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Jewish Sources in Pico's Concept of *Dignitas Hominis*: An Outline of the Problem

Abstract: The paper deals with Pico's conception of man, especially with regard to his use of Jewish sources. This is mostly apparent in Pico's works *Oratio* (1486), *Conclusiones* (1486) and *Heptaplus* (1488/89). Firstly, we point out his collaboration with Flavius Mithridates, who was Pico's Hebrew teacher and an interpreter of some Jewish mystical texts (Gersonides, Nahmanides, Recanati). Secondly, we emphasize that at the same time Pico was in contact with another Jewish scholar Yohanan Alemanno as well. For this reason, modern interpreters (Idel, Lelli) believe that one of the main sources not only for Pico's *Oratio* but also for his late work *Heptaplus* were some of Alemanno's writings (particularly his *Heshek Shlomo* and *Hay ha-'Olamim*). Therefore, I examine Pico's syncretic model of *dignitas hominis*, which was inspired on one hand by Neoplatonic philosophy and Aristotelianism, and on the other hand by Jewish and Christian mystical tradition.

Keywords: Giovanni Pico, Flavius Mithridates, the dignity of man, natural felicity, supernatural felicity

Introduction

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), called *Princeps Concordiae*, was not only the leading figure of Florentine Platonism,¹ but also the author of the

¹ G.F. Pico, *Ioannis Pici Mirandulae viri omni disciplinarum genere consumatissimi vita per Ioannem Franciscum illustris principis Galeotti Pici filium conscripta*, G. Bertuzzi (ed.), Modena 1994, p. 74: "Quos inter literario amore duos sibi potissimum devinxit Angelum scilicet Politianum virum graecae latineque doctissimum, necnon variarum litterarum florum refertum ac prope vindicem Romanae linguae; alterum Marsilium Ficinum, Florentinum hominem omnifaria litteratura redolentem, sed maxi-

famous *Oratio de dignitate hominis*. According to some modern scholars, it was primarily intended to celebrate the dignity of man. However, it was not until the Strasbourg edition of 1504 that it became known as *Dignitas hominis*.² It must be said that Pico began working on it as early as September 1486, when he was sojourning in Fratta, Perugia, or in Florence.³

But how should this *Oratio* be best understood? One possible way is through the interpretation of Eugenio Garin, a pioneer of Renaissance scholarship, who, in *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: vita e dottrina* (1937), identifies the Prince of Concord as the prototype of an Italian humanist. In Garin's other book, *Italian Humanism: Philosophy and Civic Life in the Renaissance*, Pico is already interpreted as a thinker who does not work with outdated theological tools, but boldly uses the powerful weapon of Renaissance intellectuals, philology, of which the new Kabbalah⁴ is a perfect counterpart. The English scholar Frances Yates offers a simi-

num ex his qui nunc vivunt Platonikum cuius opera in Academicis sibi vindicandis usus fuerat." G. Pico, *Lettere*, F. Borghesi (ed.), p. 121; M. Ficino, *Opera omnia*, Basilea 1576 [repr. (ed.) P.O. Kristeller, Torino 1959], p. 1537; A. della Torre, *Storia dell'Accademia Platonica di Firenze*, Firenze 1902, pp. 750–751; R.P. Blum, "'Et nuper Plethon'—Ficino's Praise of Georgios Gemistos Plethon and his Rational Religion," [in:] *Laus Platonici Philosophi: Marsilio Ficino and his Influence*, S. Clucas, P.J. Forshaw, V. Rees (eds.), Leiden–Boston 2011, pp. 103–104.

² S.A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486): The Evolution of Traditional Religious and Philosophical Systems*, Tempe 1998, p. 8–19.

³ For a report of Pico's life see G. Pico, *Ioannis Pici Mirandulae viri omni disciplinarum genere consummatissimi vita...*, pp. 30–89; F. Borghesi, "A Life in Works," [in:] *Pico della Mirandola: New Essays*, M. Dougherty (ed.), Cambridge 2008, pp. 202–219; G. Busi, *Vera relazione sulla vita e i fatti di Giovanni Pico conte della Mirandola*, Torino 2010, p. 201; G. Pico, *Oratio (De hominis dignitate)*, [in:] G. Pico, *De hominis dignitate; Heptaplus; De ente et uno; e scritti vari*, E. Garin (ed.), Firenze 1942, pp. 101–165 (for an English translation of Pico's *Oratio* see G. Pico, "Appendix A: Pico's Oration," [in:] B. Copenhaver, *Magic and the Dignity of Man: Pico della Mirandola and His Oration in Modern Memory*, Cambridge–London 2019, pp. 459–482; for an Italian translation of Pico's *Oratio* see G. Pico, *La dignità dell'uomo*, R. Ebgi (ed.), Torino 2021, pp. 2–93. Compare with one of Pico's Letters: "Commentariolum nostrum non est quod admireris otiosi cum esse voluimus et omnino nihil agere id egimus, animum remittentes potiusquam intendentes. Omnia praeludium est commentariorum quae in platonis symposium meditatur. Erit in illis quid tu saltem ames et laudes quum omnia nostra amas et laudas [...] ex Fratta, 10 Novembris 1486..." (G. Pico, *Lettere*, p. 138); E. Cassirer, "Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: A Study in the History of Renaissance Ideas," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 3 [2] (1942), pp. 138–143.

⁴ The Kabbalah is Jewish mystical teaching, characterized as the reception of tradition by oral transmission, involving two main parts. The first is speculative and dominated by the doctrine of *Sefirot* (from *safar*—calculate); the other is practical Kabbalah with the doctrine of names (*Semot*) as lower world are founded and united by *En sofit* (Infinity). There are ten *Sefirot*, represented by the number 10: *Keter*, *Hokmah*, *Binah*, *Hesed*, *Din*, *Tiferet*, *Nesah*, *Hod*, *Yesod* and *Malkut* (see G. Busi, *La Qabbalah*, Roma–Bari 2006). See one of Pico's Jewish sources: *Corona Nominis Boni* of Abraham Axelrad: "Audiivi tamen quosdam qui addunt super numero decem numerationum ipsam Ensoph per unam numerationem quia dicunt postquam omnes numerationes sunt decem in numero suo habent omnino finem numero idem est dicendum quod creavit coronam superiorem tamquam ens id est quoddam oculum ipso ensoph et est causa causarum seu adinventio adinventium" (C. Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism*, Cambridge–London 1989, p. 236). Compare with M. Recanati, *Commentary on the Daily Prayers: Flavius Mithridates' Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text, and an English Version*, vol. 1, G. Corazzol (ed.), Torino 2008, p. 70: "Et iam sapientes nostri dicunt quod, antequam creasset deus sanctus et benedictus mundum suum, erat ipse deus sanctus et

lar perspective. Her work *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* is worth mentioning. According to Yates, Pico's man can also be described as *homo magus* who is able to control the world of nature (*liber naturae*) by his wit and power.⁵

On the other hand, Farmer and Copenhaver offer a different interpretation. In his book *Syncretism in the West*, Farmer engages in a sharp polemic with Yates' thesis, and he also weakens the relationship between Ficino's and Pico's conception of magic, on which the English scholar based his reading to some extent. This was also done earlier by William G. Craven in *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Symbol of His Age: Modern Interpretations of a Renaissance Philosopher*. Farmer, however, takes his interpretation of Pico's man even further by presenting him as a humble servant who uses his power primarily to transform himself/his nature (*natura*) rather than to subjugate the world of nature (*liber naturae*).⁶

Apart from the Platonic and Arabic sources of *dignitas hominis*, modern researchers (Copenhaver, Ebgi)⁷ mostly concentrate on the reception of Jewish sources based on the assumption that Pico prepared the edition of *Oratio* (1486) and was at the same time in contact with the Jewish intellectuals Elia del Medigo, (1458–1493) Flavius Mithridates 1450–1490), his Hebrew teacher and translator,⁸

benedictus et nomen eius solum tantum, ut etiam dicit magnus rabi eliezer in amphorismis suis itaque ascendit in cogitatione sua velle producere et facere esse decem numerationes, quarum vita et nutritio est ab ipso benedicto et excelso vocato ensoph, et in virtute essencie est essencia prime numerationis, a qua procedit virtus omnium numerationum.”

⁵ E. Garin, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Vita e dottrina*, Firenze 1937, pp. 70–73; E. Garin, *Italian Humanism: Philosophy and Civic Life in the Renaissance*, New York 1965, p. 106; F. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, Chicago–London 1964, p. 127.

