changing

Associated with the world of Becoming

Human Soul in *Timaeus*

Tripartite Soul

Differs from soul in *Phaedo* which is undivided

Timaeus

Divine part of the soul in the head and the mortal part in the trunk of the body

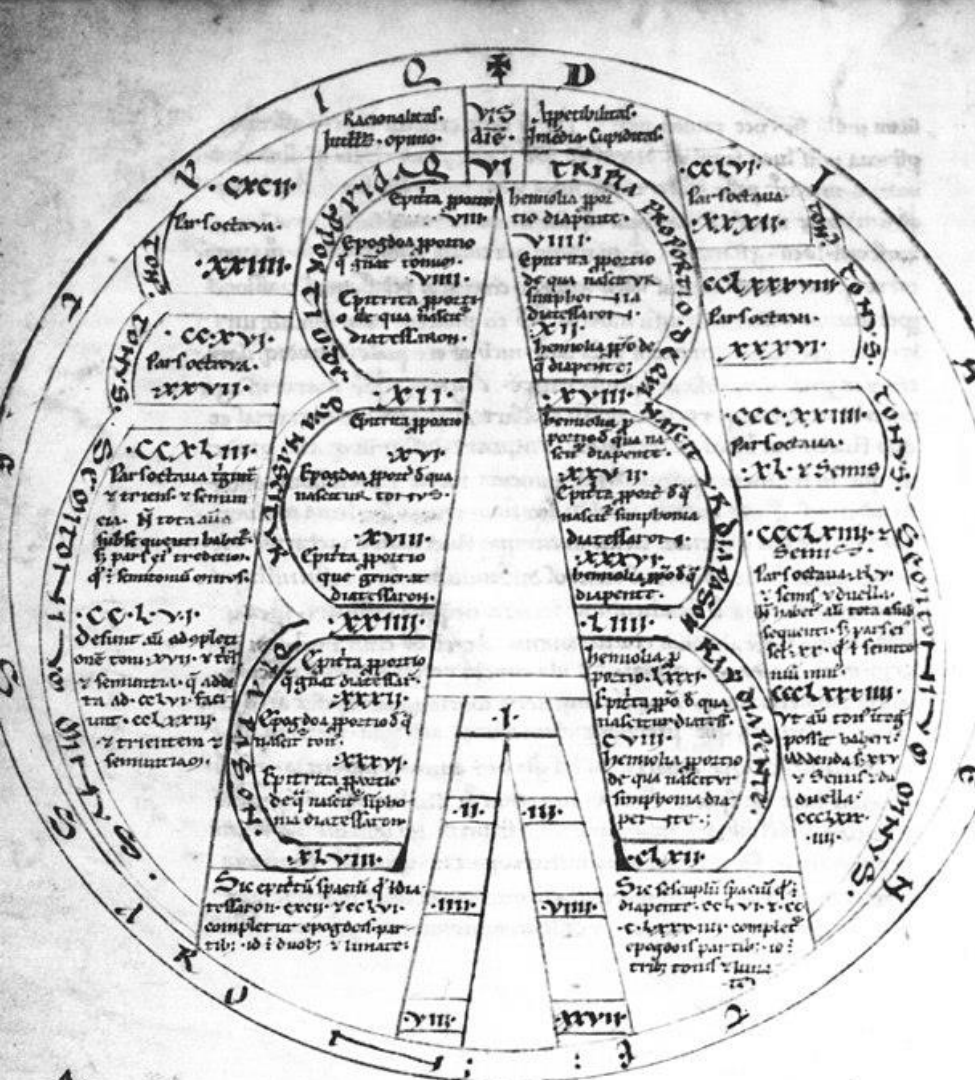
Mortal soul divided into two

One part below the midriff – concerned with appetites that he wrote 'was not going to understand the deliverance of reason'

Other part between midriff and head 'so that it might listen to reason and together with it restrain by force the part consisting of appetites'

Only the reasoning part of the soul is immortal

Timeaus, 69c – 70a



¶ Constituitur animi mundi ex eentia individua & diuidua & ex archetypo & yle. & ex natura
ad & omnia. Naturam uero eandem & diuidiam uocat gra & spēs. Nam licet gra in spēs diuisa sint
cū in sui natura eandem sint naturam. Et si autem ex illa eentia & potentia dicitur naturam uocantur
diuisa uirescunt. Nam per individua eentia notat intellectus per quem diuina percipiuntur per diuidua
uero yleu sensus designantur per quem corporea percipiuntur. Et naturam autem eandem & diuidiam rō & spēs
per quam gra & spēs disceruntur possuntur &;

Ficino on Plato



‘I consider Plato’s style is more like that of a divine oracle than any human eloquence, now resounding on high, now flowing with the sweetness of nectar, ever encompassing the secrets of heaven.’

Ficino, Preface to the Commentaries on Plato, trans. School of Economic Science (unpublished), cited in Voss, ‘Introduction’, p. 5.



Ficino on Plato

“Since [Plato] holds the soul to be a kind of mirror in which the image of the divine countenance is easily reflected, his scrupulous step by step search for God continually prompts him to turn towards the beauty of the soul, understanding the famous oracle ‘Know thyself!’ to mean above all that whoever desires to know God should first know himself. For this reason everyone who reads Plato’s writings... with the care that they deserve will derive from them every conceivable benefit, but above all these two most important principles: the pious worship of a known God and the divinity of souls. These form the basis for all understanding of things, for every disposition of one’s life and for all aspects of happiness.”

Ficino, *Platonic Theology* trans. M.J.B.Allen & J. Warden, vol.1, 148.

Plotinus' Cosmology

Centred around three elements – the 'Three Primary Hypostases'

Each is a mirror image of the one above in increasing levels of materiality

The One or the Good

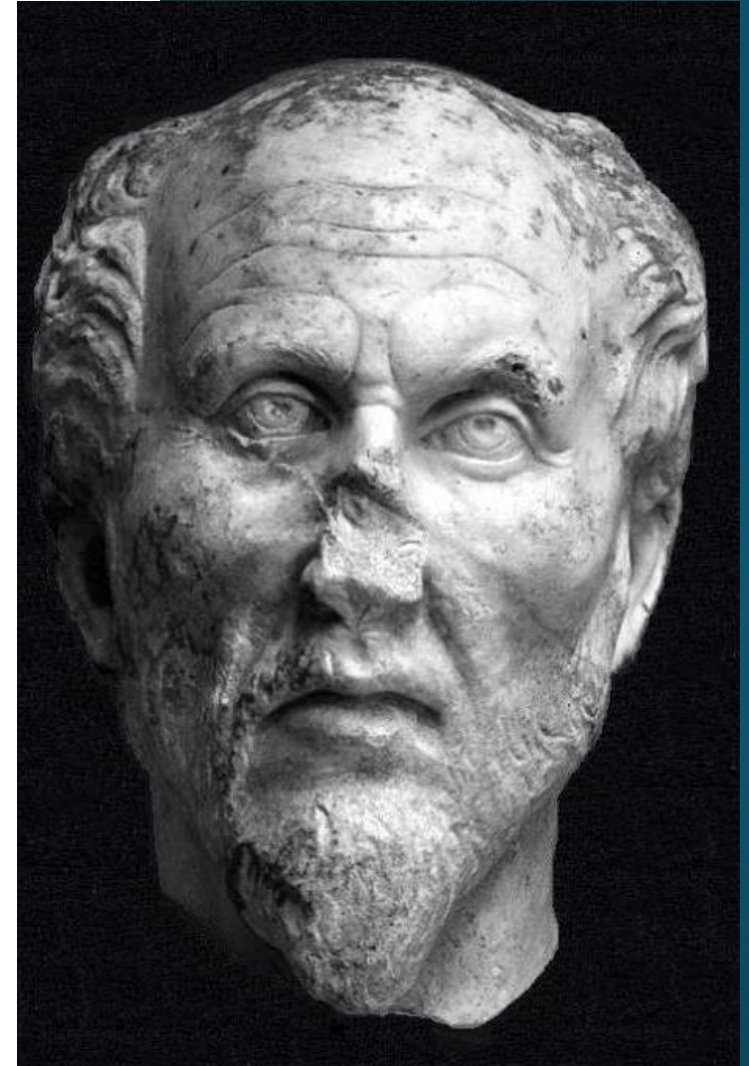
The Mind or the Intellect (Nous)

The Soul (Psyche)

The One produces the Mind and the Mind produces the Soul

The Soul generates the material world starting with human souls which therefore have a spark of divinity

Enneads V.1



Plotinus (204/5 CE – 270 CE)

The One

From Plato's 'Idea of the Good' in
the *Republic*

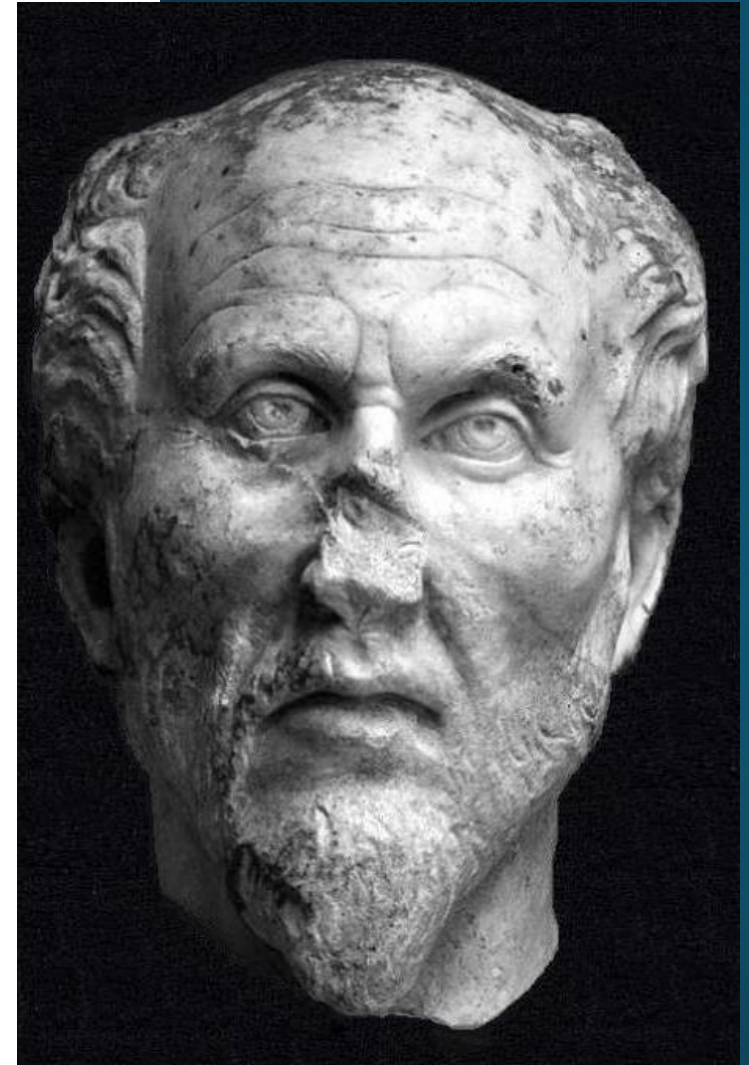
Ineffable and Eternal

Transcendent and self-sufficient

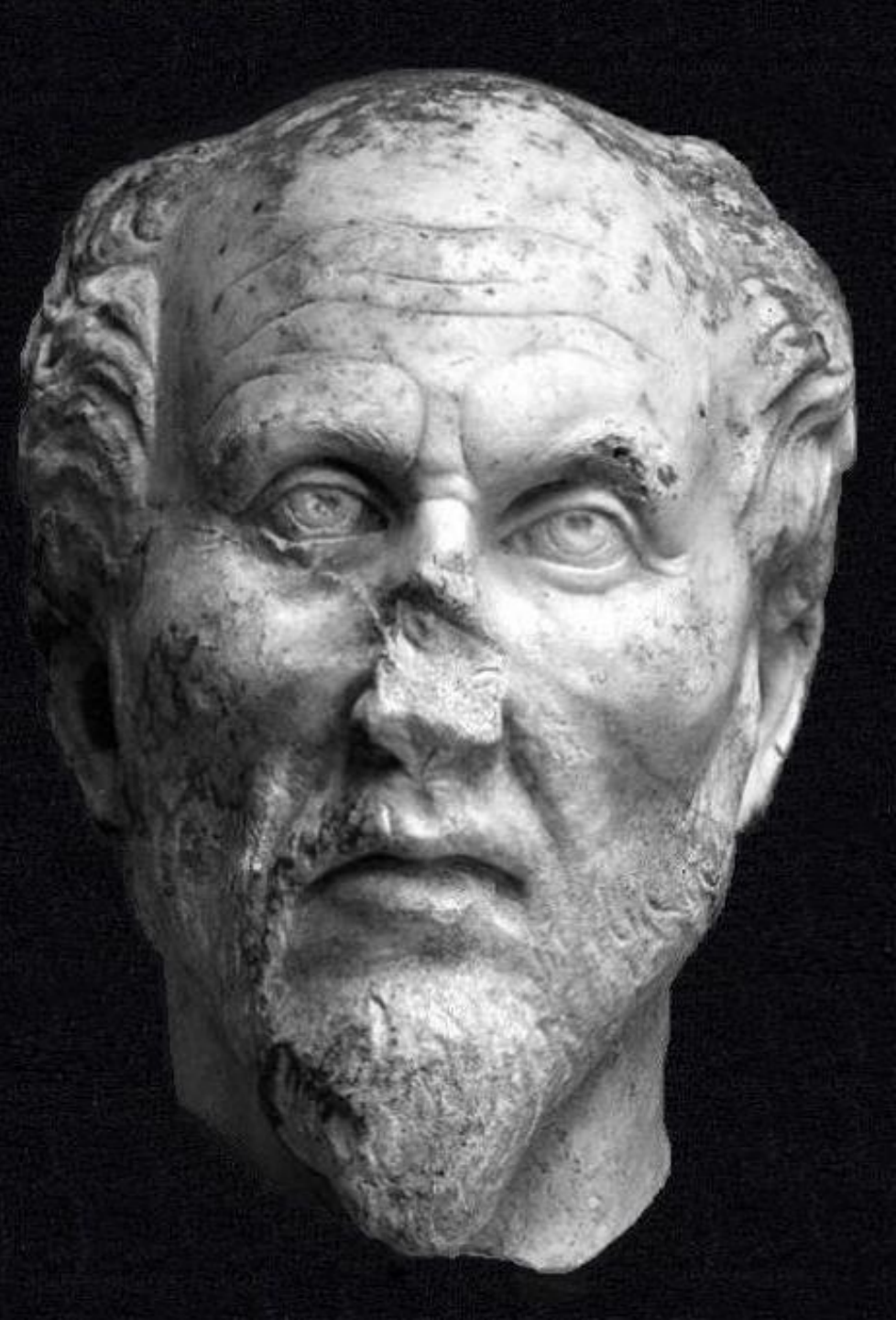
The One is the cause of everything
in the universe

By an emanation of its essence

Likens it to rays of light
emanating from the Sun



Plotinus (204/5 CE – 270 CE)



Plotinus' Cosmology

Our souls have forgotten their Father and their true nature

This has led them to self-alienation and self-contempt

‘What is it, then, which has made the souls forget their father, God, and be ignorant of themselves and him, even though they are parts which come from his higher world and altogether belong to it?’

