

Selections from *Libri de Vita**

An Exhortation by Marsilio Ficino to the Reader

Good health, honored guest! Good health to any of you who come to our doorstep hungry for health! I beg you, the guest who is hungry, to see how hospitable I am. For no sooner had you entered than I asked about your health. Anticipating your health, I bid you good health as soon as I saw you. When you entered here, unknown to me, I received you with great pleasure. If you follow my customs, I will give you the health promised (if God allows it).

You have happened upon a host who is friendly to everyone, and full of love toward you. If you bring a similar love, and if you have put aside all your hate, what vital medicines will you find here! For it was love and the pleasure of your parents that gave you life. Hatred and sorrow, on the other hand, destroy life. Any of you who is suffering from the sorrow of hate, then, there is no place here for you, no vital medicine left that will ever help you. Therefore, I am speaking to you not so much as a host, but as a friend.

The laboratory of your Marsilio is somewhat larger than just the space you see bounded here. For not only is it enclosed in the following book, but in the two preceding books, too. All of it is offered as a kind of medicine for the powers of life, so that your life will be healthy and long. It is based here and there on the work of doctors who are helpful on planetary matters. Our laboratory here, our antidotes, drugs, poultices, ointments and remedies, offer different things to different types of people. If you do not like some of these things, just put them aside, lest you reject the rest because of a few.

If you do not approve of astronomical images, even those that have been found to be good for the health of mortals, remember that I, myself, do not so much approve of them as describe them. You can, with my permission, or even, if you prefer, with my recommendation, put such things aside. At least you should not neglect the medicines that have been strengthened with a little planetary help - or you will have neglected life itself. For I have found, through frequent and long experience, that these medicines, as well as other things made correctly by astrologers, are as different as wine is from water.

Even when I was an infant, born in the eight month from conception, in Florence, in the month of October, early in the evening, when I was half-alive with Saturn in retrograde, only such diligence seemed to be what kept me alive. My life was almost returned to God. Such diligence kept me healthy for my first three years. Even if I must tell you more things like this, know that I speak the truth. I bring it up not to boast (which is something very wrong for a philosopher), but rather to exhort you.

* Excerpts from *Libri de Vita*, Book III, *On Making Your Life Agree with the Heavens*, from Marsilio Ficino's *Book of Life*, Charles Boer (trans.) (Spring Publications 1980).

But we have spoken to you enough now, advising some things, exhorting you to others. Now let us speak with Plotinus, whom you must consult very carefully.

Chapter 1

What the powers consist of, according to Plotinus, that draws the favor of the heavenly bodies, that is, the soul of the world, of the stars and of daemons; souls are easily allured by the proper forms of bodies

If there were only intellect and body in the world, but no soul, the intellect would not be drawn to the body (for it is altogether immobile, and lacks the affect of motion, as if it were the furthest possible distance from the body), nor would the body be drawn to the intellect, since it is ineffective and inept in itself for such motion, and very remote from the intellect. So if a soul, conforming to each, is placed between them, each one is easily attracted to the other.

We are easily moved by the soul, first and foremost because it is the first mobile thing, mobile from itself and of its own doing. This is because, as I have said, it contains in itself all the middles of things, and is thus nearest to each. It is connected to all things, in the middle of these things that are distant from each other, for they are not distant from it. It conforms to divine things, and to things fallen, and it verges on each with its affect, and is everywhere all the same.

The soul of the world, the *anima mundi*, divinely contains at least as many seminal reasons for things as there are ideas in the divine mind, and with these reasons it fabricates as many species in matter. Therefore, any species whatsoever answers through it sown seminal reasons to its own idea, and can often easily receive through this something from that idea, whenever it is affected through it. Thus, whenever it degenerates from its own form, it can be formed again by this middle thing next to it, and through this middle thing it easily reforms. You thus correctly use many of its things, whether an individual's or a species', things which are scattered but conforming nonetheless to an idea.

Soon you draw the singular function of gift from the idea into this material that has been so conveniently prepared, and you draw it, as it were, through the seminal reason of the soul. For it is not the intellect, itself, but the soul that does this.

No one, therefore, should think that in certain materials of the world there are numinous elements, separated, inside, from material, and that these elements get drawn out; but one should rather think of these as demons and gifts of the animate world and the living stars. No one, furthermore, should marvel that the soul can be, as it were, allured through material forms. If it can be allured to harmonious foods by these forms, it does so, and it always and freely dwells among them. There is nothing so deformed in the whole living world that it has no soul, no gift of soul contained in it. the congruities of these forms, therefore,

to the reasons of the soul of the world, are what Zoroaster called the divine lures, and Synesius agreed, calling them magic charms.

One certainly should believe that all gifts are drawn out of the soul at a certain time and for their own material species, but for convenience the seminal species produce these gifts, with their seminal elements conforming. Thus, as a man, you pursue and claim your human gifts, and not those proper to fish or birds, who get their own. You pursue, however, things which pertain to a certain star or demon, going into the flow proper to this star or demon, the way wood when it is doused with sulfur bursts into flame. This happens not only through the rays, themselves, of the star and demon, but even through the *anima mundi*, itself, wherever it is present.

The reason of the star and demon flourishes in the *anima mundi*, in part so that the seminal will be generated, and in part so that the exemplary will be recognized and known. For the soul, according to the ancient Platonic philosophers, builds figures with its reasons beyond the stars in heaven, and some of these are such that it becomes something of this figure itself. It impresses its properties on all these things. In the stars, however, and in figures, parts, and properties, all species of lower things are contained, as well as their properties.

Altogether it has forty-eight figures, as it were the twelve in the zodiac plus thirty-six more. Thirty-six must be added to the number of images in the zodiac. In the same way, the number of grades or stages is three hundred and sixty. For in any grade there are many stars, with which images are made. These images, beyond those in the zodiac, are divided into many figures, according to the same number of grades. Certain habits and proportions in the universal images are then set in place, and these are also images. Such figures have their continuity from the rays of their stars, one after another, each with its own special property.