⁶ S.A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West...*, pp. 116–132; B. Copenhaver, “The Secret of Pico's Oration: Cabala and Renaissance Philosophy,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 26 (2002), pp. 57–58; W. Craven, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Symbol of his Age: Modern Interpretations of a Renaissance Philosopher*, Geneva 1981, pp. 127–129.

⁷ R. Ebgi, *Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola e teologia poetica: contributi alla filosofia dell'umanesimo italiano*, Milano 2012 [unpublished doctoral thesis, Vita-Salute San Raffaele University]; R. Ebgi, “Introduzione,” [in:] G. Pico, *La dignità dell'uomo*, R. Ebgi (ed.), Torino 2021, pp. XI–XXII.

⁸ G. Pico, G.F. Pico, *Opera omnia (1557–1573)*, Basileae 1557 [reprint Hildesheim 1969], pp. 385–386: “Nam ille docere me Chaldaicam linguam nulla voluit ratione, nisi adiuratum prius, et quidem conceptis verbis, ne illa cuiquam traderem, facere fidem huius rei tibi potest noster Hieronymus Benivenuis, quid cum adisset forte dum me ille docebat furens Mithridates hominem eliminavit.” Mithridates' translations include: A. Abulafia, *Sitrei Torah (De Secretis Legis)*, *We-zot li Jehuda (Summa brevis cabale que intitularur Rabi Jeude)*; Azriel of Gerona, *Quaestiones super decem numerationibus cum responsibus suis; Sepherabaik cum expositione celi enar.*; Abraham ibn Waqar, *Liber de radicibus seu terminis cabalae; Expositio Decem Numerationum; De proportione divinitatis; Liber combinationum in cabala et alia manuscripta in papiro*; A. Axelrad, *Corona nominis boni*; Gersonides, *Cantica Canticorum Salmonis per Fl. Mithrodatem ad Picum traductio*. S. Campanini, “Talmud, Philosophy, Kabbalah: A Passage from Pico della Mirandola's Apologia and its Sources,” [in:] *The Words of A Wise Man's Mouth are Gracious: Festschrift for Günter Stemeberger on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, M. Perani (ed.), Berlin–New York 2005, pp. 429–448; F. Lelli, “Umanesimo Laurenziano nell'opera di Alemanno,” [in:] *La cultura ebraica all'epoca di Lorenzo il Magnifico: celebrazioni del V centenario della morte di Lorenzo il Magnifico: Convegno di studi*, Firenze: *Accademia Toscana di scienze e lettere La Colombaria*, 29 novembre 1992, D.L. Bemporad, I. Zatelli (eds.), Firenze 1998, pp. 53–54. See also Y. Gikatilla, *The Book of Punctuation: Flavius Mithridates' Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text, and an English Version*, A. Martini (ed.), Torino 2010; *The Book of Bahir: Flavius Mithridates' Latin*

and later also with Rabbi Yohanan Alemanno (1434/35–1504).⁹ For this reason, other scholars, Moshe Idel and Fabrizio Lelli, believe that one of the main sources not only for Pico's *Oratio* but also for his late work *Heptaplus* (1488/89) were some of Alemanno's writings (particularly his *Heshek Shlomo* and *Hay ha-'Olamim*), on which he worked continuously since 1469.¹⁰ Therefore, the paper focuses on two main topics. First, we consider how Pico used additional Jewish sources (Alemanno, Gersonides, Nahmanides, Recanati etc.). Second, we analyse how the Prince of Concord incorporated them into his syncretic conception of *dignitas hominis* in both his works.

***Oratio*: Man as the creative image of God**

In the context of Yates' thesis, it suffices to recall Pico's famous dictum which appears right at the beginning of the *Oratio*: "Supporting his opinion is that saying of Mercury: Man is a great miracle, Asclepius," on the basis of which Yates links this anthropological motif with hermetic elements. These were to contribute to the birth of a new form of man (*homo magus*), standing in a total contrast to his medieval predecessor (*homo miser*).¹¹

It cannot be denied that *homo*, in Pico's conception, becomes a self-governing and esteemed sculptor, shaping his nature as he himself wishes. Man (*imago Dei*) is thus no longer considered a miserable creature (*miser*), as it was in the medieval tradition. He is therefore not set in a rigidly hierarchical static framework. On the contrary, in the spirit of Renaissance anthropological traditions, he is placed in the dynamic centre of all events. And he is even allowed to become an active co-creator of God, as the ancient theologians¹² already knew. Moreover, he can determine his

Translation, the Hebrew Text, and an English Version, S. Campanini (ed.), Torino 2005; *The Great Parchment: Flavius Mithridates' Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text, and an English Version*, G. Busi, S. Campanini (eds.), Torino 2004.

⁹ B. Kiezkowski, "Averroismo e platonismo in Italia negli ultimi decenni del secolo XV," *Giornale critic della filosofia italiana* 14 [2/1] (1933), pp. 286–301; K.P. Bland, "Elijah Del Medigo's Response to the Kabbalah of Fifteenth-Century Jewry and Pico della Mirandola," *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 1 (1991), pp. 23–53; M. Engel, *Elijah Del Medigo and Paduan Aristotelism*, London et al. 2017, pp. 6–9; F. Secret, *Kabbalistes Chrétiens de la Renaissance*, Paris 1964, p. 43; C. Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter...*, pp. 256–257.

¹⁰ M. Idel, "The Ladder of Ascension—The Reverberations of a Medieval Motif in the Renaissance," *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, vol. 2, I. Twersky (ed.), Cambridge 1984, pp. 86–87; F. Lelli, "Umanesimo Laurenziano..." pp. 53–55.

¹¹ G. Pico, *Oratio (De hominis dignitate)*, ed. Garin, p. 102: "Cui sententiae illud Mercurii adstipulatur: 'Magnum, o Asclepi, miraculum est homo.'" See G. Pico, "Appendix A: Pico's Oration," p. 459. Compare with Pico's *Heptaplus* (G. Pico, *Heptaplus. De Septiformi sex dierum Geneseos enarratione ad Laurentium Medicem*, [in:] G. Pico, *De hominis dignitate; Heptaplus...*, p. 304: "Est harum omnium simul in unum confluentium naturarum vere divina possessio, ut libeat exclamare illud Mercurii: 'Magnum, o Asclepi, miraculum est homo.'" See B. Copenhaver, "The Secret of Pico's Oration..." p. 58.

¹² C.B. Schmitt, "'Prisca theologia e Philosophia Perennis:' due temi del Rinascimento italiano e la loro fortuna," [in:] *Il pensiero italiano del Rinascimento e il tempo nostro: atti del 5. Convegno internazionale del Centro di studi umanistici: Montepulciano, Palazzo Tarugi, 8–13 Agosto 1968*, G. Taragi (ed.) Firenze, 1970, pp. 219–220; C. Vasoli, "Der Mythos der 'Prisci Theologi' als Ideologie der Renova-

own destiny. It is up to him to decide what path he will take, whether he will fall to the level of animals or whether he will rise upwards to the angelic world. In other words: “if the seeds he tends are vegetal, the man will be a plant. If they are sensual, he will grow into a beast. If they are rational, he will turn into a heavenly animal. If they are intellectual, he will be an angel and a son of God.”¹³ On the other hand, it is not necessary to overestimate the novelty of Pico’s conception. In fact, Gregory of Nyssa, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and Augustine, for example, all thought of man in a similar way. Besides, it is worth realizing that *Oratio* was meant to be, above all, a perfectly formulated introductory speech for the planned debate on the Nine Hundred Theses that the Prince of Concord wanted to defend in Rome before the world’s eminent scholars of that time (January 6, 1487).¹⁴

tio, [in:] *Das Ende des Hermetismus. Historische Kritik und neue Naturphilosophie in der Spätrenaissance*, M. Mulsow (ed.), Tübingen 2002, pp. 19–60; J. Lauster, “Marsilio Ficino as a Christian Thinker: Theological Aspects of His Platonism,” *Marsilio Ficino, His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, M.J.B. Allen, V. Rees, (eds.), Leiden–Boston–Köln 2001, pp. 45–69; W.J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*, Cambridge 2012, pp. 41–53.

