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Author(s): Ockenström, Lauri

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Ficino's human Demiurge and its sources: the case of *Hermetica*

Traditionally it has been suggested that the Renaissance period brought forth new, optimistic conceptions of man and even an ideal of human autonomy underlining man's faculties and virtues. This view has been particularly manifest in the case of the arts, where the Renaissance man was considered capable of challenging not only his ancient predecessors but also the works of nature and of God. Later such conceptions of the Renaissance have been modified and subjected to a critical re-evaluation, but the basic assumption about the prevailing anthropocentric attitudes has remained more or less the same. There have not been, however, many comprehensive studies exploring the origins of these new conceptions of man and human creativity flourishing within the humanistic movement. Conventionally scholars have emphasized vague factors like the mystical *Zeitgeist* or, related to it, some kind of new optimistic atmosphere formed by fresh technological innovations that consequently inspired artists and philosophers. Some connections to classical authors such as Aristotle, Cicero and Augustine have been made, and to the text of *Genesis*, which granted man the domination over the material world and inspired the debate on man's dignity¹. Nonetheless, this branch of study is far from being satisfactorily completed, and, while we continually gain new information on ancient and medieval thought, the philosophical and ideological connections between ancient sources, both Christian and pagan, and Renaissance thought on man need to be re-evaluated. The aim of this paper therefore is to investigate some of these connections in the Neoplatonic tradition, a principal focus of discussion since late Antiquity.

One of the most outstanding theorists of the XV century taking part in the discussion on the human condition was Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), a Florentine humanist, philosopher, astrologer and translator. Since Paul Oskar Kristeller the consensus seems to have been that Ficino deliberately reshaped Neoplatonic metaphys-

¹ On the tradition of the human condition and dignity, vd. e.g. C. TRINKAUS, *In Our Image and Likeness. Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1970.

ics in order to underline man's unique position as the middle link of the universe and as the image of God. According to some more recent estimations Ficino created the most far-reaching ideal of human autonomy of his days – an ideal that was to have some impact on the scientific revolution in the 16th century². His philosophy on man – or anthropocentric philosophy, if the term may be used – is an eclectic compilation of inconsistent ideas deriving from various sources, thus posing a challenge to the reader. In this paper I focus on one important group of Ficino's sources involved with the discussion of man's condition, the ancient myths of creation. The most influential of these myths was naturally the Biblical *Genesis*, whose importance to Western attitudes is indisputable, but I shall pay more attention to two non-Christian sources, the myth presented in Plato's *Timaeus* and especially the Hermetic myth of creation. The Latin translation of the latter, made by Ficino in his youth, arguably reveals some interesting details reflecting the interpreter's ambiguous attitudes towards this heterodox and esoteric text of Egyptian origin.

Plato's *Timaeus* has particular importance because it belongs to those few texts presumed to be among the sources of Ficino's anthropocentric philosophy. Two decades ago Michael J. B. Allen made an assumption according to which Ficino saw his ideal man not merely as a skilled artisan but also as a divine *artifex*, who is legitimately supposed to continue the creation in "God's image and likeness". Subsequently he suggests that specifically the *Timaeus* served as "a primary source" for Ficino's idealistic conception of man. According to his main argument the creative divinity, the Demiurge, as described in Plato's myth, served as an exemplar for the Renaissance understanding of man, influencing the opinions Ficino and his contemporaries, like Christoforo Landino and other Florentine *ingeniosi*, possessed regarding man's creative capacities³.

Closer examination, however, makes it possible to suggest that Ficino's indebtedness to the Platonic myth is not necessarily so great. My aim is not to disprove Allen's assumption of the demiurge as a model for man's creativity, but rather to juxtapose the conceptions of the *Timaeus* with those of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, and examine the Hermetic Genesis as a possible source of Ficino's anthropocentric thought. As a preliminary I shall identify the main features of Ficino's conceptions of man.

