THE AVATARS OF DIGNITY

A STUDY IN THE IMAGERY OF HUMANISM

DISSERTATION

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THE AVATARS OF DIGNITY:
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

What surmounts the reach
Of human sense, I shall delineate so,
By lik'ning spiritual to corporal forms,
As may express them best...

((Yet)) who, though with the tongue
Of Angels, can relate, or to what things
Lik'en on Earth conspicuous, that may lift
Human imagination to such highth
Of Godlike Power?

Paradise Lost

Creating avatars for good and evil and sensualizing—that is, materializing for the imagination—the consequences of beatitude or malediction are not properly the office of the theologian or the philosopher. Both, to be sure, have occasionally invoked strange muses to dramatize their systems, but few would impugn their effectiveness in their peculiar callings simply because they failed as image makers. One does not, after all, insist on finely coalescing sensibilities in the realm of exposition and argument. On the other hand, sometimes one misses them. Especially one misses them in the exertions of such bridge builders and ferrymen as would secure our passage to the Happy Isles and Beyond. Creators of, or commentators on, the most severe ethical disciplines generally find no
difficulty in detailing (at times with excruciating minuteness) the immolation, the self-denial, and the pain necessary in attainment to bliss. But having climbed the steep and thorny path they look about them on a vague and abstract world, which, though it may be a justification for, is pretty generally an anticlimax to that heroic dedication exerted along the pathway. Such expositors may impose intellectual coordinates on an indescribable beatitude; they may calculate eternal providence with analogy, syllogism, dialectic, and—if they are mystics—with the baffling symbolism of revelation. Seldom, however, will they feelingly persuade the uninitiate of the blessedness of the elect.

One might argue that such bloodless abstractions constitute no rhetorical weakness at all; that they are necessary instruments in a kind of intellectual trial flight over realms of the ineffable, whereunto human feeling might not, in the very nature of things, approach. But appeals to the ineffable can be abused, and surely one is justified at times in attributing a crucial absence of feeling to the failure of the philosopher as poet: that which passeth understanding passeth not necessarily the feeling images of a great poet, though it well, it may be, from an Altitudo. But whether one believes that certain thoughts lie indeed too deep for tears or whether one feels that the concept of the ineffable has been cheapened by prosy
commentators who attribute to it their inability to write movingly of splendid things, the fact remains that those whose special province it has been to expound heaven to the laity have generally failed to inform that region with the shape, energy, color, and mobility necessary to make it appealing to the imagination.

Poets of the English Renaissance were sharply aware of this failure and of the desirability of invigorating the language of ethics and theology. As poets they assumed the responsibility for doing so. It was, of course, only natural the they should: poetry and philosophy had long, in the view of the most articulate critics, had a common goal, and the poet had the advantage over the philosopher in that he could most successfully give it "corporal form."

"For though their destination is the same as that of the philosophers," Boccaccio wrote in his Genealogy of the Gentile Gods (ca. 1360), the poets:

...do not arrive by the same road. The philosopher, everyone knows, by a process of syllogizing, disproves what he considers false, and in like manner proves his theory, and does all this as obviously as he can. The poet conceives his thought by contemplation, and, wholly without the help of syllogism, veils it as subtly and skilfully as he can under the outward semblance of his invention.¹


Boccaccio prefaced these distinctions to a defense of poets, against whom the Gossons and Agrippas of his own
time had brought the charge that they were either out­
right liars or the servile apes of the philosophers. He
concludes rather that they are the apes of nature, inasmuch
as they perceive "the shattering force of the winds, the
roar and crackling of flames, the thunder of the waves,
high mountains and shady groves, and rivers in their
courses.... It would be better for such critics," he
asserts of his opponents, "if they would use their best
efforts to make us all become apes of Christ, rather than
jeer at the labors of poets, which they do not understand."2

2. Ibid., 80

Boccaccio may not have intended his juxtaposition of a
list of the poet's "outward semblances of invention" and
his adjuration to his critics to "make us all become apes
of Christ" as a suggestion that poets by recreating the
forms of nature succeed also in the second enterprise--
that, in effect, the poet sensualizes God--but an inference
of this sort could not be very wide of the mark, since,
having the same destination as the philosopher, the poet
must perforce sensualize truth, which, of course, in
Boccaccio's time was identical with the Christian Godhead.

This high purpose of poetry was reaffirmed by the
poet-critics of Renaissance England. Sidney, Jonson,
Chapman and Milton are particularly explicit on the poet
as aesthetic teleologist. Sidney's observation that
poetry should teach delightfully probably came to him from his reading in the literary criticism of the Italian Ren­naissance. He could, however, have been led to it from a purely theological source, from Philip of Mornay's Treweness of the Christian Religion, the preface and first six chapters of which Sidney had translated. In his Preface Mornay submits that atheists are abroad in dangerous numbers, that the time has come to "chafe them a heat which are waxed cold":

And that is to bee done by painting out the true religion lively before their eyes with the joy, happines, and glorie which insue thereupon, to the intent that the voluptuous may seeke their joy, the covetous their gaine, and the ambitious their glorie there, bending themselves with their whole harts unto that alone, which all onely can fill their harts, and satisfie their desires.3

3. The Works of Sir Philip Sidney, ed., Albert Feuillerat, Cambridge University Press, 1923, III, 251. Sidney's translation is actually a free and vigorous paraphrase of Mornay. The remaining portions of the work were later translated by Golding, who apparently was more faithful to the original, though much less capable than Sidney at "painting out" the spirit of the work. For a comparison of the two styles of translation see Feuillerat's introductory comments to the text of Sidney's translation, III, ix-x.

That a lively depiction of the true religion was the responsibility of poets and an accomplishment exclusive to the finest poetry Sidney manifestly believed, the central doctrine of his Apology being that of all the realms of discourse poetry alone moves the percipient to virtue and that it does so by sensualizing the abstract ideas of the
sciences, and that these have always virtue as their ob­ject: "As vertue is the most excellent resting place for al worldly learning to make his end of, so Poetry, being the most familiar to teach it, and the most princely to move towards it, in the most excellent worke is the most excellent workeman."4 If one is familiar with the Ren-

4. Ibid., III, 21-22

aisance concept of virtue he may read into various portions of the Apology the notion that poetry by wedding passion to the highest and most remote reaches of human thought provides the ultimate in human achievement. Sidney does not, however, stress the notion that virtue, since it is common ground for all the sciences is hence more abstract than any of them, and that thus the poet moves in an atmosphere of universals and essences more rarefied than that of the metaphysician. Such Olympian ascriptions, explicitly set down, had to await the more ruminative pen of the Jacobean and his immediate successors. But Sidney did provide for his age a stirring reaffirmation of the aims and offices of the poet; that these in effect begin at a point beyond which the other realms of discourse cannot penetrate; that the poet and the poet alone can inform those regions that lie beyond the sensible with life and invest beatitude with such dimensions as the imagination can compass and feeling cope with. "Painting the true religion" is a poetic accomplishment which Sidney
best illustrates when he appraises the poetic achievement of the psalmist:

For what else is the awaking his musical instruments, the often and free changing of persons, his notable prospopoeias, when he maketh you, as it were, see God coming in his majesty, his telling of the beasts' joyfulness, and hills' leaping, but a heavenlie poesy, wherein almost he showeth himself a passionate lover of that unspeakable and everlasting bewtie to be seen by the eyes of the mind, only cleared by faith?5

5. Ibid., III, 7

"He maketh you see God coming in his majesty." One can assert without exaggeration that almost all serious poets of the English Renaissance who came after Sidney set themselves at some time or other in their careers to achieve what Sidney claimed for David. Not many of them succeeded in doing so: most could provide only the abstraction unwedded to the image. One suspects that these last failed to distinguish between metered exposition (frequently, it is true, vitiated and distorted by the most wretchedly ill-suited allegories, tropes, and symbols) and the employment of such exposition as the basis of image making. But the fact that poets of this period, regardless of their capabilities, pretty generally assumed the responsibility of transcending formal theology exercised a profound effect upon the aesthetics of the time.

The effect, certainly, was profound upon one of the more interesting and most baffling of Renaissance poets.
George Chapman recognized the high calling of poetry expressed by Sidney and consciously strove—perhaps too consciously—to impassion the remote. In one of his prefaces Chapman observes that an "Absolute poem" is distinguished by a "high and harty invention exprest in most significant, and unaffected phrase." This high invention he equates with an obscurity which "shroudeth it selfe in the hart of his subject, uttered with fitnes of figure, and expressive Epithites." Such utterances he terms "philosophical conceits" or "heaven-high thoughts of nature." Thus far he departs not much from Sidney or Boccaccio, except that in pointing to the matter which a poet ought to deal with he stresses the abstractions remote in the dialectical scheme (the obscurity) with which an "absolute" poet must necessarily deal. Elsewhere, however, he goes considerably beyond Sidney. Virtue (heaven-high thoughts of nature) is an abstraction which the sciences have in common, being not only the fruit but the basis of knowledge. It then follows that the absolute poet deals in universals, since virtue, an abstraction, is his subject, and since that which is most abstract is that which is most pervasive. An essence or a universal
caught in the mirrors of the particular and accidental (and an image is always particular and accidental) will hence generally yield a variety of specific applications—the more pervasive the idea the greater will be the variety of specific things to which it may refer. Chapman thus correlates his obscurity with universals and the universal with the ambiguous:

Poets profess...that their physique intends non socratem sed hominem, not the individual but the universal...: Ever (I say) enclosing within the rinde, some fruit of knowledge howsoever darkened; and (by reason of the obscurity) of ambiguous and different construction.... Est enim ipsa natura universa poesis aenigmatum plena, nec quis eam dignoscit. This ambiguity in the sense, hath given scope to the variety of expositions.7

7. A Justification of Andromeda Liberata, 1614. See Bartlett, 327. "Est enim ipsa," etc.: Plato (?), Alcibiades II, 147. Socrates' observations in full on obscurity in poetry should be of interest to readers of Chapman. The philosopher might indeed have had a Greek Chapman in mind: "For all poetry has by nature an enigmatic character, and it is by no means everybody who can interpret it. And if, moreover, the spirit of poetry happen to seize on a man who is of a begrudging temper and does not care to manifest his wisdom but keeps it to himself as far as he can, it does indeed require an almost superhuman wisdom to discover what the poet would be at."

Ambiguity is hence a symptom of poetic excellence; it is not, however (as some recent critics seem to think), the cause of it: the heaven-high thought is the cause.

"In Chapman especially," T. S. Eliot has remarked, "there is a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling, which is exactly what
we find in Donne. A nominal substitution, that of virtue—or the universal—for thought, reveals that this is exactly what Sidney argues as characteristic of all poets worthy of the name. Chapman, specifically, engaged to "recreate" the universal as that term was construed by the metaphysics popular in his day, i.e., that ultimate Potency from whence all categories of being derive. An "absolute poem" for Chapman must assert essence delightfully. This noble touchstone yields a challenging hypothesis: only ideas remote in the dialectical scheme can be freighted with the absolute in human feeling. Degree of universality in the idea properly determines degree of emotional force: the ideal poet will hence apprehend and express the Divine Hypostasis in intellectually just terms and yet in terms which will feelingly persuade us what it is. This is not to say that Chapman festoons the Deity with an arrangement of appropriate images. His approach is indirect: by providing heaven-high thoughts of nature (i.e., heaven-high thoughts of man) he attempts to dramatize the power of Divine malediction and Divine reward. The potency of that reward is illustrated in Umbra's apostrophe to the dead Bussy D'Ambois:

Look up and see thy spirit made a star:  
Join flames with Hercules, and when thou sett'st  
Thy radiant forehead in the firmament,  
Make the vast crystal crack with thy receipt:
Spread to a world of fire, and the aged sky
Chere with new sparks of old humanity.


Such, for Chapman, is man beatified, in action. Male-diction, too, when it plays upon the human soul requires, for the "outward semblance of the invention," the immense stage and the immense energy. Essentially malediction is the result of a miscalculation of the power of virtue, and any miscalculation of such a power figuratively corrupts the whole of nature. The consequences of such a blunder are suggested in the closing scene of Byron’s Tragedy (1608):

Byron ((on the scaffold)): Is it not pity I should lose my life
By such a bloody and infamous stroke?

Soldier: Now by thy spirit, and thy better Angel
If thou were clear, the continent of France
Would shrink beneath the burthen of thy death
Ere it would bear it.

(V, iv, 321-327)

Graphic representations of energy—an intense energy—and magnitude projected through, or in the ostensible control of, human agencies would seem to constitute for Chapman an important (if not the only) technique for building heaven-high thoughts of nature, for (in the words of his predecessor) painting the true religion lively before our eyes.
It will be at once apparent to readers in the literature of the English Renaissance that this species of liveliness is by no means peculiar to Chapman. Marlowe, Shakespeare, Donne, Sir Thomas Browne, and Milton frequently present human entities—or entities symbolic of the human—in easy control of stupendous cosmic forces to "incarnate" the power of virtue or to write large the terrible effects of crossing it. Cleopatra's dream of the dead Antony, for example, is limned upon the same cosmic framework as Chapman's projection of Bussy:

His face was as the heavens; and therein stuck
A sun and moon, which kept their course and lighted
The little O, the earth....
His legs bestrid the ocean; his rear'd arm
Grested the world: his voice was propertied
As all the tuned spheres, and that to friends;
But when he meant to quail and shake the orb,
He was as rattling thunder.

(V, ii, 79-86)

This for Cleopatra is a vision of manliness rewarded—a materialization, perhaps, of what it meant to "shackle accident and bolt up change" (V, ii, 6). A man, Antony himself had said (Caesar, V, v, 73-75), is one in whom the elements are harmoniously mixed. Take a man, said Hamlet, for all in all, that is, for everything pervading everything—all diffused through all. Such is Antony rewarded and materialized. Such, too, is Posthumus Leonatus as a gentleman in Cymbeline (I, i, 22-27) conceives him:

First Gent.: .... I do not think
So fair an outward and such stuff within
Endows a man but he.
Second Gent.: You speak him far.