¹³ G. Pico, *Oratio (De hominis dignitate)*, ed. Garin, pp. 105–106: “Igitur hominem accepit indiscretæ opus imaginis atque in mundi positum meditullio si est alloquutus: ‘Nec certam sedem, nec propriam faciem, nec munus ullum peculiare tibi dedimus, o Adam, ut quam sedem, quam faciem, quæ munera tute optaveris, ea, pro voto, pro tua sententia, habeas et possideas. Definita ceteris natura intra præscriptas a nobis leges coeretur. Tu, nullis angustiis coercitus, pro tuo arbitrio, in cuius manu te posui, tibi illam præfinies. Medium te mundi posui, ut circumspiceres inde commodius quicquid est in mundo....’ Si vegetalia, planta fiet. Si sensualia, obrutescet. Si rationalia, caeleste evadet animal. Si intellectualia, angelus erit et Dei filius...” See B. Copenhaver, “Magic and the Dignity of Man: De-Kanting Pico’s Oration,” [in:] *The Italian Renaissance in the Twentieth Century: Acts of an International Conference. Florence, Villa I Tatti, June 9–11, 1999*, A.J. Grieco, M. Rocke, F. Giolfredi (eds.), Firenze 2002, pp. 295–320.

¹⁴ Compare with Pico’s Letter to Girolamo Benivieni (November 12, 1486)—G. Pico, *Lettere*, p. 155: “Disputanda per me publice dogmata ante tuum a me discessum 700is clauderantur. Postquam abisti, ad 900 excreverunt progrediebanturque nisi receptui cecinisses, ad mille. Sed placuit in eo numero, utpote mystico, perdem esistere. Est enim /si vera est nostra de numeris doctrina) symbolum animæ in se ipsam [...] Accessit et oration id quod ad mitto. Cum enim statutum sit mihi ut nulla prætereat dies quin aliquid legam ex Evangelica doctrina, incidit in manus postridie quam discesseras illud Christi: ‘pacem meam do vobis, pacem meam do vobis, pacem relinquo vobis,’ illico subit[us] quoadam animi concitatione de pace quaedam ad philosophiæ laudes facientia tanta celeritate dictavi, ut notarii manum præcurrerem saepe et inverterem...;” G. Pico, *Conclusiones*, [in:] G. Pico, G.F. Pico, *Opera omnia*, p. 63: “DE ADSCRIPTIS NUMERO NONIGENTIS, DIALECTICIS, MORALIBUS, PHYSICIS, MATHEMATICIS, Metaphysicis, Theologicis, Magicis, Cabalisticis cum suis, tum sapientum Chaldeorum, Arabum, Hebreorum, Graecorum, Aegyptiorum, latinorumque, placitis disputabitur publice Ioannes Picus Mirandulanus, Concordiæ Comes, in quibus recitandis, non Romæ lingue nitorem, sed celebratissimorum Parisiensium disputatorum, dicendi genus est imitates, propterea, quod eo nostri temporis philosophi perique omnes utuntur;” G.F. Pico, *Ioannis Pici Mirandulæ viri omni disciplinarum genere consumatissimi vita...*, p. 36: “[...] his novam per numeros philosophandi institutionem annexuit, cunctaque simul publicis locis, quo facilius vulgarentur, affixit, pollicitus se soluturum eis impensas, qui ex remotis oris disceptandi gratia Romam se contulissent.” G. Pico, *Apologia*, [in:] G. Pico, G.F. Pico, *Opera omnia*, pp. 114–115, 170. M. Sudduth, “Pico della Mirandola’s Philosophy of Religion,” [in:] *Pico della Mirandola: New Essays*, M. Dougherty (ed.), Cambridge 2008, pp. 70–72; L. Dorez, L. Thuasne, *Pic de la Mirandola en France (1485–1488)*, Paris 1897, pp. 121–137; A. Sartori, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: filosofia, teologia, Concordia*, Padova 2017, pp. 235–264; G. Di Napoli, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola e la problematica dottrinale del suo tempo*, Roma 1965, pp. 92–93.

The message of *Oratio* itself can also be read in another way—it should lead man to take responsibility for shaping his own nature (*natura*). This means that its main theme is not necessarily the celebration of human dignity. Indeed, the first man (Adam) received from his Creator one of the most glorious gifts, the ability to determine his nature according to his own free will. Yet, or precisely because of this, man: “can sink back into lower forms that are beasts; man can be born again to higher forms that are divine.”¹⁵ Man has thus been entrusted with the extraordinary task of caring for his soul. But how to reach it? Pico is aware that he has to equip man well with argumentation, and therefore prefers philosophical contemplation to rhetorical skill. Such a philosophical weapon, if it is liberated from confusion by dialectics and stripped of all impurity by moral philosophy, will enable the sage to penetrate all the mysteries of nature. However, the knowledge of natural and divine things mediated by natural philosophy will not lead the contemplative scholar to the desired goal.¹⁶

Therefore, Pico goes on to urge that *homo contemplativus* should also improve himself by studying theology so that he can climb Jacob's ladder of knowledge to its top, that is, to a mystical union with God. Nevertheless, if man does not sufficiently perfect himself, he will not reach that goal but will fall into the animal kingdom. Pico here combines Christian motifs (the Dionysian process of purification, enlightenment, and perfection), with elements of Aristotelian-Averroist philosophy (the unification of the passive and active intellect) and themes drawn from Jewish mysticism (the transformation of the Old Testament Enoch into the angelic being *Metatron*).¹⁷

¹⁵ G. Pico, *Oratio (De hominis dignitate)*, ed. Garin, p. 106: “Poteris inferiora quae sunt bruta degenerare; poteris in superiora quae sunt divina ex tui animi sententia regenerari” (“Appendix A: Pico's Oration,” p. 461).

¹⁶ G. Pico, *Oratio (De hominis dignitate)*, ed. Garin, pp. 116–118.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 150–152; G. Pico, *Commento dello illustrissimo signor conte J. Pico della Mirandola sopra una canzone de amore composta da Girolamo Benivieni cittadino Fiorentino secondo la mente et opinione de'Platonici*, [in:] G. Pico, *De hominis dignitate; Heptaplus...*, p. 479; Pseudo-Dionysius, *Corpus Dionysiacum*, G. Heil, A.M. Ritter (eds.), Berlin 1991, p. 30 [*De caelesti hierarchia*, 209c]. According to the Book of Enoch (3 *Enoch* 3:1; 16, 5) Enoch was transformed into the angel of divinity (*Metatron / Mattatron*). Compare with Pico's *Oration* and *Commento*: “Nam et Hebraeorum theologia secretior nunc Enoch sanctum in angelum divinitatis...” (G. Pico, *Oratio (De hominis dignitate)*, ed. Garin, p. 108); “Questa prima creatura, da Platonici a da antique filosofi Mercurio Trimegisto e Zoroastre è chiamato ora figliuolo da Dio, ora Sapienza, ora mente, ora ragione divina, il che alcuni interpretano ancora Verbo. Ed abbi cuascuno diligente avvertenzia di non intendere che questo sia quello che da nostril Teologi è detto figliuolo di Dio, perchè noi intendiamo oer il figliuolo una medesima essenza col padre, a lui in ogni cosa eguale, creatore finalmente e non creatura, ma debbesi comparare quello che è Platonici chiamano figliuolo di Dio al primo e più nobile angelo da Dio creato” (G. Pico, *Commento*, ed. Garin, pp. 466–467). See also G. Pico, *Conclusiones* 10, p. 108: “Illud quod apud Cabalistas dicitur illud est sine dubio, quod ab Orpheo Pallas a Zoroastre paterna mens, a Mercurio Dei filium a Pythagora sapiential, a Parmenide sphere intelligibilis.” The angel of divinity / Son of God is also identified with *Pan* (G. Pico, *Conclusiones* 28, p. 107): “Frustra adit naturam et protheum, qui pana non attraxerit.” Here Pico was inspired by F. Mithridates, *Sermo de passione domini*, C. Wirszubski (ed.), Jerusalem 1963, pp. 125–126: “Tunc iussus est cum ad paludem veniret nunciaret Magnum Pana interiisse. cum ventum est ad locum Thammus magna voce inclamavit, interijt Pan. statim ululatus et gemitus auditus est. hec etiam relata Tyberio Cesari fidem habuere, cuius iussu perquisitus quisnam esset iste Pan, responsum est eum fuisse qui fuit filius Mercuij ex Penelope. Pan igitur deus qui omnia

Although *Oratio* was not ultimately completed and was only published posthumously by his nephew Gianfrancesco,¹⁸ Pico never abandoned the process of human self-improvement and elevation to angelic dignity. He developed the idea gradually in his other writings, such as *Commento* (1486), where we encounter *homo contemplativus* travelling through the six stages of perfection on Jacob's ladder, with the aim of reaching the very top of knowledge, that is, finding that true source of beauty (or knowledge). His soul, however, must first detach itself from the sensual beauty associated with the body in order to eventually merge with the higher active intellect. Pico seems to draw on several sources here. First, there are the Greek influences: Plato's dialogue *Symposion* and Proclus' *Elementatio theologica*. Secondly are Arabic sources: Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyawī's writing *The Book of Gardens* (*Kitab al-Hada'iq*), which was mediated to Pico by Alemanno.¹⁹