From these most carefully arranged forms hang the forms of lower things, as if they were arranged there. These heavenly bodies, as if they were disjunct among themselves, proceed to join by reasons of the soul. The mutable ones proceed from the stable ones. But these, to the extent that they do not comprehend themselves, are carried back to the forms in the mind, comprehending themselves in the animal part or in something more eminent. They are a multiplicity, but they are, as it were, reduced into the one that is simplest and good, like the heavenly figures at the pole.

But let us return to the soul. When the soul produces the special forms and powers of the lower bodies, it makes these through its own reasons, with the help of what is under the stars and heavenly forms. The singular gifts of individuals, which are often in some people much more marvelous than those that appear in the species itself, are shown through similar seminal reasons. They do this not so much with the help of heavenly forms and figures than with the location of the stars, the habit of their movements, and the aspects of the Planets. They are first shown among themselves and then in the more sublime stars.

Our soul, beyond the powers of the limbs, produces a power of life common everywhere in us, but especially in the heart, as if it were a fountain of fire nearest the soul. The *anima mundi* flourishes everywhere in the same way, but it especially unfolds its own power of life in the Sun. Thus, they locate the soul, both in us and in the world, as whole in any limb, and especially strong in the heart and in the Sun.

Yet always remember that just as the power of our soul adheres to the limbs through the spirit, so the power of the *anima mundi*, through the quintessence, which everywhere flourishes as if it were a spirit inside the worldly body, spreads out through all things that are under the *anima mundi*. It especially infuses its power into those which draw its spirit the most.

The fifth essence, however, can be taken inside more and more by us, if we know how to separate it from the other elements with which it is heavily mixed, or at least if we know how to use those things which abound in it. This is especially true for things in which it is purer, as in select wines and sugar, balsam and gold, precious stones, things which are pleasantly fragrant and things which shine, especially those that have a warm, moist, and clear quality in a subtle substance, which, besides wine, includes the whitest sugar, especially if you add gold to it, and the odor of cinnamon and roses.

Just as foods that we eat properly, though they are not alive in themselves, return us to the form of our life through our spirit, so also our bodies draw the most from worldly life when they are properly fitted to the spiritual and worldly body through worldly things and through our spirit. If you want food to take form for your brain or liver or stomach, you should eat, as much as you can, food such as brains, livers, and the stomachs of animals that are not far distant from human nature.

If you want your body and spirit to receive power from some limb of the world, for example from the Sun, learn which are the Solar things among metals and stones, even more among plants, but among the animal world most of all, especially among men. For there is no doubt that they confer on you similar qualities. These and more should be held forth and taken inside for their powers, especially on a day and in an hour of the Sun, with the Sun reigning in its figure in the sky. Solar things are all those things that are called Heliotrope - because they are turned to the Sun - for example, gold and the color of gold, chrysolite, carbuncle, myrrh, incense, musk, amber, balsam, golden honey, aromatic calamus, saffron, spikenard, cinnamon, wood aloe, and other aromatics, the Ram, the Hawk, the hen, the swan, the lion, the beetle, the crocodile, people who are golden-haired, curly-haired, sometimes bald-headed people, and the magnanimous.

Our bodies are able to be fitted to these in part through foods, in part through fragrant ointments, and in part just through habituation. They should be felt, frequently thought about, and even loved. One should very much seek out light.

If you worry about destroying your belly from a poultice of the liver, draw the faculty of the liver to the belly, first with massages, then with poultices that gather the liver, using chicory, endive, spode, agrimony, and liver salve. In the

same way, lest your stomach be destroyed by Jove, move your body on the day and in an hour when Jove is reigning, and meanwhile use Jovial things, like silver, amethyst, topaz, coral, crystal, beryl, spode, sapphire, green and airy colors, wine, white sugar, honey, and thoughts and feelings that are very Jovial, too: constant ones, balanced ones, religious and law-abiding ones. Associate with men of this kind, sanguine and handsome, venerable and versatile.

Remember, against cold things, the first things to be taken are gold and wine, mint and saffron. The Jovial animals are the lamb and the peacock, the eagle and the calf. In the same way, the power of Venus is drawn by turtle-doves, pigeons, the white water-wagtail, and other things which modesty does not permit me to list.

Chapter 13

On the power of images according to the ancients, and on acquiring medicines from the heavens

Ptolemy said in the Centiloquium that the images of lower things are subject to the celestial faces. Ancient wise men used to fabricate certain images, therefore, similar to the faces of the planets when they are in the sky, as if these faces then entered into examples of the lower things.

Even Haly approves of this, saying one can make a useful image of a snake when the Moon goes under the heavenly Snake, or happily faces it. Likewise, you can make an effective effigy of Scorpio when the Moon enters the sign of Scorpio, and this sign holds one corner of its four. He says it was done in Egypt in his time, and that he was present when a seal of Scorpio on bezoar stone was impressed onto a figure of incense, and this was given in a drink to someone whom a scorpion itself had stung. The person was suddenly cured.

Even the physician Hahameth agrees that these are useful to make, and Serapio agrees too. Furthermore, Haly tells us that a famous wise man known to him made images with a similar industriousness, and these were made to move, which effect (I do not know how) we read of in Archytas.

Trismegistus tells us of such things too, which the Egyptians made out of certain things of the world in order to get strength. He says they used to bring the souls of daemons into these to good effect, including the soul of his ancestor, Mercury. In the same way, they used to make the souls of Phoebus, Isis, and Osiris descend into statues, to be for men's use or even to be harmful to men. Likewise, Prometheus snatched life and heavenly light into a certain figment of clay.

But the Magi who were followers of Zoroaster, in summoning spirit from Hecate, used certain gold javelins marked with the characters of the heavens, on which a sapphire was inserted, and a whip made of bull's hide was whirled around, during which time they changed. But I will pass over their chants. For the Platonist Psellus disapproves of them and mocks them.