Enneads, V.1.1

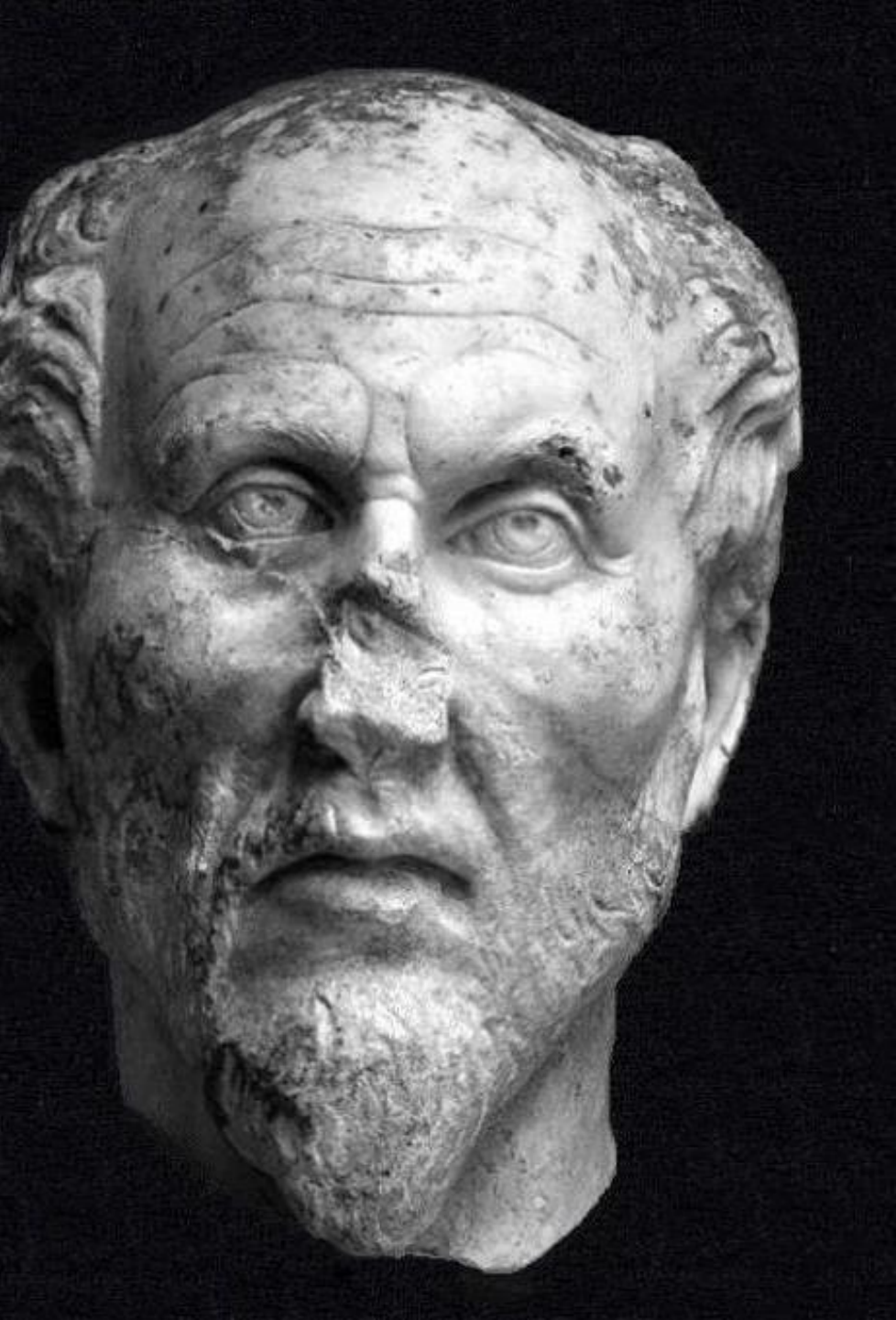
Two ways to bring them back:

Show how contemptible material things are

Show them their true value

First they must understand the nature of soul, then they can grasp Intellect

Then they find the One within themselves



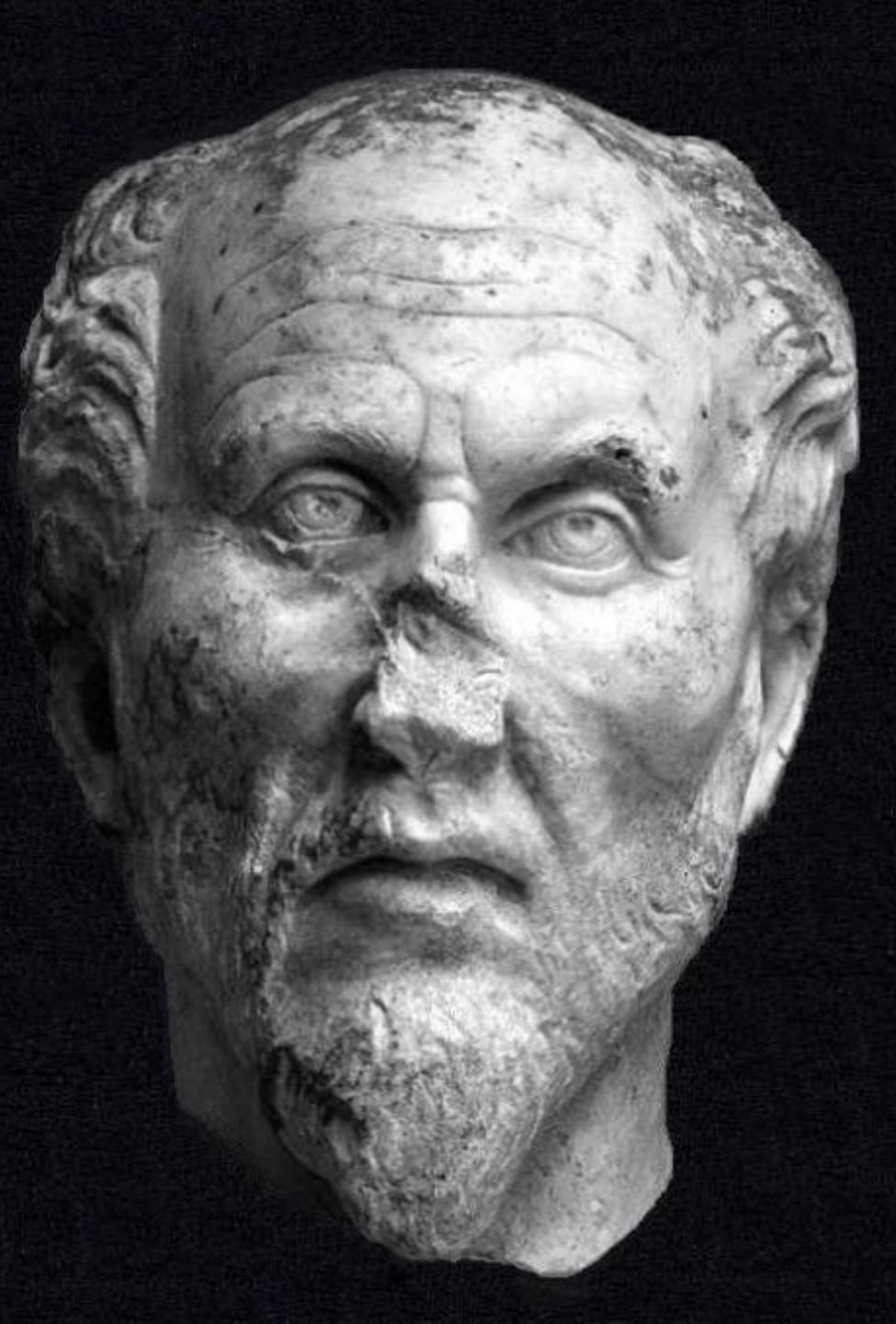
Plotinus' Cosmology

The purpose of philosophy is to awaken people to the reality beyond the material world

Intellectual discipline, fueled by love and enthusiasm, can take them back to the Mind or Intellect

People have a moral responsibility to seek to unite with the One

However only mystical experience can reunite them with the One



The Human Soul

It is on the border between the physical and non-physical realms

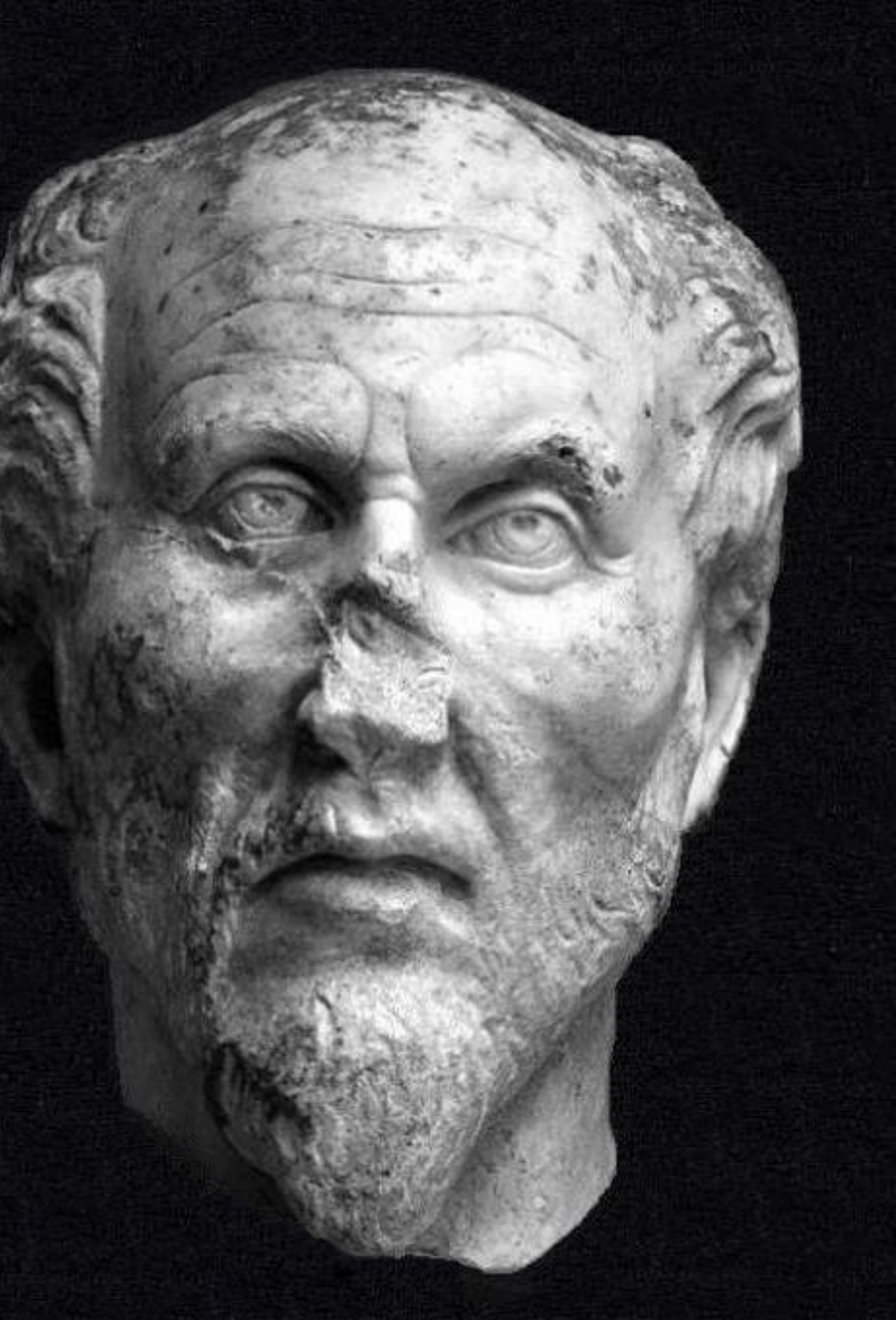
The soul consists of a higher and lower part

The higher part is unchangeable and divine and aloof from the lower part

It provides the lower part with life

The lower part is the seat of the personality including passions and vices

Enneads, VII.3.9



Plotinus View of the Heavens

Everything above the Moon is
incorruptible, unchanging and everlasting
He sought to explain why heavenly objects
could have bodies but still be unchanging