Heptaplus: the path to human self-improvement

It is, however, primarily Pico's work *Heptaplus*, in which, following medieval Christian and Kabbalistic tradition, the Prince of Concord contemplates the six days of creation and the seventh day of rest by allegorical interpretation, i.e. the coming of Christ as the King of the victorious Sabbath. Pico thus distinguishes two types of felicity here. One type is natural felicity (*felicitas naturalis*), whose guide Moses, enables man to know all the secrets of the law hidden in the book of nature. The other is supernatural felicity (alias *felicitas supernaturalis*). Through it, man reaches the summit of knowledge and can become completely united with his beginning. However, only angels and people among creatures can aspire to this type of felicity.²⁰

quae sunt in mundo comprehendit: unde nomen habet..." Plato, *Cra.* 408b–d. Compare with Francesco Zorzi's *Problemata* f. 322v, 5,3, p. 296: "Cur Deus ab Hermete dicitur sphaera intelligibilis cuius centrum est ubique, circumferentia vero nusquam? Nonne quia ipse Deus vera sphaera est, in ipsum terminans a quo et principium habet? Nam ipse est principium et finis omnium. Hinc omnia creata quae Dei vestigium gerunt, ad rotunditatem tendunt, ut de coelis, terra caeterisque elementis manifeste patet. Et hoc idem est de aliis. Quamvis id non ita clare appareat. Centrum autem sphaerae huius, quod est tota haec mundana machina, est ubique, quia omnem locum occupat, cum ultra mundum non sit locus. Circumferentia vero, quae est ipse Deus omnia ambiens, nusquam est, quia a loco non capitur, sed ipse omnia capit." M. Ficino, *Opera*, p. 1309; Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica*, III 11, 43; G. Boccaccio, *Genealogiae deorum gentilium*, 1, 4. See: S. Campanini, "Saggio introduttivo," [in:] F. Zorzi, *De harmonia mundi*, p. LXIV. Compare with Reuchlin's *De arte cabalistica*, 52v–53r. See: G.A. Gerhard, "Zum Told des grossen Pan," *Wiener Studien* 27 (1915), pp. 323–352; M. Idel, *Ben: Sonship and Jewish Mysticism*, London–New York–Jerusalem 2007, pp. 507–509.

¹⁸ M. Dougherty, "Three Precursors to Pico della Mirandola's Roman Disputation," [in:] *Pico della Mirandola: New Essays*, M. Dougherty (ed.), pp. 146–147.

¹⁹ M.J.B. Allen, *Studies in the Platonism of Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico*, London–New York 2017, pp. 86–103; Y. Alemanno, "Hay ha-Olamim," Mantua (MS), fol. 103r, [in:] F. Lelli, "Prisca Philosophia and Docta Religio: The Boundaries of Rational Knowledge in Jewish and Christian Humanist Thought," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 91 [1–2] (2000), p. 69; A. Ben-Zaken, *Reading Hayy ibn-Yaḳzān: A Cross-Cultural History of Autodidacticism*, Baltimore 2010, pp. 71–76.

²⁰ G. Pico, *Heptaplus*, ed. Garin, pp. 324–326: "Est autem felicitas (ut theologi praedicant) alia quam per naturam, alia quam per gratiam consequi possumus. Illam naturalem, hanc supernaturalem. De

But what position does *imago Dei* hold in *Heptaplus*? According to Pico, man does indeed fall, together with animals, into the lowest part (i.e. the sublunary) of the world, which can be metaphorically described as both terrestrial and celestial waters. And together with them he shares the sensual part of his soul (*sensus*), yet he surpasses them with his reason (*ratio*). *Ratio* symbolically corresponds to the heaven (i.e. the firmament). But there is the third and highest part of the human soul, namely the intellect, with which God has also endowed man. This is found “in the waters above the heavens, where all is directed by pure and eternal intelligence.” Pico further compares the intellectual part to celestial waters, where: “the spirit of the Lord is brooding over the waters.” Therefore, the intellect also enables man to “commune with angels, as John says.”²¹ In the second preface to *Heptaplus* it is even stated that man as the image of God (*imago Dei*) should be designated as the fourth world, since all the things that are found in the other worlds are included in it.²² Can we therefore regard him as an active creator—a magician who by his wit and his power reaches the gates of true felicity, as Garin and Yates judged, or should we regard “Adam” rather as a humble servant who will only be raised to the true peace by the supernatural power of God, as Trinkaus and Farmer pointed out?²³

Let us first investigate what the two works have in common. In both *Oratio* and *Heptaplus* there is a demand for human self-improvement. Pico already expresses it in the introduction to the fourth book of *Heptaplus*, but he uses Platonic ideas as well: “how useful and necessary self-knowledge is to man was so demonstrated by Plato in *Alcibiades* I (to pass over the Delphic inscription).”²⁴ On the other

prima, id est de naturali, satis dictum a Mose, quoniam rerum cognita natura, naturalem quoque earum felicitatem cognoscimus... Felicitatem ego sic definitio: reditum uniuscuiusque rei ad suum principium.”

²¹ Ibidem, p. 274 (English translation: D. Carmichael, *The Heptaplus*, [in:] G. Pico, *On The Dignity of Man; On Being and the One; Heptaplus*, Indianapolis–Cambridge 1965, p. 120): [...] “per quam dicere illud Ioannis possumus societas nostra cum angelis est.” Compare with G. Pico, *Commento*, ed. Garin, p. 479: “Tertio, è la parte sensitiva e motiva, per la quale ha convenienza con gli animali irrazionali. Quarto, è la parte razionale, la quale è propria de gli uomini e de gli animali razionali, e da’Peripatetici latini è creduto essere l’ultima e la più nobile parte dell’anima nostra, cum mondimento sopra essa sia la parte intellettuale ed angelica, per la quale l’uomo così conviene con gli Angeli, come per la parte sensitiva conviene con le bestie...” John 1:3.

²² G. Pico, *Heptaplus*, ed. Garin, p. 192: “Est praeter tres quos narravimus, quartus alius mundus in quo et ea omnia inveniuntur quae sunt in reliquis. Hic ipse est homo qui et propterea, ut catholici dicunt doctores, in Evangelio omnis creaturae appellatione censetur [...] Tritum in scholis verborum est, esse hominem minorem mundum...”

²³ E. Garin, “La Dignitas hominis e la letteratura patristica,” *La Rinascita* 1 [4] (1938), pp. 102–146; F. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, p. 116; C. Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, London 1970, pp. 505–526; S.A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West...*, pp. 129–130.

²⁴ G. Pico, *Heptaplus*, ed. Garin, p. 268: “Quam autem utilis enim homini, quam necessaria sit sui cognition (ut praeteream litteram delphicam), ita est a Platone in primo Alcibiade demonstratum” (English translation: D. Carmichael, *The Heptaplus*, p. 117). Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 124a ff. Compare with Pico’s *Oration* (G. Pico, *Oratio (De hominis dignitate)*, ed. Garin, p. 124: “Tum illud γνῶθι σεαυτόν, id est cognosce te ipsum, ad totius naturae nos cognitionem, cuius et interstitium et quasi cynnus natura est hominis excitat et inhortatur. Qui enim se cognoscit, in se omnia cognoscit, ut Zoroaster prius, deinde Plato in Alcibiade scripserunt.”

hand, Pico is also aware that not all people wish to embark on such a journey, and some of them even reject it. In such a case, however, one must reckon that one will always be in the thrall of one's lust and one's instincts. The daily procurement of these will gradually lead him to lose his judgment and ultimately his original dignity (*dignitas hominis*) which Adam inherited from God "in the beginning." Like in *Oratio*, also in *Heptaplus* man is in danger of being reduced to the level of stupid animals: "what is more wretched than this? What is more vile and contemptible than to become lackeys to the animals of which nature made us leaders?"²⁵

It is understandable that Pico would recommend Adam to choose another, more challenging option. But how can such felicity be found? It must be said that in the introduction to the seventh chapter of *Heptaplus*, Pico considered two types of *felicitas* in total. One type he called natural felicity (*felicitas naturalis*). This is of a philosophical nature, and it is characteristic for it that neither plants nor animals have access to it. However, there is felicity which is reserved only for man and angels, as has been said above. Because Adam boasts two excellent gifts, reason and free will. Nevertheless, as a result of the original sin, he is unable, by his own strength and weakened nature, to reach the gates to a higher type of theological felicity (*felicitas supernaturalis*). Man can, however, be raised to it by means of grace.²⁶

Further, it is clear from *Heptaplus* that a different path is chosen by philosophers and another is put forward by theologians. The former limit human felicity to the knowledge of truth (i.e. *felicitas naturalis*), or they regard it as a form of true friendship. Such felicity was favoured, for example, by Al-Farabi, who found it in the study of philosophy itself.²⁷ In *Oratio*, Empedocles considered the form of true friendship and argued, "through the symbols of strife and friendship, or of war and peace, the dual nature that is set in our souls: one of them lifts us upwards to the heavens and the other drags us down into the depths." The Pythagoreans were also his intercessors: "this is the friendship that the Pythagoreans call the end of all philosophy, that peace which God makes in His heavens, which the angels who came down to earth announced to men of good will so that these men would, ascending to heaven, be transformed by it into angels."²⁸

²⁵ G. Pico, *Heptaplus*, ed. Garin, p. 268: "quo quid miserius? quid despiciatius et contemptibilis? fieri scilicet pedissequos bestiarum, quarum nos duces natura statuerat." (English translation: D. Carmichael, *The Heptaplus*, p. 118).