Ficino's anthropocentric vision reaches its most manifest moments in the *The-*

² P. O. KRISTELLER, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, New York 1943, pp. 400-401; D. R. LEA, «Christianity and Western attitudes towards the natural environment», *History of European Ideas*, 18, 4 (July 1994) 513-524; C. TRINKAUS, «Marsilio Ficino and the Ideal of Human Autonomy», in K. EISENBICHLER-O. Z. PUGLIESE (eds.), *Ficino and Renaissance Neoplatonism*, Dovehouse Editions, Ottawa, Canada 1986, pp. 141-153 (University of Toronto Italian Studies, 1).

³ M. J. B. ALLEN, «Marsilio Ficino's interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus* and its myth of the demiurge», in J. HANKINS- J. MONFASANI-F. PURNELL, JR. (eds.), *Supplementum festivum: Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, Binghamton 1987, pp. 401-438 (e.g. pp. 401, 408).

ologia Platonica, his philosophical masterpiece written between 1470 and 1474, immediately after he had completed the Latin translation of the Platonic corpus, and about ten years after he made the acquaintance of the Hermetic Genesis. Ficino's optimistic vision of human dignity, contained mostly in the 13th and 14th books of the *Theologia*, is focused on the notion of man's dominion in the earthly realm, based on the rational capacities of the human soul. We can roughly outline three basic features: First, man is the master of all mortal beings and material elements, "a god on earth". Second, man has intellectual skills to "measure and transcend the heavens", i.e. he is capable of attaining all knowledge of the universe and reach transcendent, divine wisdom, and thus understand the essence of Platonic ideas. Third, man can use knowledge and rational skills to create forms following the model given by ideas, thus imitating God's creation and emulating Nature's works⁴.

In this latter sense we can easily recognize certain affinities with the Platonic Demiurge adumbrated in the *Timaeus*, which, being the only text of Plato available to the Latin West, had a great impact on medieval metaphysics and on Ficino's Platonic predecessors. Ficino knew already in the 1450s Calcidius' translation and commentary and the *Glossae* of William of Conches; during the following decade he composed a new translation and commentary – as he did for other dialogues of Plato as well – which turned out to be the most influential commentary of the *Timaeus* for centuries⁵. Ficino seemingly adopted the Platonic view of man's creativity. In the myth presented in the *Timaeus* the creative act of the Demiurge is based on the eternal and unchangeable pattern or exemplar, which was, in the later Platonic tradition, associated with the realm of ideas⁶. In Ficino's theory, which actually owed more to Plotinus, Proclus and Iamblichus than to Plato, the permanent ideas as patterns formed the fundamental argument as well – a comparison that seems to make it plausible to draw a linkage from Plato's demiurge to Ficino's man.

There are also some interesting aspects in Allen's speculation regarding Fici-

⁴ The most revealing passage of the *Theologia* occurs in the 13th book: «In iis artificiis animadvertere licet, quemadmodum homo et omnes et undique tractat mundi materias, quasi homini omnes subiiciantur. Tractat, inquam, elementa, lapides, metalla, plantas et animalia, et in multas traducit formas atque figures, quod numquam bestiae faciunt. Neque uno est elemento contentus aut quibusdam ut bruta, sed utitur omnibus, quasi sit omnium dominus. [...] Merito caelesti elemento solum caeleste animal delectatur; caelesti virtute ascendit caelum atque metitur. Supercaelesti mente transcendit caelum. Nec utitur tantum elementis homo, sed ornat [...] Vicem gerit dei qui omnia elementa habitat colitque omnia, et terrae praesens non abest ab aethere [...] Homo igitur qui universaliter cunctis et viventibus et non viventibus providet est quidam deus», Marsilio Ficino, *Theologia Platonica*, ed. by J. HANKINS-W. BOWEN, English translation by M. J. B. ALLEN, Volume 4, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London 2004. Chapter 13.3.3, pp. 172-173. Vd. also 13.4.1-2, pp. 182-185, and 14.5.1-2, pp. 250-253.

⁵ ALLEN (1987), op. cit., p. 403.

