

Pico della Mirandola
Part IV of
The Renaissance
Philosophy of Man

INTRODUCTION

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GIOVANNI PICO, count of Mirandola, thanks to his social position and to his early death, has always appealed strongly to the popular imagination, while his learning and his thought have earned him the admiration of serious scholars, both in his own time and ever since.¹ The circumstances of his life and death did not permit him to develop his ideas into a mature system of thought. Yet his extant writings display a remarkable wealth of knowledge and erudition and contain brilliant suggestions that were both fruitful and characteristic.

The range of Pico's learning is not only extensive; it assumes additional interest from the fact that he was able to absorb many different ideas and traditions that most of his contemporaries would have considered incompatible.² Having enjoyed a thorough classical education, he was familiar with the major works of Latin and Greek literature and philosophy; he cultivated the friendship of some of the leading Humanists of his time; and was able to write letters and treatises in a style which satisfied their meticulous standard of literary elegance. At the universities of Padua and Paris he became acquainted with the logical and philosophical tradition of the Middle Ages and with the writings of the Schoolmen. Pico was not only able to handle their technique of argument and their terminology; he was ready to defend their reputation against the attacks of his Humanist friends. Through his extended stay in Florence and through his friendship with Ficino, he became exposed to the influence of Platonic and Neo-

1. The best and most complete monograph on Pico is E. Garin's *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: Vita e dottrina* (Florence, 1937).

2. For the extent of Pico's learning see P. Kibre, *The Library of Pico della Mirandola* (New York, 1936).

Platonic doctrines emanating from the Florentine Academy. At the same time, because of his different background and ideas, he was able to enrich the thought and influence of that distinguished circle. Adding the study of Hebrew and Arabic to the more common Latin and Greek, he not only gave an impulse to oriental studies but also came into direct contact with the heritage of medieval Arabic and Jewish philosophy. Strongly shaken by his unexpected conflict with the Church authorities over his disputation, in his later years Pico showed an increasing concern for religion and finally became a friend and follower of Savonarola. If we add to this his interest in vernacular Italian poetry and literature, we have the picture of a many-sided if not "universal" intellectual activity that corresponded to the best traditions and ideals of his time.

No less significant are the direct contributions which Pico made to the thought of the Renaissance. His attack on astrology, though prompted by religious and moral rather than by scientific considerations, remains a remarkable episode that made an impression on Kepler himself. Pico's interest in the Cabala led to a broad current of Christian Cabalism which includes, among others, John Reuchlin, and which remained important throughout the sixteenth century.³

Even more important are Pico's conception of the dignity of man and his ideal of a universal harmony among philosophers. Both find eloquent expression in the short treatise known as the *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. Since the *Oration* is one of Pico's most famous writings, it seems strange that it has not been translated into English long ago,⁴ for the little work fully de-

3. Joseph L. Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance* (New York, 1944).

4. An English translation by Charles Glenn Wallis was recently published in the magazine *View* (fall, 1944, pp. 88-90, 100-101; December, 1944, pp. 134-35; 146-51). However, the present translation has been ready for publication for many years, and several passages from it were published as early as 1942 (*Journal of the History of Ideas*, III [1942], 347-54).

serves its reputation, as its content is both intrinsically interesting and characteristic of its author and of its time. A recent attempt to dismiss this work as a merely rhetorical exercise is not convincing; its characteristic ideas are confirmed by Pico's other writings, and a rhetorical form of expression is no proof that the author does not mean to indorse the ideas he is setting forth in that fashion.⁵

