

be so inflamed with those Socratic frenzies sung by Plato in the *Phaedrus*,²³ that, by the oarage of feet and wings escaping speedily from hence, that is, from a world set on evil, he might be borne on the fastest of courses to the heavenly Jerusalem? Let us be driven, Fathers, let us be driven by the frenzies of Socrates, that they may so throw us into ecstasy as to put our mind and ourselves in God. Let us be driven by them, if we have first done what is in our power. For if through moral philosophy the forces of our passions have by a fitting agreement become so intent on harmony that they can sing together in undisturbed concord, and if through dialectic our reason has moved progressively in a rhythmical measure, then we shall be stirred by the frenzy of the Muses and drink the heavenly harmony with our inmost hearing. Thereupon Bacchus, the leader of the Muses, by showing in his mysteries, that is, in the visible signs of nature,²⁴ the invisible things of God to us who study philosophy, will intoxicate us with the fulness of God's house, in which, if we prove faithful, like Moses, hallowed theology shall come and inspire us with a doubled frenzy. For, exalted to her lofty height, we shall measure therefrom all things that are and shall be and have been in indivisible eternity; and, admiring their original beauty, like the seers of Phoebus, we shall become her own winged lovers. And at last, roused by ineffable love as by a sting, like burning Seraphim rapt from ourselves, full of divine power we shall no longer be ourselves but shall become He Himself Who made us.

17. If anyone investigates the holy names of Apollo, their meanings and hidden mysteries, these amply show that that god is no less a philosopher than a seer; but, since Ammonius has sufficiently examined this subject, there is no reason why I should now treat it otherwise. But, Fathers, three Delphic precepts may suggest themselves to your minds, which are very necessary to those who are to go into the most sacred and revered temple, not of the false but of the true Apollo, who lights every soul as it enters this world.²⁵ You will see that they give us no other advice

23. [245b ff.]

24. [Cf. Rom. 1:20.]

25. [John 1:9.]

than that we should with all our strength embrace this threefold philosophy which is the concern of our present debate. For the saying *μὴδὲν ἄγαν*, that is, "Nothing too much," prescribes a standard and rule for all the virtues through the doctrine of the Mean, with which moral philosophy duly deals. Then the saying *γνῶθι σεαυτὸν*, that is, "Know thyself," urges and encourages us to the investigation of all nature, of which the nature of man is both the connecting link and, so to speak, the "mixed bowl." For he who knows himself in himself knows all things, as Zoroaster first wrote, and then Plato in his *Alcibiades*.²⁶ When we are finally lighted in this knowledge by natural philosophy, and nearest to God are uttering the theological greeting, *εἰ, that is, "Thou art,"* we shall likewise in bliss be addressing the true Apollo on intimate terms.

18. Let us also consult the wise Pythagoras, especially wise in that he never deemed himself worthy the name of a wise man. He will first enjoin us not to sit on a bushel, that is, not by unoccupied sloth to lose our rational faculty, by which the soul measures, judges, and considers all things; but we must direct and stimulate it unremittingly by the discipline and rule of dialectic. Then he will point out to us two things particularly to beware of: that we should not make water facing the sun or cut our nails while offering sacrifice. But after we have, through the agency of moral philosophy, both voided the lax desires of our too abundant pleasures and pared away like nail-cuttings the sharp corners of anger and the stings of wrath, only then may we begin to take part in the holy rites, that is, the mysteries of Bacchus we have mentioned, and to be free for our contemplation, whose father and leader the Sun is rightly named. Finally, Pythagoras will enjoin us to feed the cock, that is, to feast the divine part of our soul on the knowledge of things divine as if on substantial food and heavenly ambrosia. This is the cock at whose sight the lion, that is, all earthly power, trembles and is filled with awe. This is that cock to whom, we read in Job, intelligence was given.

26. [133c ff.]

When this cock crows, erring man comes to his senses. This cock in the twilight of morning daily sings with the morning stars as they praise God. The dying Socrates, when he hoped to join the divinity of his spirit with the divinity of a greater world, said that he owed this cock to Aesculapius, that is, to the physician of souls, now that he had passed beyond all danger of illness.²⁷

19. Let us review also the records of the Chaldeans, and we shall see (if they are to be trusted) the road to felicity laid open to mortals through the same sciences. His Chaldaean interpreters write that it was a saying of Zoroaster that the soul is winged and that, when the wings drop off, she falls headlong into the body; and then, after her wings have grown again sufficiently, she flies back to heaven. When his followers asked him in what manner they could obtain souls winged with well-feathered wings, he replied: "Refresh ye your wings in the waters of life." Again when they asked where they should seek those waters, he answered them thus by a parable (as was the custom of the man): "God's paradise is laved and watered by four rivers, from whose same source ye may draw the waters of your salvation. The name of that in the north is Pischon, which meaneth the right. The name of that in the west is Dichon, which signifieth expiation. The name of that in the east is Chiddikel, which expesseth light, and of that in the south, Perath, which we may interpret as piety."