⁶ Plato, *Tim.* 29a, 30a-31a, 39e.

no's views on the Christian Trinity and its relation to the *Timaeus* and to the ontological hierarchy of Neoplatonism. Allen concludes that although Ficino seems to accept the traditional Christian interpretation, he is simultaneously giving support to the Arean and subordinationist view inherited from late classical Neoplatonic sources. However this view, in which the Demiurge-Creator was subordinated to the highest Godhead, would have been a heresy if applied to the Christian view of the Trinity, and so Ficino was not able to adapt this model to the Christian God. He however did, according to Allen, apply it to man, and this kind of semi-heretic interpretation on the *Timaeus* would have given him (and his contemporaries like Landino) a new, efficient instrument to emphasize man's creative capacities⁷.

The statement that Ficino's man has some features in common with the Platonic demiurge seems mostly acceptable. There are, however, some inconsistencies dissolving the relations between the two systems at the theoretical level regarding the human condition. The *Timaeus* does not grant man the absolute dominion over the universe, nor the permission or power to create in the demiurgic way. The basic similarity, the idea of creating according to ideas, appears frequently throughout Plato's dialogues and the Platonic tradition. The myth of the *Timaeus* has obviously been a source of inspiration for Ficino, but it does not offer a direct model or particularly useful instruments for outlining the optimistic vision we confront in the *Theologia Platonica*. One cannot claim that the myth of the *Timaeus* would be outstandingly anthropocentric – in a way even the Biblical myth of creation grants man more virtues than its Platonic counterpart. We must also bear in mind that when dealing with anthropocentric arguments Ficino never cites the *Timaeus*, which is mentioned in the *Theologia* only in other contexts⁸. Therefore it does not seem likely that the *Timaeus* would have been “a primary source” of Ficino's thought: Actually it can explain only a minor branch of Ficino's conceptions regarding man's creativity. In search of more influential sources and useful models we must turn elsewhere.

The third myth of creation Ficino knew was a part of Hermetic writings, known also as the *Hermetica*, a miscellany of Greek esoteric texts composed in Egypt during first four centuries A.D. Although their vocabulary derives from Hellenistic philosophy, the ideas can be traced back to the old Egyptian religious traditions and early Gnosticism. In the Middle Ages only one philosophical Hermetic text, the Latin *Asclepius*, had been circulating in the West, but around 1460 a Byzantine manuscript

⁷ ALLEN (1987), op. cit., pp. 429-431, 433-438. Allen's account leaves some crucial problems unsolved, but the basic assumption that Ficino sympathized with Arean and subordinationists metaphysics with divinities multiplied in the Proclean way, seems plausible. Vd. also M. J. B. ALLEN, «Marsilio Ficino on Plato, the Neoplatonists and the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity», *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Winter, 1984), 555-584.

⁸ Usually the *Timaeus* is connected to creation and the principle of plenitude, e.g. *Theologia Platonica* 2.13.2.

containing fourteen Hermetic treatises, a part of the compilation nowadays known as the *Corpus Hermeticum*, was introduced in Florence. Ficino was immediately commissioned by Cosimo de' Medici to translate the collection into Latin. The translation, which should rather be considered as a new interpretation, was completed in 1463 and became known as *Pimander*. Ficino's foreword, the *Argumentum*⁹, reveals the great reverence and enthusiasm the young interpreter felt for the mythical author Hermes or Mercurius Trismegistus, who was, because of a serious and widespread misunderstanding, located in the pre-classical era and considered as the first member in the chain of *Prisci theologi*. As a contemporary of Moses and the founder of theology and philosophy, as Ficino and his contemporaries believed, Trismegistus also constituted a fruitful connection between Mosaic Wisdom and Plato's philosophy¹⁰.

Unfortunately there are no constructive studies exploring Ficino's real indebtedness to the Hermetic sources – traditionally Hermes was not mentioned among Ficino's sources, but since the 1960s Hermetism was connected with Ficino's magical, occult and astrological thought by names like D. P. Walker and F. Yates. Nonetheless, by the 1990s these connections were proven weak, and the Hermetism seemingly ceased to have large importance for Ficino's philosophy¹¹. This ignorance

⁹ Marsilio Ficino, *Opera omnia*, Basel 1576, p. 1837. The most authoritative manuscripts are probably found in Florence, at the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 21.8, ff. 2v-4v; Firenze, and BML, Plut. 21.21, ff. 1r-2v.