The Hebrews, when they were in Egypt, learned how to set up a golden calf, as the astrologers thought this would bring the favor of Venus and the Moon against the influxes of Scorpio and Mars that were unsafe for the Jews.

Porphiry, in his *Letter to Anebo*, declares that images are effective and adds that, at certain times, those who exhale with proper fumigations are immediately made strong by taking the airy daemons into their chests. Iamblichus agrees that in materials which are in natural agreement with the heavenly bodies, and which are properly and correctly gathered from all over and brought together, the powers and effects are not only celestial, but are able to take on the daemonic and divine, too. Proclus and Synesius say the same.

The wonderful works that can be done for health by doctors who are learned in astrology through stuff that is made up of many things, for example, powders, liquors, unguents, and tablets, seem to have a more likely value and reason in themselves than images: first, because powders, liquors, unguents, and tablets, made correctly, take on the heavenly influxes more easily and quickly than the harder materials from which images are usually made; second, because either the heavenly effects are taken inside us and converted into us or at least they inhere more and penetrate deeper; and third, because images are constructed from only one kind of thing, or from a few. The powders, and so forth, can be more selective because they consist of many things. So that if there were a hundred gifts of the Sun and Jove scattered over a hundred plants and animals, you could make up these hundred known to you and put them into one form, and then you would seem to have nearly the whole of the Sun and Jove.

You realize, of course, that the lower nature cannot capture all the powers of the higher nature in one thing, and so these are scattered about us through many natures, and they can be more conveniently gathered through the works of doctors than through images. Images made from wood, therefore, have little power, for wood, even if it is very hard, is easily taken for a celestial influx, and if it will receive it, will retain it less. Anything that is ripped up out of the bowels of Mother Earth loses, in a little while, all the vigor of its earthly life, and is easily converted into another quality. Stones and metals, even if they seem too hard to accept a heavenly gift, nonetheless retain it longer, if they receive it, as Iamblichus agrees. Their hardness, the vestiges and gifts of worldly life, qualities they had when they were sticking to the earth, are held by them after being dug out. For this reason they are considered at least suitable material for taking and holding the celestial powers.

It is likely, as I said in the previous book, that things that are this beautiful could not have been formed under the earth except by a great effort of the heavens, and the power of this effort, once impressed on them, endures. For heaven has worked a very long time on these things, cooking and shaping them.

Indeed, since you cannot easily put together many things of this kind, you must try diligently to discover which metal, among all those on your list, belongs most to some star, or which stone is the highest in rank, so that at least in knowing where this one ranks you might know the others for their powers, too. With this little undertaking you might even change the heavenly things into being in agreement with it.

For the sake of an example, in the Solar ranking, under a man of Phoebus, the hawk or rooster holds the highest place among the animals, balsam or laurel among the plants, gold among the metals, carbuncle or ruby among the stones, and boiling air among the elements, for fire itself is considered Martial. As we have said, however, to increase the influx of the Sun, or Jove, or Venus, we know from common sense that one should not, from birth, appear the destroyer of these.

Chapter 16

On the power of heaven, and on the powers of the rays from which images are thought to obtain their force

The staggering magnitude of the heavens, their immense power and motion, work in such a way that all the rays of all the stars penetrate immediately and easily right into the center of the earth, which is barely a pinpoint in the heavens, as the astronomers say. Here, as the Pythagoreans and Platonists say, the rays are extremely strong, because they can touch right down to the center, and because they are all gathered in a narrow place. Their violence down there makes the earth ignite, it is so dry and far from any humor, and having ignited, it is thinned out and dispersed through its passages all over the place, spuming out lave and sulfur.

But they think this fire is very smoky, and almost a fire that does not have any light, just as in the sky there is a light that does not have any fire. This is a fire, however, that is between the celestial and the infernal, its light combined with a raging heat. They think, however, that this fire flowing up from the center is a Vestal fire. They think Vesta is the goddess and life of the earth. That is why the ancients used to construct a temple to Vesta in the middle of their cities and place a perpetual fire in the middle of it.

But lest we go further off the track here, let us conclude that if the rays of the stars penetrate the whole earth, it cannot easily be denied that they penetrate metal and stone, too, when they are suddenly engraved with images, and whatever marvelous things one is able to impress on them. Indeed, in the bowels of the earth these rays produce the most precious things.

But who would deny that these things are penetrated by such rays? Even air and quality, and sound, less effectively, pass through solid things suddenly, and affect them with a certain quality of their own. Indeed, if hardness were able to resist penetrating rays, light would pass through air much more quickly than water, and water much more quickly than glass, and glass more quickly than crystal. But when they pierce through solid spaces as if they were liquid ones, it is apparent that no hardness can resist such rays.

They say metals receive heavenly rays and influxes, and even keep them for a time, binding such things to heaven. They keep, I mean, a certain power created by what is drawn out of the rays all running together. But why should this be, that a material not as hard as something can resist blows that the harder

material cannot? Well, a sword cuts though wood under wool but will not cut the wool. A ray of lightning will strike a leather skin without hurting it but will dissolve the metal that is inside it.

Since the heavenly nature is incomparably more preeminent than our kind of fire, it should not be thought that it is the duty of the heavenly ray only to do the work that we see manifest in a ray of fire, such as to illuminate, to heat, to dry out, to penetrate, to thin out, or to dissolve the things that are most known by our senses. No, the heavenly ray has many more marvelous powers and effects, although in other respects both the lower material and the frail senses are made equal with the divinity of the heavens inside.

Who will deny that the hidden powers of things, which the doctors call special, are not accomplished by an elemental nature but by a heavenly one? Such rays, therefore, can impress on images (or so they say) hidden and marvelous powers beyond what we see, in the same way that they put their powers in other things. For these rays are not immediate, like the rays of a lantern, but like wines, and like sensual things they shine through the eyes of living bodies.