²⁶ G. Pico, *Heptaplus*, ed. Garin, pp. 326–330.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 330: "De homine autem, etsi diversi diversa senserint, omnes tamen intra humanae facultatis angustias se tenuerunt, vel in ipsa tantum veri investigatione, quod Academici, vel in adeptione potius per studia philosophiae, quod Alfarabius dixit, felicitatem hominis determinantes."

²⁸ G. Pico, *Oratio (De hominis dignitate)*, ed. Garin, p. 116, 118: "interpretetur nobis Iob theologi verba Empedocles philosophus. Hic duplicem naturam in nostris animis sitam, quarum altera sursum tollimur ad caelestia, altera deorsum trudemur ad inferna, per litem et amicitiam, sive bellum et pacem, ut suam testantur carmina, nobis significat [...] Haec est illa amicitia quam totius philosophiae finem esse Pythagorici dicunt, haec illa pax quam facit Deus in excelsis suis, quam angeli in terram descendentes annuntiarunt hominibus bonae voluntatit..." B. Copenhaver, *Magic and the Dignity of Man*, p. 382.

This is what even the “pagan” Socrates wished for, and hoped for when dying: “that the divinity of his soul would be united with the divinity of the higher world” (i.e. with the Neo-Platonic concept of macrocosm).²⁹ These philosophies can indeed “harmonize” all the schisms between the different schools and can even bridge the discord in human nature, as Empedocles had already pointed out.³⁰ But they do not lead us completely to theological peace and true felicity. It was only Job who made a “covenant” with God and thus also offered peace to all people. In other words, he allowed the contemplative scholar to move away from philosophical speculative truth and to achieve its true theological dimension as well. Job, therefore, rightly became the promise of the activation of the higher intellectual part of the human soul.³¹

In *Conclusiones* and in *Heptaplus*, Pico did not hesitate to listen further to the views of some Arab and Jewish scholars (Al-Farabi, Averroes, Maimonides, Ibn Tufyal) who in their works reflected on the union of human possible intellect with the higher and separate active intellect: “Man’s greatest [felicity] is achieved when the active intellect is conjoined to the possible intellect as its form. This conjunction has been perversely and incorrectly understood by the other Latins, whom I have read, and especially by John of Jandun, who not only in this, but in almost all questions in philosophy, totally corrupted and twisted the doctrine of Averroes” (*Conclusiones*); “Avicenna, Averroes, Abu Bakr, Alexander, and the Platonists seem to allow somewhat more, basing our reason, as on its proper and, on the active intellect, or on some greater one which is nevertheless related to us; but they lead man neither to his beginning nor to his end” (*Heptaplus*). Pico here, probably under the influence of his teacher Medigo, accused the French theologian John of Jandun and some other Latin intellectuals (Aquinas, Duns Scotus) of not having sufficiently understood Averroes’ doctrine of the union (*copulatio*) of the human intellect with the separate active intellect.³²

²⁹ M. Ficino, *Opera omnia*, pp. 1389; *De amore* VII, 2, p. 242; Bessarion, *In calumniatorem Platonis*, p. 442–443; M.J.B. Allen, *Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation*, Firenze 1998, p. 209; G. Pico, *Oratio (De hominis dignitate)*, ed. Garin, p. 126: “Hunc gallum moriens Socrates, cum divinitatem animi sui divinitati maioris mundi copulaturum se speraret.” G. Pico, *Heptaplus*, ed. Garin, p. 368. Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 131a–133c; *Phaidros* 118a.

³⁰ G. Pico, *Conclusiones* 71, p. 93: “Empedocles per litem et amicitiam in anima nihil aliud intellegit quam potentiam sursum ductivam et deorsum ductivam in ea, quas ego credo proportionari in scientia sephirot aeternitati et decori.” G. Pico, *Commento*, ed. Garin, p. 496: “Ma più perfettamente parlò Empedocle, ponendo, non la discordia per sè, ma insieme con la discordia la varietà delle nature di che si compongono, e per la Concordia l’unione di quelle; e però disse solo in Dio non essere discordia perchè in lui non è unione di diverse nature anzi è essa unità semplice senza composizione alcuna...”

³¹ G. Pico, *Conclusiones* 24, p. 82: “Cum dixit Iob, qui facit pacem in excelsis suis, aquam intellexit australem et ignem septentrionalem, et praefectos illorum, de quibus non est ultra dicendum.” Compare with *The Book of Bahir*: “Quid est etiam hoc e regione alterius fecit elohim? Creavit formabile et posuit locum eius in pace, quia scribitur faciens pacem in excelsis suis. Docet quod Michael archangelus dextre dei sancti et benedicti Aque et Grandinis, et Gabriel archangelus sinistre eius et ignis, posuit pacem inter eos. Arbiter est. Et hoc est quod scribitur faciens pacem in excelsis suis.” Job 25:2; G. Pico, *Oration on the Dignity of Man. A New Translation and Commentary*, F. Borghesi, M. Papio, M. Riva (eds.), Cambridge 2012, pp. 85–87. C. Wirszubski, “Giovanni Pico’s Book of Job,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 32 [1] (1969), pp. 171–199.

³² G. Pico, *Conclusiones* 3, pp. 67–68: “Felicitas ultima hominis est cum continuatur intellectus agens possibili ut forma; quam continuationem et Latini alii quos legi et maxime Iohannes de Gandavo perverse et erronee intellexit, qui non solum in hoc sed ferme in omnibus quaesitis philosophiae, doctri-

Behind this apparent conflict there is also Pico's concordant effort to create a bridge between the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions, and consequently between Arabic and Latin interpreters. Pico did not hide such an ambition in his *Oratio*, as the following shows: "the one about reconciling the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, could have led me—beyond any suspicion of deliberately piling the numbers up—to propose hundreds of theses, not to say more, if I had worked point by point through those issues where others find discord but I find harmony?"³³ It is possible, however, that Pico was further inspired by Alemanno and shared with him a list of Arab and Greek intellectuals (Alexander of Aphrodisias, Averroes, Ibn Tufayl). Indeed, in *Hay ha-'Olamim*, the Rabbi held that although these thinkers pointed out ways or means of attaining adherence to the active intellect, they were unable to achieve the true felicity. Another reason for the failure of the Arab thinkers may also have been that they introduced concepts of a unified intellect that was not entirely consistent with Christian doctrine (as the immortality of the individual human soul would have been threatened). This is obviously related to Pico's acceptance of the views of the Arab scholars in *Heptaplus* provided that they presented their reflections on the unification of the intellect within the framework of philosophical (natural) felicity: "I neither reject nor despise their arguments and opinions, if they are taken as speaking only of natural felicity. But it is certain that through this, neither [people] nor angels can be exalted any more highly than they say."³⁴