20. Turn your attention, Fathers, to the diligent consideration of what these doctrines of Zoroaster mean. Surely nothing else than that we should wash away the uncleanness from our eyes by moral science as if by the western waves; that we should align their keen vision toward the right by the rule of dialectic as if by the northern line; that we should then accustom them to endure in the contemplation of nature the still feeble light of truth as if it were the first rays of the rising sun, so that at last, through the agency of theological piety and the most holy worship of God, we may like heavenly eagles boldly endure the

²⁷ [Cf. *Phaedo* 118a.]

most brilliant splendor of the meridian sun. These are, perhaps, those ideas proper to morning, midday, and evening first sung by David and given a broader interpretation by Augustine. This is that noonday light which incites the Seraphs to their goal and equally sheds light on the Cherubs. This is that country toward which Abraham, our father of old, was ever journeying. This is that place where, as the doctrines of Cabalists and Moors have handed down to posterity, there is no room for unclean spirits. And, if it is right to bring into the open anything at all of the occult mysteries, even in the guise of a riddle, since a sudden fall from heaven has condemned the head of man to dizziness, and, in the words of Jeremiah, death has come in through our windows and smitten our vitals and our heart,²⁸ let us summon Raphael, celestial physician, that he may set us free by moral philosophy and by dialectic as though by wholesome drugs. Then, when we are restored to health, Gabriel, "the strength of God," shall abide in us, leading us through the miracles of nature and showing us on every side the merit and the might of God. He will at last consign us to the high priest Michael, who will distinguish those who have completed their term in the service of philosophy with the holy office of theology as if with a crown of precious stones.

21. These, reverend Fathers, are the considerations that have not only inspired but compelled me to the study of philosophy. I should certainly not set them forth were I not answering those who are wont to condemn the study of philosophy, especially among men of rank or even of a mediocre station in life. For this whole study of philosophy has now (and it is the misfortune of our age) come to despise and contumely rather than to honor and glory. Thus this deadly and monstrous conviction has come to pervade the minds of well-nigh all—that philosophy either must be studied not at all or by few persons, as if it were absolutely nothing to have clearly ascertained, before our eyes and before our hands, the causes of things, the ways of nature, the

²⁸ [Jer., 9:21.]

plan of the universe, the purposes of God, and the mysteries of heaven and earth; unless one may obtain some favor, or make money for one's self. Rather, it has come to the point where none is now deemed wise, alas, save those who make the study of wisdom a mercenary profession, and where it is possible to see the chaste Pallas, who was sent among men as the gift of the gods, hooted, hissed, and whistled off the stage; and not having anyone to love or to befriend her, unless by selling herself, as it were, she repays into the treasury of her "lover" even the ill-gained money received as the poor price of her tarnished virginity.

22. I speak all these accusations (not without the deepest grief and indignation) not against the princes of this time but against the philosophers, who both believe and openly declare that there should be no study of philosophy for the reason that no fee and no compensation have been fixed for philosophers, just as if they did not show by this one sign that they are no philosophers, that since their whole life is set either on profit or on ambition they do not embrace the very discovery of truth for its own sake. I shall grant myself this and blush not at all to praise myself to this extent that I have never studied philosophy for any other reason than that I might be a philosopher; and that I have neither hoped for any pay from my studies, from my labors by lamp-light, nor sought any other reward than the cultivation of my mind and the knowledge of the truth I have ever longed for above all things. I have always been so desirous, so enamored of this, that I have relinquished all interest in affairs private and public and given myself over entirely to leisure for contemplation, from which no disparagements of those who hate me, no curses of the enemies of wisdom, have been able in the past or will be able in the future to discourage me. Philosophy herself has taught me to rely on my own conscience rather than on the opinions of others, and always to take thought not so much that people may speak no evil of me, as, rather, that I myself may neither say nor do aught that is evil.