First Gent.: I do extend him, sir, within himself,
Crush him together rather than unfold
His measure duly.

The All harmoniously elemented is a synonym for infinity and sometimes for a spiritual infinity in command of a physical one. Chapman in a eulogy on a "soule-loved friend" concludes that the latter, having been exalted beyond the heavens,

...all shall homage to your true-worth owe,
You comprehending all, that all, not you.10

10. To...W. Harriots, ll. 88-89. See Bartlett, op. cit., 383.

The virtuous man embraces the cosmos. In the eyes of Umbra such a man is Bussy; in the eyes of Cleopatra such is Antony. One should note the role of metonymy in such conceptions: Bussy's forehead cracks the firmament; Antony's arm crests the world. Sometimes the pervasiveness of an element or humor will suggest a like order of magnitude.

So Marlowe, in what is perhaps the most magnificent image of the Godhead, embodies the immensity of the Perfect Man: "See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!" "This sea," cries John Donne, in a much less happy metaphor, "this infinite sea of the blood of Christ Jesus!"11

11. Sermon XXXIII. See the Works of John Donne, D.D., Ed., Henry Alford, 1839, II, 73. Donne was much happier with water than with blood: "Draw not up seas to drown me in thy Spheare." See below, 163.
And Macbeth, in quite a different context, uses the same humor to display the scope of malediction:

> Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
> Clean from my hand? No; this my hand will rather
> The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
> Making the green one red.

(II, ii, 60-63)

Peter in George Sandys' passion play, having forsaken Christ, deplores his folly in the Macbeth manner, though the effects are rather tedious than sublime:

> Not Jordan with two heads, whose waters roll
> From snow-top Libanus, can cleanse thy soul;
> Nor thou, Callirhoe; nor that ample lake,
> From whose forsaken shore my birth I take.
> Could'st thou blue Nereus...((etc., etc.))


The whole world, the poets (both good and bad) of this period tell us, again and again, is inadequate recompence for true manliness—even as it is inadequate to absorb the evil emergent from a man gone wrong. The effect of this inadequacy is not only to glorify the deity; it is most strikingly, in the imagery of the greatest poets of this period, to apotheosize the good man and to make of evil men colossal devils. It comes in either case to a celebration of the high significance of the human soul; for without that high significance the glory of God is irrelevant to the scheme of art; and—so reasoned the school of Sidney and their immediate inheritors—without that
scheme neither ideas of human dignity nor divine beatitude will figure profoundly in the affairs of men.

It follows, therefore, that the responsibilities of the poet are immense and that his knowledge and capabilities must go beyond those of the philosopher, the historian or the divine. For, as Sidney pointed out, in delineating virtue the poet is architectonic: he cannot deal familiarly with the imagery he ought to use without first discovering the precise relationship between every branch of knowledge and the nature of good and evil.\(^\text{13}\) One concludes that such an artist-philosopher must needs be superhuman.

Chapman supports this conclusion in his description of Homer, for him the only "absolute poet," who, in his superior wisdom, presides over temporal affairs. Homer was blind,

\begin{quote}
But inward, past and future things he sawe;  
And was to both, and present times, their lawe.  
His sacred bosome was so full of fire  
That 'twas transparent; and made him expire  
His breath in flames, that did instruct (me thought)  
And (as my soule were then at full) they wrought.\(^\text{14}\)
\end{quote}

\(^\text{13}\) Feuillerat, op. cit., III, 13, 21-22.  

Ben Jonson, in his preface to Volpone, dedicated to "The Two Famous Universities," though not imputing so incendiary a spirit to the true poet as Chapman, finds him
For, if men will impartially... looke toward the offices of a Poet, they will easily conclude themselves, the impossibility of any mans being the good Poet, without first being a good man. He that is said to be able to informe young-men to all good disciplines, inflame growne-men to all great vertues...; that comes forth the interpreter, and arbiter of nature, a teacher of things divine, no lesse then humane, a master in manners; and can alone (or with a few) effect the business of man-kind: this, I take him, is no subject for pride and ignorance to exercise their rayling rhetorique upon.15


Here Jonson obviously epitomizes Sidney, but in addition he stresses the essential goodness of the poet, out of which, as out of Amalthea's horn, all else will naturally flow. What this goodness is and how it is linked to other realms of human experience John Milton undertakes to say in his Apology for Smectymnuus:

...he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought him selfe to bee a true Poem, that is, a composition, and patterne of the best and honourablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of herick men, or famous Cities, unlesse he have in himselfe the experience and the practice of all that which is praise-worthy.16


A "true Poem" for Milton is evidently what an "absolute poem" is for Chapman: who but an embodied heaven-high thought of nature could "have in himselfe the experience and the practice of all that which is praise-worthy"? Only he, as Sidney said of the Psalmist, "showeth himself a
passionate lover of that unspeakable and everlasting beauty to be seen by the eyes of the mind, only cleared by faith."

Yet though this "everlasting beauty" was unspeakable it was not unfelt, and it was the poet's dedicated mission to make us feel it and compel us toward it. That he assumed the responsibility for doing so is of some importance to an understanding and evaluation of the aesthetic principles and practices of the English Renaissance. These latter bear, in the first place, a much closer alliance to certain ideas in Renaissance and Medieval theories of knowledge and being than has heretofore been supposed. Secondly, they not infrequently reflect the methods by which a host of commentators had expounded the dignity of man. At times, in short, they reflect the ideas and sentiments of Christian humanism. I use the latter term to mean the intellectual movement in the Renaissance which sought to exalt man to the Godhead—to make him a god in knowledge and in power—by superimposing Christian doctrine upon the more optimistic aspects of classical and neo-classical philosophies. Its teleology was Christian; its methodology classical. This is not to say, however, that the methodology ever opposes or rejects the Christian ideas of Atonement, Resurrection, or Redemption. On the contrary, it presupposes them and always operates within their framework. Thus much it must
do to support the teleology, which envisions man in a state of grace and finds in the three acts of the Son—the Creation, the Atonement, and the Resurrection—the foreshadowing of man's own omniscience, all-might, and perfection. On the other hand, as we shall see, the methodology departs considerably from Christian orthodoxy in its interpretation of Original Sin, justification and election, and in what, precisely, a state of grace consists. It will be the burden of this study to show, first, that this methodology—largely concerned with the problem of knowledge—gave rise to the belief that mortal man could be omniscient, that he could, despite St. Paul's statement to the contrary, see now as in a glass clearly; second, that the teleology justified the methodology in terms of power, making absolute power the reward of omniscience; and third, that certain poets of the English Renaissance, having commissioned themselves to portray the dignity of man, created avatars for these visionary means and ends.

Christian humanism was not that aspect of the humanistic movement which gave rise to modernism and the new science. The so-called Baconian anti-rationalists, the more effective champions of Protestantism and nationalism, the exponents of natural reason and secondary law—these were partakers in or beneficiaries of the revival of learning and of the critical spirit: they were humanists or
in the humanist tradition. But they were not Christian humanists. They were, indeed, knowingly or otherwise, the opponents of it: the idealism of the latter could not survive for long the attacks made upon it by the "new philosophy"--the obverse and enduring side of the humanistic coin. On the other hand, while it lasted, Christian humanism wrought profoundly on the imagination of Englishmen. The bred-in-the-bone assumption that man is potentially the equal of deity exercised a profound effect upon the diction, the imagery, the tone and the structure, as well as on the content, of those English poets who sought to dramatize the energies of heaven and hell. This is not to say, of course, that all of those writers who drew upon Christian humanism in this enterprise were primarily concerned with or necessarily believed in its doctrines. Spenser certainly believed in them and Milton, as we shall see, was certainly primarily concerned with them: but Marlowe, Donne, and Shakespeare (to mention the more striking exploiters of the humanistic schemes) neither demonstrably believed in nor were primarily
concerned with such doctrine. The fact that passages from their work and the work of their contemporaries (including the prose writers) are used in this study to illustrate the ideas or the imagery of Christian humanism should not be taken as an assumption that humanistic doctrine necessarily illuminates the most important facets of these writers or that it "explains" them. If it happens to do so, express observations of the fact will be provided.

A survey of three ideas which such poets as Sidney, Chapman, and Milton regarded as central to their mission and their art will demonstrate the meaning and importance of Christian humanism in its effect upon the literature of the English Renaissance. These three ideas may be labeled 1) the Clear Spirit, 2) Dialectic, 3) Microcosmos. They lie at the base, respectively, of 1) the notion that the good man can arrive at omniscience, perhaps even before he leaves this world; 2) the poet's assumption that power and beauty (symbolised as virtue) are abstractions which form a nexus for the physical, moral, and intellectual world; 3) the poet's practice of blowing man up to cosmic proportions or diffusing various of his properties throughout the whole of nature to incarnate the consequences of good and evil. In their development through Platonic, Scholastic and Renaissance philosophies these ideas become so closely interassociated that by the end of the sixteenth century the mention of one almost invariably
evokes discussion of the other two. Charting the history of one idea will therefore show the evolution of all three. However, inasmuch as two of them—the Clear Spirit and Microcosmos—achieve each a distinct value as symbolism in the rhetoric and poetry of the English Renaissance it will be expedient to explore each of these two in turn. Dialectic will be seen to figure importantly in both. The exploration will deal with both principal ideas in much the same fashion: it will begin with classical and medieval antecedents, survey the repercussions of these upon representative Renaissance figures, and conclude with a slightly more extended consideration of Milton.

In such a study as this Milton is the natural figure to end with: he is England's last great man of letters in the Christian humanist tradition; that is, he was the last of these for whom the Renaissance concept of the dignity of man and of the aims of human knowledge went far toward creating the form and theme of his discourse. No poet took more seriously than he the whole duty of poetry as Sidney, Chapman, and Jonson conceived it; and none was so well prepared as he to discharge it. Standing as he does at the end of the Renaissance he arrogates to his Great Argument the manifold skeins—some of which had not been fully unraveled in Shakespeare's day—of humanistic idealism which had been a-spinning for millenia, but to
which, even as Milton wrought his great poetic *summa*
of them, the Blind Fury was applying her shears.
CHAPTER TWO

THE CLEAR SPIRIT: THE AVATAR
OF KNOWLEDGE

The mirror emblem in Renaissance epistemology owes its origin, as we shall see, to St. Paul (I Corinthians xiii, 12); the spirit emblem to the Medieval Platonists.¹

¹ See below, pp. 41-49.

One of the most fruitful developments in the history of paradox was the fusion of the two concepts which gave rise to the two images. The contemplation of human ignorance owing to the frailty of Adam inspired the Pauline figure; the working out of an epistemology which endowed the mind, sub specie temporalis, with a capacity for omniscience inspired the Platonic. It would be difficult to contrive a synthesis of images and ideas whose head lay quite so near as this one to the heels of its antipodes. Yet to this consonantia dissonans a not inconsiderable portion of humanistic doctrine is owing. Although it would doubtless be impossible to determine the precise moment of fusion, one can say that it figured importantly in the thinking of the Italian Platonists and their English readers; that it developed imperceptibly through the centuries between Plotinus and Marsilio Ficino; that it was full
blown for Chapman and Sir John Davies to admire, and a commonplace for John Milton to moralize upon.

To see *per speculum in aenigmate* was for most Renaissance commentators to behold twisted and pernicious simulacrums of reality in a glass: not literally through a glass, though the Geneva and King James Bibles adopt the latter preposition.²

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2. From the five most popular Renaissance translations into English of I Corinthians xiii, 12, one can infer no decisive tendency of interpretation:

**Tyndale, 1534:** Now we se in a glasse even in a darke speakynge: but then shall we se face to face.

**Geneva, 1560:** For now we se through a glasse darkely: but then shall we se face to face.

**Bishop's, 1568:** Nowe we see in a glasse, even in a darke speakynge: but then face to face.

**Douai, 1582:** We see now by a glasse in a darke sort: but then face to face.

**K. James, 1611:** For now we see through a glasse, darkely: but then face to face.

Bacon's construction on the Vulgate passage would seem to have been the commonplace one in his day: "*Videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate, tunc autem facie ad faciem*:

wherein nevertheless there seemeth to be a liberty granted, as far forth as the polishing of this glass, or some moderate explication to this aenigma."³ Obviously Bacon

---

had in mind a reflecting surface. If, then, the glass
is a mirror, what does one behold? Evidently an imper­
fect representation of one's self. But how is one to
reconcile this image with "seeing face to face"? Is that
revelation promised by Paul to be interpreted as a seeing
of one's self as one truly appears—tunc autem in speculo
lucido? The answer (for the Renaissance) is yes, if by
true appearance one means a full knowledge of the soul.
Whether or not Paul meant the passage to be so construed,
videbimus tunc autem facie ad faciem came to be inter­
preted as a promise to be realized only if one first rea­
lized the popular classical adjuration, Nosce te ipsum.
Since, moreover, man was fashioned in the image and simili­
tude of the Lord, the glass, purged of its darkness by
self knowledge, reflected the brow of deity. The speculum,
hence, came to symbolize the human understanding, or such
faculties of soul as the senses, the imagination, and
memory, which held up objects to its contemplation.  