¹⁰ The standard edition is *Corpus Hermeticum*. Texte établi par A. D. NOCK et traduit par A. J. FESTUGIÈRE. Société d'édition "Le belles lettres", Paris 1945. A useful English translation with introduction is found in *Hermetica. The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a new English translation, with notes and introduction*, translation, notes and introduction by B. P. COPENHAVER, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1992. For further reading on the origins of the *Hermetica*, vd. G. FOWDEN, *The Egyptian Hermes. A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, Princeton 1993.

¹¹ D. P. WALKER, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*, London, The Warburg Institute, University of London, London 1958; F. A. YATES, *Giordano Bruno and the hermetic tradition*, London 1964. Brian P. Copenhaver has convincingly proven in several studies that there are no noteworthy theoretical connections between Ficino's magic and the *Hermetica*. For instance, B. P. COPENHAVER, «Scholastic Philosophy and Renaissance Magic in the De vita of Marsilio Ficino», *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 4. (Winter 1984), 523-554; B. P. COPENHAVER, «Renaissance Magic and Neoplatonic Philosophy: "Ennead" 4.3-5 in Ficino's "De vita coelitus comparanda"», in C. G. CARFAGNI (ed.) *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, Leo S. Olschki editore, Firenze 1986, pp. 351-369; B. P. COPENHAVER, «Natural Magic, hermetism, and occultism in early modern science», in D. C. LINDBERG-R. S. WESTMAN (eds.), *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1990. Michael Allen has argued against Ficino's indebtedness to the *Hermetica*, for instance M. J. B. ALLEN, «Marsilio Ficino, Hermes Trismegistus and the *Corpus Hermeticum*», in J. HENRY-S. HUTTON (eds.), *New Perspectives on Renaissance Thought. Essays on the History of Science, Education and Philosophy: In Memory of Charles B. Schmitt*, Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd, London 1990. pp. 38-47. In this Millennium Clement Salaman has studied Ficino's Hermetism, but he deals solely with general philosophical ideas and currents which were common in late classical literary familiar to Fici-

seems almost strange, given that Ficino's pupil and rival, Pico della Mirandola, was a well-known reader and user of the *Hermetica* and cited the *Asclepius* in his famous essay on man's dignity. Actually there seems to be some evidence indicating that Ficino's ideological ties to the *Hermetica* were stronger than hitherto expected, not in his astrological magic or metaphysics, but, as in Pico's case, in his philosophy of man. This connection can be easily proven by the textual analysis and comparison between the anthropocentric passages in the 13th and 14th books of the *Theologia Platonica* and certain equivalents in the *Asclepius* and the *Pimander*. Both direct citations and indirect philosophical or ideological loans indicate that most of the segments of Ficino's anthropocentric thought have probably had a Hermetic exemplar¹².

The relation of the Hermetic myth of creation to Ficino, however, causes the same referential problem as the *Timaeus* did: there are no direct citations to it in Ficino's anthropocentric passages. Nevertheless, the Hermetic Genesis seems to contain thematic unities that are manifest in the hard core of Ficino's philosophy of man. In order to explore the possible resemblances between Ficino and Hermetic Genesis we must delineate the main features of the Hermetic myth of creation examining Ficino's Latin interpretation, the *Pimander*.

The Hermetic Genesis is included in the first treatise of the compilation in chapters 9-15. It is written, as most of the Hermetic texts, in form of a dialogue, in which the principal character, a divinity called Poimandres (in Latin Pimander) explains the creation and structure of the universe in order to make his disciple, Hermes Trismegistus, an enlightened one. In Poimandres' account the highest godhead or mind, *mens deus*, the source of life and light, creates by his word another mind, *mens opifex* (*nous demiourgos* in Greek), who in turn creates the spheres and the planetary divinities. Then the *mens opifex* – or demiurge mind, consubstantial with the word of god, makes Matter move downwards and sets the celestial spheres in motion, which consequently create unreasoning animals on earth. This far the presentation seems to be a compilation of Gnostic and Platonic features without any Judaeo-Christian traits. Then, however, we confront a passage which seems, in the beginning, to resemble strongly the Mosaic *Genesis*:

[...] pater omnium intellectus, vita et fulgor existens, hominem sibi similem procreavit, atque ei tanquam filio suo congratulatus est, pulcher enim erat, pa-

no, and fails to see the Hermetic exemplars of Ficino's anthropocentric thought. C. SALAMAN, «Echoes of Egypt in Hermes and Ficino», in M. J. B. ALLEN-V. REES (eds.), *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, Leiden 2002, pp. 115-135.

¹² I will try to discuss the argument more widely on another occasion. In short, Some anthropocentric passages in Ficino's *Theologia*, e.g. 3.2.6, 13.3.1-4 and 14.5.1 seem to have been influenced by Hermetic exemplars, like X and XII books of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, and books VI and VIII of the *Asclepius*.

trisque sui ferebat imaginem. Deus enim re vera propria forma nimirum delectatus, opera eius omnia usui concessit humano¹³.

The highest mind, the creator of the demiurge, gives birth to a man, almost in his “image and likeness” in Biblical way. Then, as in the *Genesis*, the man starts to pursue divine knowledge, but with a different kind of results. The Hermetic text describes how the Father loves his creation and bestows on him all his craftwork and consequently the first-born man, who thus becomes conscious of the creation, wants to create or “fabricate” too, like the Father had done. In the Biblical *Genesis* that kind of hybris would have been chastened¹⁴, but in the Egyptian myth, instead of a punishment, man is given not only the permission to create, but the dominion over the created world and all knowledge of the universe and planetary gods¹⁵. As the story continues the man, having now all authority over the realm of mortals and un-reasoning animals, transcends cosmic harmony, i.e. the spheres, arriving, as it seems, in transcendent, supra-celestial realm attaining divine wisdom. This symbolizes the contemplative ascent to God, presented again in the end of the treatise (1.25-26), where the man breaks through the spheres reaching the divinity. Finally the man descends down to earth, copulates with Nature thereby uniting his spiritual essence with material body. As the result man is said to be twofold, immortal and divine in his true essence, and mortal in his corporeal state¹⁶.

What was then the impact of the *Pimander* on Ficino's own philosophical thought and worldview? As stated already, the Hermetic influence seems evident in certain passages of the *Theologia Platonica*, but Ficino's own translation executed in 1462-63 gives some hints of more reserved attitudes. I refer to certain changes in the content, evidently deliberate, that Ficino seems to have carried out in his Latin interpretation. For example, in the Hermetic original¹⁷ the man observes what the de-

¹³ The Latin quotations from the *Pimander* are taken from a Florentine manuscript dating back to 1489. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 21.8, 6r. The readings are confirmed by following 15th century manuscripts: Florence, BML, Plut. 21.21; Florence, Biblioteca Marucelliana, C. 287; Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, ms. 140. For the Hermetic equivalent, see *Corpus Hermeticum* 1.12.

¹⁴ I owe the notion, as well as the appellation “Hermetic Genesis”, to Frances Yates, who underlined the so called optimistic gnosis in these passages of the Hermetic myth. F. A. YATES, *Giordano Bruno and the hermetic tradition*, London 1964, pp. 23-28.

¹⁵ Florence, BML, Plut. 21.8, ff. 6r-6v: «Homo autem cum considerasset in patre suo rerum omnium procreationem, ipse quoque fabricare voluit, unde a contemplatione patris ad speram generationis prolapsus est. Cumque omnium in se potestatem haberet, opificia septem gubernatorum animadvertit. Hi autem humanae mentis meditatione gaudentes, singuli eorum proprii ordinis participem hominem reddiderunt. Qui postquam didicit horum essentiam, propriamque naturam conspexit, penetrare, atque rescindere iam exoptabat ambitum circularum, vimque gubernatoris praesidentis igni comprehendere»; *Corpus Hermeticum* 1.13.