23. For my part, reverend Fathers, I was not unaware that this very disputation of mine would be as grateful and pleasing to you who favor all good sciences, and have been willing to honor it with your most august presence, as it would be offensive and annoying to many others. And I know there is no lack of those who have heretofore condemned my project, and who condemn it at present on a number of grounds. Enterprises that are well and conscientiously directed toward virtue have been wont to find no fewer—not to say more—detractors than those that are wickedly and falsely directed toward vice. There are, indeed, those who do not approve of this whole method of disputation and of this institution of publicly debating on learning, maintaining that it tends rather to the parade of talent and the display of erudition than to the increase of learning. There are those who do not indeed disapprove this kind of practice, but who in no wise approve it in me because I, born I admit but twenty-four years ago, should have dared at my age to offer a disputation concerning the lofty mysteries of Christian theology, the highest topics of philosophy and unfamiliar branches of knowledge, in so famous a city, before so great an assembly of very learned men, in the presence of the apostolic senate. Others, who give me leave to offer this disputation, are unwilling to allow me to debate nine hundred theses, and misrepresent it as being a work as unnecessary and as ostentatious as it is beyond my powers. I would have yielded to their objections and given in immediately if the philosophy I profess had so instructed me; and I should not now be answering them, even with philosophy as my preceptress, if I believed that this debate between us had been undertaken for the purpose of quarreling and scolding. Therefore, let the whole intention to disparage and to exasperate depart from our minds, and malice also, which Plato writes is ever absent from the heavenly choir.²⁹ Let us in friendly wise try both questions: whether I am to debate and whether I am to debate about this great number of theses.

29. [*Phaedrus* 247d.]

24. First, as to those who revile this custom of debating in public I shall certainly not say a great deal, since this crime, if it is held a crime, is shared with me not only by all of you, excellent doctors, who have rather frequently engaged in this office not without the highest praise and glory, but also by Plato, also by Aristotle, and also by the most worthy philosophers of every age. For them it was certain that, for the attainment of the knowledge of truth they were always seeking for themselves, nothing is better than to attend as often as possible the exercise of debate. For just as bodily energy is strengthened by gymnastic exercise, so beyond doubt in this wrestling-place of letters, as it were, energy of mind becomes far stronger and more vigorous. And I could not believe, either that the poets, by the arms of Pallas which they sang, or that the Hebrews, when they called the sword the symbol of wise men, were indicating to us anything else than that such honorable contests are surely a necessary way of attaining wisdom. For this reason it is, perchance, that the Chaldaeans desired in the horoscope of one who was to be a philosopher that Mars should be to Mercury in the trinal aspect, as much as to say, "If these assemblies, these disputations, should be given up, all philosophy would become sluggish and drowsy."

25. But truly with those who say I am unequal to this commission, my method of defense is more difficult. For if I say that I am equal to it, it seems that I shall take on myself the reproach of being immodest and of thinking too well of myself, and, if I admit that I am not equal to it, the reproach of being imprudent and thoughtless. See into what straits I have fallen, in what a position I am placed, since I cannot without blame promise about myself what I cannot then fail to fulfil without blame. Perhaps I could refer to that saying of Job: "The spirit is in all men,"³⁰ and be told with Timothy, "Let no man despise thy youth."³¹ But out of my own conscience I shall with more truth say this: that there is nothing either great or extraordinary about me. I do

30. [Job 32:8.]

31. [I Tim. 4:12.]

not deny that I am, if you will, studious and eager for the good sciences, but nevertheless I neither assume nor arrogate to myself the title of learned. However great the burden I may have taken on my shoulders, therefore, it was not because I was not perfectly aware of my own want of strength but because I knew that it is a distinction of contests of this kind, that is, literary ones, that there is a profit in being defeated. Whence it is that even the most feeble are by right able and bound not only not to decline but even more to court them, seeing that he who yields receives no injury but a benefit from the victor, in that through him he returns home even richer, that is, wiser and better equipped for future contests. Inspired by this hope, I, who am but a feeble soldier, have feared not at all to wage so burdensome a war with the strongest and most vigorous men of all. Whether this action be ill considered or not may be judged from the outcome of the battle and not from my age.

26. It remains in the third place to answer those who take offense at the great number of my propositions, as if the weight of these lay on their shoulders, and as if the burden, such as it is, were not rather to be borne by me alone. It is surely unbecoming and beyond measure captious to wish to set bounds to another's effort and, as Cicero says, to desire moderation in a matter which is the better as it is on a larger scale.³² In so great a venture it was necessary for me either to give complete satisfaction or to fail utterly. Should I succeed, I do not see why what is laudable to do in an affair of ten theses should be deemed culpable to have done also in an affair of nine hundred. Should I fail, they will have the wherewithal to accuse me if they hate me and to forgive me if they love me. For the failure of a young man with but slender talent and little learning in so grave and so great a matter will be more deserving of pardon than of blame. Nay, according to the poet: "If strength fails, there shall surely be praise for daring, and to have wished for great things is enough."³³ And if many in our time, in imitation

32. [De finibus i. 1.]