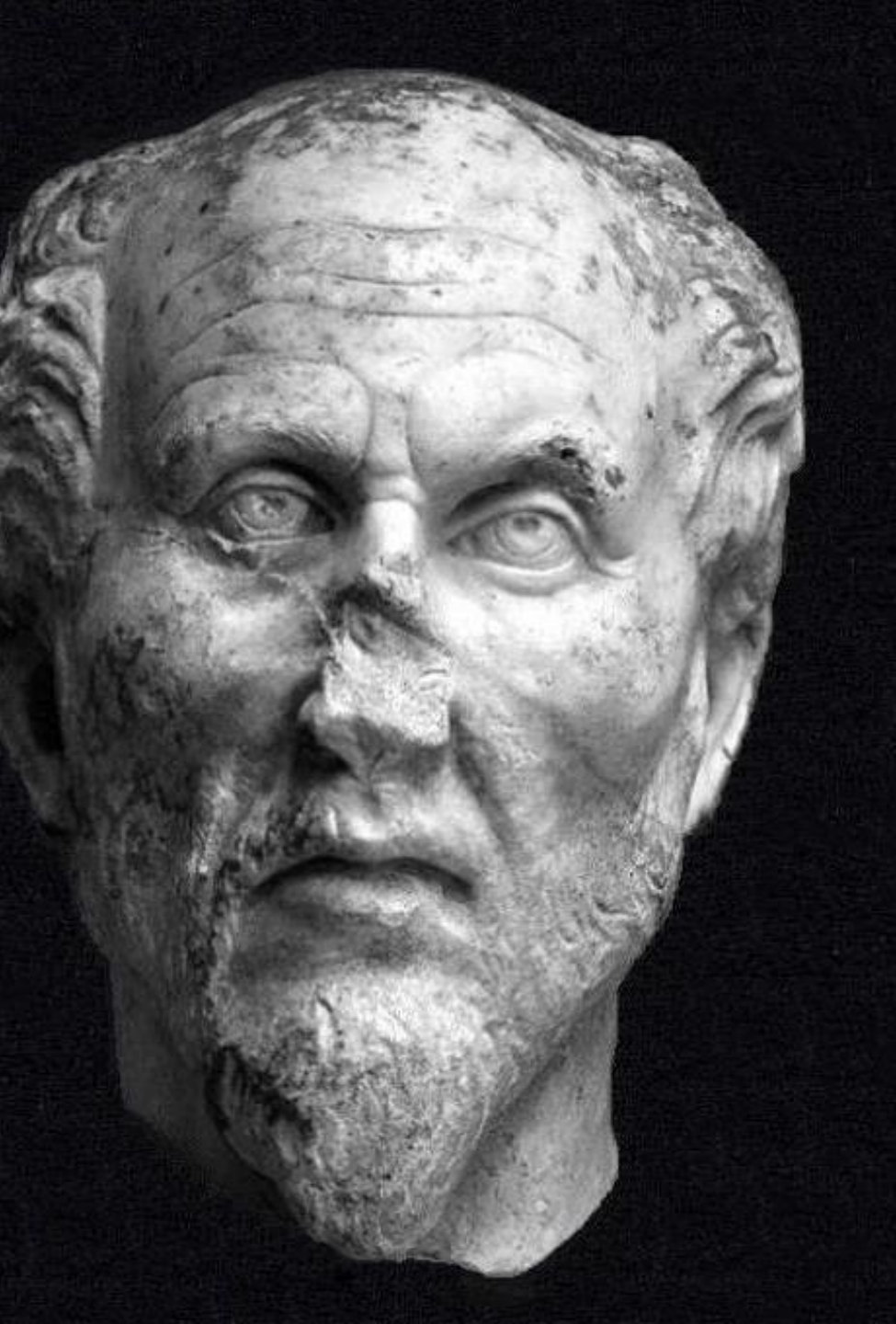
The heavens are made and ruled by a better
soul than that which makes our bodies and
other earthly things

The heavens do not contain any of the mixture
of the sublunary world

They need no nourishment, and are not
nourished by exhalations from below

The elements of the lower world in no way
affect the regions above the moon

Enneads II.I.6-8



‘On Whether the Stars are Causes’

Objections to the views of astrologers

The stars may foretell and may have a limited influence on us

However:

Astrologers make stars evil and the cause of evil to us

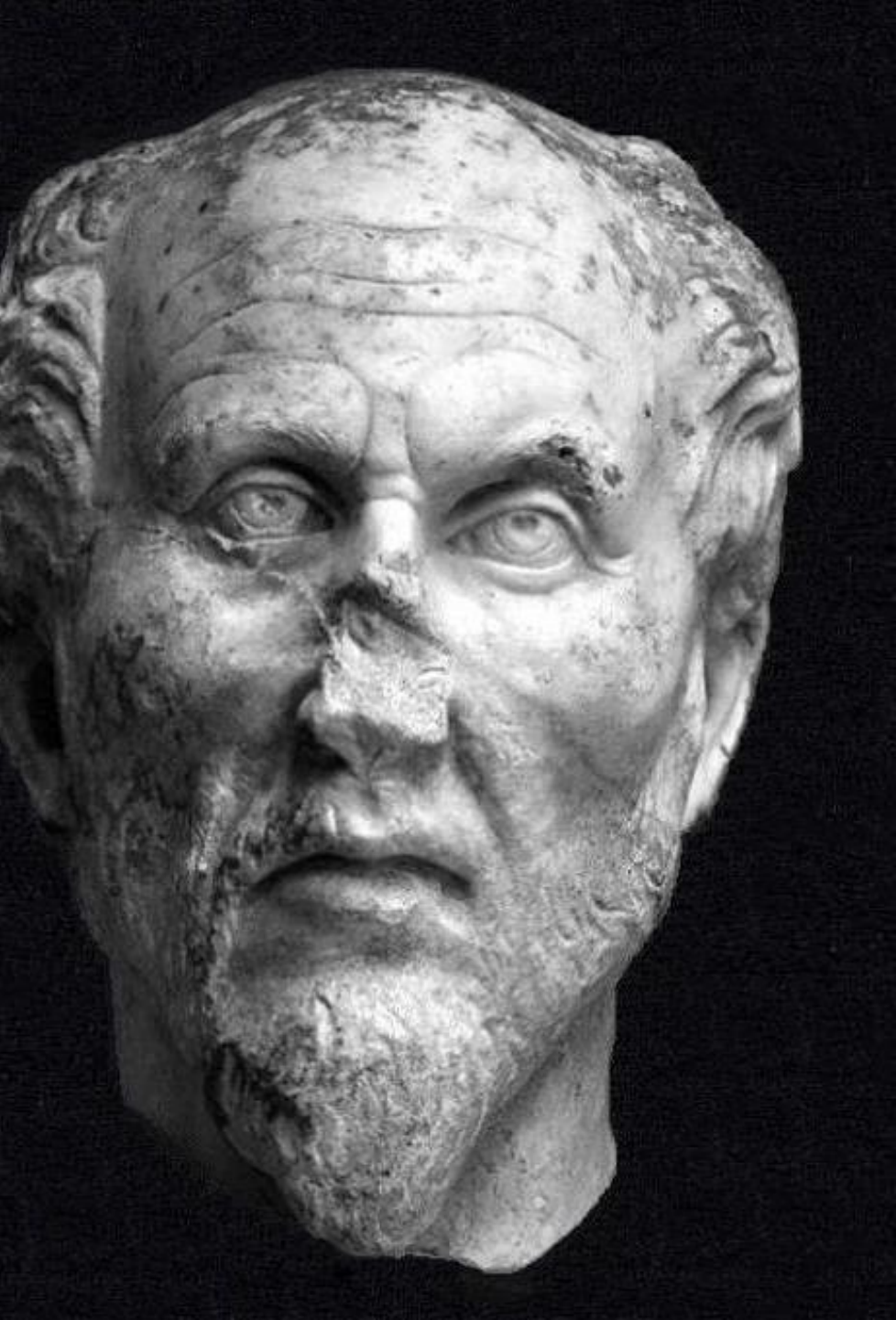
They make the stars changeable and varying in mood depending on their aspect and position and this is incompatible with the findings of astronomers

They reduce the universe to a disorderly chaos by making the stars act independently and capriciously, instead of seeing it as a living organic whole in which star-movements and influences as well as everything else form part of the pattern of its rational direction by Universal Soul

They very much exaggerate the degree to which the stars are responsible for our physical constitution and fortunes

Star-influences are only one kind of cause among many, and not the most important Our true, higher self transcends the physical universe and is beyond the reach of its necessity

Enneads, II.3. 1-6



Astrology Dissolves the Unity of the Universe

‘And as for thinking that they wait for the ascendancy of the signs of the zodiac and then act, and that according to the number of degrees it has risen are the number of years of its ascendancy, and that they reckon on their fingers the time when they will act, and may not act before these periods are reached, and altogether to refuse to grant to any one principle authority over the direction of the universe, but to give everything to the planets, as if there was not one ruler, from whom the universe has separated out, and who gives to each according to its nature to fulfil its own function and do its own work, in union with the ruling principle—***this is the opinion of someone who wants to dissolve the unity of the universe and knows nothing about its nature; the universe which has a principle and first cause which reaches to everything.***’

Enneads, II.3.6

Corpus Hermeticum

A collection of 17 Greek treatises

Presented in the form of a
dialogue

Written between 100 and 300 CE

‘A non-Christian lineage of
Hellenistic Gnosticism’

<http://gnosis.org/library/hermet.htm>

Originally believed to have been
written by Hermes Trismegistus

Lost to the West after the
Classical era but found in an
eastern Byzantine library

Tu quoniam enigmata hanc legem sunt prima
revelata sunt deinde philosophi et theologi
legem sunt. Mercurius Trismegistus singulari
singulari sua doctrina & theologia apparet
perit & debeat esse. Chaldaei antiqui et
egyptii sunt scriptores antiqui sunt.
Quare si non esset legem hanc ubi est omni
modi quod parvo non copiam summa et
legem non voluptatem & utilitatem affert. Cum
ita doctrina est ut non mediocriter et
dignatur doctrinam placet. Parvo quod non
respondet non potest esse pignus. Legem modo
non solum habere non meretur sed si non est
generis non est legem. & uterque consules ut
notant & legem. Bene vale.

FRAN. RHOL. TARVISANVS.
GHRAR. DE LISA SCRIPTORI.
MEI COPIAM FECIT.
VT IPSE CAETERIS
MAIOREM COPIAM
FACERET.
TARVISII.
M. CCCC. LXXI. NOVEMB.



ARGUMENTVM MAR SILII
CINI FLORENTINI IN LIBRO
MERCVR II TRISMEGISTI AD
COSMVM MEDICVM PATRIAE
PATREM.



Quoniam quod Moyses natus
effloruit Achas astrologus
Ptolemaeus philosophus frater. et
matrem suam matrem Mer-
curii tunc nepos fuit Mercurius Trismeg-
gistus. Hoc autem de illo scribit Augustinus
Augustinus. Quod Cicero et Lactantius
Mercurius quidem per credentem fuisse uoluit.
quoniam fuisse illum qui ab aegyptiis
in grecis autem Trismegistus appel-
latus est. Hanc asserunt concordare apud
paganos praefuisse in legem istam tradidit
Lactantius utroque sanctis in armis et
horum signis instruit. Hic in tanta hor-
um unum uenerabile fuit in deo nam et
relatus sit. Tempore illius rursus adstruit
quoniam. Nomen eius proprium ob reuer-
entiam quondam peruenit in vulgo et tunc



Planetary Spheres

Plato's *Republic*, Book X

'The Myth of Er'

Neoplatonists

Corpus Hermeticum

Gnosticism

Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1321)

Accepted cosmological model
up to Copernicus

1543 – *On the Revolutions of the
Celestial Spheres*



Planetary Spheres

Earth-centred cosmos

Seven planetary spheres

Sphere of the fixed stars

Primum Mobile – the Prime Mover

The fastest moving of the spheres

The Active Intelligence



Corpus Hermeticum

Creation Myth

The seven planets are created by the power of the Divine Mind, or Nous, as governors of the sensible world

He also creates man in his likeness

Man reveals the beauty of God to earthly Nature and they unite

Man adopts an earthly body so is both mortal and immortal

Although above the harmony of the Cosmos, he has become a slave within it

He is subject to the rule of the stars

Tu quoniam enigmata hanc legem ducis prima
revelas deinde philosophas ut theos
legas fides. Mercurius Tulliusque singul
singulorum doctrina & theologica appen
perit & debeat in te. Chaldaei antiqui the
ologos perit stupor amonit adstruat fens.
Quare si non esset leges hoc tibi esse con
suetudine pario non obsequium summa re
legorum voluptatem & utilitatem affert. Cu
mque doctrina eorumque aut medicorum etu
ditur doctrinam placet. Parit quod non
respondent non pudente pign. Legi modo
neque scire non meritis sed si scilicet
generisque a leges & rationis consules ut
notant & leges. Bene vale.

FRAN. RHOL. TARVISANVS.
GHRAR. DE LISA SCRIPTORI.
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MAIOREM COPIAM
FACERET.
TARVISII.
M. CCCC. LXXI. NOVEMB.



ARGUMENTVM MAR SILII PL
CINI FLORENTINI IN LIBRE
MERCVR II TRISMEGISTI AD
COSMVM MEDICVM PATRIAR
PATREM.



Quoniam quoniam Moyses natus
effloruit Achas astrologus
Ptolemaei phisici frater. de
maternum enim uictoris Mer
curii tunc nepos fuit Mercurius Trismeg
gistus. Hoc autem de illo scribit Apuleius
Augustinus. Quod Ciceroque Lactantius
Mercurius quique per orbem fuisse uoluit.
quoniam fuisse illum quoniam ab aegyptio
is grecis autem Tulliusque appell
latus est. Hanc afferunt conuoluit arguunt
per praefate in se legem istam tradidit.
Lactantius uero sanctus in amantibus
horumque figuris insinuat. Hic in tanta hor
um unum uenerabile fuit in decem numeris
relatus sit. Tempus illius rursus adstruat
quoniam. Nomen eius proprium ob reuer
tiam quondam pronuntiat uulgo ut tenet



Corpus Hermeticum

‘The cosmological framework which they take for granted is always astrological, even where this is not expressly stated. The material world is under the rule of the stars, and of the seven planets, the “Seven Governors”. The laws of the nature within which the religious gnostic lives are the astrological laws, and they are the setting of his religious experience.’

Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, p. 51.





Corpus Hermeticum

‘He [Hermes] is called the first author of theology: he was succeeded by Orpheus, who came second amongst ancient theologians: Aglaophemus, who had been initiated into the sacred teaching of Orpheus, was succeeded in theology by Pythagoras, whose disciple was Philolaus, the teacher of our Divine Plato. Hence there is one ancient theology (*prisca theologia*)... taking its origin in Mercurius and culminating in the Divine Plato.’