In order to understand the content and significance of the *Oration*, it is important to recall the circumstances of its composition. In December, 1486, Pico published in Rome his nine hundred theses, inviting all scholars interested to a public disputation in January, 1487. The disputation never took place. Pope Innocent VIII suspended it and appointed a commission to examine the theses. The commission condemned some of them as heretical; and, when Pico tried to defend the incriminated theses in an *Apologia*, he made things even worse and became involved in a conflict with the papal authorities that was to last for several years. Pico's *Oration* was written as an introductory speech for this projected disputation, probably in 1486. Apparently it was not usual to furnish this kind of rhetorical introduction for a disputation. Yet introductory speeches at the beginning of the school year or at the opening of particular courses were an established custom of medieval schools and universities—a custom further developed by the Humanists of the Renaissance. Pico's disputation speech was obviously patterned after such examples of academic eloquence. Especially typical is the scheme of the two parts, the first dealing with a general philosophical theme, the second announcing and justifying the topics of the disputation that is to follow. The above-mentioned events explain why the speech was never delivered and why its text was not published during Pico's lifetime. It may be added that the second half was incorporated almost verbally in the *Apologia*.

5. See Avery Dulles, *Principles concordiae: Pico della Mirandola and the Scholastic Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass., 1941).

The *Oration* was printed only after Pico's death, when his nephew, Gian Francesco, included it in a posthumous edition of his uncle's collected works. After the *Oration*, especially its first part, had become famous, some of the later editions added to the simple original title "Oration" the now familiar words "On the Dignity of Man." The criticism often voiced that the *Oration* does not correspond to its title except at the outset is hence without foundation.

The first part of the *Oration* attempts a general justification of the study of philosophy. Pico begins with a praise of man. But he rejects as unsatisfactory the traditional views that man owes his distinction to his place in the center of things or to his character as a microcosm. The true distinction of man consists rather in the fact that he has no fixed properties but has the power to share in the properties of all other beings, according to his own free choice. Yet since man has this power of choosing what form and value his life shall acquire, it is his lot and duty to make the best possible choice and to elevate himself to the life of the angels. In this ascent toward the highest form of life he is assisted by philosophy and its various parts. The second part of the *Oration* explains Pico's own interest in philosophy and the plan of his disputation. He is proposing to defend so great a number of theses because he does not follow the teachings of any particular thinker or school but wants to support propositions drawn from many different sources. This leads to a survey of his nine hundred theses, in which he discusses the various thinkers from whom most of them are taken and then emphasizes the original contribution he is trying to make with some of the others. This survey follows on the whole the arrangement of the *Conclusiones* as they appear in the printed editions. The speech ends with an appeal to the supposed audience to begin the disputation.

The general scheme of the *Oration* is obviously adapted to the occasion for which it was written, yet within this setting there

stand out two major ideas which give significance to the little work: the dignity of man and the unity of truth.

The idea of the dignity of man has a long and rather complex history. The praise of man as the inventor of the arts and crafts, as a microcosm, as a being distinguished by speech and by reason, is a common theme of ancient thought and literature. The notion that man is closer to God than any other earthly creature appears in Genesis and pervades all the Old Testament. Early Christian emphasis on the salvation of mankind and on the incarnation of Christ also implied a special position of man in the world, and some of the Church Fathers developed this notion and fused it with the conceptions inherited from pagan antiquity. All these ideas were repeated with new emphasis during the Renaissance. Giannozzo Manetti composed a treatise *On the Excellency and Dignity of Man* as a counterpart to Innocent III's work *On the Misery of Man*. Ficino, in his *Theologia Platonica*, gave an additional philosophical importance to the conception by stressing man's universality and his central position in the universe. Pico, who was undoubtedly familiar with most of these previous statements, introduced, however, an important new element. He emphasized not so much man's universality as his liberty. Man is the only creature whose life is determined not by nature but by his own free choice; and thus man no longer occupies a fixed though distinguished place in the hierarchy of being but exists outside this hierarchy as a kind of separate world.⁶

The notion of the unity of truth which dominates the second part of the *Oration* is an attempt to solve a problem that has puzzled many thinkers since ancient times: the variety and contrast between different philosophers and philosophical schools. Ancient skeptics and modern relativists have used the fact to prove