33. [Propertius ii. 10. 5-6.]

of Gorgias of Leontini, have been wont, not without praise, to propose debates not concerning nine hundred questions only, but also concerning all questions in all branches of knowledge, why should I not be allowed, and that without criticism, to discuss questions admittedly numerous but at least fixed and limited? Yet they say it is unnecessary and ostentatious. I contend that this enterprise of mine is in no way superfluous but necessary indeed; and if they will ponder with me the purpose of studying philosophy, they must, even against their wills, admit that it is plainly needful. Those who have devoted themselves to any one of the schools of philosophy, favoring, for instance, Thomas or Scotus, who are now most in fashion, are, to be sure, quite capable of making trial of their particular doctrines in the discussion of but a few questions. I, on the other hand, have so prepared myself that, pledged to the doctrines of no man,³⁴ I have ranged through all the masters of philosophy, investigated all books, and come to know all schools. Therefore, since I had to speak of them all in order that, as champion of the beliefs of one, I might not seem fettered to it and appear to place less value on the rest, even while proposing a few theses concerning individual schools I could not help proposing a great number concerning all the schools together. And let no man condemn me for coming as a friend whithersoever the tempest bear me. For it was a custom observed by all the ancients in studying every kind of writer to pass over none of the learned works they were able to read, and especially by Aristotle, who for this reason was called by Plato ἀναγλωσστής, that is, "reader." And surely it is the part of a narrow mind to have confined itself within a single Porch or Academy. Nor can one rightly choose what suits one's self from all of them who has not first come to be familiar with them all. Consider, in addition, that there is in each school something distinctive that is not common to the others.

27. And now, to begin with the men of our faith, to whom

34. [Cf. Horace *Epistles* i. 1. 14.]

philosophy came last: There is in John Scotus something lively and subtle; in Thomas, sound and consistent; in Aegidius, terse and exact; in Francis, acute and penetrating; in Albert, venerable, copious, and grand; in Henry, as it always seems to me, something sublime and to be revered. Among the Arabs, there is in Averroes something stable and unshaken; in Avempace . . . ; in Alfarabi, serious and thoughtful; in Avicenna, divine and Platonic. Among the Greeks philosophy as a whole is certainly brilliant and above all chaste. With Simplicius it is rich and abundant; with Themistius, graceful and compendious; with Alexander, harmonious and learned; with Theophrastus, weightily worked out; with Ammonius, smooth and agreeable. And if you turn your attention to the Platonists, to examine a few: in Porphyry you will rejoice in the abundance of his material and in the complexity of his religion; in Jamblichus you will revere an occult philosophy and the mysteries of the East. In Plotinus there is no isolated aspect you will admire; he shows himself admirable on every side. The toiling Platonists themselves scarcely understand him when he speaks divinely of things divine and, with learned obliquity of speech, far more than humanly of human things. I prefer to pass over the later Platonists: Proclus abounding in Asiatic richness, and those stemming from him, Hermias, Damascius, Olympiodorus, and several others, in all of whom there ever gleams that *τὸ θεῖον*, that is, "the Divine," which is the distinctive mark of the Platonists.³⁵

28. Add to this that any sect which assails the truer doctrines, and makes game of good causes by clever slander, strengthens rather than weakens the truth and, like flames stirred by agita-

35. [This catalogue is a brief survey of the philosophers utilized in Pico's nine hundred theses. John Scotus is Duns Scotus (d. 1308), Thomas is Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), Aegidius is Giles of Rome (d. 1316), Francis is Franciscus de Mayronis (d. 1325), Albert is Albertus Magnus (d. 1280), and Henry is Henry of Ghent (d. 1293), Averroes (d. 1198), Avempace (d. 1138), Alfarabi (d. 950), Simplicius (fl. ca. 530), Themistius (fl. ca. 350), and Alexander of Aphrodisias (fl. ca. a.d. 200). Most of the remaining thinkers are Neo-Platonists.]

tion, fans rather than extinguishes it. This has been my reason for wishing to bring before the public the opinions not of a single school alone (which satisfied some I could name) but rather of every school, to the end that that light of truth Plato mentions in his *Epistles*³⁶ through this comparison of several sects and this discussion of manifold philosophies might dawn more brightly on our minds, like the sun rising from the deep. What were the gain if only the philosophy of the Latins were investigated, that is, that of Albert, Thomas, Scotus, Aegidius, Francis, and Henry, if the Greek and Arabian philosophers were left out—since all wisdom has flowed from the East to the Greeks and from the Greeks to us? In their way of philosophizing, our Latins have always found it sufficient to stand on the discoveries of foreigners and to perfect the work of others. Of what use were it to treat with the Peripatetics on natural philosophy, unless the Platonic Academy were also invited? Their teaching in regard to divinity besides has always (as Augustine witnesses) been thought most hallowed of all philosophies,³⁷ and now for the first time, so far as I know (may no one grudge me the word), it has after many centuries been brought by me to the test of public disputation. What were it to have dealt with the opinions of others, no matter how many, if we are come to a gathering of wise men with no contribution of our own and are supplying nothing from our own store, brought forth and worked out by our own genius? It is surely an ignoble part to be wise only from a notebook (as Seneca says)³⁸ and, as if the discoveries of our predecessors had closed the way to our own industry and the power of nature were exhausted in us, to produce from ourselves nothing which, if it does not actually demonstrate the truth, at least intimates it from afar. For if a tiller of the soil hates sterility in his field, and a husband in his wife, surely the Divine mind joined to and associated with an

36. [Cf. *Epistle* vii. 341c-d.]