Ficino, Preface to *Pimander* (first tractate in the *Corpus Hermeticum*.)

Ficino and the *Corpus Hermeticum*

Translated 14 treatises

Pimander

Hermetic account of creation

‘Son of God’, ‘the Word’

‘That Light, He said, am I, thy God, Mind, prior to Moist Nature which appeared from Darkness; the Light-Word (Logos) [that appeared] from Mind is Son of God’

CH I.6

Addresses of Hermes to disciples Tat, Ammon and Asclepius

‘For no one of the other so-called gods, no one of men, or daimones, can be in any measure Good, but God alone; and He is Good alone and nothing else. The rest of things are separable all from the Good's nature; for [all the rest] are soul and body, which have no place that can contain the Good’

CH II.14



Gnosticism

The common features of the numerous sects that had sprung up in the first centuries of the Christian era

A product of syncretism

An emphasis on knowledge, or gnosis, as the means for the attainment of salvation, or even as the form of salvation itself

Knowledge of God brings about salvation by transforming the individual and uniting them with the divine

Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, p. 32 (1958)





Gnosticism

‘All these currents have in some way to do with **salvation**: **the general religion of the period is a religion of salvation**. Third, all of them exhibit **an exceedingly transcendent (i.e., transmundane) conception of God** and in connection with it an equally transcendent and other-worldly idea of the goal of salvation. Finally, they maintain **a radical dualism of realms of being**—God and the world, spirit and matter, soul and body, light and darkness, good and evil, life and death—and consequently an extreme polarization of existence affecting not only man but reality as a whole: the general religion of the period is **a dualistic transcendent religion of salvation**.’

Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, p. 32.

The Cosmos

A prison where humanity is trapped

The material world is evil in comparison to the world of the deity

Around and above it the cosmic spheres of the seven planets and the eighth of the fixed stars

The cosmos is the domain of the planetary demons known as Archons

The collective rulers of the world

The planetary spheres are the seats of the Archons with each sphere having own Archon

The Archons seek to prevent the spirits of humans from passing up through its spheres to the divine realm beyond

On the Origin of the World



The Cosmos

The whole purpose of the spheres is to separate humanity from God

Each sphere has its own appetites and passions which are passed on to humans by the Archons

After death, the spirit travels upwards, leaving behind at each sphere the appetites and passions associated with it, until it reaches the divine realm and becomes reunited with God

On the Origin of the World

The Archons are rulers of the world except when this role is played by their leader, Yaldaboath

The demiurge who created the material world

The Apocryphon of John





St. Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

The celestial realm influenced our bodies and the physical world but not our souls

‘So, it is impossible for celestial bodies to act directly on the intellect. Therefore, they cannot be the direct cause of things that pertain to understanding.’

‘So, it is also obvious that the opinion which asserts that celestial bodies are directly the cause of our act of understanding is false.’

But

‘Now, the condition of the human body does come under the influence of celestial motions. In fact, Augustine says, in the *City of God* v, that "it is not utterly absurd to say that certain influences of the stars are able to produce differences in bodies only ." And Damascene says, in Book 11, that "different planets establish in us diverse temperaments, habits and dispositions." So, the celestial bodies work indirectly on the good condition of understanding. Thus, just as physicians may judge the goodness of an intellect from the condition of its body, as from a proximate disposition, so also may an astronomer judge from the celestial motions, as the remote cause of such dispositions. In this way, then, it is possible that there is some truth in what Ptolemy says in his *Centiloquium*: "When, at the time of a man's birth, Mercury is in conjunction with Saturn and is itself in a strong condition, it gives inwardly to things the goodness of understanding.’

Summa Contra Gentiles Book III, Chapter 84.



Influence of Aquinas

Ficino

'I intend to assert only so much as is approved by the Church'

But

The psychic and physical worlds are intertwined and the planets are as alive in our minds and souls as in our bodies

Ficino's Cosmology

Hierarchical universe:

God, Angelic Mind, Soul, Spirit, Body

Only God, 'The One' – is perfect unity and is symbolised by the Sun

The World-soul and the human soul are interconnected

The cosmos is a unity

Humans are a microcosm – a cosmos in miniature – and therefore the planets, which are divine, are also present within us



The World Soul

A tripartite division

Intellect – motionless and far away from Body

Connected to divine and contains the Ideas

Soul – refers to Soul as the 'Primum Mobile'

Contains seminal reasons, as many in number as the Ideas in Intellect

Body – powerless and far removed from Intellect

Contains species which reflect the reasons and depend on them

Intellect and Body cannot communicate without Soul

Soul is equidistant from Intellect and Body and can move between them

Ficino, *On Obtaining Life from the Heavens*, p. 243



Spirit

Between world soul and the material world is spirit which mediates between them.

Between the human soul and the human body is spirit

‘Therefore, between the tangible and partly transient body of the world and its very soul, whose nature is very far from its body, there exists everywhere a spirit, just as there is between the soul and body in us, assuming that life everywhere is always communicated by a soul to a grosser body. For such a spirit is necessarily required as a medium by which the divine soul may both be present to the grosser body and bestow life throughout it.’

Ficino, On Obtaining Life from the Heavens, pp. 255-256





Imagination

A means of unifying sense-impressions into images, which are then translated by the mind into thoughts

The mind needs the images in order to grasp the universal concepts to which they point

Then it can leave them behind as it moves into the pure contemplation of intellectual activity

Imagination plays an essential part in the ascent towards the spiritual union of the Intellect

Intellect is where the soul realises its identity with the Divine Ideas and its immortality



Active Participation

Through active participation the Gods reveal themselves

The human soul can unite with the Divine

‘The starting point, then, for the soul’s ascent is the Platonic *anamnesis* or remembering its divine origins, and the knowledge that unfolds from this cannot be compared with the human activity of logical reasoning or comparison. It is uncovered through invocation and divination using all elements of the natural world including stars and planets as ‘unspeakable’ symbols to attract the presence of the gods.’

Voss, *Marsilio Ficino*, p. 8



Monotheism

Prisca Theologia

The original pure religion that originated with Hermes or 'Mercurius' and was perfected by the 'Divine Plato' in whose writing it culminated

Plato, the Neoplatonists and Hermes spoke of a supreme God and an immortal soul

St. Augustine's acceptance of Plato

In keeping with Christianity

D I C I,
*Atque philosophi celeberrimi,
de Vita Libri tres,*
Recens iam à mendis sitúq; vindicati,
ac summa castigati diligentia,
Q V O R V M.
*Primus, de Studiosorum sanitate tuenda.
Secundus, de Vita producenda.
Tertius, de Vita cœlitus comparanda.*



Ficino's Astral Magic

MARSILIO FICINO

Three Books on Life

Book 1 - *De vita sana* – on a healthy life

Book 2 - *De vita longa* – on a long life

Book 3 - *De vita coelitus comparanda* –
On Obtaining Life from the Heavens.

*The Book 'On Obtaining Life from the
Heavens' by Marsilio Ficino of Florence,
Which He Composed among His
Commentaries on Plotinus*

*In What, According to Plotinus, the Power
of Attracting Favor from the Heavens
Consists, Namely, that Well-adapted
Physical Forms Can Easily Allure the World-
soul and the Souls of the Stars and the
Daemons.*

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Schema huius præmissæ diuisionis Sphærarum.



Planetary Spheres

Planetary Rays

Divine energies that travel down through the spheres and back again

Earth at the centre

Spheres of the seven planets

Each planet has its attendant God or daemon

Eighth sphere of the fixed stars

Moves in the opposite direction to the planets

Above that the Divine Mind – the active Intelligence of the One



Ficino's Astral Magic

Planets as rays of divinity rather than prediction

The gods are embodied in the planets and in the material world

‘Our Spirit absorbs the Spirit of the World through the Rays of the Sun and of Jupiter, Insofar as It becomes Solar and Jovial Itself.’

Ficino, *On Obtaining Life from the Heavens*, p. 259



Ficino's Astral Magic

Sympathetic Resonance

Apollo Ray

Apollo in the realm of Intellect or Ideas

Sun on the planetary level

The king in the human world

The lion in the animal world

Heliotrope in the vegetable world

Gold on a mineral level



Ficino's Astral Magic

Moon, Mercury and Venus

Material and sensory elements

The Sun and Mars

The imagination

Jupiter

The Reason

Saturn

The contemplating intellect

Ficino, *On Obtaining Life from the Heavens*, p. 259

Ficino's Astral Magic

Earthly objects are associated with a specific planet

‘...the Mercurial things, which include: tin, silver, especially quicksilver, silver marcasite, agate, glass – both porphyritic and those kinds which mix yellow with green – emerald, lac, animals which are sagacious and clever and at the same time active such as monkeys and dogs, and people who are eloquent, sharp, and versatile, and who have oblong faces and hands which are not fat.’

Ficino, *On Obtaining Life from the Heavens*, p. 251



Ficino's Astral Magic

Objects associated with a planet carry the power of the planet

‘If you want your body and spirit to receive power from some member of the cosmos, say from the Sun, seek the things which above all are most Solar among metals and gems, still more among plants, and more yet among animals, especially human beings; for surely things which are more similar to you confer more of it. These must be brought to bear externally and, so far as possible, taken internally, especially in the day and hour of the Sun and while the Sun is dominant in a theme of the heavens.’

Ficino, *On Obtaining Life from the Heavens*, p. 249



Ficino's Astral Magic

Elect a time when the planet is strong

‘But those things which pertain to any planet should be sought and performed precisely when it has dignities as I have previously specified: in its day and hour if possible, also when it is in its own house or in its exaltation or at least in its triplicity, in its term, or in a cardine of heaven, while it is direct in motion, when it is outside of the burnt path, and preferably when it is east of the Sun, if it is above the Sun, if it is in apogee, and if it is aspected by the Moon.’

Ficino, *On Obtaining Life from the Heavens*, pp. 251-253





Ficino's Astral Magic

When we carry out tasks associated with a planet we come under the influence of that planet

‘We come under the influence of Jupiter by civic occupations, by those occupations which strive for honor, by natural philosophy, by the kind of philosophy which most people can understand, by civil religion and by laws; of Mars, by anger and contests; of the Sun and of Mercury, by the pursuit of eloquence, of song, of truth, and of glory, and of skill; of Venus, by gaiety and music and festivity; of the Moon, by a vegetable existence.’

Ficino, *On Obtaining Life from the Heavens*, pp. 253-255



Ficino's Astral Magic

The person can work with the horoscope and take responsibility for one's own fate

The planets are not just 'outside in some other place' but are mirrored in the soul in such a way that we can work with their images and direct our inner life accordingly



Ficino's Astral Magic

Know your chart and understand the domain of individual planets and play to your strengths

‘The specific rule for an individual would be to investigate which star promised what good to the individual at his nativity, to beg grace from that star rather than from another, and to await from any given star not just any gift and what belongs to other stars, but a gift proper to that one.’

Ficino, *On Obtaining Life from the Heavens*, pp. 253-255

Ficino on Determinism

‘In your wish to attribute the cause of our work to Fate you have touched upon our birth chart. I do not, of course deny that in this configuration Saturn rising in Aquarius, the Sun and Mercury in the ninth house of the heaven, and the aspect of each of the remaining planets to the ninth house, all signify a restorer of the ancient teaching, but I do deny that they produce such a man.’

Letter to John of Hungary, Ficino, *Letters* vol. 7, no.19.

Ficino and Synchronicity

Letter of thanks to Cosimo from 1462

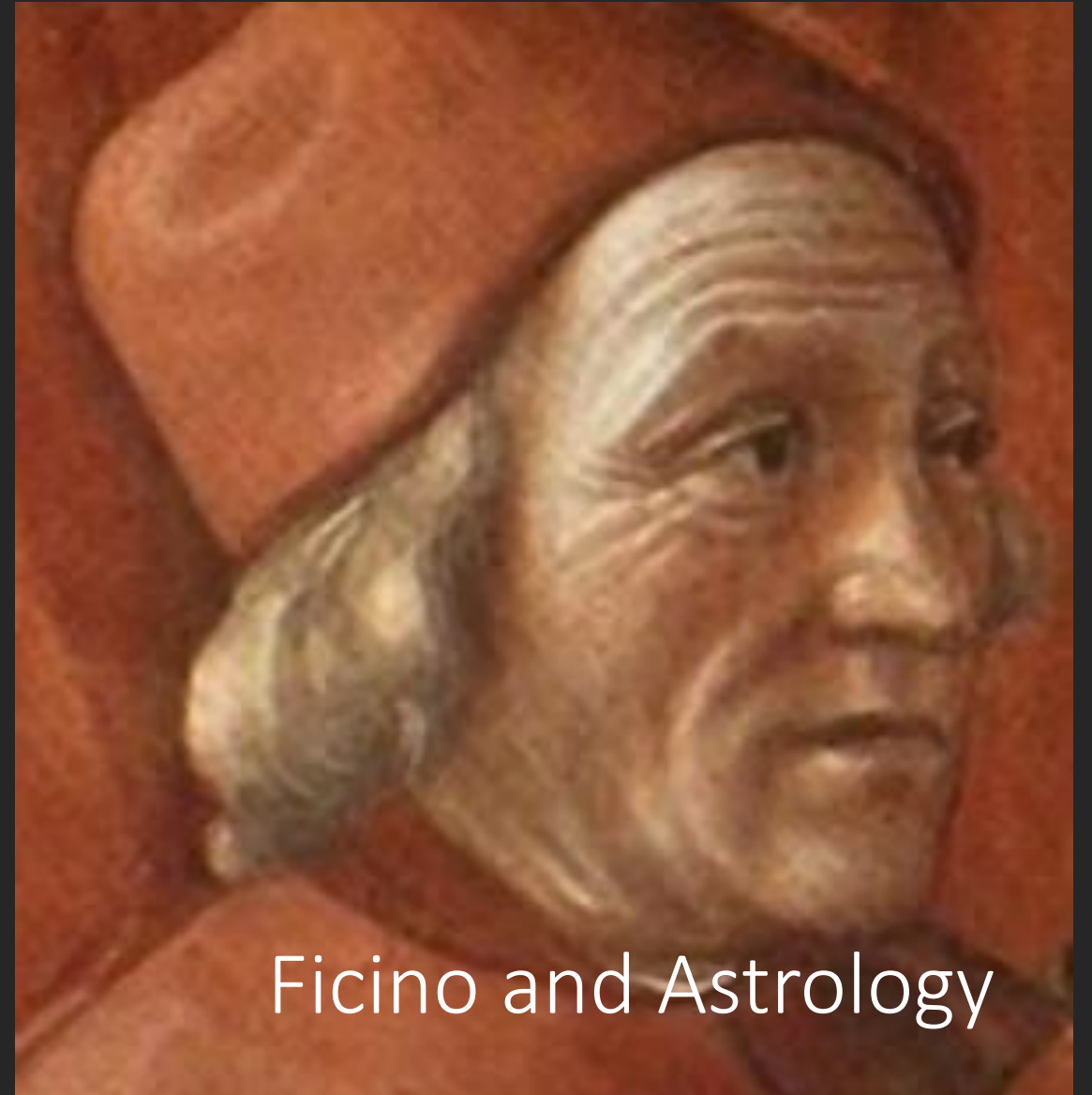
Tells him about a meaningful coincidence

Just as he was singing a hymn of Orpheus to the Cosmos - 'Cosmos, hear our prayers and grant a quiet life to a pious youth', a letter arrived from Cosimo (*Cosmus* in Latin) granting the very request of the hymn

Letter to Cosmo de Medici 1462



D I C I,
*Atque philosophi celeberrimi,
de Vita Libri tres,*
Recens iam à mendis sitúq; vindicati,
ac summa castigati diligentia,
Q V O R V M.
*Primus, de Studiosorum sanitate tuenda.
Secundus, de Vita producenda.
Tertius, de Vita cœlitus comparanda.*



Ficino and Astrology



Ambiguous Relationship with Astrology

‘If you do not approve of astronomical images, albeit invented for the health of mortals – which even I do not so much approve of as report – dismiss them with my competed permission and even, if you will, by my advice.’