4. Renaissance commentators entertained a fairly uni­
form conception of the anatomy of knowledge. The following
is a description of this anatomy based on Sir John Davies'
Nosce Telpsum (1599). His account will be found to re­
fect the account given by Plato in the Timaeus and to
differ in no important respect from the conceptions of
Bacon (in both the Advancement and the Novum Organum),
of Fulke Greville (Treatie of Humane Learning, 1633— but
probably written as early as the Advancement), of Phineas
Fletcher (The Purple Island, 1633— one of Fletcher's tardily
published Juvenilia), and of Milton (Paradise Lost, V,
110-113; 468-490): the faculties of knowledge, in an
ascending scale of excellence, are these: the five senses;
imagination, phantasy, and memory; reason; understanding;
wisdom. The senses transmit their intelligence to the
imagination, the seat of image making and the repository of sense experience; that is, imagination is the "common" sense. In its capacity as image maker it is the fantasy. Such images as the higher faculties of mind cannot readily use are relegated to the memory. Reason sifts the remaining images, weighing them discursively, shifting from ground to ground, and evaluating them in terms of the events and circumstances upon which they immediately impinge. Reason unassisted by the higher faculties yields opinion. Understanding sifts the opinions of reason by abstracting universals (over a long period) from numberless hosts of reasonings on the accidental. Wisdom comes with a full command of universals. See below, pp. 41-49 on the Neo-Platonic theory of knowledge.

Thus John Smith, the Cambridge Platonist, makes understanding the glass and imagination (i.e., fantasy) that which darkens it:

We cannot here see...in Speculo Lucido; here we can see but in a glass, and that darkly too. Our own Imaginative Powers, which are perpetually attending the highest acts of our Souls, will be breathing a grosse dew upon the pure Glasse of our Understandings, and so sully and besmear it, that we cannot see the Image of the Divinity sincerely in it.^[5]  

5. Divine Knowledge: See The Cambridge Platonists, ed., E. T. Campagnac, Oxford University Press, 1901, 96. Smith's Select Discourses were not published until eight years after his death in 1652. Most of them are probably the fruits of sermons delivered in the late forties, since Smith (who was born ca. 1616) was young when he died.

Seeing ourselves clearly in the glass of understanding we see the "image of the Divinity."

For Fulke Greville knowledge and the imagination are variously the speculum. Anatomizing knowledge he thus sensualizes the corruptive powers of imagination:

Knowledges next organ is Imagination;  
A glasse, wherein the object of our sense  
Ought to reflect true height, or declination,  
For understandings cleare intelligence:  
But this power also hath her variation,
Fixed in some, in some with difference;
In all so shadowed with selfe-application;
As makes her pictures still too foule, or faire;
Not like the life in lineament, or ayre.6

6. Treatie of Humane Learning (1633). See Poems and Dramas of Fulke Greville, ed., Geoffrey Bullough, Oxford, 1945, I, 156. This notion of imagination is almost precisely Bacon's notion of the Understanding (Novum Organum, I, xli): "And the human understanding is like a false mirror, which, receiving rays irregularly, distorts and discolors the nature of things by mingling its own nature with it."

Earlier in the same Treatie Greville imputes to knowledge itself the reflective function:

This Knowledge is the same forbidden tree,
Which man lusts after to be made his Maker;
For Knowledge is of Powers eternity,
And Perfect Glory, the true image-taker.7

7. Poems and Dramas, ibid., 154.

Absolute knowledge is a mirror faithfully and clearly reflecting the glory of God. To the skeptical Greville man's desire for it is a lust because it leads him to substitute human artifice for Divine revelation in the hope that he can hasten the time for that "tunc autem facie ad faciem." Such hope is the spawn of pride, itself a kind of false mirror:

No marvell then, if proud desires reflexion,
By gazing on this Sunne, doe make us blinde,
Nor if our Lust, Our Centaure-like Affection,
Instead of Nature,fadome clouds, and winde.8

8. Poems and Dramas, ibid., 155. The figure of Ixion coupling with a cloud was popular with the skeptics and
the anti-rationalists of Greville's time. Thus Davies
on human knowledge (Howard, 115):

What is it, but the cloud of emptie Raine
Which when Jove's guest embrac'it, he Monsters got?

Bacon also uses the figure (Works, III, 272).

Sir John Davies (Nosce Teipsum, 1599) restricts the mirror
image to the "phantasie":

The wit, the pupill of the Soules cleare eye,
And in mans world th' onley shining starre;
Lookes in the mirrour of the phantasie,
Where all the gatherings of the Senses are.9

9. The Poems of Sir John Davies, ed., Clare Howard,
Columbia University Press, 1941, 161. Fancy, phantasy,
and imagination are interchangeable terms in Renaissance
psychology: no Coleridgian subtleties were there to keep
them apart. Montaigne and Bacon, to be sure, sometimes
employ imagination to mean self-deception (see especially
Montaigne's essay on Imagination) and in Shakespeare it
can mean hallucination (Thus in M. N. D: Theseus on the
"lunatic, the lover, and the poet"); but these are loose
or informal interpretations of the word. Gianfrancesco
Pico della Mirandola (nephew of the great Giovanni) in
his discourse on the imagination (1501) makes phantasy
and imagination synonymous terms. His notion of them is
representative of the Renaissance view in general: "Now
this power of the mind, which the Greeks term Phantasia,
in Latin is called Imaginatio. And this name it received
from its function; from the Images, that is, which it
conceives and forms in itself." See Gian Pico: On the
Imagination, tr., Harry Caplan, Cornell Studies in English,
Yale University Press, 1930, 25.

Davies' "Mirrour of Phantasie" is externalized by William
Drummond as the "glass of the world," an image which Drum-
mond can justify on the ground that, as a microcosm, "Man
containeth all in him,"10 so that, in literal terms, Drum-
mond's glass resides in the mind. Its residence there is

10. The Cypress Grove (1623). See the Poetical Works
assumed by Bacon wherever he uses the image: "For the
mind of man is far from the nature of a clear and equal
glass.... Nay, it is rather like an enchanted glass, full
of superstition and imposture, if it be not reduced."
"((The Schoolmen)) ever left the oracle of God's works and
adored the deceiving and deformed images which the unequal
mirror of their minds...did represent unto them."^11

Shakespeare and Milton also invest the mind with
specula. Isabella (Measure For Measure, II, ii, 114-122),
like Bacon, finds the essence of human frailty in the
Enchanted Glass:

Merciful Heaven,
Thou rather with thy sharp and sulphurous bolt
Split' st the un wedge able and gnarled oak
Than the soft myrtle; but man, proud man,
Drest in a little brief Authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As makes the angels weep.

"Glassy essence" and "angry ape" are provocative compressions
of those sceptical sentiments rehearsed in less pithy terms
by Bacon, Greville, and Smith: Man is most ignorant of
his glassy essence, which, were it clear, would enable him
to reflect (ape) the merciful nature of divine authority.
An Angel's-eye-view finds him, however, reflecting with
a distortion wrought by undisciplined passion (anger)
the truth that lies obscured (because of the passion)
behind the glass. Yet of this truth, an emanation from
divine authority, is he most assured; that is, he will
himself be dealt with mercifully.\textsuperscript{12} An equally provoca-

tive compression of the mirror-mind complex is presented
by Milton in his first Divorce tract. In a digression
on the fable of Eros and Anteros he observes:

By the leave of those who would be counted the only grave
ones, this is no mere amatorious novel (though to be wise
and skilful in these matters, men heretofore of greatest
name in vertue, have esteemed it one of the highest arks
that human contemplation circling upward, can make from
the glassy sea whereon she stands).\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12} It is possible that Shakespeare had some such
figure as "glass of phantasie" in mind when he wrote
"fantastic tricks," intending fantastic to be taken
literally; i.e., man play," tricks of imagination all
compact. If so, the phrase is a nice development from
"glassy essence." The latter figure is generally--and
quite thoughtlessly--glossed as "brittle essence." Is­
rael Gollancz gives this more elaborate, and, I think,
more tenable, explanation: "That essential nature of man
which is like glass, from its faculty to reflect the image
of others in its own, and from its fragility, its lia­
(bility to injury or destruction." See The Modern Readers'
Shakespeare, VI, 143.

\textsuperscript{13} Works, op. cit., III, 401-402. The phrase 'glassy
sea' Milton took from Revelations (Coverdale's version),
xv, 2. As an allusion to this text the phrase poses another
problem. See below, p. 177.

The suggestion of magnitude in "glassy sea" is not capricious
or accidental. Like Drummond's "glass of the world" the
glass of understanding was thought to be immeasurably vast,
as the opening stanza of Greville's Treatie attests:

The Mind of Man is this worlds true dimension;  
And Knowledge is the measure of the minde:  
And as the minde, in her vaste comprehension  
Contains more worlds than all the world can find:  
So Knowledge doth it self farre more extend,  
Than all the minds of Men can comprehend.

The mind is as vast as what it knows. The spiral ascent of Milton's contemplation seems to be patterned after Greville's description of knowledge:

A climbing Height it is without a head,  
Depth without bottome, Way without an end,  
A Circle with no line invironed;  
Not comprehended, all it comprehends...


This is not to say that Milton borrowed these notions from Greville. The figure of knowledge as a circle without center or circumference and of the mind (or contemplation) making ascents from the glassy sea (i.e., the realm of sense experience and imagination) are common currency in the Renaissance. In the fifteenth century, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola had noted that the rational soul "is revolved in an orb of ratiocination," and that knowledge must be--paradoxically--circular and infinite because the creation to which it must correspond is circular and infinite.

As Sir Thomas Browne put it, "That mass of Flesh that circumscribes me limits not my mind: that surface that tells the Heavens it hath an end, cannot persuade me I have any: I take my circle to be above three hundred and sixty; though the number of the Ark do measure my body, it comprehendeoth not my mind."\(^\text{16}\) And else where he discourses of the "encyclopaedic and round of knowledge" and the "slow and sober wheel" of experience.\(^\text{17}\) The magnitude, the upward flight, and the sensuous foundation of mind (or contemplation, or intellect, or understanding) are the subjects of deep reflection in Chapman and Lord Herbert of Cherbury and of some of the most stately prose in Bacon.\(^\text{18}\) It is to Spenser, however, that one must turn for a full working out of the mirror-contemplation figure. If in fact Milton were indebted to a single source for his idea of contemplation's standing on a glassy sea, that source would most plausibly be the *Hymne of Heavenly Beautie* (1596), wherein Spenser, having examined the essential attributes of Deity (grace, doom, mercy, etc.),


explains how the Highest discloses these qualities to man:

Those vnto all he daily doth display,
And shew himselfe in th' image of his grace,
As in a looking glasse, through which he may
Be seene, of all his creatures vile and base,
That are vnable else to see his face,...
(113-117)

The looking-glass is that capacious mirror of nature which reflects the Book and Volume of the Word, enabling us
"To reade enregistered in every nooke/ His goodnesse..."
(131-132). Spenser, like Drummond, externalizes the mirror of mind as the glass of the world. It is the mirror which enables contemplation to soar; it is the mirror also which provides Spenser with a remarkable image:

Thence gathering plumes of perfect speculation
To impe the wings of thy high flying mynd,
Mount up aloft through heavenly contemplation,
From this darke world, whose damps the soule do blynd,
And like the natie brood of Eagles kynd,
On that bright Sunne of glorie fixe thinge eyes,
Clear'd from grosse mists of fraile infirmities.19
(134-140)

19. In the Faerie Queene (I, x, 46-68) the eye of Contemplation is the spirit:
Yet wondrous quick and persant was his spright,
As Eagles eye, that can behold the Sunne.
The Red Cross Knight must labor up a mountain to find Contemplation.

Speculation in Spenser's day was loosely a synonym for vision, but it was apparently close enough to its Latin source to be associated with the mirror image.20 "Perfect speculation"

20. See, for example, Troilus and Cressida; III, iii, 109-111.
...speculation turns not to itself,
Till it hath travel'd and is mirror'd there
Where it may see itself.

can only mean vision in a glass clearly, which vision provides flight-feathers for the soul, so that it can realize the height of its desires (impe the wings of the high flying mynd).

Such allusions to I Corinthians xiii, 12 as are represented in Bacon, Greville, Davies, Milton, Drummond, Spenser, and Smith suffice to indicate that the meaning and symbolic value of the speculum were important to Renaissance interpretations of the nature of mind, knowledge, and soul under the aspect of time and the world. It is of no special significance that the glass might variously symbolize mind, human essence, understanding, or the fancy: standing for any of these faculties it was indispensable to the shaping and development of human knowledge. What is important is the variety of interpretation regarding the relative pertinacite or fixity of the shadow on the glass. If, as Saint Paul clearly insists, we but know in part, so that our prophecies, tongues, and knowledge shall fail, cease, and vanish away, to illumine the glass is beyond man's power, and, in this world, counter to the disposition of God. To attempt the purge by advancing human science is at best a futile
occupation and at worst to be deceived, as Faustus was, as low as Hell. "Man is not," said Bacon, "to prevent his time." To press too far into the aenigma "cannot but cause a dissolution and over-throw of the spirit of man." According to Browne it was just this anticipation that proved the undoing of Satan: not his desire to be omnipotent but his assumption that he was intellectually prepared to achieve omnipotence brought him low. As we shall see, his aspirations set in the framework of Renaissance idealism were ethical and reasonable. But any effort to anticipate the Apocalypse, especially if it stems from pride, may constitute the irremissible sin. Even when it does not, to court divine wisdom may be to court insanity. As Donne told his congregation, "We may search so far and reason so long of faith and grace as that we may lose not only them but even our reason too and sooner become mad that good." "Dangerous it were," Hooker reminded his readers, "to wade too far into the doings of the Most High.... Our safest eloquence concerning Him is our silence."
Despite these fearful postures, however, there were those who persisted in negotiating deep waters, and these evoked melancholic reflection or stern rebuke from the cautious and orthodox. There are some, Sir Thomas Browne observed, who have "lost themselves in attempts above humanity." The attempts of others "have been precipitous, and their Enquiries so audacious, as to come Within command of the flaming swords."26 John Hales of Eton

found "preventing their time" all too prevalent a heresy of the congregations:

It hath been the common disease of Christians from the beginning, not to content themselves with that measure of faith, which God and the Scriptures have expressly afforded us; but out of a vain desire to know more than is revealed, they have attempted to discuss things, of which we can have no light, neither from reason nor Revelation.