6. G. Gentile, "Il concetto dell'uomo nel Rinascimento," in his *Il Pensiero italiano del Rinascimento* (3d ed.; Florence, 1940), pp. 47-113; P. O. Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino* (New York, 1943), pp. 407 ff., and "Ficino and Pomponazzi on the Place of Man in the Universe," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, V (1944), 220-26.

that there is no truth or certainty. Another and more satisfying answer to the problem has been the assumption that the opposing schools of philosophy do not merely have a common share in error but that they rather share in a common truth. This assumption was held in antiquity by the so-called eclectics and by the Neo-Platonists; it was reasserted on different grounds by Hegel; and it still underlies the better part of the studies devoted to the "history of ideas." Pico's notion of a universal truth in which the various thinkers and schools all have a part obviously belongs to this same tradition. It has been suggested that Pico's conception may have had some connection with the Averroistic doctrine of the unity of the intellect. On the other hand, Pico may have tried to give a broader application to Ficino's doctrine of natural religion and to his attempt to reconcile Platonic philosophy and Christian theology. However this may be, Pico's "syncretism" differs from ancient "eclecticism" and modern "perspectivism" on one characteristic point which seems to reflect his Scholastic background: He does not believe with the ancient eclectics that the major philosophers all agree in their doctrines and merely disagree in their words. Nor does he believe with the modern "perspectivists" that every system of thought taken as a whole represents a particular aspect of universal truth. For Pico, truth consists in a number of true statements; and the various philosophers participate in truth in so far as their writings contain, besides numerous errors, a number of specific statements that are true and hence must be accepted. In this sense, his syncretism is exclusive as well as inclusive and further removed from skepticism than its modern counterparts.

The great influence Pico's ideas of the dignity of man and of the unity of truth were destined to exercise in the Renaissance and afterward was due not only to their intrinsic merits but also to their prominent place in the thought of Pico and of his contemporaries. The notion that man owes his distinction to his freedom and that he is emancipated from the hierarchy of being is further developed and emphasized in Pico's *Heptaplus*; the

concern for man's freedom is the underlying cause for his attack on astrology, which is the subject of his major extant work.⁷ On the other hand, the unity of truth is the underlying conception of Pico's nine hundred theses; and one particular aspect of this unity—the harmony between Plato and Aristotle—was to be the subject of a large work he planned to write, of which the treatise *De ente et uno* is the only extant fragment.⁸ It is hence understandable that some scholars consider this syncretism as the central conception of Pico's thought.⁹

Less obvious but equally significant are the links that connect these two conceptions with the Humanistic movement of the early Renaissance. The early Italian Humanists were primarily concerned not with philosophical speculation but rather with the development of a cultural and educational ideal that was based on the study and imitation of classical antiquity. Yet when they were driven to justify that ideal and the significance of their classical studies, they claimed that these studies contribute to the formation of a desirable human being and are hence of particular concern for man as man. This argument is reflected in such expressions as *studia Humanitatis*, the "Humanities," and the "Humanists." This emphasis on man is one of the few ideas—perhaps the only philosophical idea—contained in the program of the early Humanists. When Pico, and Ficino before him, worked out a philosophical theory of the dignity of man in the universe, they were merely giving a more systematic and speculative development to a vague idea that had dominated the thought and aspirations of their Humanist predecessors for several generations. Pico's syncretism is likewise related to the eclecticism of the early Humanists. In their opposition to the exclusive Aristotelianism of the medieval philosophers, the Humanists

7. Ernst Cassirer, "Giovanni Pico della Mirandola," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, III (1942), 123-44, 319-46.

8. Victor M. Hamm, *Pico della Mirandola: On Being and Unity, Translated from the Latin, with an Introduction* (Milwaukee, Wis., 1943).

9. E. Anagnine, *G. Pico della Mirandola: Sincretismo religioso-filosofico* (Bari, 1937).

liked to quote and make use of the teachings of all the different ancient thinkers and schools accessible to them. They did it often in a rather haphazard and superficial manner, but they broadened the horizon and enriched the source material on which profounder thinkers could afterward draw. Pico's syncretism was a philosophical justification of this Humanist procedure and for the first time gave to it something like a positive method and dignity.