According to Pico, it was understandable that the prophet Moses was a guide to philosophical felicity. He was the first in the genealogy of the ancient theologians (*prisci theologii*) to draw on the sources of divine wisdom.³⁵ However, even Moses could not lead man to true (theological) felicity. This role was therefore entrusted to Christ, who became the guarantor of salvation for all people (Jews and Gen-

nam Avenrois corruptit omnino et depravavit." G. Pico, *Heptaplus*, ed. Garin, p. 330: "Dare aliquid plus visi Avicenna, Averrois, Abubacher, Alexander et Platonici, nostram rationem in intellectu, qui actu est, aut aliquo superiore, nobis tamen cognato, quasi in suo fine firmantes, sed neque hi hominem ad suum principium nec ad suum finem adducunt." G. Pico, *Conclusiones* 14, p. 84: "In materia de obiecto intellectus non discordat ut creditur, sed concordat Thomas et Scotus." Aristoteles, *Metaph.* XII 3, 1070a; Aristoteles, *DA* I 4, 408b; II 1, 413a. E.P. Mahoney, "G. Pico della Mirandola and E. del Medigo, N. Vernia, and A. Nifo," [in:] *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Convegno internazionale di studi nel cinquecentesimo anniversario della morte (1494–1994)*, G.C. Garfagnini (ed.), Firenze 1997, pp. 127–156; B. Nardi, *Saggi sull'aristotelismo padovano dal secolo XV al secolo XVI*, Firenze 1958, pp. 127–146; O. Akopyan, "One More (Unsuccessful) Reconciliation: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola on Averroes and Islamic Philosophy," [in:] *Averroism Between the 15th and 17th Century*, J. Matula (ed.), Nordhausen 2020, pp. 82–98; K.P. Bland, "Elijah del Medigo, Unicity of the Intellect and Immortality," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 61 (1995), pp. 1–22; G. Licata, *Secundum Avenroem. Pico della Mirandola, Elia del Medigo e la "seconda rivelazione" di Averroè*, Palermo 2022, pp. 142–144.

³³ G. Pico, *Oratio (De hominis dignitate)*, ed. Garin, pp. 162–164: "quod scilicet de concilianda Platonis Aristotelisque philosophia [...] locus scilicet omnes in quibus dissidere alii, convenire ego illos existimo particulatim enumerantem?" "Appendix A: Pico's Oration," pp. 481–482.

³⁴ G. Pico, *Heptaplus*, ed. Garin, p. 330: "Quas ego eorum disputationes atque sententias nec reprobo nec aspernor, si de naturali se tantum felicitate dicere videantur" (English translation: D. Carmichael, *The Heptaplus*, p. 150). F. Lelli, "Prisca Philosophia..." pp. 53–99; F. van Steenberghen, *La philosophie au XIII siècle*, Louvain 1991, pp. 321–425.

³⁵ G. Pico, *Apologia*, pp. 175–176; *Oratio (De hominis dignitate)*, ed. Garin, p. 156; *Commento*, ed. Garin, p. 580; *Heptaplus*, ed. Garin, pp. 170–172. F. Mithridates, *Sermo*, p. 101.

tiles) by his coming into the world in the form of the incarnate Word (*verbum*): “The Messiah brought peace for [people], but not for all. The angels did not say simply ‘and on the earth peace to [people],’ but added ‘to [people] of good will’ The same sun which gives light to pure eyes darkens and blinds the weak and feeble, and it is with good reason that He who is Savior to the good is hurtful to the wicked.”³⁶ The attribute of the true Messiah is also the sun, in which he placed his tabernacle (representing the angelic world), as the ancient Platonists already knew: “when Plato in the Republic calls the sun the visible son of God, why may we not understand it as the image of the invisible Son?”³⁷ So Christ is “the invisible sun, who is coeternal and co-equal with the Father.” And by his light he pierces even all the darkness of human sin: “Because for light to come to be is nothing but for light to participate, most fitting is that explanation of the Kabbalists that in the *Let there be light* we understand *light* to be a Mirror That Shines and in the *There was light* a Mirror That Does Not Shine.”³⁸ Such a mirror symbolizes Christ. Pico again takes inspiration from the Dionysian triad and communicates that Christ is the one who purifies, illuminates, and fills angels and people with grace.³⁹ Here, then, there is also a strong Christological and soteriological aspect. If in *Oratio* the man-Adam was the centre of all events, in *Heptaplus* Christ already becomes the centre. The Christological motif is also underlined by the fact that the true Messiah is the giver of true freedom, to which man can be raised precisely by his grace: “Then after the ineffable sacrifice performed on the altar of the cross, when Christ had come down to them, he swept them to freedom like the moving power of a whirlwind and carried them up to the level of highest felicity.”⁴⁰

How can the meditating scholar achieve such a goal? This is the task of sacred theology, for only through it can one see the “invisible mysteries of God” and thus attain perfection (*perfectio*). If *homo* wants to experience it, he must go through

³⁶ G. Pico, *Heptaplus*, ed. Garin, p. 358: “Attulit pacem Messias hominibus, sed non omnibus. Neque enim dictum ab angelis simpliciter ‘et in terra pax hominibus,’ sed adiectum ‘hominibus bonae voluntatis.’ Utique idem sol qui puros oculos illuminat, aegros et debiles caecat et obscurat, et recta fit ratione, ut qui bonis est salutaris, idem malis sit noxius” (English translation: D. Carmichael, *The Heptaplus*, pp. 162–163). Luke 2:14.

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 360: “cum solem in Republica Plato visibilem filium Dei appellet, cur non intelligamus nos imaginem esse invisibilis filii?” (English translation: D. Carmichael, *The Heptaplus*, p. 163). Plato, *Republica*, VI, 508e.

³⁸ G. Pico, *Conclusiones* 53, p. 112: “Cum fieri lucem nihil aliud quam participare lucem conveniens est valde illa Cabalistarum expositio, ut in ly, fiat lux, per lucem speculum lucens intelligamus, et in ly facta est lux, speculum non lucens” (English translation: “Appendix C: Selections from Pico’s 900 Conclusions,” in B. Copenhaver, *Magic and the Dignity of Man*, p. 500). C. Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola’s Encounter...*, pp. 37–38; E.R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, Princeton 1994, pp. 147–148.

³⁹ G. Pico, *Heptaplus*, ed. Garin, p. 266: “ut homo Christus, qua homo est, si credimus Dionysio, angelos doceat, illuminet et perficit, tanto, ut inquit Paulus, melior angelis effectus, quanto differentius prae illis nomen hereditavit, sed et nos omnes, quibus data potests filios Dei fieri per gratiam cuius dator est Christus, supra angelicam dignitatem evehi possumus.”

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 338: “Cum post peractum in ara crucis ineffabile sacrificium, descendente ad eos Christo, ab eo uti motore circumacti momento turbinis ad libertatem et evecti ad summae felicitates gradum fuerunt.”

a process of purification (*purgatio*), otherwise he will remain in the power of demons (e.g. Azazel): “One who works at Kabbalah and mixes in nothing extraneous, if he stays long at the work, will die from *binsica*, and if he makes a mistake in the work or comes to it unpurified, he will be devoured by Azazel through the Attribute of Judgment.”⁴¹ But who mediates the purifying phase? In the second preface to *Heptaplus* we find the following passage, “the heavens are on that account called by the Hebrew *asciamaim*, as if composed of *es* and *maim*, that is, of the fire and water...”⁴² Such a dictum evidently agrees with the following proposition: “Through a saying of Kabbalists that the heavens are made of Fire and Water, in one a stroke we are shown both a theological truth about the *Sefirot* themselves and the philosophical truth that elements are in the heavens only by their active power.”⁴³ Pico’s source is probably the *Book of Bahir*. “Fire” symbolizes the sefirah *Din* (judgment), while “water” corresponds to the sefirah *Hesed* (grace). In *Liber de radicibus* we further read that “the heavens” may also be a metaphorical designation for the sefirah *Tiferet*, which, as we already know, corresponds to the figure of the righteous Messiah, or Christ as an active force.⁴⁴ That is why Pico

⁴¹ G. Pico, *Conclusiones* 13, p. 109: “Qui operatur in Cabala sine admixtione extranei, si diu erit in opere, morietur ex binsica, et si errabit in opere auto non purificatus accesserit, devorabitur ab Azazele per proprietatem iudicii.” G. Pico, *Conclusiones* 21, p. 81: “Qui sciet proprietatem quae est secretum tenebrarum. Sciet cur mali demones plus in nocte quam die nocent.” Pico’s source is probably Recanati (fols. 7vb–8ra, Ch. Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola’s Encounter...*, p. 38): “And God called the light day: the word called here means drew and invited. Accordingly, the meaning of the verse is: he drew the property of the day to the day and the property of the night to the night. And because the property of strict judgment rules at night, its emissaries roam the world [at that time], this being the reason why the dominance of evil spirits is greater at night than in daytime.” Compare with the Wisdom of Zohar (*The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*, I. Tishby, F. Lachower (eds.), transl. D. Goldstein, vol. 2, Oxford 1989 [reprint 1993], p. 652): “They are the *Fallen down*—this is Uzza, whom the Holy One, blessed be He, cast down into the depth of darkness, and who dwells in the depth up to his neck, as we have said, and darkness is scattered before him. So he is called *fallen down*: he fell from heaven, and then he fell again into the depth of darkness. Azazel is the one *with opened eyes*, because darkness was not scattered over him, because he did not protest or rage against Heaven like the one [mentioned] above.” Leviticus 16:8.