This discontent, he finds, is no easily expiable sin:

"For Heresy is an act of the will, not of reason; and is indeed a lie, not a mistake."27 It represented that kind

of vaulting ambition which Greville imputes to Ixion, to those who "lust" after knowledge.
It was by no means, however, an aberration confined to Faustian characters in Renaissance England. Surveying the arts and sciences more than a hundred years before Hales wrote his tract on schism, Henry Cornelius Agrippa, the virtuoso of Nettisheim, was moved to draw up a comprehensive indictment of all mirror-polishers, a task which he inaugurates as follows:

It is an old Opinion, and the concurring and unanimous judgment almost of all Philosophers, whereby they uphold, that every Science addeth so much of a sublime Nature to Man himself, according to the Capacity and Worth of every Person, as many times enables them to Translate themselves beyond the Limits of Humanity, even to the Celestial Seats of the Blessed. From hence have proceeded those various and innumerable Encomiums of the Sciences, whereby every one hath endeavour'd, in accurate, as well as long Orations, to prefer, and as it were to extol beyond the Heavens themselves, those Arts and Mysteries, wherein, with continual labor, he hath exercised the strength and vigor of his Ingenuity or Invention. But I, persuaded by reasons of other nature, do verily believe, that there is nothing more pernicious, nothing more destructive to the well-being of Men, or to the Salvation of our Souls, than the Arts and Sciences themselves.28


Had Agrippa lived in 17th-Century England he could not have given a more apt characterization of the spirit of that Platonic idealism which invests, as we shall see, some of Milton's Cambridge Prolusions. As, however, he was a denizen of 16th-Century Nettisheim, we may suppose he had in mind the wild extravagances and careering epistemologies which inspire the exigeses and commentaries of
the 15th-and 16th-century continental humanists, particularly in Italy and Spain. These and their English proselytes were not, however, without cogent defences against their skeptical critics.

They could begin, as the skeptics did, with Holy Writ.

In his second epistle to the Corinthians Paul again uses the mirror image (iii, 7-8, 17-18; iv, 6):

But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?...Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord....For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Here the glass, though indeed it is not the same one as was earlier set about with enigmas, evidently is unstained; the contemplation of it appears to lead eventually to an apotheosis of the beholder: yet there is every indication that this glass is present to the eye of every mortal man who has the spirit of the Lord upon him. Here we may note a close connection between the glass and the Holy Spirit or Divine glory. James (i, 23-25) by implication makes
the glass the symbol of the Spirit:

For if any be hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty..., this man shall be blessed in his dead.

If one puts James and Paul together, whoever looks into the mirror liberty looks into the spirit of the Lord; whoever does so finds himself endowed with "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God." If one puts James, Paul, and Genesis 1, 27 together ("So God created man in his own image..."), the glass of spirit would seem to reside in the soul of man, and through this "with open face beholding," we see in speculo lucido. On the basis of Scriptural evidence, of course, there is no justification whatever for assuming that Paul had contradicted himself or that the specula in I and II Corinthians are interchangeable: and infinite gulf separates the pursuit of secular and the endowment of Divine knowledge. The two mirrors are, perhaps, symbolic of the difference between natural (corrupt) reason and right reason as these terms were understood by the fathers of the Church and by the Renaissance skeptics. Of right reason Augustine has this to say:

...with the sight of the soul we see in the eternal truth, from which all temporal things have been made, the form according to which we effect something, in ourselves or in bodies, with a true and right reason; and it is from the same source that we conceive and possess a true knowledge of things....If we both see that what you say is
true, and that what I saw is true, where, I ask, do we see this? Surely, neither I in you, nor you in me, but both of us in the immutable truth itself which transcends our minds....as from one man's face many likenesses are reflected in a mirror, so many truths are reflected from the one divine truth.30

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A true knowledge of things comes to us through an immutable truth which "transcends our minds." The latter is the glass of liberty. It cannot be searched by discursive reason; we are, on the contrary, the passive recipients of whatever light this mirror sheds upon our minds. The mirror of right reason is hence the Deity, so that, in the awkward imagery of this epistemology, we look upon the glass of the Lord in the darkened mirror of our mind; but whatever of truth that we apprehend in this exercise comes not from our attempts to disperse the darkness but from the light (right reason) which shines through the glass of understanding in spite of its darkness. This light is, of course, but sparingly reflected, so that, as St. Thomas observed in commenting on the mirror of mind, "we cannot conclude that God is seen in His essence in this life, but only as in a mirror":

and to this the Apostle witnesses as regards the knowledge of this life: We see now through a glass in a dark manner. And though this mirror, which is the human mind, reflects the likeness of God in a higher way than creatures of lower degree, yet the knowledge of God that can be gathered from the human mind does not transcend the genus of the
knowledge gathered from sensible things; since even the
soul knows what it itself is through understanding the
natures of sensible things....Consequently, even in this
way God is not known in a higher manner than the cause is
known from its effect. 31


The Augustinian and Thomistic distinctions between the glass
of mind and the glass of liberty seem lucid and reasonable
enough, but they were not, apparently, seriously con­
sidered by certain influential commentators of the early
Renaissance; for at that time the two mirrors were confused,
so that the arts and sciences became the pathway to heaven,
allowing men to believe, as Agrippa protested, that a
mastery of secular knowledge "many times enables them to
Translate themselves beyond the Limits of Humanity, even
to the Celestial Seats of the Blessed."

II

In part, what encouraged man to assume that he might
thus wilfully "prevent his time" was a striking coincidence
in the imagery of Platonism and Holy Writ. The Platonic
Spirit, the "Animate," is likened to a mirror by Plotinus
and later writers. 32

32. Plotinus very likely borrowed his similitude from
Plato, who, in the Timaeus (71) likens the liver to a
mirror, the function of which is to reflect the power of
thought to the "house of the lower nature." God contrived
"that it should be solid and smooth, and bright and sweet,
and should also have a bitter quality, in order that the
power of thought, which proceeds from the mind, might be reflected as in a mirror which receives likenesses of objects and gives back images of them to the sight; and so might strike terror into the desires...." See The Dialogues of Plato, Tr., Benjamin Jowett, Random House, 1937, II, 49.

Cultivation of the Animate through dialectic leads to a knowledge of self and hence to an intimate knowledge of Deity. A brief examination of the problem of knowledge in Plotinus will help explain how later philosophers confused the Pauline mirrors.

Man can know his universe by knowing himself. This dictum is axiomatic with Plotinus. It leads at once to two difficult questions: 1) How does man set about knowing himself? 2) What does he gain by knowing the universe? Plotinus initiates his answer to the first by describing the essential man—a complex of elements which form the conscious mind and which Plotinus calls the "We." It is made up of "Discursive-reasoning, Sense-Knowledge and Intellection." These faculties owe their existence to "Ideal-Forms," that is, to the impressions on the soul of all separate and particular truths, which emanate from the Divine Mind. The whole man is a trinity. He is soul, body and the "Animate." The Animate serves as a go-between
or "Couplement" for soul and body. It owes its origin to
"the organized body and something else, let us say a
light, which the Soul gives forth from itself." It is
the seat of sense perception; sense impressions are trans­
mitted from the body to the soul through it, since "the
faculty of perception in the Soul cannot act by the immedi­
ate grasping of sensible objects, but only by the discern­
ing of impressions printed upon the Animate by sensation."34

34. Enneads, I, 1, 5.

Sensation itself is a phantasmal representation of
the Intelligibles, the Ideal-Forms inherent in the soul.
Now the soul is so constituted that it cannot view itself
except through the Animate, so that the Animate serves
in the dual capacity of refining bodily sensation and of
dimly reflecting the Ideal Forms. To know itself the soul
must view the Animate and infer correspondences between
itself and what the latter presents. The reflected
"phantoms" are specific and accidental; they correspond
in the soul with the generic and necessary; the basis of
the correspondence is thus an equation: the specific is
to the Animate as the generic is to the soul. Classifi­
cation of the phantoms that proceed across the glass of
the Animate is thus the means whereby the soul can know
itself. One ideal form in the soul is the quality essential
to numberless hosts of the accidental. The first task
of the soul must be to discover similarities among super-
ificially dissimilar things. It must next abstract the thing in common which distinguishes these particular phenomena from other things. It must then repeat the process with other sets of particulars and then determine what the inferred abstractions themselves have in common.

This exercise, which Plotinus calls Dialectic, indefinitely

35. A term borrowed from Plato, but it is not so fully worked out in the Dialogues: "In the Symposium, where the lover and the philosopher are shown by Socrates to be one and the same, dialectic is the gradual process by the aid of which we pass from the sensible to the ideal, and the earthly love is refined into the 'birth in beauty.' A like conception is found in the Republic. There it is the means by which we learn to employ the hypotheses of science, not as final results, but as points from which the mind may rise into the higher heaven of ideas and behold truth and being (Rep. 6. 510, 511). This vague and magnificent conception was, perhaps, scarcely clearer to Plato himself at the time when he wrote than it is to us." Jowett, Index to the Dialogues, Random House, 1937, II, 848.

repeated, at last enables the soul to discern the Ideal Forms, or First-Kinds, which are the Categories of all being; further, Dialectic establishes, "in the light of intellection, the unity there is in all that issues from these Firsts, until it has traversed the entire Intellectual Realm: then, resolving the unity into the particulars once more, it returns to the point from which it starts."36


Enabled to ascend and descend at will this Jacob's Ladder of abstraction and subsumptions, man passes in review the truth in himself and simultaneously the truth
writ large on the heavens. Plotinus furnishes his readers with three illustrations of how to manage the rudiments of Dialectic. The musician, the lover, and the philosopher have this in common that, in their several ways, they are seeking—or ought to seek—the First Kind of their desire. The task of the lover provides the clearest example of the function of Dialectic:

His lesson must be to fall down no longer in bewildered delight before some one embodied form; he must be led, under a system of mental discipline, to beauty everywhere and made to discern the One Principle underlying all, a Principle apart from the material forms, springing from another source, and elsewhere, more truly present. The beauty, for example, in a noble course of life and in an admirably organised social system may be pointed out to him—a first training this in the loveliness of the immaterial—he must learn to recognise the beauty in the arts, sciences, virtues; then these severed and particular forms must be brought under one principle by the explanation of their origin. From the virtues he is to be led to the Intellectual-Principle, to the Authentic-Existent; thence onward, he treads the upward way.37

37. Enneads, I, 3, 2.

To explain the existence of Ideal Forms in the soul Plotinus asserts that God, the Divine Hypostasis (i.e., the ultimate category under which the First-Kinds and hence all existence are subsumed) diffuses through man all the stages of His emanations, infinitely various, infinitesimally differentiated. The first three stages are vital to the soul’s cognitive faculties. These are the Intellectual Principle (the Divine Hypostasis), Authentic Existence (the realm of the First-Kinds), and “that Soul which is
of these three--actually all one under the aspects of three distinct stages of Dialectic. The divided soul in man is thus a species of the genus Authentic Existence, which in turn is subsumed under Intellectual Principle. Intellection, the capacity to use Dialectic, is present to the We by virtue of the Intellectual Principle, this capacity being the one characteristic of pure divinity present in the divided soul. Sense Perception, the capacity to superimpose sensation on the Ideal Forms for the purpose of knowing the latter through Dialectic, and Discursive Reason, the capacity to describe cause and effect, arise from the presence, respectively, of Authentic Existence and the Divided Soul. Divided Soul, however, is all that is logically present of this trinity in man, the two other elements being implicit in Divided Soul by virtue of its being one of a category under Intellectual Principle. Within the confines of Divided Soul, in any case, lies the essence of all cosmic phenomena below itself. These essences it imparts to man through the medium of the Animate. It is at this stage of his exposition that Plotinus likens the Animate to a series of mirrors into which the soul looks to find itself:

In so far as any bodies ((i.e., human bodies)) are Animates, the Soul has given itself to each of the separate
material masses; or rather it appears to be present in
the bodies by the fact that it shines into them: it
makes them living beings by merging images or likenesses
of itself like one face caught by many mirrors. The first
of these images is the faculty of Sense-Perception seated
in the Couplement; and from this downwards all the suc-
cessive images are to be recognised as phases of the Soul
in lessening succession from one another, until the series
ends in the faculties of generation and growth and of all
production of offspring.39

39. Enneads, I, 1, 8.

Man, though Plotinus does not call him such, is thus a
microcosm. More particularly, he is a little chain of
being. The true man, however, resides in the "We"; below
that—below discursive reason— is the "Ours," which we
have in common with the "multiple brute." The multi-
plicity of our lower nature, however, will permanently
obscure our higher, will even degrade the We to the level
of the Ours, that is deprive awareness of self of its
high cognitive faculties, unless we rigorously employ these
faculties to make the soul aware of itself and its origin.
On the other hand, a thorough searching of the mirrors
will yield a full knowledge of our souls and take us up
to God— and in this enterprise we can succeed while yet
we are embodied and dwell beneath the moon.40

40. For a discussion of Plotinus' answer to the second
question, Why should man know his universe? see below, pp.
The Animate of Plotinus, which, as that "third something" between soul and body, enabled the mind to infer the glory and wisdom of God from the works of God, was to be construed as secular evidence that the mirror could, independently of direct intercession by the Lord, be purged of its enigmas and distortions. Before, however, the confusion between the Animate and the Speculum occurred, a confusion between the Animate and the notion of spirit as defined by medieval medicine appears to have taken place. The confusion was a natural one, because spirit, like the animate, was a third something, a couplement, between soul and body. The purest spirit, according to Galen's physiology, originates in the residue of blood in the right ventricle of the heart. Thomas Vicary, in his Profitable Treatise of the Anatomie of Mans Body (1548), presents the following paraphrase of Galen's theory:

The residue that is left of this ((blood)) is made subtill through the vertue of the hart; and then this blood is sent into a concauitie or pytte in the myddest of the Harte betwene the two Ventrilkles and therein it is made hote and pured; and then it passeth into the left Ventricle, and there is ingendred in it a spirit that is clearer, brighter, and subtiller then any corporal or bodely thing that is ingendred of the foure Elementes: for it is a thing that is a meane betwene the body and soule.41

When Marsilio Ficino undertook to expound the nature of the "third something" in man, he substituted spirit for Animate, evidently on the assumption that Galen had the same thing in mind as Plotinus. In any case, his definition reflects both the Galenic and the Plotinian notions:

There appear to be really three things in us: soul, spirit, and body. Soul and body, naturally very different from each other, are joined by the median, spirit, which is a certain very thin and clear vapor, created through the heat of the heart from the purest part of the blood; and thence diffused through all the parts. This spirit receives the powers of the soul and transfers them into the body.