Thus the *Oration on the Dignity of Man* is not merely a piece of rhetoric; it contains ideas that are of major importance in the thought of Pico and in the thought of the Renaissance.

ORATION ON THE DIGNITY OF MAN

I HAVE read in the records of the Arabians, reverend Fathers, that Abdala the Saracen,¹ when questioned as to what on this stage of the world, as it were, could be seen most worthy of wonder, replied: "There is nothing to be seen more wonderful than man." In agreement with this opinion is the saying of Hermes Trismegistus: "A great miracle, Asclepius, is man."² But when I weighed the reason for these maxims, the many grounds for the excellence of human nature reported by many men failed to satisfy me—that man is the intermediary between creatures, the intimate of the gods, the king of the lower beings, by the acuteness of his senses, by the discernment of his reason, and by the light of his intelligence the interpreter of nature, the interval between fixed eternity and fleeting time, and (as the Persians say) the bond, nay, rather, the marriage song of the world, on David's testimony but little lower than the angels.³ Admittedly great though these reasons be, they are not the principal grounds, that is, those which may rightfully claim for themselves the privilege of the highest admiration. For why should we not admire more the angels themselves and the blessed choirs of heaven? At last it seems to me I have come to understand why man is the most fortunate of creatures and consequently worthy of all admiration and what precisely is that rank which is his lot in the universal chain of Being—a rank to be envied not only by brutes but even by the stars and by minds beyond this world. It is a matter past faith and a wondrous one. Why should it not be? For it is on this very account that man is rightly called and judged a great miracle and a wonderful creature indeed.

2. But hear, Fathers, exactly what this rank is and, as friendly

1. [Abdala, that is, Abd Allah, probably the cousin of Mohammed.]

2. [Asclepius i. 6 (*Hermetica*, ed. W. Scott, I, 294).] 3. [Ps. 8:5.]

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auditors, conformably to your kindness, do me this favor. God the Father, the supreme Architect, had already built this cosmic home we behold, the most sacred temple of His godhead, by the laws of His mysterious wisdom. The region above the heavens He had adorned with Intelligences, the heavenly spheres He had quickened with eternal souls, and the excrementary and filthy parts of the lower world He had filled with a multitude of animals of every kind. But, when the work was finished, the Craftsman kept wishing that there were someone to ponder the plan of so great a work, to love its beauty, and to wonder at its vastness. Therefore, when everything was done (as Moses and Timaeus bear witness), He finally took thought concerning the creation of man. But there was not among His archetypes that from which He could fashion a new offspring, nor was there in His treasure-houses anything which He might bestow on His new son as an inheritance, nor was there in the seats of all the world a place where the latter might sit to contemplate the universe. All was now complete; all things had been assigned to the highest, the middle, and the lowest orders.⁴ But in its final creation it was not the part of the Father's power to fail as though exhausted. It was not the part of His wisdom to waver in a needful matter through poverty of counsel. It was not the part of His kindly love that he who was to praise God's divine generosity in regard to others should be compelled to condemn it in regard to himself.

3. At last the best of artisans ordained that that creature to whom He had been able to give nothing proper to himself should have joint possession of whatever had been peculiar to each of the different kinds of being. He therefore took man as a creature of indeterminate nature and, assigning him a place in the middle of the world, addressed him thus: "Neither a fixed abode nor a form that is thine alone nor any function peculiar to thyself have we given thee, Adam, to the end that according to thy longing and according to thy judgment thou mayest have and possess what abode, what form, and what functions thou thyself shalt

4. [Cf. Plato *Protagoras* 321c ff.]