⁴² G. Pico, *Heptaplus*, ed. Garin, p. 184: “caelum natura media idcirco ab Hebraeis asciamaim, quasi ex es et maim, idest ex igne et aqua quam diximus, compositum nuncupatur” (English translation: D. Carmichael, *The Heptaplus*, p. 75).

⁴³ G. Pico, *Conclusiones* 67, p. 113: “Per dictum Cabalistarum, quod Coeli sunt ex igne et aqua, simul et veritatem theologicam de ipsis Sephirot nobis manifestat, et philosophicam veritatem, quod elementa in coelo sint tantum secundum activam virtutem.”

⁴⁴ *The Book of Bahir* 59/40, pp. 150–151: “Quid est celi? Hoc scilicet quod docet cepisse Deum sanctum et benedictum ignem et aquam et agglutinasse ea simul et fecisse ex eis principium verbis suis ut scribitur principium verbi tui veritatis, et hoc est quod scribitur xamaim idest celi [...] Dixerunt ei usque huc facit pacem in excelsis suis, posuit inter eos pacem et fraternitatem ut daret pacem inter nos et charitatem.” *Liber de radicibus*, fol. 261r (Wirszubski, p. 181): “א״ל״ל״ sine he idest celi indicat Tiphereth. cum he vero quandoque indicat Intelligentiam, quandoque ipsam Tiphereth. et significat hassamaim ly celi.” See also: G. Pico, *Conclusiones* 27, p. 82: “Sicut congregatio aquarum est iustus, ita mare ad quod tendunt omnia flumina est divinitas.” Pico was probably inspired by Recanati as well (see fol. 9va, Ch. Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola’s Encounter...*, p. 42): “this is the house of assembly of waters from above, for it is there that all waters gather together and thence they flow and issue. Rabbi Hiyya said: *the gathering of waters*; this is Saddiq, the Righteous...” Acts 3:13–14.

thought that “the kabbalists inevitably have to concede this: that the true Messiah will purify [people] through water.” But He no longer dies, He conquers death and overcomes even the devil whom He has cast down under our feet.⁴⁵

In *Heptaplus* the thesis is developed and refined. According to Pico, the power of water is most manifested in baptism, for then we receive the proper power of God:

it was the supreme gift of incarnate Word that through the sacrament of baptism, by which the virtue of Christ is transfused into us, we may be reborn as sons of God, born not of blood, but of God... After the gentiles and Jews had been converted to Christ, it remained for them, shaping themselves to the cross of the Lord through the holy bath, to be re-made in the image of God...

This is the reason why we may call ourselves sons of God, who are not born of blood (like the old Adam) but of God (like the second Adam).⁴⁶ The time is finally propitious when, after the six days of creation, the day of the triumphant Sabbath (*yovelot*) arrives: in other words, the age of Jubilee is coming, “Whoever knows in the Kabbalah the mystery of the gates if intelligence will understand the mystery of the great jubilee.”⁴⁷ Pico here connects Pythagorean philosophy with the Kabbalistic method of exegesis (i.e. *gematria*).⁴⁸ “One who knows what the denary is in formal arithmetic and recognizes the nature of the first spherical number will

⁴⁵ G. Pico, *Conclusiones* 40, p. 111: “Hoc habent inevitabiliter concedere Cabalistsae, quod verus Messias per aquam homines purgabit.” *Conclusions* 45, p. 111: “Scitur ex Cabala apertissime, cur Dei filius cum aqua baptismi venerit, et spiritus sanctus cum igne,” G. Pico, *Heptaplus*, ed. Garin, p. 266: “Adsit Ille nobis et laqueum conterat, qui et contrivit Sathanam sub nostris pedibus, Iesus Christus primogenitus omnis creaturae...” Matthew 3:11–12. C. Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter...*, pp. 180–181; Compare with Recanati's *Commentary on the Daily Prayers* (4. 1, pp. 207–208): “Purificatio autem hec non fit nisi cum aqua. Tu vero nosti antequam laventur manus inheret eis et habitat cacopneuma quod dicitur raha. Et secretum huius rei est quod indicant sapientes nostri, quod in nocte est inperium proprietatis iudicii, de qua scribitur pones tenebras et facis noctem in qua repunt omnia animalia silve. Proprietas enim iudicii vocatur laïla, idest nox. Quando igitur venit dies, quod est proprietas clemenciarum, faciu[n]t illum transire per aquas ad indicandum proprietatem pietatis ubi sunt aque superiores et benedictio et bonitas venit in mundum per purificationem que fit per aquas...”

⁴⁶ G. Pico, *Heptaplus*, ed. Garin, p. 286, 372: “Verum sicut omnes in primo Adam, qui oboedivit Sathanae magis quam Deo cuius filii secundum carnem, deformati ab homine degeneramus ad brutum, ita in Adam novissimo Iesu Christo qui voluntatem Patris implevit et suo sanguine debellavit nequitias spiritales, cuius filii omnes secundum spiritum, reformati per gratiam regeneramus ab homine in adoptione filiorum Dei, si modo ut in illo ita in nobis princeps tenebrarum et mundi huius nihil invenerit [...] Quoniam autem supremum beneficium corporati Verbi id fuit, ut per Baptismi sacramentum, per quod virtus Christi in nos transfunditur, regeneremur in filios Dei non ex sanguinibus sed ex Deo nati [...] Conversis enim ad Christum gentibus et Iudaeis, hoc erat reliquum, ut per sanctissimum lavacrum dominicae cruci se conformantes, reformarentur ad imaginem Dei” (English translation: D. Carmichael, *The Heptaplus*, p. 169).

⁴⁷ G. Pico, *Conclusines*, 13, p. 81: “Qui noverit in Cabala mysterium portarum intelligentiae, cognoscat mysterium magni Iobelei.” Compare with Gikatilla's *Portae iustitiae*, Cod. Chigi, fols. 128–129r (Ch. Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter...*, p. 32): “Si vero intellexeris secretum Iobelei et secretum quinquaginta portarum Intelligentiae intelliges hoc misterium intellectu perfecto. Et jam volo tibi declarare. Scias quod [...] Et scias quod hec numeratio vocatur Iobeleus et sic textus [Lev 25:11] dicit Jobeleus est annus quinquagesimi anni erit vobis, equidem quinquaginta quod est secretum quinquaginta portarum Intelligentiae.”

⁴⁸ Gematria—one of the kabbalistic mystical techniques (*notarikon*, *themurah*), where the letters of the Hebrew alphabet are represented as numbers. Compare with Blau's definition of gematria: “the sum of numerical equivalents of the letters of two or more words was the same, the worlds might be

know what I still have not read in any Kabbalist, which is that in Kabbalah this is the foundation of the secret of the Great Jubilee.”⁴⁹

Pico probably proceeds from Gikatilla’s *Portae Iustitiae*, but he also combines it with the trinitarian and eschatological vision of Joachim of Fiore, which is symbolized by the three ages: i.e. God the Father (Old Testament), the Son (New Testament), and the Holy Spirit (Eternal Testament): “From the mystery of the three letters in the word Sabbath, we can interpret Kabbalistically that the world will sabbatize when the Son of God becomes man, and that ultimately the Sabbath will come when [people] are regenerated in the Son of God.”⁵⁰ Here, Pico uses as his source the *Expositio super decem numerationum*, which discusses the mystery of the great Sabbath that will occur in the fiftieth age, the enumeration of which includes the fifty gates, called the fifty gates of intelligence (symbolizing the sefirah *Binah*): “From the principle in the preceding conclusion one can equally know the secret of the fifty gates of intelligence, and of the thousandth generation, and of the kingdom of all ages.”⁵¹ However, it is possible, as Brian Ogren points out, that Pico also combines the *Expositio* with the reasoning of Nahmanides, in whose conception the cycle of the *shmittot* comprises forty-nine years (thus the number seven in the basis, which corresponds also to the seven lower sephiroth), while the number fifty already refers to the age of jubilees (*yovelot*). That’s why the pure soul, which is detached from everything corporeal (material), turns and returns in

considered identical and used interchangeably,” J. Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance*, New York 1944, pp. 8–9.