37. [Cf. *City of God* ix. 1 and many other passages.]

38. [*Epistles* xxxiii. 7.]

infertile soul will hate it the more in that a far nobler offspring is desired.

29. For this reason I have not been content to add to the tenets held in common many teachings taken from the ancient theology of Hermes Trismegistus, many from the doctrines of the Chaldaeans and of Pythagoras, and many from the occult mysteries of the Hebrews. I have proposed also as subjects for discussion several theses in natural philosophy and in divinity, discovered and studied by me. I have proposed, first of all, a harmony between Plato and Aristotle, believed to exist by many ere this but adequately proved by no one. Boethius among the Latins promised that he would do it, but there is no trace of his having done what he always wished to do. Among the Greeks, Simplicius made the same declaration, and would that he had been as good as his word! Augustine also writes, in the *Contra Academicos*, that there were not lacking several who tried with their keenest arguments to prove the same thing, that the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle are identical.³⁹ John the Grammarian⁴⁰ likewise, although he did say that Plato differs from Aristotle only in the minds of those who do not understand Plato's words, nevertheless left it to posterity to prove. I have, moreover, brought to bear several passages in which I maintain that the opinions of Scotus and Thomas, and several in which I hold that those of Averroes and Avicenna, which are considered to be contradictory, are in agreement.

30. In the second place, I have next arranged the fruit of my thinking on both the Platonic and the Aristotelian philosophy, and then seventy-two new physical and metaphysical theses by means of which whoever holds them will be able (unless I am mistaken—which will soon be made manifest to me) to answer any question whatever proposed in natural philosophy or divinity, by a system far other than we are taught in that philosophy which is studied in the schools and practised by the doctors of this age. Nor ought anyone, Fathers, to be so amazed that I, in

39. [*Contra academicos* iii. 42.]

40. [Joannes Philoponus.]

my first years, at my tender age, at which it was hardly legitimate for me (as some have taunted) to read the books of others, should wish to introduce a new philosophy; but rather one should praise it if it is sustained or condemn it if it does not find favor, and finally, when these my discoveries and my scholarship come to be judged, number not their author's years so much as their own merits or faults.

31. There is, furthermore, still another method of philosophizing through numbers, which I have introduced as new, but which is in fact old, and was observed by the earliest theologians, principally by Pythagoras, by Aglaophamos, Philolaus, and Plato, and by the first Platonists, but which in this present era, like many other illustrious things, has perished through the carelessness of posterity, so that hardly any traces of it can be found. Plato writes in the *Epinomis* that, of all the liberal arts and theoretical sciences, the science of computation is the chief and the most divine.⁴¹ Likewise, inquiring, "Why is man the wisest of animals?" he concludes, "Because he knows how to count," an opinion which Aristotle also mentions in his *Problems*.⁴² Abumassar writes that it was a saying of Avenzoar of Babylon that he knows all things who knows how to count. These statements cannot possibly be true if by the science of computation they mean that science in which, at present, merchants in particular are most skilled. To this also Plato bears witness, warning us with raised voice not to think that this divine arithmetic is the arithmetic of traders.⁴³ I therefore promised, when I seemed after much nocturnal labor to have discovered that arithmetic which is so highly extolled, that I myself would (in order to make trial of this matter) reply in public through the art of number to seventy-four questions considered of chief importance in physics and metaphysics.

32. I have also proposed theorems dealing with magic, in which I have indicated that magic has two forms, one of which depends entirely on the work and authority of demons, a thing to

41. [976c ff.] 42. [xxxii. 6. 956 a 11 ff.] 43. [Republic 525b ff.]