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The nature of all other beings is limited and constrained within the bounds of laws prescribed by Us. Thou, constrained by no limits, in accordance with thine own free will, in whose hand We have placed thee, shalt ordain for thyself the limits of thy nature. We have set thee at the world's center that thou mayest from thence more easily observe whatever is in the world. We have made thee neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with freedom of choice and with honor, as though the maker and molder of thyself, thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer. Thou shalt have the power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are brutish. Thou shalt have the power, out of thy soul's judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms, which are divine."

4. O supreme generosity of God the Father, O highest and most marvelous felicity of man! To him it is granted to have whatever he chooses, to be whatever he wills. Beasts as soon as they are born (so says Lucilius)⁵ bring with them from their mother's womb all they will ever possess. Spiritual beings, either from the beginning or soon thereafter, become what they are to be for ever and ever. On man when he came into life the Father conferred the seeds of all kinds and the germs of every way of life. Whatever seeds each man cultivates will grow to maturity and bear in him their own fruit. If they be vegetative, he will be like a plant. If sensitive, he will become brutish. If rational, he will grow into a heavenly being. If intellectual, he will be an angel and the son of God.⁶ And if, happy in the lot of no created thing, he withdraws into the center of his own unity, his spirit, made one with God, in the solitary darkness of God, who is set above all things, shall surpass them all. Who would not admire this our chameleon? Or who could more greatly admire aught else whatever? It is man who Asclepius of Athens, arguing from his mutability of character and from his self-transforming nature, on just grounds says was symbolized by Proteus in the mysteries.

5. [Frag. 623 (Marx).]

6. [Cf. Ficino *Theologia Platonica* xiv. 3.]

Hence those metamorphoses renowned among the Hebrews and the Pythagoreans.

5. For the occult theology of the Hebrews sometimes transforms the holy Enoch into an angel of divinity whom they call "Mal'akh Adonay Sheba'oth," and sometimes transforms others into other divinities.⁷ The Pythagoreans degrade impious men into brutes and, if one is to believe Empedocles, even into plants. Mohammed, in imitation, often had this saying on his tongue: "They who have deviated from divine law become beasts," and surely he spoke justly. For it is not the bark that makes the plant but its senseless and insentient nature; neither is it the hide that makes the beast of burden but its irrational, sensitive soul; neither is it the orbed form that makes the heavens but their undeviating order; nor is it the sundering from body but his spiritual intelligence that makes the angel. For if you see one abandoned to his appetites crawling on the ground, it is a plant and not a man you see; if you see one blinded by the vain illusions of imagery, as it were of Calypso, and, softened by their gnawing allurements, delivered over to his senses, it is a beast and not a man you see. If you see a philosopher determining all things by means of right reason, him you shall reverence: he is a heavenly being and not of this earth. If you see a pure contemplator, one unaware of the body and confined to the inner reaches of the mind, he is neither an earthly nor a heavenly being; he is a more reverend divinity vested with human flesh.

6. Are there any who would not admire man, who is, in the sacred writings of Moses and the Christians, not without reason described sometimes by the name of "all flesh," sometimes by that of "every creature," inasmuch as he himself molds, fashions, and changes himself into the form of all flesh and into the character of every creature? For this reason the Persian Euanthes, in describing the Chaldaean theology, writes that man has no semblance that is inborn and his very own but many that are external and foreign to him; whence this saying of the Chaldaeans:

7. [Book of Enoch 40:8.]

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"Hanorish tharah sharinas," that is, "Man is a being of varied, manifold, and inconstant nature."⁸ But why do we emphasize this? To the end that after we have been born to this condition—that we can become what we will—we should understand that we ought to have especial care to this, that it should never be said against us that, although born to a privileged position, we failed to recognize it and became like unto wild animals and senseless beasts of burden, but that rather the saying of Asaph the prophet should apply: "Ye are all angels and sons of the Most High,"⁹ and that we may not, by abusing the most indulgent generosity of the Father, make for ourselves that freedom of choice He has given into something harmful instead of salutary. Let a certain holy ambition invade our souls, so that, not content with the mediocre, we shall pant after the highest and (since we may if we wish) toil with all our strength to obtain it.