They bring miraculous gifts from the imaginations and minds of the heavens. They drive a force that is extremely violent because of their strong affect. They drive the body with an extremely rapid movement. They especially drive their heavenly rays into the spirit. Down from on high they drive into bodies the hardest things, for these are the weakest things to the heavens.

There are, however, in different stars different powers, and even in the rays themselves there are differences. In the blows of these rays that fall in one place rather than another, different powers are born. In the mutual falling of rays in one place or another, here or there or wherever, different powers arise suddenly with effects on one kind of thing, effects that are greater and faster than on another kind, and on other mixtures of elements and the qualities of elements, even much faster than in Music, where different tones and numbers are struck in different places.

If you have considered these things carefully, perhaps you will not be skeptical when it is said that with a certain hurling of rays these powers are impressed onto images, and different powers with a different hurling.

How do they do this so quickly? I will not go into the enchantments that are done with a sudden glance. I will skip also the extremely poignant cases where love is suddenly kindled by the rays of the eyes - these, too, a kind of enchantment - which I recommend you get from my book on love. I will not mention how quickly a red eye infects someone looking at it, and a menstruating woman looking in a mirror. Were there not supposed to be certain angry families among the Illyrians and the Triballi who could kill a man with a glance? And certain women in Scythia who used to do the same thing? There are certain kinds of bulls and snakes that killed men by shooting rays from their eyes. The touch of an electric eel can stun you even at a distance through the staff in your hands. The sea-urchin is said to be able to stop a great ship just by its touch. There are certain spiders in Apulia who with either a bite or some hidden thing suddenly transform your spirit and soul into a stupor. What does a rabid dog do, or is it not apparent from his bite? What does the scopa plant,

or the wild strawberry do? Do they not stir up poisons and madness at the slightest touch? How can you deny, therefore, that the heavenly bodies touch with the rays of *their* eyes, with which our own see, and so immediately do wonderful things?¹

A pregnant woman, after all, with her touch, immediately leaves a mark on the limb of the child being born, a mark that is much to be wished for. Do you doubt that rays, touching different places, do different things? When you are gathering the herb, hellebore, and you carry the leaf down or up, suddenly touching it, are you not made into hellebore, so that your humors flow down or up accordingly? At the beginning of something or the birth of someone, do not the heavenly influxes, with their concoction and digestion of material, bestow their marvelous gifts in an instant, not over long periods of time? Is it not true that when the face of the heavens is favoring them, countless frogs and other creatures come leaping off the beaches in a second? There is so much celestial power in these materials, so much speed.

If the kind of fire we have is one that can be made instantly, why should the heavenly kind take so long? Would anyone doubt that the sky can ignite great things in a moment, even in materials less ready for it, when its flame is so much bigger? Why do you doubt, then, that the heavens can likewise make things that are shaped into images? You will say, I suppose, what I myself used to say, that these things have undergone the natural stages of change. But one has to be pretty dumb to diminish this heavenly gift and not receive it inside.

The Physics people do not want an image fabricated on just any old stone or metal, but on certain ones in which the heavenly nature has naturally started the kind of power they want - and not just started but perfected, like a flame in sulfur. It has finally perfected this power when this material is driven, forcefully, through art, under a similar kind of heavenly influx. Once driven, it heats up.

Art, therefore, arouses the inchoate power there, and while it renders this into a figure, similar to its own heavenly figure, it exposes further the Idea of itself, which, when it is exposed, is a completion of the heavenly power which had begun at first like a flame in sulfur. Thus there is a certain power in amber, given to it by the heavens, for seizing chaff. No matter how weak the amber is, though it is often made stronger by friction or heat, it suddenly does this.

Serapio writes about a similar power given to the stone *albugedis*, which looks like a sapphire, but it does not draw off the chaff until you have rubbed the stone on your hair. It is like the Jovial stone bezoar, too, which saves you from death, as we have explained in our book *Against the Plague*. It receives this power against poisons from Jove, at first, but it does not get very strong until you have worked it up with other materials. When under the heavenly influx of Scorpio you get an image of this supernal figure, it is said to contain a complete

¹Copenhaver (1990, pg. 276) provides the following explanations for the references in this paragraph. Illyrians, Scythians, and Triballi, and other peoples of southeastern Europe had reputations among the Romans for the “evil eye”. The “bull” and “snake” in the original Latin are “catoblepas” (“downlooker”) and “regulus” (or “basilisk”). The former is perhaps the gnu, the latter is perhaps the spitting cobra. The “spider” in the original Latin is “phalangium”, which Copenhaver suggests belongs to the genus *Lathrodectus*.

force against scorpions, a force which is strengthened when mixed with mastic or incense. The same thing happens with a sapphire, a topaz, an emerald, and other stones.

The art of such images is never effective unless its material is in agreement with the star and the effect for which the artist chose to make it, and not unless this same material returns through the image the same affects which it had at its beginning. They say that no materials should be used for images except the ones that are known to you to have the force which you want.

They caution you to scrutinize very carefully the powers of stones and metals, and to keep in mind, meanwhile, that among stones a certain carbuncle shimmers in darkness, and the ruby is especially subject to the Sun, the sapphire to Jove, the emerald to Venus, Mercury, and the Moon. Among the metals, hardly any have power beyond gold and silver. It would be a safer bet with these to refer pure gold to the Sun *and* Jove, to the sun because of its color, to Jove because of its temperate mixture, nothing being more temperate than Jove and gold; likewise, if you refer pure silver to the Moon and Jove; to Venus, gold mixed with silver.

Above all, it would make the image more effective if the element power in its material were in agreement with its special power that is inside it naturally, and this other special power thus helped capture the heavenly things through the figure, too.

Finally, you must learn thoroughly how to make the lower figures and forms conform to the heavenly ones, as they say, as Perseus, with the cut-off head of the Medusa, was accustomed to predict the future beheading of some people, and many similar things. Remember, nobody doubts that the Moon and other planets under certain signs move certain things in us.