be abhorred, so help me the God of truth, and a monstrous thing. The other, when it is rightly pursued, is nothing else than the utter perfection of natural philosophy. While the Greeks make mention of both of them, they call the former *γοργελα*, in no wise honoring it with the name of magic; the latter they call by the characteristic and fitting name of *μαγεία*, as if it were a perfect and most high wisdom. For, as Porphyry says, in the Persian tongue *magus* expresses the same idea as "interpreter" and "worker of the divine" with us. Moreover, Fathers, the disparity and unlikeness between these arts is great, nay, rather, the greatest possible. The former not only the Christian religion but all religions and every well-constituted state condemn and abhor. The latter all wise men, all peoples devoted to the study of heavenly and divine things, approve and embrace. The former is the most deceitful of arts; the latter a higher and more holy philosophy. The former is vain and empty; the latter, sure, trustworthy, and sound. Whoso has cherished the former has ever dissembled, because it is a shame and a reproach to an author; but from the latter the highest renown and glory of letters was derived in ancient days, and almost always has been. No man who was a philosopher and eager to study the good arts has ever been a student of the former; but Pythagoras, Empedocles, Democritus, and Plato all traveled to study the latter, taught it when they returned, and esteemed it before all others in their mysteries. As the former is approved by no reasonable arguments, so is it not by established authors; the latter, honored by the most celebrated fathers, as it were, has in particular two authors: Zoroaster, whom Abaris the Hyperborean copied, and Zoroaster, not him of whom perhaps you are thinking but him who is the son of Oromasius.

33. If we ask Plato what the magic of both these men was, he will reply, in his *Alcibiades*,⁴⁴ that the magic of Zoroaster was none other than the science of the Divine in which the kings of the Persians instructed their sons, to the end that they might be

44. [122a.]

taught to rule their own commonwealth by the example of the commonwealth of the world. He will answer, in the *Charmides*,⁴⁵ that the magic of Zamolxis was that medicine of the soul through which temperance is brought to the soul as through temperance health is brought to the body. In their footsteps Charondas, Damigeron, Apollonius, Osthanes, and Dardanus thereafter persevered. Homer persevered, whom I shall sometime prove, in my *Poetic Theology*, to have concealed this philosophy beneath the wanderings of his Ulysses, just as he has concealed all others. Eudoxus and Hermippus persevered. Almost all who have searched through the Pythagorean and Platonic mysteries have persevered. Furthermore, from among the later philosophers I find three who have scented it out—the Arabian al-Kindi, Roger Bacon, and William of Paris.⁴⁶ Plotinus also mentions it when he demonstrates that a *magus* is the servant of nature and not a contriver. This very wise man approves and maintains this magic, so hating the other that, when he was summoned to the rites of evil spirits, he said that they should come to him rather than that he should go to them; and surely he was right.⁴⁷ For even as the former makes man the bound slave of wicked powers, so does the latter make him their ruler and their lord. In conclusion, the former can claim for itself the name of neither art nor science, while the latter, abounding in the loftiest mysteries, embraces the deepest contemplation of the most secret things, and at last the knowledge of all nature. The latter, in calling forth into the light as if from their hiding-places the powers scattered and sown in the world by the loving-kindness of God, does not so much work wonders as diligently serve a wondering nature. The latter, having more searchingly examined into the harmony of the universe, which the Greeks with greater significance call *συμπάθεια*, and having clearly perceived the

45. [156e-157a.]

46. [Alkindi (d. ca. 870); Roger Bacon (d. 1294); William of Paris, better known as William of Auvergne (d. 1249).]

47. [Cf. Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* 10.]

reciprocal affinity of natures, and applying to each single thing the suitable and peculiar inducements (which are called the *ivvres* of the magicians) brings forth into the open the miracles concealed in the recesses of the world, in the depths of nature, and in the storehouses and mysteries of God, just as if she herself were their maker; and, as the farmer weds his elms to vines, even so does the *magus* wed earth to heaven, that is, he weds lower things to the endowments and powers of higher things. Whence it comes about that the latter is as divine and as salutary as the former is unnatural and harmful; for this reason especially, that in subjecting man to the enemies of God, the former calls him away from God, but the latter rouses him to the admiration of God's works which is the most certain condition of a willing faith, hope, and love. For nothing moves one to religion and to the worship of God more than the diligent contemplation of the wonders of God; if we have thoroughly examined them by this natural magic we are considering, we shall be compelled to sing, more ardently inspired to the worship and love of the Creator: "The heavens and all the earth are full of the majesty of thy glory."⁴⁸ And this is enough about magic. I have said these things about it, for I know there are many who, just as dogs always bark at strangers, in the same way often condemn and hate what they do not understand.

34. I come now to the things I have elicited from the ancient mysteries of the Hebrews and have cited for the confirmation of the inviolable Catholic faith. Lest perchance they should be deemed fabrications, trifles, or the tales of jugglers by those to whom they are unfamiliar, I wish all to understand what they are and of what sort, whence they come, by what and by how illustrious authors supported, and how mysterious, how divine, and how necessary they are to the men of our faith for defending our religion against the grievous misrepresentations of the Hebrews.

Not only the famous doctors of the Hebrews, but also from among men of our opinion Esdras, Hilary, and Origen write that

48. [From the "Sanctus" of the Mass.]