7. Let us disdain earthly things, despise heavenly things, and, finally, esteeming less whatever is of the world, hasten to that court which is beyond the world and nearest to the Godhead. There, as the sacred mysteries relate, Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones hold the first places; let us, incapable of yielding to them, and intolerant of a lower place, emulate their dignity and their glory. If we have willed it, we shall be second to them in nothing.

8. But how shall we go about it, and what in the end shall we do? Let us consider what they do, what sort of life they lead. If we also come to lead that life (for we have the power), we shall then equal their good fortune. The Seraph burns with the fire of love. The Cherub glows with the splendor of intelligence. The Throne stands by the steadfastness of judgment. Therefore if, in giving ourselves over to the active life, we have after due consideration undertaken the care of the lower beings, we shall be strengthened with the firm stability of Thrones. If, unoccupied by deeds, we pass our time in the leisure of contemplation, con-

8. [The source of this quotation could not be discovered.]

9. [Cf. Ps. 82:6.]

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sidering the Creator in the creature and the creature in the Creator, we shall be all ablaze with Cherubic light. If we long with love for the Creator himself alone, we shall speedily flame up with His consuming fire into a Seraphic likeness. Above the Throne, that is, above the just judge, God sits as Judge of the ages. Above the Cherub, that is, above him who contemplates, God flies, and cherishes him, as it were, in watching over him. For the spirit of the Lord moves upon the waters, the waters, I say, which are above the firmament¹⁰ and which in Job praise the Lord with hymns before dawn. Whoso is a Seraph, that is, a lover, is in God and God in him, nay, rather, God and himself are one. Great is the power of Thrones, which we attain in using judgment, and most high the exaltation of Seraphs, which we attain in loving.

9. But by what means is one able either to judge or to love things unknown? Moses loved a God whom he saw and, as judge, administered among the people what he had first beheld in contemplation upon the mountain. Therefore, the Cherub as intermediary by his own light makes us ready for the Seraphic fire and equally lights the way to the judgment of the Thrones. This is the bond of the first minds, the Palladian order, the chief of contemplative philosophy. This is the one for us first to emulate, to court, and to understand; the one from whence we may be rapt to the heights of love and descend, well taught and well prepared, to the functions of active life. But truly it is worth while, if our life is to be modeled on the example of the Cherubic life, to have before our eyes and clearly understood both its nature and its quality and those things which are the deeds and the labor of Cherubs. But since it is not permitted us to attain this through our own efforts, we who are but flesh and know of the things of earth, let us go to the ancient fathers who, inasmuch as they were familiar and conversant with these matters, can give sure and altogether trustworthy testimony. Let us consult the Apostle Paul, the chosen vessel,¹¹ as to what he saw the hosts of

10. [Gen. 1:2.]

11. [Acts 9:15.]

Cherubim doing when he was himself exalted to the third heaven. He will answer, according to the interpretation of Dionysius,¹² that he saw them being purified, then being illuminated, and at last being made perfect. Let us also, therefore, by emulating the Cherubic way of life on earth, by taming the impulses of our passions with moral science, by dispelling the darkness of reason with dialectic, and by, so to speak, washing away the filth of ignorance and vice, cleanse our soul, so that her passions may not rave at random nor her reason through heedlessness ever be deranged.