Chapter 17

What power is possessed by figures in the sky and figures under the sky

But lest you distrust figures too much, the ancients say you should keep in mind that in this region under the elemental Moon, they can also have a very great elemental quality, changing into one element or another, like heat and cold, humor and dryness. Those qualities, however, which are less elemental or material are, for example, lights, colors, numbers, and figures. They are perhaps less able to change into these, though these are very strong, they say, in heavenly gifts. For in the heavens, lights, numbers, and figures are virtually the most powerful of all things, especially since there is no matter there, as the Peripatetics and many others think.

Figures, numbers, and rays, therefore, since no other things are sustained there in matter, seem to be almost substantial. Since in the order of things mathematical forms come before physical ones, as if they were simple and less in need of anything, they rightly obtain great authority for themselves in the stages of the world that come before them, that is, in the heavenly stages, so that there

will not be anything less in number, figure, or light than there is in some elemental property. The sign of this authority is seen even under the Moon.

For material qualities are shared with many species of things, so that when these are slightly changed, species are not themselves altogether changed. The figures and numbers of natural parts, however, possess a property that is inseparable and peculiar to the species; namely, those heavenly things which have been destined to be with the species. They have a special connection with ideas in the mind, the queen of the world. When these same numbers and species are delineated there with their proper ideas, it is no wonder that their proper powers are thus strengthened. Thus the species is drawn together in certain figures of natural things. Then movements and generations, and mutations, with certain numbers, are drawn together.

As for light, what can I say? It is either an act of the intelligence, or an image. Colors, however, are certain kinds of light. This is why the astrologers say that where there are lights, that is, colors, figures, and numbers, in material things, they can very easily prepare us for heavenly things, so that, they say, you should not deny these things. You should not ignore the harmony that exists through their proportions and numbers, which has a marvelous power for strengthening, moving, and affecting the spirit, the soul, and the body.

Proportions, however, that are constituted of numbers, are almost like figures, not only because they are made out of lines and points, but because of their motion. Also, with their movement the heavenly figures maintain themselves, and with their harmonies, their rays, their movements penetrating everything, they thus affect the spirit, in a hidden way, from day to day, as Music, above all, can affect it in a more open way. Look how easily the figure of a mourner moves many people to misery. And how much the figure of a lovable person suddenly affects and moves the eyes and the imagination, the spirit, and humors. Well, a heavenly figure is no less alive and effective. Does not the kind and smiling face of the prince of a city exhilarate everyone? The fierce or somber face just as suddenly scare everyone? What do you suppose, then, the heavenly faces can do, those lords of all earthly places?

When you think that people who are making babies often imprint on their faces not only their own actions but even what they were imagining, and this gets imprinted in turn on sons born long afterward, well, by the same token, the heavenly faces immediately infect matter with their marks, which seem sometimes to hide for a long time, but which emerge in time. The faces of heaven are the celestial figures. You can call figures that are more stable there than others, faces. Faces, however, are figures which change there frequently. The aspects of the stars which are made among themselves with a daily motion, you can call their faces and their figures. For they are called hexagons and tetragons.

Okay, someone might say, we want heavenly figures that are powerful at doing things, but how do we make figures with the art of images? The ancients would answer, not to worry about what is powerful - our figures are powerful in themselves to do things - but whether they are ready for actions, and ready to receive the powers of the heavenly figures, to the extent that they are made

properly with such things ruling them, and shaped for such things by the carpenter's ruler. For that figure forces the figure out.

When the lyre is sounding, does it not happen that another starts making sounds too? It is enough if you make the figure the same and put it out of sight, putting your faith in it, and staying intent upon it. For what happens if one lyre suddenly yields to another, other than that you have changed a location, the form conforming to it being the same.

The gentle figure of a mirror, concave, shining in harmony with the sky, properly receives its heavenly gift that focuses collectively the rays of Phoebus into itself, and then burns even the most solid thing down to its core from this focus. So, they say, have no doubt, a certain kind of image can be made from matter, especially from matter that is harmonious with the heavens, a heavenly gift that is given through the figure made with an art similar to heaven's own. This gift is first conceived in the thing itself, then passed to the nearest person or the person carrying it.

When not only the figure, but even its disposition is pervious - what they call diaphanous - it is to a certain extent ineffective and passive in its own nature. Because a pervious disposition is a special presentation of light in heaven, than whenever under heaven this is natural, when this disposition obtains something, a sudden celestial light is acquired and conserved. The heat with this is either fiery, as in flame, or somewhat airy, or watery and glutinous, as in moonlight or lanternlight or carbuncles, and perhaps even as in camphor.

Pay close attention now to what follows on images.

Chapter 26

How the things below, exposed to the things above, draw down the things above; and how the most powerful worldly gifts are received through worldly materials

But lest we digress even further from what we started to do in the beginning, which was simply to interpret Plotinus, let us briefly sum it all up.

The world is effected by the good itself (as Plato teaches, along with Timaeus the Pythagorean) as best as it can be effected. It is therefore not only corporeal, but sharing in the life and intelligence above. This is why, beyond this body of the world familiarly clear to the senses, there hides in it a certain spirit-body, exceeding the capacity of the fallen senses. In its spirit the soul thrives; in its soul the intelligence shines.

Just as, under the Moon, air is not mixed with earth except through water, nor fire mixed with water except through air, so in the universe there is a certain food or kindling for the soul that couples it to the body, and this is what we call spirit. The soul also is a kind of kindling in the spirit and the body of the world, divinely following on the intelligence, just as oil is used to penetrate a deep dryness in wood. The oil that it drinks in is food for the fire. I call it the next thing to heat. Heat, itself, is the vehicle of light, and if this wood is of such a

kind that it shines with the present fire, it does not burn, which is the way it is when we see it.