¹⁶ Florence, BML, Plut. 21.8, f. 6v; *Corpus Hermeticum* 1.14-15.

¹⁷ *Corpus Hermeticum* 1.13. The Greek manuscript Ficino used is, with great probability, the

miurge, the second mind, had created with his father's help. A bit later the demiurge and man are called brothers (for they came from the same father) in a passage where the man observes "his brother's craftwork". The modified equivalents in Ficino's Latin interpretations¹⁸, «Homo autem cum considerasset in patre suo rerum omnium procreationem», and «opificia septem gubernatorum animadvertit», show that the role of the demiurge-mind has diminished and the creation is attributed to the supreme mind solely. Ficino's refusal to call man demiurge's brother – and thus his equal with equal divine rights – is not without significance either.

These examples are not the only cases in the *Pimander* where the young translator seems to have modified the content: Still in the first treatise Ficino does not admit that human beings would be subject to fate¹⁹, and later, in the tenth treatise, he refuses to call the human soul "demonic", as the original would have required²⁰. To me it seems improbable that these divergences would be due to textual corruption or translator's errors²¹ – more likely, we are dealing with conscious, deliberate modifications. But what made Ficino reformulate the contents of the *Hermetica*? The case of fate seems to have an obvious explanation: Free Will of man was one of Ficino's most beloved philosophical ideas and he has probably tried to make the text he was translating to accord with his own ideology. But why did he refuse to call man the brother of the demiurge, or the human soul demonic? The literal translations would have given him possibilities to emphasize man's divine nature and unique position on the earth. One possible solution might be that still in 1462, when Ficino was not yet widely familiar with the Platonic corpus and Neoplatonic sources, these ideas seemed too radical to him. Perhaps the young scholar felt uncomfortable with such argumentation, and thus, fearing to fall into heresy, dared not make that kind of conception public, not even in a translation. By emphasizing the role of the supreme mind in the creation and by fading out the demiurge-mind he actually weakened

one still preserved in Florence (BML, Plut. 71.33.). The readings discussed here are verified by the ms. in question.

¹⁸ Vd. *Supra*, n. 15. *Corpus Hermeticum* 1.13.

¹⁹ *Corpus Hermeticum* 1.15 – In Ficino's version the other creatures, not human beings, are affected by mortality and subjects to fate: «Cetera vero viventia, quae mortalia sunt, fato subiecta, patiuntur». Florence, BML, Plut 21.8, f. 6v. (In the *Opera omnia* there is an editorial mistake, *praetera vero viventia.*)

²⁰ *Corpus Hermeticum* 10.19. In Ficino's version «Humana certe anima [...] beata est atque divina». Florence, BML, Plut. 21.8, f. 25r. According to the Greek original the human soul is "demonic and divine". BML, Plut. 71.33, f. 135v.

²¹ The early printed editions of the *Pimander* and the Basel edition of Ficino's *Opera omnia* (1576) are famous of fatal editorial mistakes and corruption. Vd. F. PURNELL JR., «Hermes and the Sibyl: A Note on Ficino's *Pimander*», *Renaissance Quarterly*, 30, No. 3. (Autumn 1977), 305-310. In the early manuscripts produced in the Medicean circle the occurrence of such errors would have been rather unlikely, however.

the subordinationist and anthropocentric tones of the Hermetic Genesis making it slightly more compatible with the Catholic dogma and the medieval *interpretatio Christiana* of *Timaeus*, where all of creation was attributed to one God.

However, although it seems that young Ficino had difficulties in accepting some ideas manifest in the *Hermetica*, the content of which he seemingly modified to make it more compatible with orthodox thought, the time he spent with Hermetic writings arguably left some long-lasting traces on his philosophy. All the main features of his anthropocentrism appear to have a Hermetic model, and actually the Hermetic Genesis is the sole single text containing a precursor for them all. First, it grants man all authority over mortal beings and dominion over material world; second, man is given the capacity to attain divine knowledge from the super-celestial realm, and third – with particular importance – man is given permission to create and produce forms with his divine virtues. Although Ficino in his *Pimander* restrained himself from calling man Demiurge's brother, by the time he was composing the *Theologia* he evidently did adopt the ideal of "demiurgic" man, equal to the "divine architect" in creative capacities and rational arts.