‘The Words of Marsilio Ficino to the Reader of the Following Book’, *‘On Obtaining Life from the Heavens’*, Kaske and Clark, p. 239



Ambiguous Relationship with Astrology

‘These astrologers, in declaring that every single thing is necessarily brought about by the stars, are themselves involved in three highly pernicious errors, and they involve the public in them too. For insofar as they are able, they take away from God, Almighty and Supreme, his own providence and his absolute sovereignty over the universe. Next, they deny the justice of the angels; for according to them, the angels move the celestial bodies in such a way that from hence come forth all the crimes of men, all evil events for good men and all good events for evil men. Lastly, they take away from men their free will and deprive them of all peace of mind, for it seems to the astrologers that men, no less than beasts, are driven hither and thither.’



Ambiguous Relationship with Astrology

1477 – Wrote but did not publish:

Disputatio contra iudicium astrologorum (A Disputation against the judgement of astrologers)



Ambiguous Relationship with Astrology

1478 – wrote to Pope Sixtus IV, as one ‘equally devoted to both prophecy and astrology’

Makes predictions based on astrological configurations

In most of his letters he repeatedly refers to the influence of the planets on his and his friends’ charts

Letters of Marsilio Ficino

Ambiguous Relationship with Astrology

Sought to unify religion and philosophy

‘I therefore exhort and implore all philosophers to reach out and embrace religion firmly, and all priests to devote themselves diligently to the study of legitimate philosophy.’

Ficino, Prologue to *De Christiana religione*,

Symbolised astrologically by Jupiter and Saturn

1484 - Jupiter Saturn conjunction

Published his translations of Plato in 1484



Ambiguous Relationship with Astrology

Saw astrology as a means of developing self-knowledge with ultimately lead to knowledge of God

Critical of astrologers who used astrology for prediction and who believed stars determined events on earth



Book of the Sun (1494)

Compares the Sun to God and to Goodness

‘A vital spirit between the soul of the world and the body’

‘Even eternal things - the virtue and divinity of God - can be seen through the Sun’

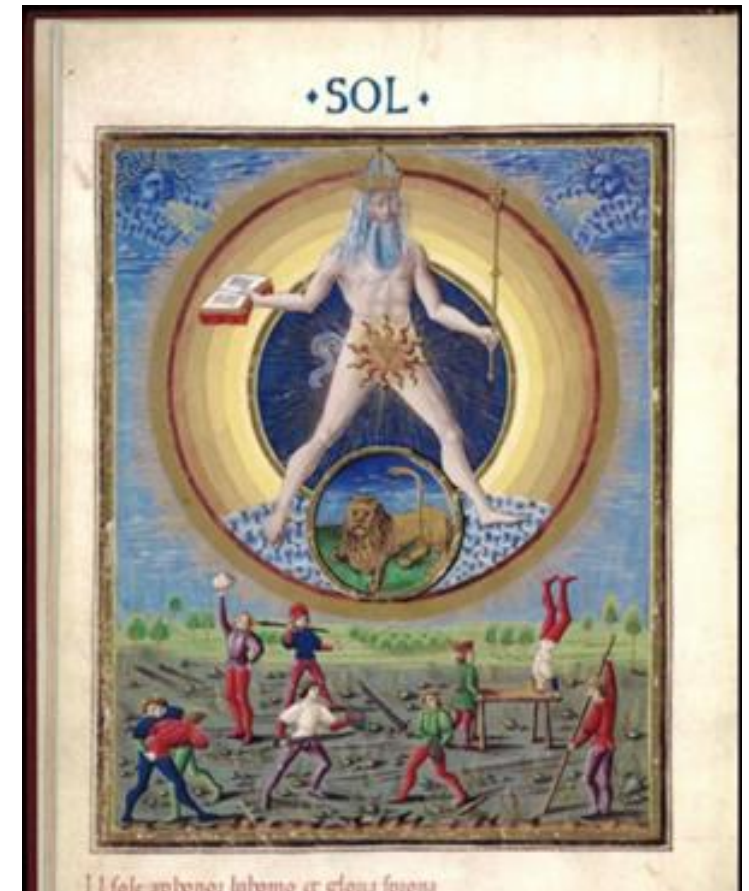


‘Having very diligently considered these things, our divine Plato named the Sun the visible son of Goodness itself. He also thought that the Sun was the manifest symbol of God, placed by God himself in this worldly temple so that everyone everywhere could admire it above all else. Plato and Plotinus said that the ancients venerated this Sun as God. The ancient gentile theologians placed all their gods in the Sun, to which Iamblichus, Julian and Macrobius testify. Certainly whoever does not view the Sun in the world as the image and minister of God, has certainly never reflected upon the night, nor looked upon the rising Sun; nor has he thought how extraordinary this is, nor how suddenly those things which were thought to be dead return to life’



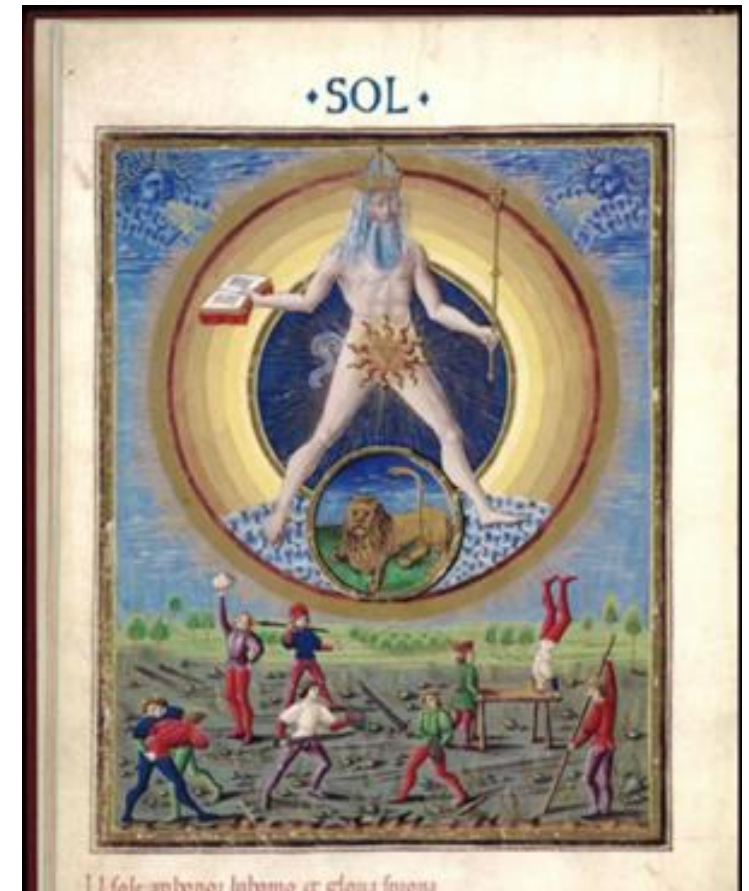
‘There is nothing in the world more like the divine trinity than the Sun. For in the one substance of the Sun a certain three-foldness exists, distinct in its parts yet united. Firstly a natural fecundity which is completely hidden from our senses, secondly, a manifest light flowing out of this fecundity, ever equal to it, and thirdly a heating virtue quite equal to both. The fecundity represents the Father; light, likened to intelligence, represents the Son conceived of intelligence; heat stands for the loving spirit. Around this divine trinity our theologians discovered three hierarchies of angels, each one containing three orders. The first consecrated to the Father, the second to the Son, the third to the Spirit

Book of the Sun (1494)



'Next, through the twelve signs of the zodiac, it is called living, as Abraham and Haly say, and that sign which the Sun invigorates actually appears to be alive. Moreover, the Sun fills the two adjacent signs with so much potency, that this space on both sides is called by the Arabs the ductoria of the Sun - that is the solar field. When planets pass through them, avoiding being burnt up in the meantime, they acquire a marvellous power, especially if the superior planets, finding themselves in this position, rise before the Sun and the inferior ones after the Sun. The sign in which the Sun is exalted, that is Aries, in this way becomes the head of the signs, signifying the head in any living thing. Also, that sign in which the Sun is domiciled, that is Leo, is the heart of the signs, and so rules the heart in any living thing. For when the Sun enters Leo, it extinguishes in many regions the epidemic of the Python's poison. Moreover the yearly fortune of the whole world will always depend on the entry of the Sun into Aries, and hence from this the nature of any spring may properly be judged; just as the quality of summer is judged from the ingress of the Sun into Cancer, or that of autumn from its entrance into Libra, and from the coming into Capricorn the quality of winter is discovered; these things are gleaned from the figure of the heavens present at that time.'

Book of the Sun (1494)



Book of the Sun (1494)

‘Similarly when the Sun returns by the exact degree and minute to its place in the nativity of any person, his share of fortune is unfolded through the whole year. It happens in this way because the movement of the Sun as the first and chief of the planets is very simple (as Aristotle says), neither falling away from the middle of the Zodiac as the others do, nor retrograding.’



D I C I,
*Atque philosophi celeberrimi,
de Vita Libri tres,*
Recens iam à mendis sitúq; vindicati,
ac summa castigati diligentia,
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*Primus, de Studiosorum sanitate tuenda.
Secundus, de Vita producenda.
Tertius, de Vita cœlitus comparanda.*



Ficino's Legacy



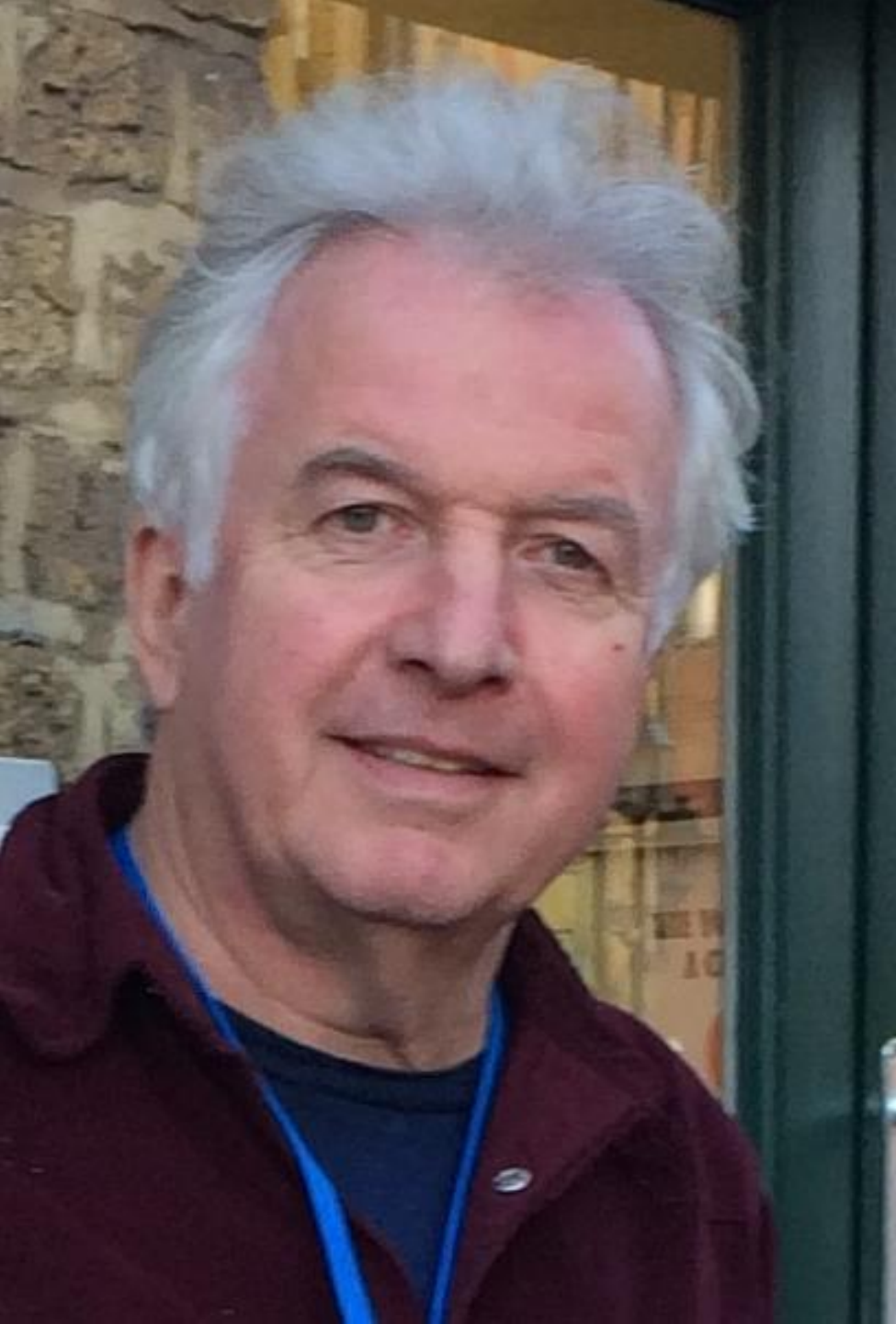
Ficino's Influence

Renaissance revival of magic

Change in how magic was viewed

‘The learned and assiduous reader of such authors as Iamblichus, Porphyry, or even of Plotinus, could no longer regard magic as the trade of ignorant and inferior persons.’