Now in this example we see that for a man or anything else under the Moon vital things can be received as long as there are certain preparations, in part natural, in part artificial. Even certain good intellectual things somehow come down, too.

What pertains to religion here, let us discuss some other time, though Plotinus himself brings that subject up right here in the middle.

As for what pertains to natural influxes, the kind that are coming down from above, realize that they can be acquired in us and in our materials at any age, when nature supplies us with its poultices, and when heaven conspires to bring them. Does not nature, the creator of the foetus itself, when it affects the little body with a certain kind of arrangement it has, and shapes it, does it not bring forth spirit from the universe immediately with this preparation, right in the foetus itself, as if it were a kind of food it was giving it? And through this poultice, as it were, does it not draw life and soul?

Finally, through a certain species and disposition of the soul, the body is so alive that it is worthy now of a mind as if this were a gift of the heavens. Nature, therefore, is everywhere a magician, as Plotinus and Synesius have said. It clearly entices certain things with certain foods, just as gravity draws heavy things to the center of the earth, or the curve of the Moon draws light things, or leaves are drawn by heat, or toots are drawn by water, and so on.

The wise men of India say that by this same kind of attraction the world is bound to itself, saying that the world is sometimes a masculine animal, sometimes a feminine one, and that it is everywhere copulating with itself out of this mutual love of its own limbs. They say that it exists in such a way that the bonds that hold these limbs together are inside its own mind, which, going through its limbs, works the whole mass and mixes with the great body itself.

Orpheus called this nature of the world, and Jove's world, both masculine and feminine. It is so because the world is everywhere hot to make love to its own mutual parts. Everywhere it is mixed between the masculine and feminine sex, as the order of signs declares, where, in perpetual order, the masculine goes first, the feminine follows. The trees and herbs prove this too, which have both sexes the same as animals.

I will pass over the fact that fire goes to air, and water goes to earth, like man to woman, because there is nothing surprising in the fact that the world's limbs, among themselves and all its parts, lust for copulation with each other. The planets are in accord with this, too, part of them being masculine, part of them, in fact, feminine, and Mercury in particular is both masculine and feminine, as the father of Hermaphroditus.

If we turn to agriculture, one prepares a field and sees for heavenly gifts, and with certain graftings one propagates the life of a plant, leading to another and a better species. Doctors, physicians, and surgeons do similar things in our own bodies to nourish them and to make them acquire more richly the nature of the universe. A philosopher learned in natural and astral matters, whom we call therefore a Magus, does the same thing, with certain earthly enticements

drawing the heavenly things when he does it properly, sowing no differently than a farmer who is knowledgeable in grafting, who starts a new shoot off old stock.

This is exactly what Ptolemy said, too, agreeing that a man who is wise in this way can help in the work of the stars just like a farmer can in working the power of the earth. A magus subjects earthly things to the heavens, the lower to the higher, so that everywhere things that are feminine are made fertile by things that are masculine, as iron is drawn to a magnet, as camphor is sucked by boiling air, as crystal is illuminated by the Sun, as sulfur and sublime liquor are ignited by fire, as the empty shell of an egg, filled with dew, is lifted by the Sun; in fact, as an egg itself is nourished by a hen.

Just as some nourish their eggs, others bring life from the universe even without such animals. by preparing certain materials for them, they create animals without eggs or apparent seeds, like the scorpion from clover, bees from a cow, blackbirds from sage, getting life from the world with certain material at the right times.

Thus, the wise man, when he knows a certain material, or those partly worked on by nature, partly finished by art, gathers them even if they are scattered, and know which heavenly influx they are able to receive. He gathers these with the planet reigning whose influx they contain; he prepares them, uses them, and obtains for himself, through them, the heavenly gifts.

For whenever a certain material is exposed to the higher beings, the way a mirror is to your face and a wall is to the echo of your voice, it falls out, obviously through some extremely powerful agent everywhere present by its power and its marvelous life, that it acquires a passionate power, exactly the way a mirror reflects an image from your face and a wall represents an echo from your voice.

Plotinus himself uses these same examples, where he says that the high priests or maguses, imitating Mercurius, were accustomed to receiving something divine and wonderful in their statues and sacrifices. He says, however, along with Trismegistus, that through these materials nothing numinous was received separate from the material inside, but only something worldly, as I have said from the beginning, and Synesius agrees.

By something worldly, I mean a certain life, or something vital from the soul of the world, and from the souls of the spheres and stars, or even a certain movement, a vital one, as if brought on by daemons; in fact, those same daemons who sometimes get into materials.

Mercurius himself, whom Plotinus follows, says that he made, through airy daemons and not celestial or sublime ones, statues from herbs, trees, stones, and aromatics, that had some natural force of divinity (as he says) in them. He adds that songs are like the heavenly things, from which he says they delight us, and that the heavenly things are present longer in them than in statues, both for the good or the ill of man.

He says, too, that Egyptian wise men, who were also priests, when they were unable once to persuade the people that there are Gods, that is, certain spirits above men, thought to use this kind of illicit Magic to entice daemons into statues to appear to be Gods. But Iamblichus condemns the Egyptians for this,

that they accepted daemons not only as certain steps to be used in discovering the higher Gods, but even more, that they adored them. he prefers the Chaldaeans, in fact, for not employing daemons.

The Chaldaeans, I say, were masters of religion, for we suspect that the astrologers of the Chaldaeans, far more than those of the Egyptians, tried to draw daemons through the celestial harmony into earthen statues.

This is what the Hebrew astrologer, Samuel, seems to mean, supported by the authority of David, his fellow astrologer, that the ancients clearly were makers of images and statues that would predict the future. He says that the harmony of the heavens was arranged in these. They would melt some metal into the shape of a beautiful man, on a day of Mercury in the third hour, and certainly on a day of Saturn, when Mercury goes under Saturn in Aquarius, in the ninth region of heaven, which designates prophecy. Gemini is rising then, a star that signifies prophets, they say, and Mars is burned by the Sun; but Mercury is not looking on, and the Sun is looking at the place of its conjunction. Venus, meanwhile, is obtaining some corner in the West and is powerful, while the Moon looks at an ascending grade from her triangle, and Saturn does the same. This is what Samuel says.