One could make an assumption that in the beginning of the 1460's young Ficino dared not, or did not want – even in a translation of other author's work – to postulate opinions that seemed to be too heretical or too contradictory to the dominating ideologies. Instead in the 1470s, after he had translated the Platonic corpus, familiarized himself with Proclus, Plotinus and other non-Christian Neoplatonic and esoteric sources (such as *Chaldaean Oracles*) and elaborated the Hermetic philosophy in the Platonic illumination, he was more willing to accept the essential ideas of the *Hermetica*, seeing no obstacle to harnessing Hermes Trismegistus to the cause of his anthropocentric apologetics. In the 13th and 14th books of the *Theologia Platonica* Ficino hesitates no more, as we have seen, to call man god-like and grant him demiurgic capacities²² – and in doing this he had no need to apply the model of the *Timaeus* Demiurge to man but simply follow the optimistic passages of Hermetic Genesis and other Hermetic texts in which man himself was already made divine and god-like. It is also plausible that the *Hermetica* in general, despite its unconstructive character, served as an early impulse which guided Ficino towards the Neoplatonic and heterodoxical worldview he postulated in the 1470s.

To conclude, despite the absence of the direct citations to the Hermetic Genesis, the juxtaposition seems to indicate that Ficino had adopted and confirmed its basic ideas by the time he composed the *Theologia Platonica*. One could argue that Ficino did not appreciate the Hermetic myth of creation less than two other myths he knew, the *Timaeus* and the Mosaic *Genesis*: In its anthropocentrism the Hermetic Genesis appears to be closer to the Bible than the *Timaeus*, and thus more compat-

²² Vd. *Supra*, n. 4.

ible with Mosaic truths; in its metaphysics it has more resemblance to Plotinus and Proclus – and thus Ficino’s own opinions – than to the Timaeian view. And when compared to the Mosaic *Genesis*, its conception of man appears to be more optimistic and liberal and thus more suitable to Florence of the quattrocento. Therefore it seems arguable that Ficino sympathized with the Hermetic *Genesis* and probably exploited it as reinforcement when formulating his Neoplatonic worldview and optimistic ideal of man. At least it seems to support Ficino’s anthropocentric ideals more directly and forcefully than the theoretical and metaphysically cryptic *Timaeus* or other classical authors.

It seems that the Hermetic writings in general left their traces, not so much in Ficino’s magic and occult thought, but in his optimistic and anthropocentric visions on man. One could argue that the Hermetic influence on Ficino’s thought was not, as some scholars have stated, early and limited; more likely, the *Hermetica* appears to be a primary source of inspiration during his mature period, when the *Theologia Platonica* was composed. Although Ficino does not cite the myths of creation in the context of his anthropocentrism, the ideological and philosophical conceptions they contain become manifestly expressed. Various elements familiar from the *Timaeus* and the *Biblical Genesis* are, for sure, apparent in Ficino’s thought on man’s creativity, but in the Hermetic myth of creation there are even more affinities with his own visions. One could also make a suggestion – and not totally fallacious, I suppose – that the Hermetic *Genesis* was one of the most important single sources for Ficino’s ideal of the “human demiurge”, a human being equipped with divine capacities for creation.

If these assumptions are accurate, we are looking at an interesting occurrence of coexistence, where the Christian and non-Christian, classical and pseudo-classical elements of thought are happily mingled together in a new environment. This should actually not appear a novelty, if we bear in mind Ficino’s habit of considering many non-classical and pagan sources as equals to the Classical and Christian ones. The Florentine milieu Ficino lived in was naturally Christian, but not monolithically, and the boundaries of the orthodoxy were still more flexible than during the following centuries. Perhaps these circumstances, along with the appearance of new Neoplatonic and esoteric sources, allowed the mysterious wisdom of ancient Egypt, seen through the eye of Florentine humanism, to contribute to the development of the Western philosophy of man.