Thus far he echoes Galen: what he has said is precisely in line with Vicary's paraphrase. Forthwith, however, he shifts his ground and concludes his description of spirit as though he were repeating a lesson from the Enneads:

...the spirit receives through the instruments of the senses the images of external bodies; these images cannot be communicated directly to the soul, because incorporeal substance, which is more excellent than bodies, cannot be given form by them through the reception of images. But at least, the soul, being present to the spirit in every part, easily sees the images of bodies shining in it as though in a mirror, and through them it judges bodies, and this cognition is called by the Platonists sense perception. While it sees these images, it conceives in itself by its own strength images like them, but much purer. Conception of this kind we call imagination and fancy; the images conceived here are kept in the memory. Through these, the eyes of the soul are wakened to behold the Universal Ideas of things which the soul holds within itself. Therefore it sees a certain man by sense and conceives him in imagination, and in common with its own innate Idea of humanity, by the intellect it contemplates the principle and definition common to all men, and it preserves what has been contemplated.42

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42. Ficino's Commentary on Plato's Symposium, tr., Sears R. Jayne, University of Missouri Studies, 1944, 189.
This psycophysical exposition of the learning process is obviously Neo-Platonic, and the substitution of spirit—that clearest of substances "ingendred of the foure Elementes," in Vicary's words—for the Animate would not be significant, were it not for the fact that, like the mirror, spirit means in the Scriptures something quite different from the tertium quid. In the symbolism of the Platonists the mirror is spirit, the spirit is the Animate, and the Animate the instrument by which dialectic will take the soul heavenward. In the Scriptures the mirror also symbolizes spirit, but the latter represents not the couplement but variously the soul or mind of man or the third member of the Trinity. Searching Holy Writ for clues to the nature of man yields no "Third Something" at all and assigns a quite different function to Spirit. Calvin explains what this function is:

That man consists of soul and body, ought not to be controverted. By the "soul" I understand an immortal, yet created essence, which is the nobler part of him. Sometimes it is called a "Spirit:" for though when these names are connected, they have a different signification, yet when "spirit" is used separately, it means the same as "soul:" as when Solomon, speaking of death, says that "then the spirit shall return unto God, who gave it."

...Those who imagine that the soul is called a spirit, because it is a breath or faculty divinely infused into the body, but destitute of any essence, are proved to be in a gross error by the thing itself, and by the whole tenor of Scripture. 43

Calvin is not here at odds with Ficino; he is rather talking a different language, which (coincidentally, as we have seen) employs the same words to express different ideas and (confusion confounded) the identical symbols to stand for these same words: Calvin's mirror is the glass of the world: "...for the exact symmetry of the universe is a mirror, in which we may contemplate the otherwise invisible God." (Institutes, I, v, 1). But this mirror is equally the mirror of ourselves, because man is "a microcosm, or world in miniature" (I, v, 3). Through this glass we may learn to admire God, and secular knowledge applied to this end is praiseworthy but not essential, "since the meanest and most illiterate of mankind, who are furnished with no other assistance than their own eyes, cannot be ignorant of the excellence of the Divine skill..." (I, v, 2). Far otherwise is the construction which Ficino places upon the office of secular knowledge: the glass of the Animate, as it were, defies Divine malediction and assures omniscience to the diligent mind:

The first question appears to be whether or not the intellect can attain a clear understanding of everything which is included under being. Certainly it can. The intellect divides being into ten most universal genera, and these ten by degrees into as many subordinate genera as possible. It then arranges certain ultimate species under the subordinate genera; and, finally, it places single things, without end, as it were, under the species in the manner we have described. If the intellect can comprehend being itself as a definite whole, and, as it were, divide it by degrees into all its members, diligently comparing these
members in turn both to each other and to the whole, then who can deny that by nature it is able to grasp universal Being itself?  


Nowhere in Ficino is it assumed that a special dispensation from God is necessary to this success in Dialectic. The reward of such enterprise is more imposing than that offered by Plotinus, involving no less than the soul's arrogation unto itself of the entire universe. That which the mind knows the mind becomes: "What, then, does the intellect seek if not to transform all things into itself by depicting all things in the intellect according to the nature of the intellect?" By taking on the spiritual forms of all things and becoming all, the intellect, along with the will, which strives "to transform itself into all things by enjoying all things according to the nature of each," rests at last in the infinite, enjoying a sway coextensive with the Creator's.  

45. *Epistolae*, Ibid., 201-203.

Ficino's division of soul into intellect and will in its quest after the eternal represents a fundamental departure from Plotinian teleology. In the latter "Contemplation of that calm, eternal Identity" constitutes the ultimate reward. In the former, the presence of will in the soul argues the possibility of our playing an active role in the realm of
Authentic Existence. Through the will we may express our omniscience in terms of a divine power. In Ficino's young contemporary, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, it is this energy of will rather than the serenity of contemplation that catches the imagination:

Let us bathe in moral philosophy as if in a living river. Yet this will not be enough if we wish to be companions of the angels going up and down on Jacob's ladder, unless we have first been well fitted and instructed to be promoted duly from step to step, to stray nowhere from the stairway, and to engage in the alternate comings and goings. Once we have achieved this by the art of discourse of reasoning ((i.e., by dialectic)), then, inspired by the Cherubic spirit, using philosophy through the steps of the ladder, that is, of nature, and penetrating all things from center to center, we shall sometime descend, with titanic force rending the unity like Osiris into many parts, and we shall sometimes ascend, with the force of Phoebus, collecting the parts like the limbs of Osiris into a unity, until, resting at last in the bosom of the Father who is above the ladder, we shall be made perfect with the felicity of theology.46

46. Oration on the Dignity of Man, IV (1486), tr., Elizabeth Forbes; Cassierer et al., Ibid., 225.

The Cherubic Spirit, of course, is the Holy Spirit, the glass of liberty, the inspiration of which releases that divine energy in man. Here we see in combination the most attractive tenets of Platonism and the New Testament: the reward of unlimited freedom (which coupled with omniscience—

with Videbimus tunc autem facie ad faciem—means absolute power) is promised us in II Corinthians; the scientific means to the intellectual conquest of this All is detailed for us by the Platonists. This confusion of means (good
deeds, faith, long patience, and the Resurrection with dialectic) and ends (dynamic participation in a dynamic Godhead with passive adoration of a static Unity) evidently escaped the notice of both these early humanists.

The true dignity of man, Pico submits, lies in his capacity to rise superior to the angels. That magic wand of philosophy will raise us to the heights from whence

...we shall measure...all things that are and shall be and have been in indivisible eternity; and, admiring their original beauty, like the seers of Phoebus, we shall become her own winged lovers. And at last, roused by ineffable love as by a sting, like burning Seraphim rapt from ourselves, full of divine power we shall no longer be ourselves, but shall become He Himself Who made us.47

47. Oration, ibid., 234.

Thus do the Christian Platonists shackle accident and bolt up change: they set the wise man on a plane with Christ. Most significantly, death and the mystery of the Resurrection appear to be irrelevant in the ascent of the dialectician to the Most High. Man can prevent his time: the glass of spirit being clear, dialectic is infallible.

Clearing the spirit is an act of will—of deliberate choice—on the part of every man:

On man when he came into life the Father conferred the seeds of all kinds and germs of every way of life. Whatever seeds each man cultivates will grow to maturity and bear in him their own fruit. If they be vegetative, he will be like a plant. If sensitive, he will become brutish. If rational, he will grow into a heavenly being. If intellectual, he will be an angel and the son of God. And if, happy in the lot of no created thing, he withdraws into the center of his own unity, his spirit, made one
with God, in the solitary darkness of God, who is set above all things, shall surpass them all.\(^{48}\)

\(^{48}\) Oration, ibid., 225.

These "germs of every way of life" are reminiscent of the Aristotelian categories of the soul— the vegetative, sensitive, appetitive, locomotive, and intellectual (De Anima, II, 3) and one finds the Scholastics making the same division in an effort to demonstrate that the soul regards all being as its object. Among Medieval writers, including St. Thomas, however, the inclination of the soul toward all being comes to nothing in the postlapsarian cosmos.\(^{49}\) But those who assimilated this anatomy of soul to the Platonic tradition could imply, as Pico did, that the instruments of knowledge, though initially obscure, may be disclosed in their original perfection by the will.

One could pay lip service to the doctrine of Original Sin and the enigmatic speculum, as the Platonists in England did, and still promote the more appealing views of Ficino and Pico. "Reason," said John Smith, in his discourse on "Divine Knowledge," "is not every where so extinguish'd, as that we may not by that enter into the Souls of men....We want not so much Means of knowing what we ought to doe, as Wills to doe that which we may
That is, given the germs of every way of life (i.e., the means of knowing), it remains only that we summon our intellectuals—an undertaking within the power of us all—to dissipate the shadows. The summons is essentially an exercise in Plotinian abstractions wherein man ascends his own chain of being from the vegetative to the intellectual. The will is hence mental discipline or that which animates dialectic. Ascending the Aristotelian rungs (or categories) of being, dialectic moves through the following categories of knowledge:

The First is...a naked perception of Sensible impressions, without any work of Reason. The Second...a Miscellaneous kind of knowledge arising of a collation of its Sensations with its own more obscure and dark Ideas. The Third,...Discourse and Reason, which the Platonists describe Mathematical knowledge by, which, because it spins out its own notions by a constant series of Deduction, knitting up consequences one upon another by Demonstrations, is...a Progressive kind of knowledge....There is, Fourthly, a naked Intuition of Eternal Truth which is always the same, which never rises nor sets, but alwaies stands still in its Vertical, and fills the whole Horizon of the Soul with a mild and gentle light.51

This last category, the "naked Intuition," we cannot evoke in our quest for truth until we have commanded the lower three: for we become aware of the higher faculties only when we seek to rectify what the lower faculties have brought to us, and the process of rectification is progressive:

50. Campagnac, op. cit., 91.

51. A Discourse Demonstrating the Immortality of the Soul, ibid., 135.
Fansy corrects Sense for discerning with passion and material mixture, from which that purifies its object: opinion corrects Fansie, because it apprehends things by forms and phantasms, which itself is above; and Science corrects Opinion, because it knows without discerning of causes; and the Mind...or Intuitive faculty corrects the Scientific, because by a Progressive kind of Analysis it divides the Intelligible Object, where itself knows and sees things together in their undivided essence.52

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52. A Discourse...of the Soul, ibid, 138-139.

The level of "correctness" whereon we finally rest reflects—or corresponds to—the strength of our will. The most enfeebled wills remain at the level of sense experience. Such were the Epicureans: "The knowledge of these men I should call...a knowledge wherein Sense and Reason are so twisted up together, that it cannot easily be unravel'd.... Their highest Reason...(complies) with their senses, and both conspire together in vulgar opinion." The second level of will belongs to that man who "thinks not fit to view his own face in any other Glass but that of Reason and Understanding." Such a one is "fit to be initiated into the Mysteria minora, the lesser Mysteries of Religion." The third level exposes its possessor fitfully and intermittently to the delights of pure intellection: he is "continually flying off from the Body and Bodily passion, and returning into himself," i.e., into the intuitive part of his mind. The fourth level belongs to "The true Metaphysical and Contemplative man...", who running and shooting up above his own Logical or Self-rational...
cursive)) life, pierceth into the Highest Life." The role of the will in Smith makes the problem of knowledge an ethical problem; hence the ideal Christian is the truly wise man. The Christian character of omniscience together with the essentially Platonic anatomy which Smith accords it allows him to equate Pauline Charity with Platonic wisdom. We see the two interwoven in his characterization of the "Contemplative man," who, having cultivated his intellectual, has, in effect, apotheosized himself:

Such a one, who by Universal Love and Holy Affection abstracting himself from himself, endeavours the nearest Union with the Divine Essence that may be,...knitting his owne centre, if he have any, unto the centre of Divine Being. To such an one the Platonists are wont to attribute...a true Divine Wisedome, powerfully displaying it self...in an Intellectual life, as they phrase it...This Divine Knowledge...makes us amorous of Divine beauty, beautifull and lovely; and this Divine Love and Purity reciprocally exalts Divine Knowledge; both of them growing up together....Such a Life and Knowledge as this is, peculiarly belongs to the true and sober Christian who lives in Him who is Life itself, and is enlightened by Him who is the Truth it self....This Life is nothing else but God's own breath within him, and an Infant Christ (if I may use the expression) formed in his Soul, who is in a sense...the shining forth of the Father's glory.

This knowledge, he hastens to add, "is but here in its infancy; there is an higher knowledge or an higher degree of this knowledge that doth not, that cannot, descend upon us in these earthly habitations." Yet the qualification
itself but reveals Smith's confidence in man's cognitive powers: we share in Divine knowledge only to a lesser degree than the Godhead; our minds, though limited, none-theless admit of eternal truth.