I myself, however, first of all, following the opinion of blessed Thomas Aquinas, think that if they really did make statues that talked, they found these words not simply through the influx of the stars but through daemons. And secondly, if by chance it happened that they got into statues of this kind, I do not think they were bound there through a heavenly influx, but rather they yielded to the will of their worshippers and were finally trapped there. For a higher nature, sometimes, can be united to a lower one, but it cannot be confined. And that disposition of the stars, which I described just a moment ago, cannot, perhaps, come about.

Although daemons can be enclosed in statues through astronomical business, nevertheless, where they appear because worship is shown towards them, Porphyry says, they speak oracles according to astronomical rules. These are frequently ambiguous, and rightly so, because, as Iamblichus agrees, true prophecy and certain prophecy come about not through daemons or human arts nor through nature, but by a divine inspiration in minds that have been cleansed.

But let us get back to Mercurius - in fact, let us get back to Plotinus! Mercurius said priests received a power that was from the nature of the world, and that this was mixed. Plotinus, following him, thinks that everything can be easily conciliated in the soul of the world to the extent that it generates and moves the forms of natural things through certain seminal reasons divinely inside it. He even calls these reasons Gods, because they are never apart from the ideas of the supreme mind.

Therefore, through reasons of this kind, the soul of the world easily applies itself to materials which it formed from the very beginning through these. Some magus or priest will then use the forms of these things, collecting them correctly and at the right times. These forms belong properly to this or that reason, like

the magnet to iron, rhubarb to bile, saffron to the heart, agrimony and scoria to the liver, spice and musk to the brain.

This can be done at any time, as long as you apply these reasons to the forms. The sublimer gifts will then descend, to the extent that their reasons in the soul of the world are joined to the intellectual forms of this same soul, and through these to ideas in the divine mind. Iamblichus approves of this too, where he deals with sacrifices.

But this is a subject we will discuss more appropriately some other time. Then, far from seeming the impure superstition of pagan people, it will seem, quite the contrary, pure Evangelical piety. We have already in fact shown this in great part in our book *On the Christian Religion*.

The Apology of Marsilio Ficino

in which he deals with medicine, astrology, the life of the world, and the Magi who greeted Christ immediately after he was born

Marsilio Ficino, the Florentine, sends greetings again and again to his most beloved brothers in the search for truth, the three Peters: Nero, Guicciardini, and Soderini.² I should more appropriately call you ‘Tripeter’ than three Peters. For just as the hand is one, and its many fingers do not make it many, so though you have three bodies, my friends, your one will makes you a Peter. Christ, the creator of the heavenly kingdom, created a huge rock and built the immense edifice of his Church upon it. I, too, am given such huge rocks, by some divine fate, that these three Peters will be enough now for my own arduous edifice.

Now, my friends, if you do not already know it, you will need the fortress of Minerva if we are to hold off from us the savage, giant force of these evil people. This is why I have shrunk your first fortress, constructed of three rocks, to one, to defend the life of my *Three Books*; to save, that is, their public life. You know, I assume, that I composed my Book of Life in a division of three little books. The first was called *On the Healthy Life*, the second *On Long Life*, and the third *On Heavenly Life*. The food of the title is pleasant in order to entice many people to taste it.

But in such a large audience there will of course be many ignorant people and not a few who are downright evil.

Someone, for example, will say, “Is not Marsilio a priest? He certainly is. Well what do priests have to do with medicine? And furthermore, what business of his is astrology?”

Someone else will say, “What does a Christian have to do with magic and images?”

Someone else, someone unworthy of life itself, will deny heaven its life.

²Piero di Francesco del Nero, Piero di Jacopo Guicciardini, and Piero Soderini. Members of Ficino’s Florence Academy.

All those who feel this way will be extremely ungrateful for our help to them, and contrary to our kindness, with which we counseled them publicly for the prosperity of their lives and for their faculty of mind, they will not hesitate to be cruel.

Our struggle in this will therefore be shared, and thus a little lighter, for there are three of you against these three enemies. your battle stations are assigned. But do not refute invective with further invective (you see how much I know what is on your mind.) You must suck their bitterness out (your own pleasantness is marvelous for this) and overcome them with the sweetness of your own honey.

First of all, splendid Nero, you answer to the first charge: the priests of antiquity used to be doctors, and astronomers, too. The histories of the Chaldaeans and Persians, and the Egyptians, all testify to that. Nothing is more pertinent to the pious priest than the singular duty of charity, which is exactly what one does when he offers the greatest help of all, and in this the ancient priests were especially brilliant. There can be no question that the most magnificent service of all, one that is very necessary, one that is most sought by humanity, is the work that gives mankind a healthy mind in a healthy body. And even we can be good at this, if we join medicine to the priesthood. But because medicine without the favor of the heavens (as Hippocrates and Galen confessed, and as we have discovered, too) is very often worthless, in fact, very often harmful, it is no wonder that Astronomy belongs to this same charity of the priest's to which we said medicine also belongs. This kind of doctor, in my opinion, the sacred books compel us to honor, because the Almighty, out of necessity, created him.

Christ himself, the bestower of life, ordered his disciples to cure the sick throughout the world, and taught his priests that if they could not heal with words they should at least heal with herbs and stones. And if these were not enough, he told them to do this with a certain breath of heaven. For he would himself at times move animals to his medicine with this same breath of heaven, to provide them abundantly with life. Thus, divinely aroused by an impulse of heaven, serpents are healed with fennel, swallows heal their eyes with swallow-wort, eagles troubled with birth find eagle-stone through divine providence, and with it they immediately force out their eggs comfortably. Thus God himself, who, through the heavens, stirs the animal world to find medicines, certainly permits his priests to expel diseases; not for money, I mean, but for charity, using medicines that have been strengthened by the heavens.