Yates, Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, p. 46)

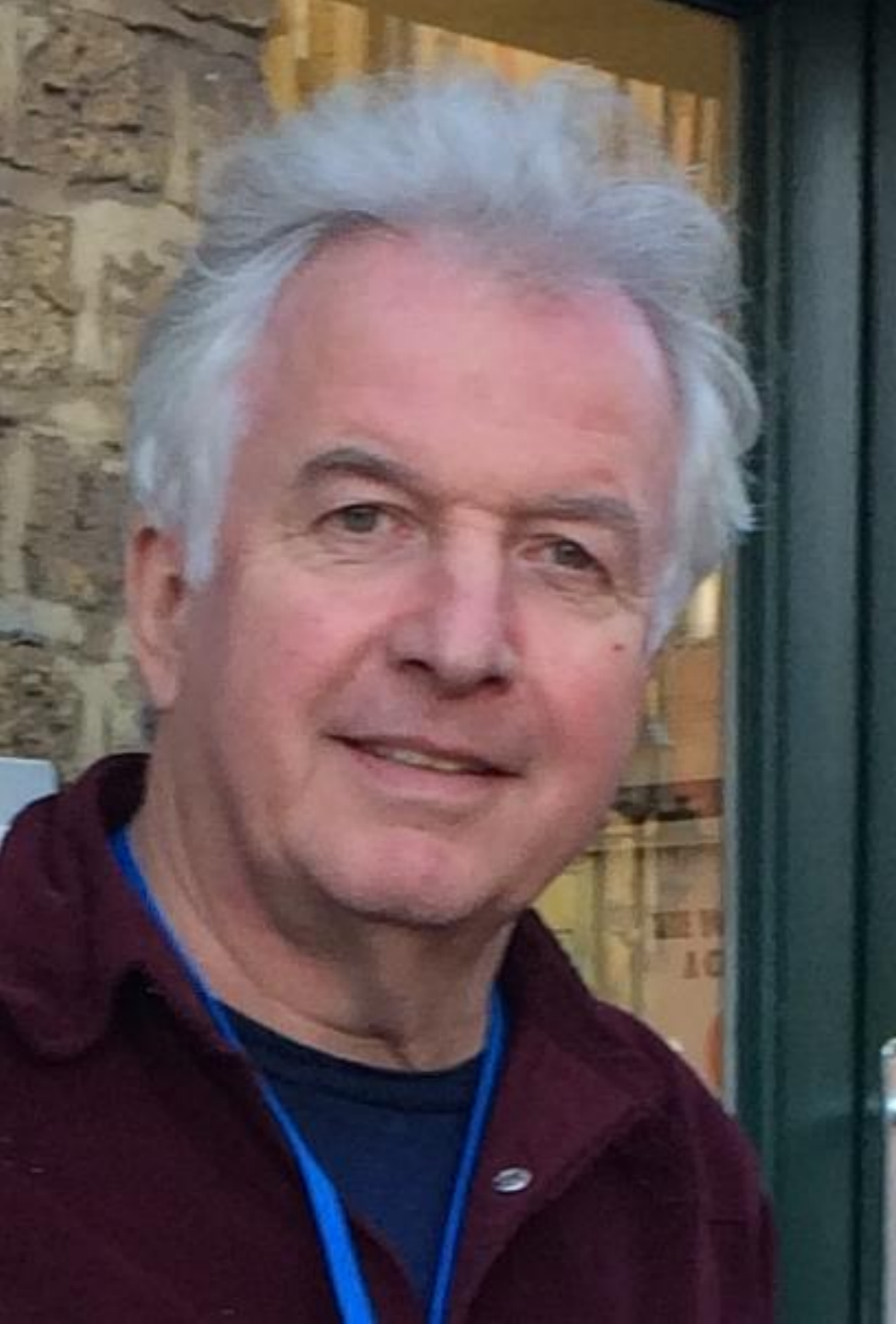


Sympathy

‘The harmonization of one’s life with the cosmos through ritual, meditation, the use of talismans, colour, music and herbs.’

‘Not only did he legitimise astral magic in a Christian context but he also elevated the planetary deities to a more important function by emphasizing their role as aspects of the internal, individual psyche with whom one can genuinely communicate – as opposed to seeing the planets merely as external transmitters of primarily physical influences. Physical influences were real and were key to the functioning of astral magic, but they were also, as was the entire cosmos, of divine origin.’

Campion, A History of Western Astrology Vol. 2, p. 90.



Ficino's Influence

‘The consequence was a reordering of the relationship between the soul and the cosmos, or at least a sympathetic part of it, back to before the Church Fathers’ denunciation of astrology.’

Nick Campion, *A History of Western Astrology Vol II*, p. 86.



Ficino's Influence

Re-birth of classical leaning in the Renaissance

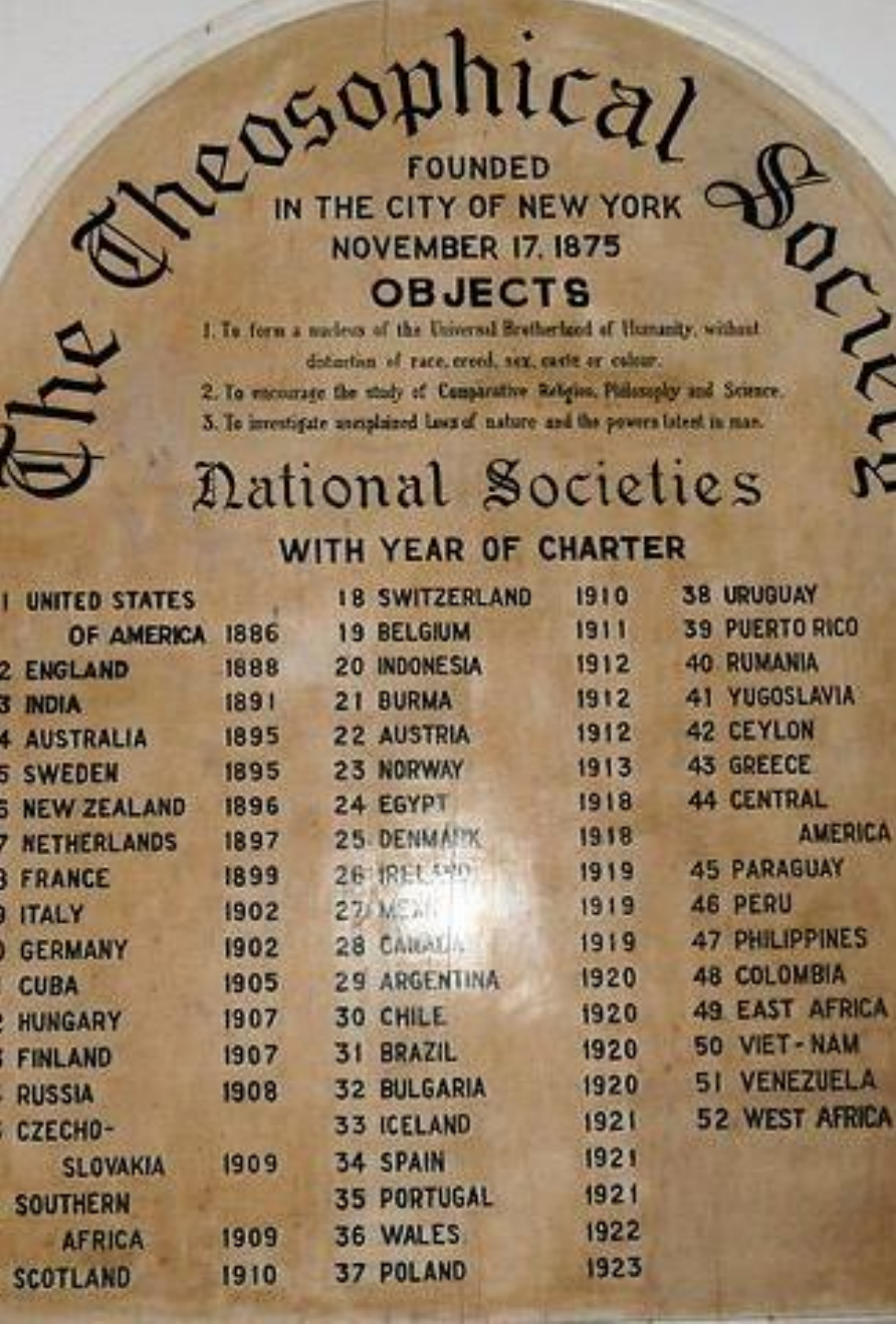
A new emphasis in Christianity on the capacity of the human soul to realise its innate divinity

Growth in 16th and 17th centuries of occult societies such as Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry, with their emphasis on initiation and 'hidden' knowledge of the secrets of the universe

The birth in the 19th century of the theosophical movement led by Helena Blavatsky

The astrology of Alan Leo

The psychological astrology of Dane Rudhyar and Liz Greene



Theosophical Society

Founded on 17th November 1875 in New York by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Ron Olcott

Movement spread throughout the world

- Care and nurturing of the soul
- All religions have a single origin and contain the same core of truth
- The Absolute is the One Infinite Eternal Divine Principle
- The Logos is the expression of the Absolute which radiates from the Absolute to bring the world into being
- At the heart of the spiritual universe is the Central Spiritual Sun
- Every atom is a spark of the One, so everything in the universe contains life and consciousness

◦ H. P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled* Vol. 1

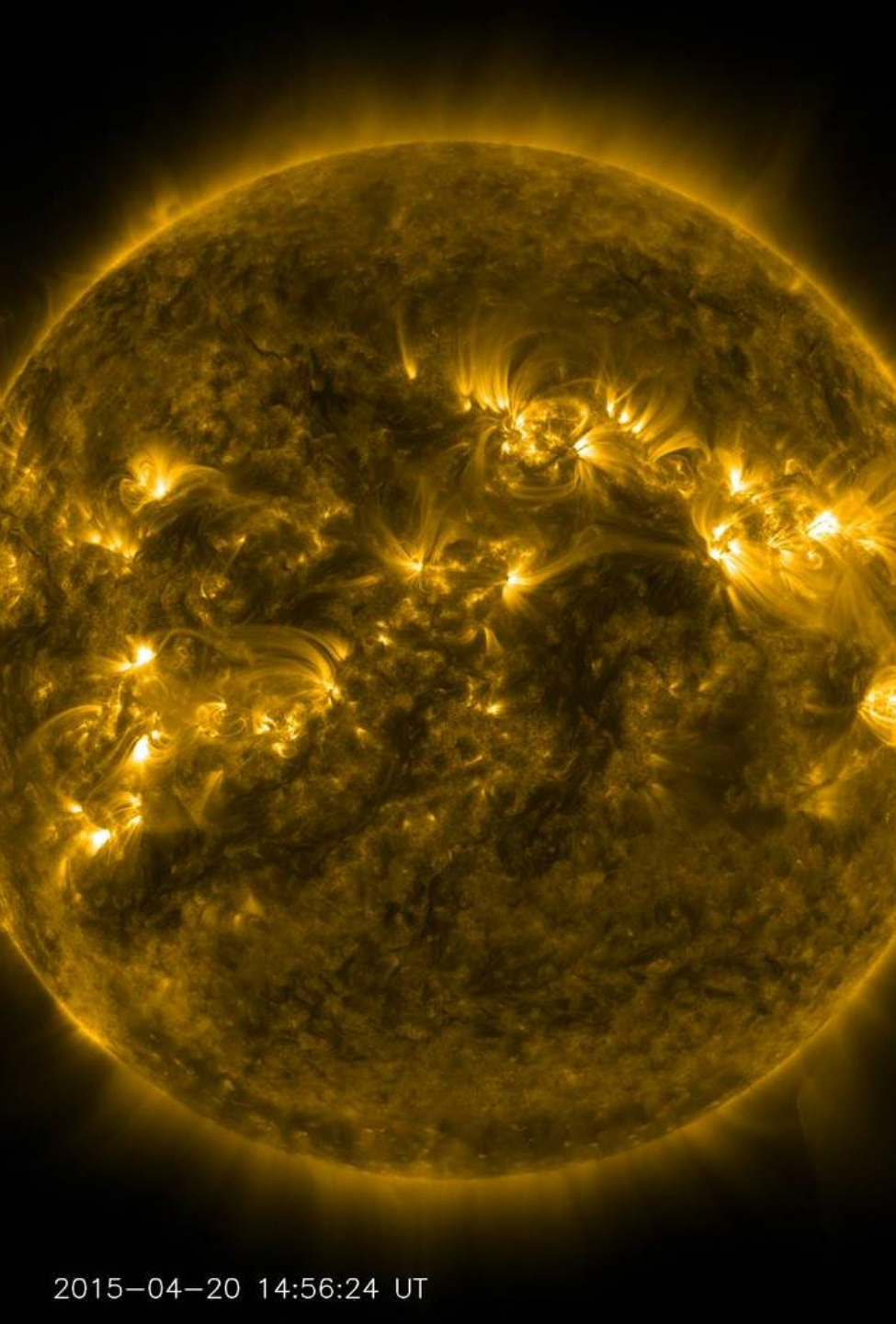


Theosophy and Astrology

An astrology based on spiritual development rather than prediction

- 'Astrology is a science *as infallible* as astronomy itself, with the condition, however, that its interpreters must be equally infallible ... that has always proved a stumbling-block ... In astrology and psychology one has to step beyond the visible world of matter, and enter into the domain of transcendent spirit.'