"By Mind, and Understanding, and Will," said Benjamin Whichcote (The Work of Reason), Smith's Cambridge colleague, man "hath intercourse and communion with God, and things invisible....He that by Motion upwards contemplates God, converses with things Spiritual and Immaterial, he doth fit himself more for attendance upon God, and converses with Angels and separate Souls."55 Like Smith, Whichcote

55. Campagnac, ibid., 52. Nothing by Whichcote was published until fifteen years after his death in 1683.

makes it clear that the elevation of the mind from the sensible to the intellectual is requisite to the apprehension of Divine Light:

That which is the Height and Excellency of Humane Nature, viz., our Reason, is not laid aside nor discharged, much less is it confounded by any of the Materials of Religion; but awakened, excited, employed, directed, and improved by it: For the Mind and Understanding of Man, is that Faculty, whereby Man is made capable of God, and apprehensive of him....Bring that with you, or else you are not capable Receivers: Unless you drink in these Moral Principles; unless you do receive them by Reason, the Reason of Things by the Reason of your Mind, your Religion is but shallow and superficial.

Like Smith and Pico, Whichcote views the categories of the soul as evidence that man can abstract the divine from his nature and identify himself with it:

Man is a Compound of different and several things; he hath several sorts of Faculties, which we are wont
in our Philosophy to call his upper and his lower Powers; and by these he doth converse with things of a very different order. By the higher Powers, he is able to converse both with God and things Spiritual and Coelestial; and by the lower Powers, with Terrene and Earthy.56

56. The Work of Reason, ibid., 51-52.

Conversation with "things Spiritual and Coelestial" involves "extracting spiritual Notions from material Things," the only employment "worthy of intellectual Nature."57 Such extractions characterize that "motion upwards" by which the mind contemplates God. It is dialectic. It evolves Divine Affection, which, says Whichcote, in his tract on Christian Religion, will disperse all shadows on the glass:

Divine Affection burns up all contrary Principles in the Soul, and brings the Soul into a likeness and Similitude to God. For, the Divine light received into the Mind, doth first irradiate and clear the Mind from its gross and thick Darkness, whereby it was unexercised and unemploy'd about God: And this is the first Work: Mental Illumination; raising right Notions of God and Things in our Minds; ((scattering)) the Mists of Darkness....Knowledge is the first Step to Virtue.58

58. Ibid., 45. The Brackets are Campagnac's.

In his Work of Reason Whichcote explains how this Divine Light is to be admitted to the mind:

Now here is that, which I recommend to you all; Work for the Mind; and this is that which is most peculiar and proper to Humane Nature. No one is born to this, more than another: But if you will be intellectually improved, if you will be refined in your Spirits, refined in your Morals; if you will be more than the vulgus Hominum; you must set your
selves in the ways of Reading, Meditation and Conference, and Self-reflection, and awaken your Intellectuals; or else you shall come to nothing. 59

59. Ibid., 52-53.

Every man, in short, is potentially a clear spirit, an "infant Christ"; it requires only that he cultivate his "intellectuals" by studying nature (i.e., the steps of the ladder, as Pico said) to see in speculo lucido, albeit in a circumscribed one.

The circumscription, however, is not a mortal stain, but merely an attribute of uncompleted growth and is itself a promise of the infinite. Our capacity to choose the approaches to omniscience is, said Lord Herbert of Cherbury, "the final characteristic of man"; by which he meant that free will is the essential image of God in man: in free will "we can trace in narrow compass the form and system of the infinite." 60 For Herbert as for Ficino both

60. De Veritate (1624), op. cit., 163.

will and intellect are potentially infinite. Herbert's epistemology is predicated on the assumption that man as microcosm is possessed of "faculties" ("By faculty I mean every inner power which develops the different forms of apprehension in their relation to different forms of ((external)) objects"); 61 which correspond with every fact,

61. Ibid., 108.
element, and event in the macrocosm: "Every principle of individuation possesses some analogy in us." To be made aware of the former we must bring a given faculty into conformity with its object. Although the act of conformity is a natural instinct, right conformity consistently arrived at is difficult to achieve, since appearances are deceptive and sense organs frequently imperfect.

Rational concepts based on appearances must hence be re-adjusted by the intellect before conformity can be assured: "For this reason truth of intellect is only achieved with labour and care." The categories of truth in Herbert are reminiscent of the classical categories of the soul; they are four, consisting of things, appearances, concepts and the intellect:

Now the truth of thing is the inherent conformity of the things itself, or that ground in virtue of which everything remains consistent with itself. The truth of appearance consists in the conditional conformity with the thing. The truth of concept is the conditional conformity between our subjective faculties and the thing as it appears. The truth of intellect consists of the right conformity between all the preceding conformities. All truth according to this doctrine consists of conformity.62

62. Ibid., 87.

The intellect hence completes the edifice of truth; in so far as it brings into conformity all lesser conformities it is performing the office of dialectic. What is notable in the epistemology of Herbert is not his exposition of intellect but his emphasis on the infinite faculties of mind.
Because they are infinite, "we can find a limit in things but none in ourselves." Hence, as Chapman and Greville had earlier observed, we can comprehend the All; that All not us: "...the whole visible world cannot comprehend the soul, and in view of its sublime nature it may be the only object we do not comprehend in this world." As does Ficino, Herbert posits a kind of mystic recreation of the objects of the material world into the energy of the soul: ...

This species of liberty is granted the truth-seeker while yet he labors under the veil of mortality:

The body or flesh serves as a veil for the secret parts of the sensitive soul, but man, who is naked in all else, is borne towards everything that the understanding comprehends or faith can grasp. Wrapped only in this covering
he raises his head, in other words his intellectual faculties, above the clouds and freely contemplating all things, he paces at large the courts of heaven and earth....

66. Ibid., 330.

Such glorious conceptions of the spirit of the temporal man as we see presented by Pico, Ficino, Smith, Whichcote, and Lord Herbert, obviously could not have been seriously entertained by these writers had they taken a serious view of Original Sin or of I Corinthians, xiii, 12. In terms of symbolism they had merged the mirror of the Animate with the mirror of mind, thereby disenchanting the glass. In the vocabulary of humanistic optimism the clear glass became the clear spirit, and the clear spirit the liberated man described by the Platonists.

The poets of Renaissance England were aware of these mergers and evolutions. Whether or not they believed in the efficacy or, indeed, in the existence of the clear spirit or the clear mirror, the former term frequently evokes the image of the reflecting surface and the latter a suggestion of the noble mind. Thus Fulke Greville's definition of clear spirit involves the mirror's clear reflection: "Cleare spirits...in Images set forth/ The wayes of Nature by fine imitation"; i.e., by justly reflecting

67. Caelica (1633), Sonnet LXXX, 1-2; Bullough, op. cit., 130.
nature's laws. In another of his remarkable compressions Shakespeare catches the mirror quality of spirit and in addition suggests its significance in Medieval medicine:

Something sure of state...
Hath puddled his clear spirit; and in such cases
Men's natures wrangle with inferior things,
Though great ones be their object....
    Nay, we must think men are not gods,
Nor of them look for such observancy
As fits the bridal.68

68. Othello, III, iv, 137-147.

Desdemona and Isabella are sister pessimists: the puddled spirit, like the glassy essence, assures them men are angry apes, not gods. In so far as a clear spirit can be puddled it is a fluid like blood or water, a notion obviously derived from Vicary's Galen or kindred sources; in so far as the puddling baffles man's high purpose, the clear spirit is a reflecting pool69 or mirror into which he must look to

69. Cf. Troilus and Cressida, III, iii, 311-315:

    My mind is troubled, like a fountain stirr'd,
    And I myself see not the bottom of it.

    Would the fountain of your Mind were clear again,
    that I might water an ass at it!

"wrangle with great things"; finally, in so far as the puddling frustrates man's claim to be like the gods, the clear spirit is the symbol of divine power. Shakespeare might have appealed to Ficino's definition of spirit to "justify" his metaphor in respect to the mirror and water
analogies implicit in it; in respect to the suggestion that spirit is mind or understanding he could have appealed to the Scriptures or to Calvin.

George Chapman, "gulled nightly with intelligence" of the clear spirit, wrote also of the puddled one, whom he terms the Dark Spirit: "I know," he writes to Matthew Royden, in defense of his obscure verse, "that empty, and dark spirits, wil complained of palpable night: but those that before-hand, have a radiant and light-bearing intellect, will say they can passe through Corynnas Garden without the helpe of a Lanterne." The illuminated Homer is the

70. Bartlett, op. cit., 50.

clear spirit and his light-bearing intellect invests him with divinity. The Duke of Byron, a spirit puddled by ambition, is, as we have earlier noted, told on the scaffold that this darkness has cost him the shaking of a continent.71

71. See above, p. 11.

Occasionally the adjective clear is used to suggest the potency of clear spirit. Sir John Davies, addressing his "most Gracious and Dread Soveraigne," evidently intends the adjective to suggest omniscience and celestial blessedness:

...that cleare Maiestie, which in the North, Doth like another Sunne in glorie rise, Which standeth fixt, yet spreadhs her heavenly worth, Loadstone to Hearts, and Loadstaree to all Eyes...

72. Nosce Teipsum: Howard, op. cit., 111.
In the thirteenth Hymn of Astraea (of her Mind) Davies imputes superhuman qualities to the clear spirit of his queen:

Brought downe from heau'n of Angels kind,
Euen now do I admire her mind:
This is my contemplation,
Her cleare sweet Spirit which is reind,
A boue Humane Creation.73

73. Howard, ibid., 209.

Spenser's "plumes of perfect speculation" and Milton's "glassy sea" are finally indistinguishable from the clear spirit as construed by Shakespeare, Chapman, Greville, and Davies. The relationship between the spirit and the mirror is nowhere more strikingly brought out than in a comparison between the above encomium by Davies on his queen's mind, the "cleare, sweet spirit," and Spenser's praise of her "pure minde," which he calls a "mirrour sheene":

But where shall I in all Antiquity
So faire a patterne finde, where may be seen
The goodly praise of Princely curtesie,
As in your selfe, O soueraine Lady Queene,
In whose pure minde, as in a mirrour sheene,
It showes, and with her brightnesse doth inflame
The eyes of all, which theron fixed beene;
But meriteth indeede an higher name:
Yet so from low to high vplifted is your name.74

74. Faerie Queene, VI, Prologue, 6.

The clear spirit and the "Mirrour sheene" foster the same virtues, or rather poets associate with each the power to exalt a being so endowed to the celestial seats. This
power we have seen discussed at length by the Christian Platonists. On the basis of those philosophical and religious ideas associated with the two images it appears likely that any writer in the English Renaissance who made the clear spirit or the clear mirror an attribute of any mortal being was deliberately invoking Christian-Platonic metaphysics. If he designed that his readers should take these attributions seriously and without qualification, it is quite likely that he believed in and seriously expounded these metaphysics himself. The *Four Hymns* and various passages in the *Faery Queen* (particularly the cantos on Mutability and Contemplation) argue that Spenser was as firmly persuaded of the mirror's perfectibility as were any of the Christian optimists from whom he borrowed.  

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In his case, the "mirrour sheene" is symptomatic of his understanding of the nature, potentialities, and destiny of man. For similar reasons, the clear spirit is a symptom, as we shall see, of John Milton's understanding of himself.

III

*Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise (That last infirmity of Noble mind) To scorn delights, and live laborious dayes; But the fair Guerdon when we hope to find, And think to burst out into sudden blaze,*
Gomes the blind fury with th' abhorred shears,
And slits the thin spun life. But not the praise,
Phoebus replied....

Lycidas, 70-77

Clear spirit here evidently means noble mind, as it
does in Davies' hymn to Elizabeth; it is the attribute
of the "homely, slighted shepher," the poet, who, as
Milton reminds us in Smectymnuus, ought to "have in him-
selfe the experience and the practice of all that which
is praise-worthy." That he thought this ideal attainable
he enunciates early in his career, and there is no good
reason to suppose that he ever changed his mind. In his
Animadversions (1641) Milton recapitulates what he had said
in Lycidas of the clear spirit, that it scorns carnal
pleasures and seeks self-ennoblement. Such a spirit he
contrasts with the "prelatical episcopates," whose gross
darkness prompts them to sport with Amaryllis in the shade
and to be degenerately ignorant of the divine origins of
knowledge:

Doe they thinke then that all these meaner and superfluous
things come from God, & the divine gift of learning from
the den of Plutus, or the cave of Mammon? Certainly never
any cleare spirit nurst up from higher influences with a
soule inlarg'd to the dimensions of spacious art and high
knowledge ever enter'd there but with scorn, & thought it
ever foule disdain to make pelf or ambition the reward of
his studies, it being the greatest honor, the greatest fruit
and proficiency of learned studies to despise these things.76


A clear spirit is one with a "soule inlarg'd to the dimen-
sions of spacious art and high knowledge." If the poet had
in mind the same dimensions for these as were set down by Pico and Ficino, it is a spirit which, in Ficino's words, "is able to grasp universal Being itself"; or in Lord Herbert's words, one which "paces at large the courts of heaven and earth." We need not, however, put the words of the Platonists into Milton's mouth. He obliges us with his own discourse on the capacities of the noble mind: while yet a student at Cambridge he measured the spaciousness of art and the height of knowledge and put these estimates on record:

What a thing it is to grasp the nature of the whole firmament and of its stars, all the movements and change of the atmosphere, whether it strikes terror into ignorant minds by the majestic roll of thunder or by fiery comets, or whether it freezes into snow or hail, or whether again it falls softly and gently in showers or dew; then perfectly to understand the shifting winds and all the exhalations and vapours which earth and sea give forth; next to know the hidden virtues of plants and metals and understand the nature and the feelings, if that may be, of every living creature; next the delicate structure of the human body and the art of keeping it in health; and, to crown all, the divine might and power of the soul, and any knowledge we may have gained concerning those beings which we call spirits and genii and daemons. There is an infinite number of subjects besides these, a great part of which might be learnt in less time than it would take to enumerate them all. So at length, gentlemen, when universal learning has once completed its cycle, the spirit of man, no longer confined within this dark prison house, will reach out far and wide, till it fills the whole world and the space far beyond with the expansion of its divine greatness.77


These words might have been spoken by the ghost of Giovanni Pico: they are wholly in keeping with his themes and his
enthusiasm. Omniscience--nothing short of it—is grist for the clear spirit; infinity is within its power to assimilate. The man so abundantly endowed will be little short of omnipotent:

He will indeed seem to be one whose rule and dominion the stars obey, to whose command earth and sea hearken, and whom winds and tempests serve; to whom, lastly, Nature herself has surrendered, as if indeed some god had abdicated the throne of the world and entrusted its rights, laws, and administration to him as governor.  