Moses on the mount received from God not only the Law, which he left to posterity written down in five books, but also a true and more occult explanation of the Law. It was, moreover, commanded him of God by all means to proclaim the Law to the people but not to commit the interpretation of the Law to writing or to make it a matter of common knowledge. He himself should reveal it only to Iesu Nave,⁴⁹ who in his turn should unveil it to the other high priests to come after him, under a strict obligation of silence. It was enough through guileless story to recognize now the power of God, now his wrath against the wicked, his mercy to the righteous, his justice to all; and through divine and beneficial precepts to be brought to a good and happy way of life and the worship of true religion. But to make public the occult mysteries, the secrets of the supreme Godhead hidden beneath the shell of the Law and under a clumsy show of words -- what else were this than to give a holy thing to dogs and to cast pearls before swine?⁵⁰ Therefore to keep hidden from the people the things to be shared by the initiate, among whom alone, Paul says, he spoke wisdom, was not the part of human deliberation but of divine command.⁵¹ This custom the ancient philosophers most reverently observed, for Pythagoras wrote nothing except a few trifles, which he intrusted on his deathbed to his daughter Dama. The Sphinxes carved on the temples of the Egyptians reminded them that mystic doctrines should be kept inviolable from the common herd by means of the knots of riddles. Plato, writing certain things to Dion concerning the highest substances, said: "It must be stated in riddles, lest the letter should fall by chance into the hands of others and what I am writing to you should be apprehended by others."⁵² Aristotle used to say that his books of *Metaphysics*, in which he treated of things divine, were both published and not published. What further? Origen asserts that Jesus Christ, the Teacher of life, made many revelations to his disciples, which they were unwilling to write down

49. [Cf. Ecclesi. 46:11.]

50. [Cf. Matt. 7:6.]

51. [Cf. Rom. 1:17 and I Cor. 2:13.]

52. [Epistle ii. 321d.]

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lest they should become commonplaces to the rabble. This is in the highest degree confirmed by Dionysius the Areopagite, who says that the occult mysteries were conveyed by the founders of our religion ἐκ νοῦ εἰς νοῦν διὰ μέσων λόγων, from mind to mind, without writing, through the medium of speech.

35. In exactly the same way, when the true interpretation of the Law according to the command of God, divinely handed down to Moses, was revealed, it was called the Cabala, a word which is the same among the Hebrews as "reception" among ourselves; for this reason, of course, that one man from another, by a sort of hereditary right, received that doctrine not through written records but through a regular succession of revelations. But after the Hebrews were restored by Cyrus from the Babylonian captivity, and after the temple had been established anew under Zorobabel, they brought their attention to the restoration of the Law. Esdras, then the head of the church, after the book of Moses had been amended, when he plainly recognized that, because of the exiles, the massacres, the flights, and the captivity of the children of Israel, the custom instituted by their forefathers of transmitting the doctrine from mouth to mouth could not be preserved, and that it would come to pass that the mysteries of the heavenly teachings divinely bestowed on them would be lost, since the memory of them could not long endure without the aid of written records, decided that those of the elders then surviving should be called together and that each one should impart to the gathering whatever he possessed by personal recollection concerning the mysteries of the Law and that scribes should be employed to collect them into seventy volumes (about the number of elders in the Sanhedrin). That you may not have to rely on me alone in this matter, Fathers, hear Esdras himself speak thus: "And it came to pass, when the forty days were fulfilled, that the Most High spake unto me, saying, The first that thou hast written publish openly, and let the worthy and the unworthy read it: but keep the seventy last books, that thou mayst deliver them to such as be wise among thy people: for in them is

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the spring of understanding, the fountain of wisdom, and the stream of knowledge. And I did so." And these are the words of Esdras to the letter.⁵³ These are the books of cabalistic lore. In these books principally resides, as Esdras with a clear voice justly declared, the spring of understanding, that is, the ineffable theology of the supersubstantial deity; the fountain of wisdom, that is, the exact metaphysic of the intellectual and angelic forms; and the stream of knowledge, that is, the most steadfast philosophy of natural things. Pope Sixtus the Fourth who last preceded the pope under whom we are now fortunate to be living, Innocent the Eighth, took the greatest pains and interest in seeing that these books should be translated into the Latin tongue for a public service to our faith, and, when he died, three of them had been done into Latin. Among the Hebrews of the present day these books are cherished with such devotion that it is permitted no man to touch them unless he be forty years of age.