⁴⁹ G. Pico, *Conclusiones* 68, p. 113: “Qui sciverit quid sit denarius in Arithmetica formali, et cognoverit naturam primi numeri sphaerici, sciet illud quod ego adhuc aliquem Cabaliam non legi, et est quod sit fundamentum secreti magni Iobelei in Cabala” (English translation: B. Copenhaver, *Magic and the Dignity of Man*, p. 501).

⁵⁰ G. Pico, *Conclusiones* 16, p. 109: “Ex mysterio trium litterarum, quae sunt in dictione Sciabat, id est possumus interpretari Cabalistiche tunc sabatizare mundum, cum Dei filius fit homo, et ultimo futurum sabbatum cum homines in Dei filium regenerabuntur.” Compare with John 14:2–3. B. McGinn, *The Calabrian Abbot: Joachim of Fiore in the History of Western Thought*, New York 1985, pp. 161–200.

⁵¹ G. Pico, *Conclusiones* 69, p. 113: “Ex fundamento praecedentis conclusionis sciri pariter potest secretum quinquaginta portarum intelligentiae, et millesimae generationis, et regni omnium seculorum. Expositio decem numerationum,” Vat. Ebr. 191, f. 73r (C. Black, *Pico’s Heptaplus and Biblical Hermeneutics*, Leiden–Boston 2006, p. 227): “Sabbatum magnum est magnus Iobeleus et dicitur magnum quia constat ex septem ebdomadibus annorum; et dicitur annus quinquagesimus; et hec numeratio habet quinquaginta portas que dicuntur porte intelligentie quas omnes deus sanctus et benedictus tradidit moysi doctori nostro preter unam et ideo hec numeratio dicitur iobel et est sabatum magnum quia indicat legem de ore natam, que exponit legem scriptam que vocatur mons domini et hoc est secretum textus dicentis cum secuti fuerint Iubeleum tunc ipsi ascendent in monte.” Nahmanides, “Dal commentario alla Torah: introduzione e commento a Genesi 1–3,” transl. S. Campanini, M. Perani, [in:] M. Idel, M. Perani, *Nahmanide esegeta e cabalista: Studi e testi*, Firenze 2020, pp. 304–305. Compare with Nahmanides, 1853, [in:] B. Ogren, “The Forty-Nine Gates of Wisdom as Forty-Nine Ways to Christ: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s Heptaplus and Nahmanidean Kabbalah,” *Rinascimento* 49 (2009), p. 39: “The Holy One, blessed is He, blessed the world-to-come, which begins in the seventh millennium, and as I have already said, the matter of these millenia and that which comes with them are hinted at in the decree of the *shmittah* and the *yovel*. And the counting of the *’omer* follows seven weeks, and the fiftieth day is holy.”

an act of mystical union. Corazzol, however, believes that Pico may have drawn further from Recanati, in whom both these cycles (*shmittot* and *yovelot*) also appear. His view is apparently supported by the *Liber de secretis*, which discusses the mystery of the great Jubilee, towards which (a.k.a. *teshuva*) everything points. According to Wirszubski, the term *teshuva* (“the quality of repentance”) refers to the formless substance (*tohu*) and, on a symbolic level, to the sefirah *Hokhmah*, or the sefirah *Binah*, as some Jewish kabbalists believe.⁵²

In Pico's conception, however, this is the moment in which people will be restored and will rest perfectly in Christ. True (theological) felicity (*felicitas ultima*) thus consists in a return to its beginning. This is characterized in *Heptaplus* as the union of the small human world with the great God's world, understood with Christ as the wisdom, which can also be expressed as the reunion of the Shekinah (sefirah *Malkhut*, cf. above) and the sefirah *Tiferet*.⁵³ The true Messiah becomes both the guarantor of the new covenant and the fulfillment of the whole divine law, as also follows from this dictum:

because the law of God's wisdom decreed among them a pact of peace and friendship in conformity with the kinship and mutual harmony of their natures. This pact is good, therefore, because it is directed and oriented toward God, who is the good itself [...] Let us also copy the holy pact of the world, so that we may be united together in mutual charity, and that at the same time, through the true love of God, we may all achieve our felicity and become one with Him.⁵⁴

⁵² G. Corazzol, “L'influsso di Mitridate sulla concezione picchiana di cabala,” [in:] M. Perani, G. Corazzol, *Flavio Mitridate mediatore fra culture nel contesto dell'ebraismo siciliano del XV secolo*, Palermo 2012, p. 199 (166). See also M. Recanati, *Commentary...*, p. 248: “Omnis generatio est quinquaginta annorum ex quibus co[n]stat iobeleus, ac si dixisset ad quinquaginta milia annorum, quod est magnus iobeleus. Et hoc est secretum iobelei, de quo scribitur anno iobelei huiusmodi redibit dominus et cetera et omnia redibunt ad tesuvam. Et ideo dicitur thesuva reductio et alio nomine iobel.” C. Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter...*, p. 176.

⁵³ G. Pico, *Heptaplus*, ed. Garin, p. 380: “Est enim α et ω (ut scribit Ioannes), et ipse principium se appellavit; et nos demonstravimus finem omnium rerum esse, ut in principio suo restituantur [...] Primum igitur illud advertendum, vocari a Mose mundum hominem magnum. Nam si homo est parvus mundus, utique mundus est magnus homo.” G. Pico, *Conclusiones* 17, p. 35: “Ubi cumque in scriptura fit mentio amoris maris et feminae nobis mystice designatur coniuncto Tipheret et Chieneseth Israel, vel Beth et Tipheret.” Recanati, fol. 212ra: “I have already made known to you that the secret of the union of a man with his wife is the union of Tiferet with the Shekinah...” See also M.J.B. Allen, “Cultura Hominis: Giovanni Pico, Marsilio Ficino and the Idea of Man,” [in:] *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola*, G.C. Garfagnini. (ed.), Firenze 1997, p. 194; R.B. Waddington, “The Sun at the Center: Structure as Meaning in Pico della Mirandola's Heptaplus,” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 3 (1973), pp. 75–80.

⁵⁴ G. Pico, *Heptaplus*, p. 382: “Quod foedus ideo est bonum, quia ad Deum, qui est ipsum bonum, ita dirigitur et ordinatur [...] Imitemur et nos sanctissimum foedus mundi, ut et mutua caritate invicem simus unum et simul omnes per veram Dei dilectionem cum illo unum feliciter evadamus” (English translation: D. Carmichael, *The Heptaplus*, pp. 173–174); *ibidem*, p. 372: “Qui igitur Spiritu vivunt, ii sunt filii Dei, ii Christi fratres, ii destinati aeternae hereditati, quam mercedem et fidei et bene actae vitae in caelesti Hierusalem, feliciter possidebunt;” G. Pico, *Expositiones in Psalmos*, A. Raspanti (ed.), Firenze 1997, pp. 212–214: “Scimus in civitate terrena montem Syon electum in primis in quo templum erat. Videamus in superiori Hierosolima quod sit Domini templum. Ipse nos docet Ioannes dicens templum ibi esse Deum; quod si ita est, quem Domini dicemus montem? Certe ipsum Christum, quem unum plenitudo divinitatis inhabitat: ipse ille est mone, ita ut impleret universam faciem terrae; et utique si iri supernam Hierusalem id futurum est praecipuum, scilicet contemplatio, quod vel ipsa

Conclusion

We can conclude that Pico's *Oratio* was just a sort of elegant introductory speech of the forthcoming debate on the Nine Hundred Theses, which, due to circumstances, never happened. Nevertheless, in it, Pico already sketched out the anthropological-theological and philosophical themes that he gradually developed in *Commento* and in *Heptaplus*. It can be said that this speech itself was not primarily a celebration of the dignity of man, consisting, among other things, in his ability to control the world, as Garin or Yates thought. It is thus more possible to accept the interpretations of Farmer, Trinkaus, and Copenhaver.

On the other hand, the purified *homo contemplativus* does not merely become a "minister" and an interpreter of divine things (as Farmer believed), but he also penetrates into the essence of divinity, the culmination of which is supernatural felicity (*felicitas supernaturalis*), which is perhaps most clearly manifested in Pico's *Heptaplus*. Apart from the above, it must also be admitted that already in *Oratio* Pico is inspired by the Jewish sources (Nahmanides, Recanati, Gersonides) mediated to him by Mithridates. But he later transformed these motifs into *Heptaplus*, where he was influenced by the kabbalistic conception of Alemanno as well.

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nuncupatio montis Syon indicat, alii ne hoc attribuamus quam illi qui est veritas et sapientia Patris et cuius lumine omnium oculi ad veri contemplationem attollentur."

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