78. Tillyard, ibid., 112. This paean to omnipotence is a faint echo—albeit in all probability an accidental one—of those mighty lines of Prospero, describing his "rough magic" (Tempest, V, i, 41-50). See below, p. 171.

Dominion over this world, however, provides insufficient scope for the noble mind, as Milton informs his auditors in an earlier prologue:

But let not your mind rest content to be bounded and cabined by the limits which encompass the earth, but let it wander beyond the confines of the world, and at the last attain the summit of all human wisdom and learn to know itself, and therewith those holy minds and intelligences whose company it must hereafter join.  

79. Third Academic Exercise; Tillyard, ibid., 72.

This visionary gleam may be an unconscious reflection of Spenser's fourth Hymn or of the canto on Contemplation in the first book of the Faery Queen. It represents ultimately the sentiments of the Italians and is vibrant with that same wild optimism which Agrippa had seen fit to exercise a century before. In addition it adumbrates the sentiment of Whichcote, that he who cultivates his intellectuals
doth fit himself more for attendance upon God, and con-
verses with Angels and separate souls." It is, in short,
in the Christian-Platonic tradition, and shows that Milton's
notion of the clear spirit, derived from his literary or
philosophical predecessors and sustained by his Platonic
contemporaries, was the notion of the unstained glass.

How remote were these symbols and meditations from
those who held that the understanding is necessarily (and,
in this world, irremissibly) impure? We can perceive the
abyssal cleavage obtaining between the two traditions if
we compare, not the conflicting views of human understand-
ing, but the orthodox Christian idea of God with the
Platonic-Christian idea of man. These we find to be al-
ost identical in tone and theme! Here, for example, is
Calvin on his Maker:

Now, what illustrious specimens of his power have we to
arrest our attention! unless it be possible for us not to
know what strength is required to sustain with his word
this immense fabric of heaven and earth; now by his mere
nod to shake the heaven with roaring peals of thunder, to
consume whatever he choose with lightnings, and set the
atmosphere on fire with the flame; now to disturb it with
tempests in various forms, and immediately, if he please,
to compose all to instantaneous serenity; to restrain,
suspended as it were in air, the sea, which, by its ele-
vation, seems to threaten the earth with continual devas-
tation; now raising it in a tremendous manner, by the
tumultuous violence of the winds, and now appeasing the
waves to render it calm.80


How does this "lively adumbration" (as Calvin calls it)
substantially differ from Milton's clear spirit "to whose
command earth and seas hearken, and whom winds and tempests serve? These is, of course, nothing surprising from the Platonist's point of view in this parallel: as Pico had declared, the clear spirit will "become He himself Who made us." From Calvin's point of view, however, since to him we are not "infant Christs," an illimitable abyss separates the two entities, and any suggestion to the contrary is more than blasphemous; it is supremely Satanic. For the depravity of man is total; to reckon without it is to deny the necessity of redemption, which denial is the thesis of Antichrist.81

81. Ibid., II, iii, 1.

Many of Calvin's Anglican and Puritan disciples were equally certain of man's necessary darkness. Richard Hooker's recognition of man's depravity forces him to conclude that the shadows on the mirror are inexorable by mortal agency:

The search of knowledge is a thing painful; and the painfulness of knowledge is that which maketh the Will so hardly inclinable thereunto. The root hereof, divine maluction; whereby the instruments being weakened wherewithal the soul (especially in reasoning) doth work, it preferreth rest in ignorance before wearisome labor to know. For a spur of diligence therefore we have a natural thirst after knowledge ingrafted in us. But by reason of that original weakness in the instruments, without which the understanding part is not able in this world by discourse to work, the very conceit of painfulness is as a bridle to stay us.82

82. Ecclesiastical Polity, I, vii, 7.
Here Hooker alludes to "the germs of every way of life" when he asserts that the "understanding part" cannot function without the assistance of the "instruments," which, weakened by original sin, are a thing painful to develop. Like Smith, he asserts that the will is the key to knowledge; but, unlike Smith, he regards the power to evoke the understanding (i.e., the intellectuals) as unattainable. Our enfeebled natures, far from enabling us to soar beyond the cabined and ample world, will hardly allow us to place our foot securely on the first rung of dialectic. This is not to say that the arts and sciences are mere vanity and the work of reason irrelevant to salvation: these reveal facets of divine glory which increase our awe and may bolster our faith in the Most High; but they fail utterly to promote "right reason," that is, to afford us insight into primary causes and laws.83

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83. Hooker, Bacon, Greville, and Sir Thomas Browne, with varying emphasis, point up these virtues of the arts and sciences. In this respect they sharply differed from Agrippa and Montaigne (Raymond Sebonde), who were utterly supine before the enigma. Significantly, Agrippa's work appeared five years before Calvin brought out the first edition of the Institutes (1535), and Sebond's Natural Theology, of course, pre-dated the Reformation. The difference in attitude may hence be due in part to Calvin's own stand with regard to secular knowledge, which is approximately that of Hooker, Greville, and Browne: "Of his wonderful wisdom, both heaven and earth contain innumerable proofs; not only those more abstruse things, which are the subjects of astronomy, medicine, and the whole science of physics, but those things, which force themselves on the view of the most illiterate of mankind, so that they cannot open their eyes without being constrained to witness them. Adepts, indeed, in those liberal arts, or persons just initiated into them, are thereby enabled to proceed much further in
investigating the secrets of Divine Wisdom. Yet ignorance of those sciences prevents no man from such a survey of the workmanship of God, as is more than sufficient to excite his admiration of the Divine Architect. In disquisitions concerning the motions of stars, in fixing their peculiar properties, there is need of skill, exactness, and industry; and the providence of God being more clearly revealed by these discoveries, the mind ought to rise to a sublimer elevation for the contemplation of his glory." Institutes, I, v, 2. To wrench from context the latter part of this paragraph (beginning with "In disquisitions concerning...") would be to provide Bacon with that theological motive to which he appeals in the Advancement of Learning for the classification of nature. In itself it expresses that sentiment to which Bacon gave his cautious vent on the speculum: "...wherein nevertheless there seemeth to be a liberty granted, as far forth as the polishing of this glass, or some moderate explication to this enigma." Calvin, of course, would admit of no such liberty's being granted.

They are, at best, but jots and tittles in the vast scheme of knowledge. Fulke Greville is of Hooker's mind with respect to our necessary ignorance. Far from putting us in God-like command of nature and in sociable contact with discarnate souls, our minds are slaves of ineptitudes and prisoners of Egyptian darkness:

For our defects in Nature who sees not?
Wee enter first things present not conceiving,
Not knowing future, what is past forgot:
All other Creatures instant power receiving,
To helpe themselves; Man onely bringeth sense
To feele, and waile his native Impotence.84

84. Humane Learning; Bullough, op. cit., 155.

The assumption that man can know himself in this world is a Satanic counsel; indeed, it was Satan's notion that he knew himself fully (and that hence he was the equal of deity) that inaugurated his damnation. Hooker's explanation of
angelic apostasy takes this tack:

It seemeth...that there was no other way for angels to sin, but by reflex of their understanding upon themselves; when being held with admiration of their own sublimity and honour, the memory of their subordination unto God and their dependency on him was drowned in this conceit; whereupon their adoration, love, and imitation of God could not choose but be also interrupted. The fall of angels therefore was pride.85

85. Ecclesiastical Polity, op. cit., I, iv, 1.

Pride was engendered by a reflex of the understanding upon itself; that is, by its holding up the mirror of mind to itself and admiring therein the uncompleted effigy of the difine similitude: in Hooker's day reflexive (i.e., reflecting) and mirroring were synonyms (see the O. E. D.). Phineas Fletcher's explanation of Satan's fall also employs the reflexive argument:

Thus fell this Prince of darkness, once a bright
And glorious starre: he wilfull turn'd away
His borrowed globe from that eternall light:
Himself he sought, so lost himself....86


A similar explanation of the apostasy is advanced by Sir Thomas Browne, who implies that Satan at the time of his fall was short of full spiritual development; that had his understanding not suffered a reflex upon itself, he might in time have realized his ambition.87 Browne explicitely

87. That the devil desired that which, had he not fallen,
he would have reached is a belief reaching back to early Medieval times. St. Thomas attributes it to Anselm of Canterbury (Summa Theologica, Q. 63, A, 3).

imputes his pride to bad judgment:

Man was not only deceivable in his Integrity, but the Angels of light in all their Clarity. He that said, He would be like the highest, did Err, if in some way he conceived himself so already: but in attempting so high an effect upon himself, he misunderstood the nature of God, and held a false apprehension of his own; whereby vainly attempting not only insolencies, but impossibilities, he deceived himself as low as Hell.88

88. Pseudodoxia Epidemica; Heynes, op. cit., III, 19.

"...if in some way he conceived himself so already": the qualification is important; it suggests that the aspiration was legitimate, that the crime was in the anticipation, which brought forth a misconstruction on Godhead, upon which misconstruction Satan, like Ixion, begot monsters, e.g., Hell and Death, Sin and Pride. These antecedents have all but o'ercrowed the spirit of man; nevertheless, we may yet lift a little the Egyptian darkness:

But now our understanding being eclipsed, as well as our tempers infirmed, we must betake our selves to ways of reparation, and depend upon the illumination of our endeavours. For, thus we may in some measure repair our primary ruines, and build our selves men again.89

89. Ibid., 46.

This is reminiscent of Bacon's cautious view of the speculum. The wording itself, however, is notably similar to Milton's definition of the aims of education. Yet the contrasts in
emphasis and tone are more significant than the similarities in diction:

The end then of Learning is to repair the ruines of our first Parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him, which being united to the heavenly grace of faith makes up the highest perfection.90

90. Tractate of Education (1644); Works, op. cit., IV, 277.

No suggestion that this end is an unattainable ideal appears in the Tractate to qualify the above pronouncement. The student who diligently applies himself can do more than repair his primary ruins: he can be like God. The method is reminiscent of that implicit in the prologues; that is, we must exploit the particular and accidental to arrive at the necessary and universal:

...because our understanding cannot in this body found itself but on sensible things, nor arrive so clearly to the knowledge of God and things invisible, as by orderly conning over the visible and inferior creature, the same method is necessarily to be followed in all discreet teaching.91

91. Ibid., IV, 277.

It is interesting that this doctrine reflects the position of St. Thomas, that "The knowledge of God that can be gathered from the human mind does not transcend the genus of the knowledge gathered from sensible things."92 Yet whereas

92. See above, p. 40.

Thomas adduces this argument as evidence of our inability to apprehend the essence of God, Milton offers it as the
method whereby we may "regain to know God aright." For, "united to the heavenly grace of faith," it is sufficient to illuminate the entire surface of the mirror. Such optimism is a far cry from the premise of Calvin that man is totally corrupt, or of Hooker that in our weakness knowledge is too painful for our wills to advance, or of Greville, that we grope blindly in Egyptian darkness, or of Browne, that we may in some measure repair our primary ruins. Milton's is a school designed to graduate infant Christs—and what must the master of such an academy be? The inference leaves him wonderfully close to the topmost throne above the hyaline, or in the seventh circle of the damned, depending on one's religious views. In any case, his attitude toward the nature of man did not substantially change between his Cambridge period and his thirty-sixth year. In between these lie Lycidas (1637) and the homely slighted shepherd.

Evidently, therefore, what Milton aims to tell us when, in Lycidas, he speaks of himself as a clear spirit, is this: I, who have abjured worldly pleasure, by disciplined study and meditation have rectified the Adam in my nature, so that no longer do I see the nature of things in a glass darkly but in a glass clearly. That illumination which St. Paul held was reserved for the blessed man in the next world has been accorded me in this. My spirit is a mirror which reflects without distortion the shape of all things
in the cosmos to my soul; it is a mirror larger than the world, for it shows me things of which this world knows nothing. It is a crystal which promises me omniscience and persuades me that I, too, am the son of God, the heir of absolute glory and absolute power. Only such as I are fitted to the poet's task--only we whose glass is cleared, who are potentially something better than the angels--can cast the image of eternal providence.

This conviction was to inspire him to "Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime." Far from rejecting the notion of the clear spirit in his riper years, Milton saw fit to make it, in a sense, the raison d'être of his two epics. It justifies and is the means to that astronomical and millenial sweep of the prophet's eye, which, like the Mind in the Third Prolusion, "wanders beyond the confines of the world," and has commerce with "those holy minds and intelligences whose company it must hereafter join."

For his epics, in effect, Milton, having previously identified himself with the clear spirit, applied that identification dynamically to the cosmic scope of his Arguments. To encompass these he departs from the rhetorical postures of his humanistic predecessors and Platonic contemporaries: the plural pronoun and the conditional or future verb are discarded for the singular and the unconditional: it is no longer "we may" ascend and descend at will the ladder of existence, or "we will be" like those holy intelligences;
it is rather "I do" and "I am." Very simply, Milton took the Christian Platonists at their word: he bathed in moral philosophy, lived laborious days, evoked his intellectuals from the germs of every way of life, studied nature, studied man, was hence finally ready to soar on plumes of perfect speculation, and, with the help of Pico's Cherubic Spirit, to penetrate all things from center to center, rending unities with Osirian power and reassembling them with Apollonian deliberation. Paradise Lost and Paradise Regain'd, in short, are themselves projections of the clear spirit, the capstones and, as it were, the crowning testimonials to that centuries-long-sustained humanistic faith in the nobility of man. Milton's invocations to Urania in both epics argue his faith in his own clear spirit and indicate his conviction that the illumination of his glass was, at least in the heat of composition, total. His management of the temptation scenes in Paradise Lost argue that a misconstruction on the development of clear spirit is Satan's one potent weapon and Eve's one fatal flaw: Satan's perversion of clear spirit is thus crucial to the theme of that epic. Finally, those allusions (generally in the form of epic similes) to gods, prophets, and conquerors; to the manifold branches of human learning, to superstition and to myth; and to the laws, manners, and arts of numerous civilizations--all these far-flung in space and time--argue a deliberate effort to persuade the "fit audience" of the
clear spirit's power to marshall the species and the genera of universal being.