◦ *Isis Unveiled Vol. 1*, p.259



Central Spiritual Sun

The Sun in the chart represents the Central Spiritual Sun of theosophy

The Sun's position in the chart was paramount

It is the Solar Logos or divine reason

‘There is but One Life within the Universe – the Supreme Life of God, streaming through the Sun’

◦ Alan Leo (1904), p. xix

The more developed the individual, the more the Sun dominated the chart



Aland Leo (1860-1917)

‘The most influential British astrologer of the early twentieth century’

Nicholas Campion, *Astrology and Popular Religion in the Modern West: Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), p.32.



Aland Leo (1860-1917)

‘Sooner or later it must be realised that character is destiny’

◦ Alan Leo (1913), p. 35

‘The knowledge that each man is a law unto himself that within each is the power to create his own destiny and build his character.’

A strong character can overcome the limitations of the chart

The horoscope represents the body but not the spirit or soul

Focusing on the individual (spirit) rather than the personality allows people to rule their stars and achieve self-realisation



21st Century Astrology

Self-Awareness and Spiritual Growth

- 2004 – Majority of astrologers view astrology as a tool for self-development and growth
 - Nicholas Campion (2004)



Dualism in Astrology

Bernadette Brady

Dualism in astrology is where the astrologer considered that the horoscope was only a partial or incomplete view of the self

‘He (Leo) accepted a dualist argument by insulating the soul, character, and will from the full influence of fate, allowing it to only influence the body’

Still found in the books of twentieth century astrologers

46% of astrologers held a dualistic view of the chart

Bernadette Brady (2011), p. 284



Ficino's Influence

'Ficino was responsible for a shift in astrological philosophy and practice which has only been paralleled in the twentieth-century development of depth and transpersonal psychology, exposing its potential as a symbolic system of initiatory power.'

Voss, Marsilio Ficino, Introduction

D I C I,
*Atque philosophi celeberrimi,
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 ac summa castigati diligentia,
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Ficino's Horoscope



Ficino's Horoscope

‘Ficino had a very bad horoscope. I believe this accounts in part not only for his peculiar adaptations but for his occasional rejection of astrology, as in the unfinished, unpublished *Disputatio contra iudicium astrologorum*... A person with a bad horoscope could hardly be casual and lukewarm towards astrology: he would have to either reinterpret it to give him some hope or else deny it outright.’

Kaske and Clark, *‘The Author in the Work’*, p. 19.

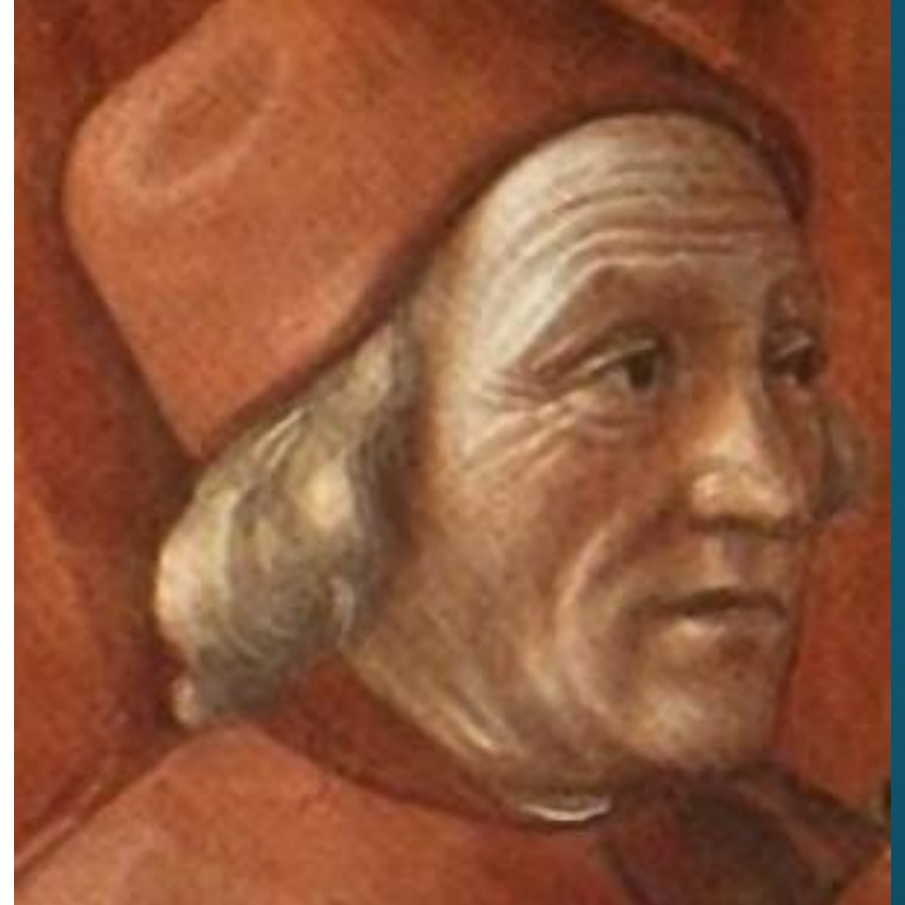
Ficino on Saturn

‘Just as the Sun is hostile to nocturnal animals, but friendly to the diurnal, so Saturn is hostile to those people who are either leading publicly an ordinary life or even to those fleeing the company of the crowd but not laying aside their ordinary emotions. For Saturn has relinquished the ordinary life to Jupiter, but he claims for himself a life sequestered and divine.’

‘He is most hostile of all, however, to people professing the contemplative life and not practising it.’

‘Saturn has taken over things that transcend the physical.’

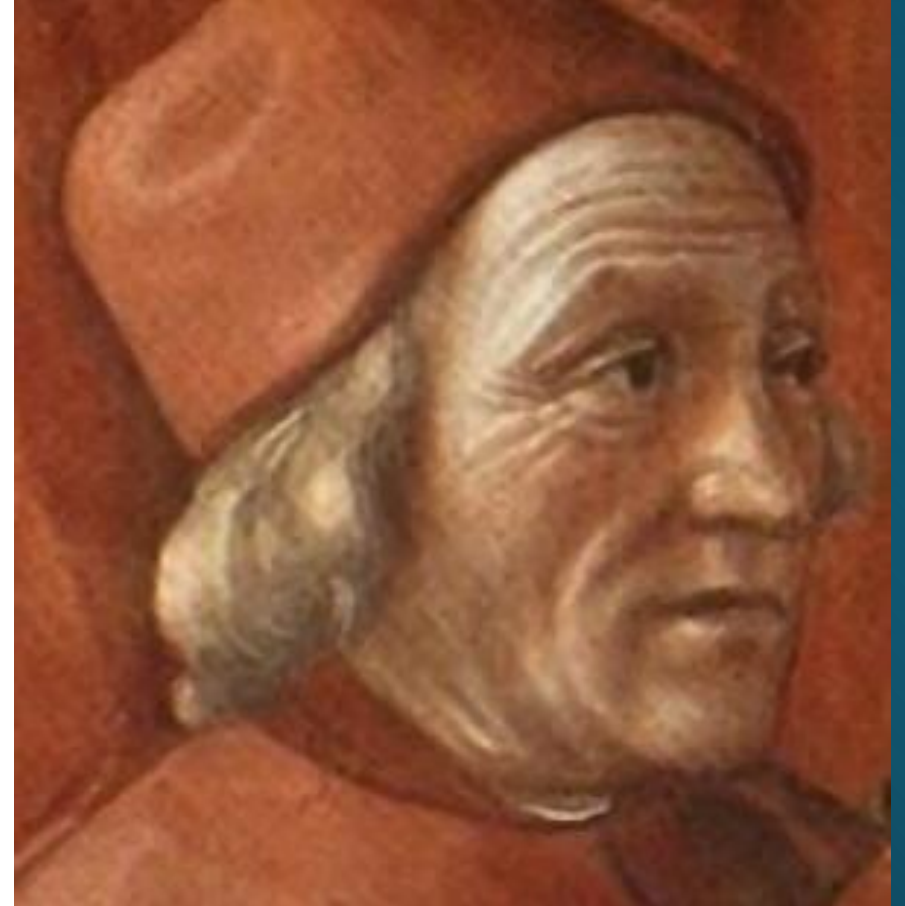
On Obtaining Life from the Heavens, XX11.30-45



Ficino on Saturn

‘You should certainly not neglect the powers of Saturn. For the Arabic writers say he is the most powerful of all; that we know planets submit their powers to those [planets] whom they are approaching, but that all approach him, rather than vice versa [because he is the slowest]; and that planets in conjunction with him act according to his nature.’

On Obtaining Life from the Heavens, XX11.60-70





Ficino on Saturn

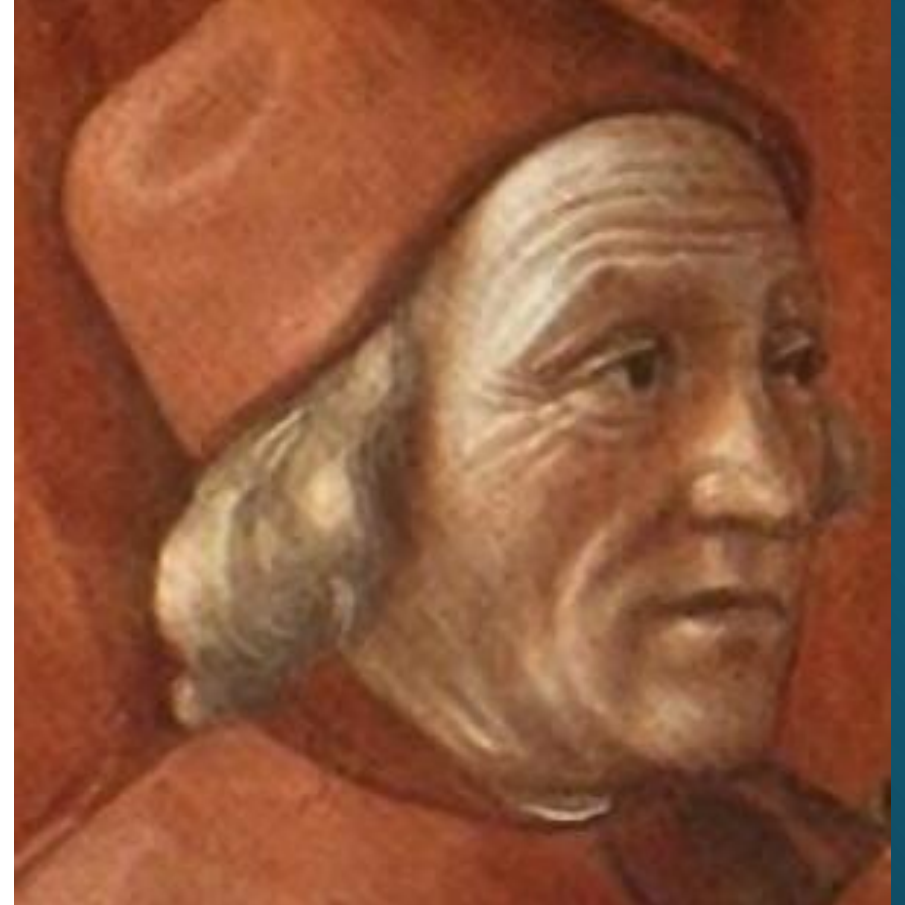
‘For he is of all the planets the head of the widest sphere....Saturn is also neighbour to the innumerable [fixed] stars; and indeed, he is very similar to the Primum Mobile because he travels a lengthy circuit.’

On Obtaining Life from the Heavens, XX11.60-70

Ficino on Saturn

‘He is the highest of planets; hence they call that man fortunate whom Saturn fortunately favours. And although most people are terrified of him as alien from the ordinary life of man, nevertheless the Arabs consider he is agreeable even to the common life whenever he has very great power and dignity as he ascends, or his Jupiter aspects him favourable or receives him well in his terms.’

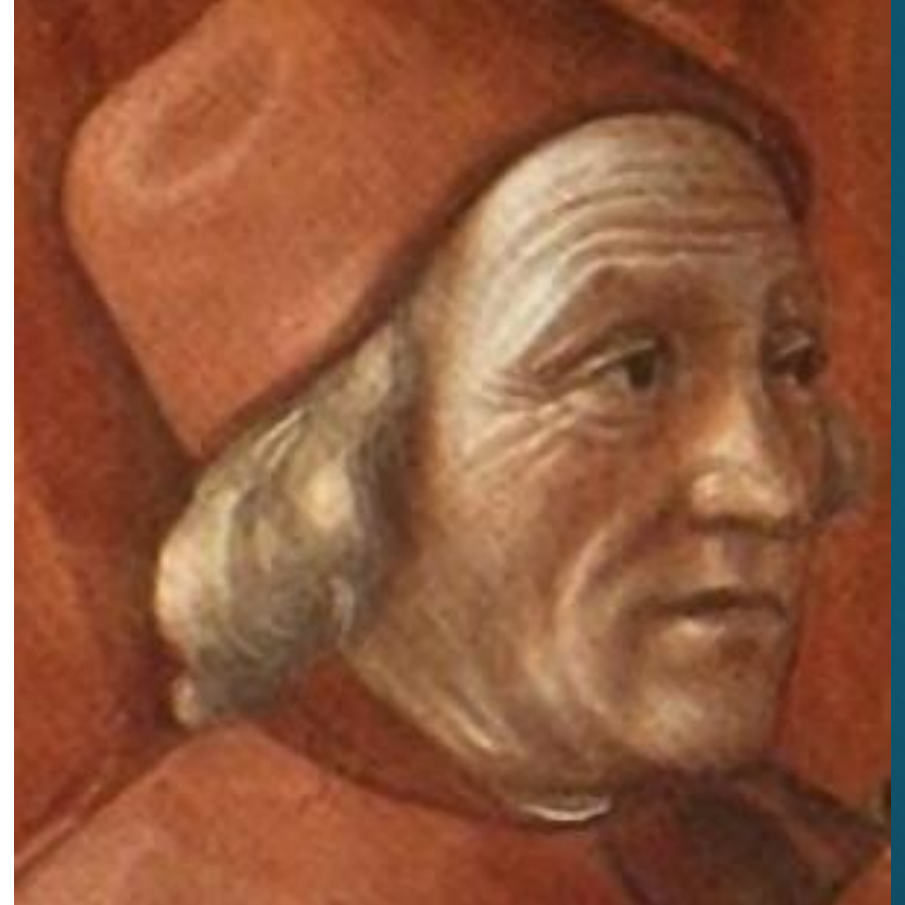
On Obtaining Life from the Heavens, XX11.70-75



Ficino on Saturn

‘Otherwise, unreasonably received in matter, particularly gross matter, his influence is like a poison, just as by putrefaction or adustion an egg may become poisonous. From such influence, certain people are born or become impure, lazy, sad, envious, and exposed to impure demons. Flee far from the company of these. For in places the poison of Saturn lies hidden and dormant like sulfur far from flame; but in living bodies it often blazes up and, like kindled sulfur, not only burns but fills everything around with noxious vapour and infects the bystanders.’