10. Then let us fill our well-prepared and purified soul with the light of natural philosophy, so that we may at last perfect her in the knowledge of things divine. And lest we be satisfied with those of our faith, let us consult the patriarch Jacob, whose form gleams carved on the throne of glory. Sleeping in the lower world but keeping watch in the upper, the wisest of fathers will advise us. But he will advise us through a figure (in this way everything was wont to come to those men) that there is a ladder extending from the lowest earth to the highest heaven, divided in a series of many steps, with the Lord seated at the top, and angels in contemplation ascending and descending over them alternately by turns.¹³

11. If this is what we must practice in our aspiration to the angelic way of life, I ask: "Who will touch the ladder of the Lord either with fouled foot or with unclean hands?" As the sacred mysteries have it, it is impious for the impure to touch the pure. But what are these feet? What these hands? Surely the foot of the soul is that most contemptible part by which the soul rests on matter as on the soil of the earth, I mean the nourishing and feeding power, the tinder of lust, and the teacher of pleasurable weakness. Why should we not call the hands of the soul its iras-

12. [Dionysius the Areopagite. The writings current under that name, composed by an unknown author probably about A.D. 500, were long attributed to Dionysius, the disciple of Paul, and hence enjoyed an enormous authority.]

13. [Gen. 28:12.]

cible power, which struggles on its behalf as the champion of desire and as plunderer seizes in the dust and sun what desire will devour slumbering in the shade? These hands, these feet, that is, all the sentient part whereon resides the attraction of the body which, as they say, by wrenching the neck holds the soul in check, lest we be hurled down from the ladder as impious and unclean, let us bathe in moral philosophy as if in a living river. Yet this will not be enough if we wish to be companions of the angels going up and down on Jacob's ladder, unless we have first been well fired and instructed to be promoted duly from step to step, to stray nowhere from the stairway, and to engage in the alternate comings and goings. Once we have achieved this by the art of discourse or reasoning, then, inspired by the Cherubic spirit, using philosophy through the steps of the ladder, that is, of nature, and penetrating all things from center to center, we shall sometimes descend, with titanic force rending the unity like Osiris into many parts, and we shall sometimes ascend, with the force of Phoebus collecting the parts like the limbs of Osiris into a unity, until, resting at last in the bosom of the Father who is above the ladder, we shall be made perfect with the felicity of theology.

12. Let us also inquire of the just Job, who entered into a life-covenant with God before he himself was brought forth into life, what the most high God requires above all in those tens of hundreds of thousands who attend him. He will answer that it is peace, in accord with what we read in him: "He maketh peace in his high places."¹⁴ And since the middle order expounds to the lower orders the counsel of the highest order, let Empedocles the philosopher expound to us the words of Job the theologian. He indicates to us a twofold nature present in our souls, by one side of which we are raised on high to the heavenly regions, and by the other side plunged downward into the lower, through strife and friendship or through war and peace, as he witnesses in the verses in which he makes complaint that he is being driven into

¹⁴. [Job 25:2.]

the sea, himself goaded by strife and discord into the semblance of a madman and a fugitive from the gods.¹⁵

13. Surely, Fathers, there is in us a discord many times as great; we have at hand wars grievous and more than civil,¹⁶ wars of the spirit which, if we dislike them, if we aspire to that peace which may so raise us to the sublime that we shall be established among the exalted of the Lord, only philosophy will entirely allay and subdue in us. In the first place, if our man but ask a truce of his enemies, moral philosophy will check the unbridled inroads of the many-sided beast and the leonine passions of wrath and violence. If we then take wiser counsel with ourselves and learn to desire the security of everlasting peace, it will be at hand and will generously fulfil our prayers. After both beasts are felled like a sacrificed sow, it will confirm an inviolable compact of holiest peace between flesh and spirit. Dialectic will appease the tumults of reason made confused and anxious by inconsistencies of statement and sophisms of syllogisms. Natural philosophy will allay the strife and differences of opinion which vex, distract, and wound the spirit from all sides. But she will so assuage them as to compel us to remember that, according to Heraclitus, nature was begotten from war, that it was on this account repeatedly called "strife" by Homer, and that it is not, therefore, in the power of natural philosophy to give us in nature a true quiet and unshaken peace but that this is the function and privilege of her mistress, that is, of holiest theology. She will show us the way and as comrade lead us to her who, seeing us hastening from afar, will exclaim "Come to me, ye who have labored. Come and I will restore you. Come to me, and I will give you peace, which the world and nature cannot give you."¹⁷

14. When we have been so soothingly called, so kindly urged, we shall fly up with winged feet, like earthly Mercuries, to the embraces of our blessed mother and enjoy that wished-for peace, most holy peace, indivisible bond, of one accord in the friendship

¹⁵. [Frag. 115. 13-14. (Diels).]