36. When I had purchased these books at no small cost to myself, when I had read them through with the greatest diligence and with unwearying toil, I saw in them (as God is my witness) not so much the Mosaic as the Christian religion. There is the mystery of the Trinity, there the Incarnation of the Word, there the divinity of the Messiah; there I have read about original sin, its expiation through Christ, the heavenly Jerusalem, the fall of the devils, the orders of the angels, purgatory, and the punishments of hell, the same things we read daily in Paul and Dionysius, in Jerome and Augustine. But in those parts which concern philosophy you really seem to hear Pythagoras and Plato, whose principles are so closely related to the Christian faith that our Augustine gives immeasurable thanks to God that the books of the Platonists have come into his hands.⁵⁴ Taken altogether, there is absolutely no controversy between ourselves and the Hebrews on any matter, with regard to which they cannot be refuted and

53. [II Esdras 14: 5-6.]

54. [Cf. *Confessions* viii. 2.]

gainsaid out of the cabalistic books, so that there will not be even a corner left in which they may hide themselves. I have as a most weighty witness of this fact that very learned man Antonius Chronicus⁵⁵ who, when I was with him at a banquet, with his own ears heard Dactylus, a Hebrew trained in this lore, with all his heart agree entirely to the Christian idea of the Trinity.⁵⁶

37. But let me return to surveying the chapters of my disputation. I have introduced also my own idea of the interpretation of the prophetic verses of Orpheus and Zoroaster.⁵⁷ Orpheus is read among the Greeks in a nearly complete text, Zoroaster only in part, though, among the Chaldaeans, in a more complete text, and both are believed to be the fathers and authors of ancient wisdom. Now, to pass over Zoroaster, the frequent mention of whom among the Platonists is never without the greatest respect, Jamblichus of Chalcis writes that Pythagoras followed the Orphic theology as the model on which he fashioned and built his own philosophy. Nay, furthermore, they say that the maxims of Pythagoras are alone called holy, because he proceeded from the principles of Orpheus; and that the secret doctrine of numbers and whatever Greek philosophy has of the great or the sublime has flowed from thence as its first font. But as was the practice of the ancient theologians, even so did Orpheus protect the mysteries of his dogmas with the coverings of fables, and conceal them with a poetic veil, so that whoever should read his hymns would suppose there was nothing beneath them beyond idle tales and perfectly unadulterated trifles. I have wished to say this so

55. [Antonio Vinciguerra, called Chronicus, a Venetian diplomat and writer (see Arnaldo della Torre, *Di Antonio Vinciguerra e delle sue Satire* [Rocca S. Casciano, 1902]).]

56. [For Dactylus, one of Pico's Jewish teachers, see U. Cassuto, *Gli Ebrei a Firenze nell'età del Rinascimento* (Florence, 1918), pp. 317-19.]

57. [For the influence of the Orphic texts in the Italian Renaissance see P. O. Kristeller, "The Scholastic Background of Marsilio Ficino," *Traditio*, II (1944), 271-72. For the influence of the Chaldaic Oracles then attributed to Zoroaster see B. Kiezkowski, *Studi sul Platonismo del Rinascimento in Italia* (Florence, 1936), pp. 34 ff. and 155 ff.]

that it might be known what a task it was for me, how difficult it was to draw out the hidden meaning of the secrets of philosophy from the intentional tangles of riddles and from the obscurity of fables, especially since I have been aided, in a matter so serious, so abstruse, and so little known, by no toil, no application on the part of other interpreters. And yet like dogs they have barked that I have made a kind of heap of inconsequential nothings for a vain display of mere quantity, as if these were not all questions in the highest degree disputed and controversial, in which the main schools are at swords' points, and as if I had not contributed many things utterly unknown and untried to these very men who are even now tearing at my reputation and who consider that they are the leaders in philosophy. Nay, I am so far from this fault that I have taken great pains to reduce my argument to as few chapters as I could. If I myself had (after the wont of others) wished to divide it into parts and to cut it to pieces, it would undoubtedly have grown to a countless number.

38. And, to hold my peace about the rest, who is there who does not know that a single proposition of the nine hundred, the one that treats of reconciling the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, I could have developed, beyond all suspicion of my having wooed mere quantity, into six hundred, nay, more chapters, by enumerating one after the other all those points in which others consider those philosophers to differ and I, to agree? But I must certainly speak (for I shall speak, albeit neither modestly nor in conformity with my own character), since my enviers and detractors compel me to: I have wished to give assurance by this contest of mine, not so much that I know many things, as that I know things of which many are ignorant. And now, in order that this, reverend Fathers, may become manifest to you by the facts and that my oration may no longer stand in the way of your desire, excellent doctors, whom I perceive to be prepared and girded up in the expectation of the dispute, not without great delight: let us now—and may the outcome be fortunate and favorable—join battle as to the sound of a trumpet of war.

V

PIETRO POMPONAZZI

*Translated by WILLIAM HENRY HAY II, revised by
JOHN HERMAN RANDALL, JR., and annotated
by PAUL OSKAR KRISTELLER*