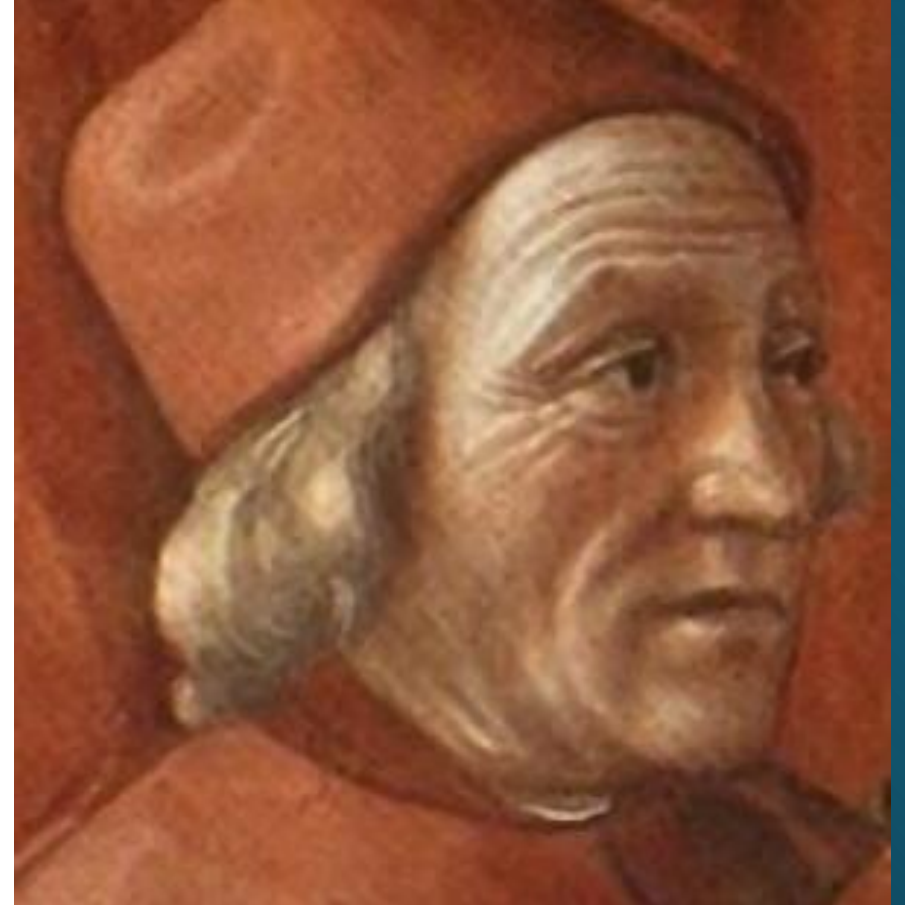
On Obtaining Life from the Heavens, XX11.75-80



Ficino on Saturn

‘But it is not only those who flee to Jupiter who escape the noxious influence of Saturn and undergo his propitious influence; it is also those who give themselves over with their whole mind to the divine contemplation signified by Saturn himself. The Chaldeans, Egyptians and Platonists think that by this method one can avoid the malice of fate.’

*On Obtaining Life from the Heavens,
XX11.85-90*

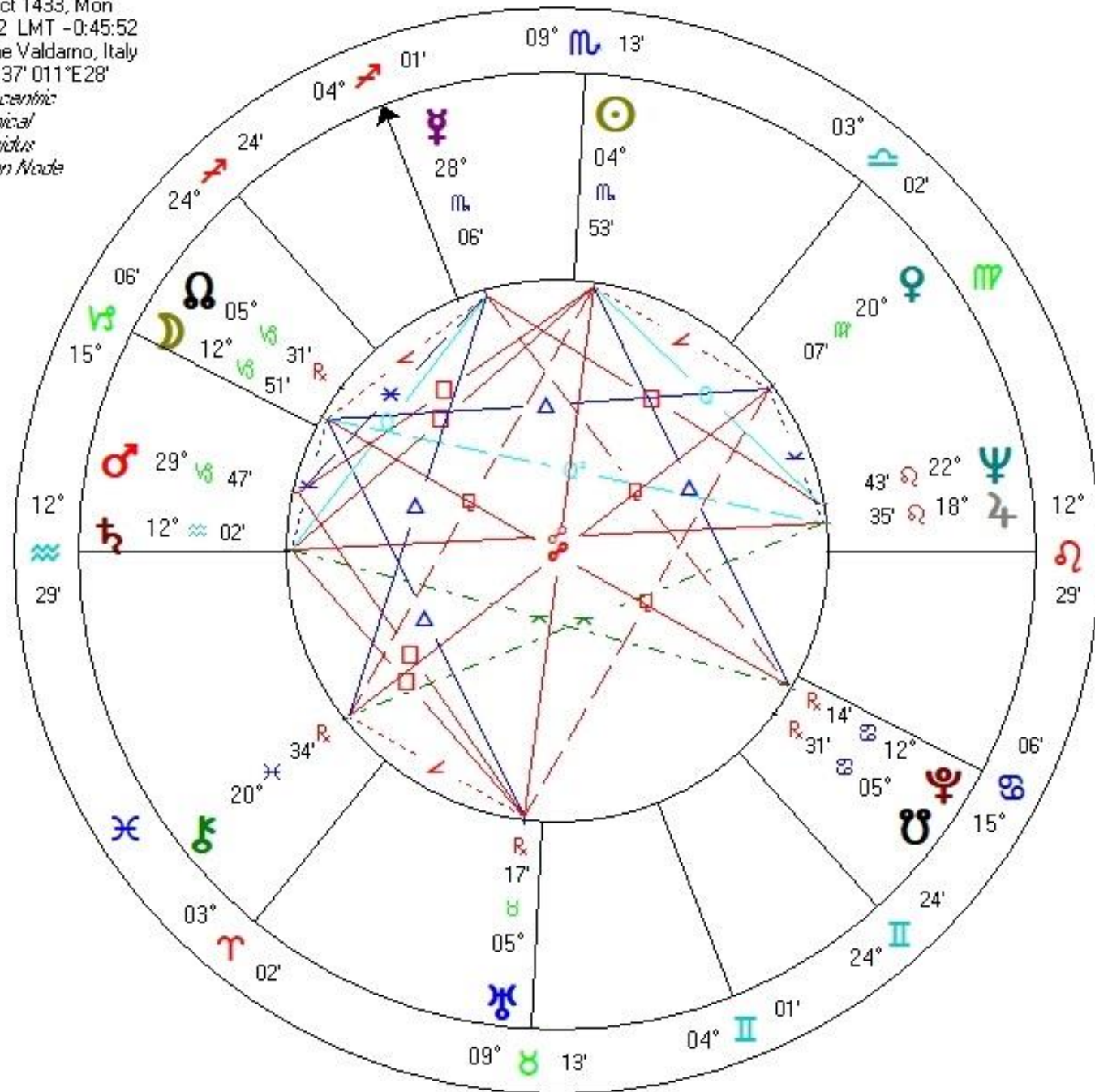


Ficino's Interpretation

‘Saturn seems to have impressed the seal of melancholy on me from the beginning; set as he is, almost in the midst of my ascendant Aquarius, he is influenced by Mars, also in Aquarius, and the Moon in Capricorn. He is in square aspect to the Sun and Mercury in Scorpio, which occupy the ninth house. But Venus in Libra and Jupiter in Cancer have, perhaps, offered some resistance to this melancholy nature.’

Ficino, Letter to Giovanni Cavalcanti

Marsilio Ficino
Natal Chart
19 Oct 1433, Mon
13:42 LMT -0:45:52
Figline Valdarno, Italy
43°N37' 011°E28'
Geocentric
Tropical
Placidus
Mean Node



Ficino's Interpretation

'At the heart of Ficino's psychology was the concept of melancholy, the natural condition arising from the Neoplatonic orthodoxy that the soul does not want to be in the body:

Campion, *A History of Western Astrology Vol II*, P. 91

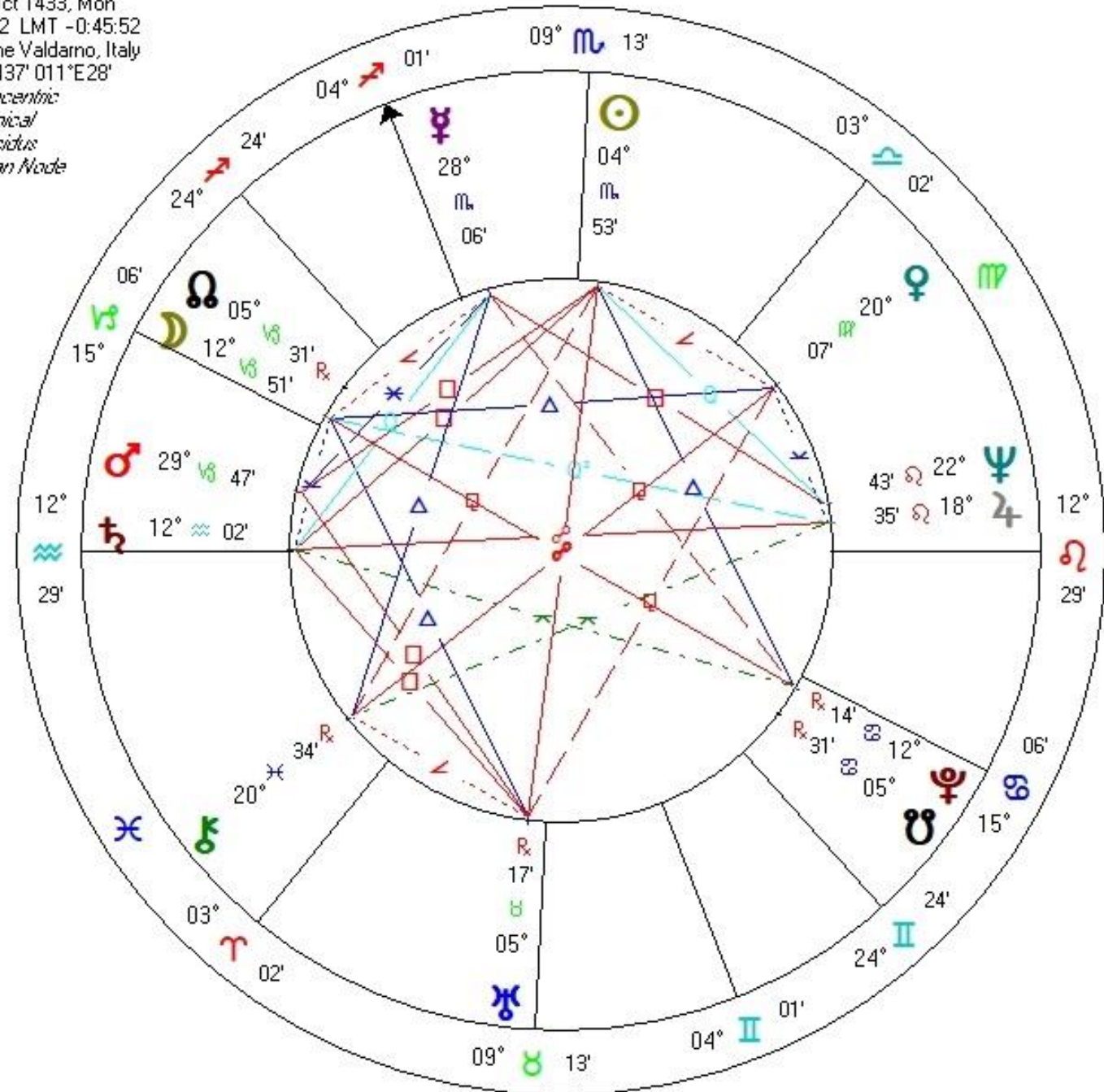
On Obtaining Life from the Heavens

Aimed at students who are likely to suffer from melancholy

Contemplation and hard abstract study brings them under the influence of Saturn

Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, p. 67

Marsilio Ficino
Natal Chart
19 Oct 1433, Mon
13:42 LMT -0:45:52
Figline Valdarno, Italy
43°N37' 011°E28'
Geocentric
Tropical
Placidus
Mean Node



Ficino's Horoscope

‘It is in a very timid hesitating and cautious manner that Ficino embarks on a mild form of astral magic, attempting to alter, to escape from, his Saturnian horoscope by capturing, guiding towards himself, more fortunate astral influences. Yet this comparatively harmless attempt at astral medical therapy was to open a flood-gate through which an astonishing revival of magic poured all over Europe.’

Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, p. 93.



15th Century Florence

‘But for a brief, golden period in 15th century Florence, the ancient gods descended once more and inspired human creativity to unprecedented heights, summoned by the invitation of Marsilio Ficino.’

Voss, Introduction, p. 1



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Images

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