¹⁶. [Cf. Lucan *Pharsalia*. i. 1.] ¹⁷. [Matt. 11:28 and John 14:27.]

through which all rational souls not only shall come into harmony in the one mind which is above all minds but shall in some ineffable way become altogether one. This is that friendship which the Pythagoreans say is the end of all philosophy. This is that peace which God creates in his heavens, which the angels descending to earth proclaimed to men of good will,¹⁸ that through it men might ascend to heaven and become angels. Let us wish this peace for our friends, for our century. Let us wish it for every home into which we go; let us wish it for our own soul, that through it she shall herself be made the house of God, and to the end that as soon as she has cast out her uncleanness through moral philosophy and dialectic, adorned herself with manifold philosophy as with the splendor of a courtier, and crowned the pediments of her doors with the garlands of theology, the King of Glory may descend and, coming with his Father, make his stay with her. If she show herself worthy of so great a guest, she shall, by the boundless mercy which is his, in golden raiment like a wedding gown, and surrounded by a varied throng of sciences, receive her beautiful guest not merely as a guest but as a spouse from whom she will never be parted. She will desire rather to be parted from her own people and, forgetting her father's house and herself, will desire to die in herself in order to live in her spouse, in whose sight surely the death of his saints is precious¹⁹—death, I say, if we must call death that fulness of life, the consideration of which wise men have asserted to be the aim of philosophy.²⁰

15. Let us also cite Moses himself, but little removed from the springing abundance of the holy and unspeakable wisdom by whose nectar the angels are made drunk. Let us hearken to the venerable judge in these words proclaiming laws to us who are dwellers in the desert loneliness of this body: "Let those who, as yet unclean, still need moral philosophy, live with the people outside the tabernacle under the sky, meanwhile purifying them-

18. [Luke 2:14.]

19. [Cf. Ps. 116:15.]

20. [Cf. Plato *Phaedo* 81a.]

selves like the priests of Thessaly. Let those who have already ordered their conduct be received into the sanctuary but not quite yet touch the holy vessels; let them first like zealous Levites in the service of dialectic minister to the holy things of philosophy. Then when they have been admitted even to these, let them now behold the many-colored robe of the higher palace of the Lord, that is to say, the stars; let them now behold the heavenly candlestick divided into seven lights; let them now behold the fur tent, that is, the elements,²¹ in the priesthood of philosophy, so that when they are in the end, through the favor of theological sublimity, granted entrance into the inner part of the temple, they may rejoice in the glory of the Godhead with no veil before his image." This of a surety Moses commands us and, in commanding, summons, urges, and encourages us by means of philosophy to prepare ourselves a way, while we can, to the heavenly glory to come.

16. But indeed not only the Mosaic and Christian mysteries but also the theology of the ancients show us the benefits and value of the liberal arts, the discussion of which I am about to undertake. For what else did the degrees of the initiates observed in the mysteries of the Greeks mean? For they arrived at a perception of the mysteries when they had first been purified through those expiatory sciences, as it were, moral philosophy and dialectic. What else can that perception possibly be than an interpretation of occult nature by means of philosophy? Then at length to those who were so disposed came that EPIKITEIA,²² that is to say, the observation of things divine by the light of theology. Who would not long to be initiated into such sacred rites? Who would not desire, by neglecting all human concerns, by despising the goods of fortune, and by disregarding those of the body, to become the guest of the gods while yet living on earth, and, made drunk by the nectar of eternity, to be endowed with the gifts of immortality though still a mortal being? Who would not wish to

21. [Cf. Exod. 26:14; 36:19; 39:33.]

22. [Initiation in the Eleusinian mysteries.]