You can add to this anything more that would help that your own mind can come up with to sting them.

Then you come on strong right after this, Guicciardini, and answer the curious, saying that magic and images are not so much recommended by Marsilio but described by him, and that he is simply interpreting Plotinus. Which the writings plainly show, if they are read with an open mind.

Nor is Ficino talking about the profane kind of magic which uses the cult of demons - assert this strongly - but the natural kind of magic which seizes, from the heavenly bodies through natural things, benefits for helping one's health - be

sure to mention that. This faculty seems so much more helpful to the minds that legitimately use it than even medicine or agriculture do in their way, and even more helpful depending on our industry in joining heavenly things to the earthly.

In this work the first people of all were the Magi who worshipped Christ at his birth. Why, therefore, should you be afraid of the name 'Magus', as if it were terrifying? It is a name pleasing to the Gospels, not something wicked and venomous, but signifying a wise man and a priest. Was not such a Magus the first worshipper of Christ? If you will permit me to say it, he was like a farmer who cultivates a field, only he was a cultivator of the world. He did not worship the world, any more than a farmer worships the earth. But just as a farmer, for the sake of human food, tempers his field to the weather, so this wise man, this priest, for the sake of human health, tempered the lower things of the world to the highest, and like the eggs of a hen, subjected the earthly things to the warmth of the heavens. This is something that God himself always does, and teaches us to do, and persuades us to do, that the lower things might be generated by the higher, and be moved and ruled.

So, there are two kinds of magic. One, with a certain ritual, works with demons and often makes predictions. This is driven out when the Prince of This World is driven out. The other kind, which subjects natural materials to natural causes, works miraculously. There are two types of this artifice. One is curious, the other is necessary.

The former manufactures worthless omens for public display, as when the Persian Magi, using sage that has rotted under excrement while the Sun and Moon take the second aspect of Leo and hold the same grade there, produced something like a blackbird with a serpent's tail, and then reduced this to ashes, poured them into a brazier, and made a house seem immediately to be full of serpents. One should run from such silly and even health-endangering stuff.

The necessary kind of artifice should be held onto, however, which joins medicine to astrology.

If someone is really persistent and presses this further, Guicciardini, this is the way you must take him on: tell him that no man should read these harmful things, nor know them, nor remember them, nor use them, if he is unworthy of such benefits. There are many other things which you will be able to come up with out of your own head in tackling this ungrateful ignorance.

And now what is there for you to do, our nimble Soderini? Whether or not you will lift up the superstitious and the blind, those who see life in the most abject animals and the vilest herbs but do not see it in heaven or the world, I do not know. If these little manikins allow life only in the least particles of the world, what madness, what contempt they will feel toward us! They will not want to know the whole world, they will not want it to live, that whole in which we live and are moved and exist.

Aratus³ once sang about his, saying that Jove was the shared life of the world body. I do not know what luck made me come upon these words of Aratus now.

Remember Luke the Evangelist, and remember to use freely the words of the Apostle Paul, in which those wise men did not tremble at the life of the world.

But some superstitious person might object to these, and not easily be convinced by these words that Paul himself said of the world - that it has soul, but that it is only under God, and that we live in this same God. that is all right. Let us not give it a name in the world, then, if soul does not please them. Let the name 'soul' be profane. Will it be okay at least to call it some kind of life? Which god himself, the shaper of the world, so happily and kindly breathed on as his work when it was finished, since he was not eager for just the vilest things to have such life, and since he daily presents this life through the heavens and through many things which are so generously in the heavens.

Speak, my love, do you not see cows and donkeys - O cow! O donkey! - who, with a sort of touch bring forth living things from themselves to be alive? If these can bring forth living things just from some look, would you not assume that these other things live much more? This must be true, if there is such life.

The sky is married to the earth but does not touch it (in most people's opinion, anyway). He does not copulate with his wife, the earth, but he beholds his wife through the pits of the stars, as if with the rays of eyes that are everywhere, and beholding her, he impregnates her and creates living things. Now does not one who bestows life just by looking have a certain life of his own? Are you going to tell me that what gave life and a living aspect to a bird like the sparrow is worse off than a sparrow? Bring all this up - unless you are not convinced yourself - and you will knock the superstitious out; in fact, you will knock them dead!

In order to get as many patrons for our cause as we can, Peter Neri, I want you to recruit that Amphion of ours, Cristoforo Landino⁴, our orator and poet. Our Amphion will quickly demolish the stone walls of our enemies with the wonderful smoothness of his music.

You, dear Guicciardini, my other chief, go now, go quickly, and rouse our Hercules, Poliziano.⁵ Whenever Hercules was in a particularly dangerous fight, he would call for his Iolaus, so you now likewise go get our Hercules, that this Hercules Poliziano might attack these barbarian monsters now devastating Latium and chew them up, murder them, maul them viciously, and safely defend us. He will then grab his club and bludgeon this hundred-headed Hydra that is now threatening our books, and he will burn it up in flames.

Hey, my sweet Soderini, come on, rise up, go get Pico⁶, our Phoebus. I often call him my Phoebus, and he calls me in turn his Dionysus, his Bacchus. We are therefore brothers! Tell my Phoebus that the poisonous Pytho is after us,

³Greek Stoic (ca. 315-240 B.C.E.)

⁴Member of Ficino's Florence Academy. Amphion is a figure from Greek mythology.

⁵Angelo degli Ambrogini Poliziano, member of the Florence Academy.

⁶Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, member of the Florence Academy.

emerging once again from his swamp. Please, beg him to bend his bow! Have him fire his arrows right now! Once he starts shooting, he will kill the whole poisonous pack with one shot, and I know what I am talking about.

Farewell now, my dear lovely brothers, not just strong in health, but worthy of happiness, too. Care for the health and happiness of my books as they are now being brought into the light.