Three invocations to Urania (the Holy Ghost) occur in *Paradise Lost*. The first inaugurates the epic theme; the second the Pronouncements of the Most High and His Son; the third the description of creation. A fourth invocation opens *Paradise Regain'd*. In each of these Milton plays the humble suppliant; without divine guidance he can accomplish nothing. But this posture of humility is fugitive and superficial; for, of course, the prayers are answered as soon as uttered; and the glass of understanding is made flawless before the story unfolds:

What in me is dark
Illumin, what is low raise and support.
(I, 22-23)

Looking through the eyes of Urania he oversoars Olympian perspectives:

93. Jove's "usurping" tribe were of middling significance:
...these first in Crest
And Ida known, thence on the Snowy top
Of cold Olympus rul'd the middle Air,
Thir highest Heav'n.
(P. L., I, 514-517)

They are, hence, beneath the notice of one who intends "no middle flight."

"...for Heav'n hides nothing from thy view/ Nor the deep
Tract of Hell." (P. L., I, 27-28). Blindness is no handicap to one equipped to penetrate the Hyaline before God's throne, though before he takes us there, he notes that his defect makes "wisdome at one entrance quite shut out"; so
that another invocation to the Spirit is appropriate:

So much the rather thou Celestial light
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight.

(P. L., III, 51-55)

The "planted eyes" are reminiscent of Spenser's eye of contemplation "Cleared from grosse mists of fraile infirmi-
ties" (Heavenly Beautie, 140), and the irradiation reminis-
cent of Chapman's vision of Homer:

His sacred bosome was so full of fire
That 'twas transparent; and made him expire
His breath in flames.

(Teares of Peace, 39-41)

This serene arrogation to his personal glass of under-
standing of those lights which his predecessors had seen fit to impute only to hypothetical readers or remote dig-
nitaries is re-expressed when Milton turns his discourse from Heaven to the Spheres, effecting the transition with his most revealing address to Urania:

Up led by thee
Into the Heav'n of Heav'ns I have presum'd
An Earthlie Guest, and drawn Empyreal Aire,
Thy tempring; with like safetie guided down
Return me to my Native Element....
Half yet remains unsung, but narrower bound
Within the visible Diurnal Spheare;
Standing on Earth, not rapt above the Pole,
More safe I sing....

(VII, 12-24)

The "visible Diurnal Spheare" is his "Native Element," which encompasses the latitude and history of Creation, for these matters are what he forthwith undertakes to expound. He has realized the dream expressed in his Seventh Prolusion:
his spirit "fills the whole world and the space beyond with
the expansion of its divine greatness." More safe, he
sings of "The King of Glorie in his powerful Word/ and
Spirit coming to create new Worlds." His subsequent de­
scriptions of the enclosure of the deep, of bringing chaos
therein to heel, of the creation of seas and upheaving
mountains, of Leviathan, who "at his gills draws in and at
his trunk spouts out a sea," of the multitudes of nobler
and baser creatures, of the planets and the Pleiades,
which pursue a mystic dance across the glacis of the
hyaline--these together with Adam's account of his own
creation and Eve's are surely justifications for his state­
ment in Paradise Regain'd that his "prompted Song" is borne

...through highth or depth of natures bounds
With properous wing full summ'd to tell of deeds
Above Heroic.

(I, 13-15)

They are copia illustrative of what the clear spirit can do.

In terms of artistic function, they are Milton's way
of incarnating the universe for the imagination; they
succeed (though the effect, of course, is cumulative) in
moving us to perceive--in prompting us, as it were, pictori­
ally and musically to intuit--the fact that creation in
all its aspects has been assimilated to the unfolding of
this tale. To accomplish this assimilation Milton is
profuse with allusion, particularly in the first book.

Here the thronging juxtapositions of the disparate and the
remote fuse geography and time and transubstantiate both
with the replications of apostasy. It was Dr. Johnson's contention that Milton's allusions are at times over-prolific: "He expands the adventitious image beyond the dimensions which the occasion required. Thus comparing the shield of Satan to the orb of the Moon, he crowds the imagination with the discovery of the telescope, and all the wonders which the telescope discovers." It


is perfectly true that the immediate occasion requires nothing so elaborate, but this complex of images serves another purpose: it subtly suggests--taken together with numerous similar image clusters--the vast context of pride. Satan in his pre-creation-Hell is perforce associated with a still-to-be-created and a still-later-to-be-discovered plurality of worlds, together with an achievement (in the foremost files of time) in modern science, and with Renaissance Italy and the moon. What appears superficially as an indecorous melange is in reality the reflection of a doctrine consistently supported and developed, that all creatures, animate or otherwise, inchoate or otherwise, have a stake in the success or failure of Satan's mission, and this is the thread on which their otherwise unrelated existences can logically be strung. The mission of Satan is the fall of man, the fall of man--the darkening of his spirit--the scope of his design, but if he succeeds, if
the spirit of man should cease to fill the world with the expansion of its divine greatness, the whole world will feel the loss. Hence Satan's design is at once microcosmic and cosmic; for it was on sufferance of the first man's glass of intellect that the spheres revolved in harmony; once it dimmed, the world decayed. It was one of Milton's supreme achievements that he could materialize for the imagination (through the disposition of his copia) the universal tragedy of the Fall. The achievement owes considerable to the earlier Milton's notion of a clear spirit: if that spirit could not have filled the world, if it could not have assimilated all being, if it could not have been one whom winds and tempests serve, Adam's loss would have shrunk to mean—to fundamentally materialistic—dimensions. In such a case what would have been the point of painting the cosmic stage lively before our eyes or where the motive for the incarnation of universal being? What, indeed, would there have been in the subject worthy to exercise the pen of a clear spirit?

As we have seen elsewhere, among earlier writers to assert the clear spirit was virtually tantamount to denying the existence of Original Sin; yet Milton not only upholds the latter doctrine, he formally presents it as the theme of Paradise Lost. How does he reconcile the two notions? In essence, he asserts that because Adam was unexercised in dialectic, because, at the time of the temptation, he had not had the opportunity to explore and understand his
own nature, because, in effect, he was unaware that his glass was clear, he was only in posse a clear spirit, though the well-being of the world turned on that potential: the power and the privileges of the clear spirit were his, but he had still to learn of them, that is, he had still to become wise. Although he was endowed with right reason, which enabled him "to discern the chief good, and in which consisted as it were the life of the understanding," he never took advantage of this endowment. Hence, he was never a clear spirit in actu: it was the Archangel Michael who had to tell him, after the fall, of that "paradise within him, happier far," which could supersede the one he lost. In an important sense, therefore, clear spirit was not among the virtues sacrificed by the fall of man: in the beginning it was not his to sacrifice. Power and glory he lost, together with the relatively easy means to omniscience. These losses we inherit, but though our tempers be infirmed we can yet be wiser than Adam, who failed to utilize what grace had bestowed. Moreover, the infant Christ is, in posse, superior to the paradised Adam: once delivered from sin and death, he "is raised to a far more excellent state of grace and glory than that from which he had fallen." This belief Milton reasserts in the Tetra-chordon (1645) and it is implicit in Michael's promise

95. Christian Doctrine, I, xii.

to Adam. Hence, a man who has diligently cultivated his intellectuals and saturated himself in Christian doctrine can reasonably assume himself to have repaired the intellectual ruins of his first parents and still suffer the privative consequences of their sin, for he cannot in the mortal state regain the power which they lost.

That Adam and Eve were spirits only potentially clear is a doctrine central to the poet's management of the temptation scenes. Far from being clear spirits, they were brought low by a desire to become such before their time and in an absurd, mechanical fashion, i.e., by eating the apple. For the serpent's lie concerning the apple was that it cleared the spirit. With that weapon he early begins the temptation, an undertaking which is first reported in Eve's description of her nightmare:

...alone I pass'd through ways
That brought me on a sudden to the Tree
Of interdicted Knowledge...
And as I wondering lookt, beside it stood
One shap'd and wing'd like one of those from Heav'n
By us oft seen; his dewie locks distill'd
Ambrosia; on that Tree he also gaz'd;
And 0 fair Plant, said he, with fruit surcharg'd,
Deigns none to ease thy load and taste thy sweet,
Nor God, nor Man; is Knowledge so despis'd?...
This said he paus'd not, but with ventrous Arme
He pluckt, he tasted; mee damp horror chil'd
At such bold words vouched with a deed so bold;
But he thus overjoy'd, O Fruit Divine,
Sweet of thy self, but much more sweet thus cropt,
Forbid'n here, it seems, as onely fit
For Gods, yet able to make Gods of Men:...
Here, happie Creature, fair Angelic Eve,
Partake thou also; happie though thou art,
Happier thou mayst be, worthier canst not be:
Taste this, and be henceforth among the Gods
Thy self a Goddess, not to Earth confind,
But sometimes in the Air, as wee, sometimes
Ascend to Heav'n, by merit thine, and see
What life the Gods live there, and such live thou.
So saying, he drew nigh, and to me held,
Even to my mouth of that same fruit held part
Which he had pluckt....

Forthwith up to the Clouds
With him I flew, and underneath beheld
The Earth outstretcht immense, a prospect wide
And various: wondring at my flight and change
To this high exaltation.

"Happier thou mayst be, worthier canst not be": this is
the crux of the Temptation. "Heaven is by merit thine."
But, of course, it isn't. Eve is no clear spirit who can,
like Milton, be "rapt above the pole," nor can eating an
apple make her one: earning a noble mind requires diligent
study and long meditation, even when the instruments of
knowledge are pure. To think otherwise is to suffer Hooker's
"reflex of the understanding upon itself." Eve's
fall, like the angels' was through pride. Satan evokes
this potential reflex in Eve at the actual scene of the
temptation by imputing supernatural power to the tree.
When Eve expresses surprise that a serpent should speak,
he tells her that he has won discourse of reason by eating
the forbidden fruit, which he had tasted simply to satisfy
his hunger:

Sated at length, ere long I might perceive
Strange alteration in me, to degree
Of Reason in my inward Powers, and Speech
Wanted not long, though to this shape retain'd.
Thenceforth to Speculations high or deep
I turnd my thoughts, and with capacious mind
Considered all things visible in Heav'n,
Or Earth, or Middle, all things fair and good.

(IX, 598-605)

The apple empowers him to know and do all that which "spacious art and high knowledge" enable the clear spirit to perform in the prologues. Satan develops his theme with an apostrophe to the tree:

O Sacred, Wise, and Wisdom-giving Plant,
Mother of Science, Now I feel thy Power
Within me cleere, not onely to discerne
Things in thir Causes, but to trace the wayes
Of highest Agents, deemd however wise.

(IX, 679-683)

He can "discerne things in thir causes"; that is, he is miraculously become a dialectician and "knows those holy mind and intelligences whose company he must hereafter join." When Eve protests that God has forbidden her the fruit, Satan tempts her again—and this time successfully—with the vision of the clear spirit:

He knows that in the day
Ye eate thereof, your Eyes that seem so cleere,
Yet are but dim, shall perfetly be then
Op'nd and cleerd, and ye shall be as Gods,
Knowing both Good and Evil as they know.

(IX, 705-709)

Satan ascribes to the tree the power that Milton ascribes to Urania and promises Eve the wisdom which Milton, in large part, commands. Eve's crime, therefore, lay not in aspiring to this degree of knowledge but in assuming that she was ready to receive it. Satan manages the temptation with consummate skill—as well he ought: for the arguments he uses here are the very same by which he deceived himself,
and Eve, like Satan (to paraphrase Sir Thomas Browne), when she thought she could be like the highest, did erre, if in some way she conceived herself so already. She prevented her time, the one plausible sin in a creature of Paradise, and at the same time the crowning irony of the Fall; for had she abided her time she would have won what Satan promised.

Yet if there was deep distress in this irony for Eve there were the seeds of glory in it for her Puritan grandson and historian. He, circling upward from the glassy sea wherefrom she fell, broods over his creation, infusing it with the vital virtue of his more than Puritan conviction that malediction disperses with the shadows on the glass and informing it with noble demonstrations that his glass is clear, that he is on his way to loftier arcs than these: it is a conviction that stands between man's destiny and Satan "like Atlas or Teneriff unremov'd." The glass of the animate fused with the glass of Liberty and the animate-spirit with the soul-spirit encouraged some remarkable pronouncements in the literature of Renaissance optimism. In Milton it encouraged vision. It encouraged him to the belief that in sapience he oversoared the Adversary. That he bade fair to oversoar the hierarchy of the blessed angels as well--not only in sapience but, eventually, in glory and power--is another of his beliefs. But the genesis of that requires a separate chapter; it is more closely linked to Microcosmos than to Clear Spirit.
CHAPTER THREE

MICRO COSMOS:

THE AVATAR OF POWER

The world that I regard is my self; it is the Microcosm of my own frame that I cast mine eye on; for the other I use it but like my Globe, and turn it round sometimes for my recreation. Men that look upon my outside, perusing only my condition and Fortunes, do err in my Altitude; for I am above Atlas his shoulders.

Browne, Religio Medici

"Knowledge," said Fulke Greville, "is of power's eternity." Power is knowledge's excuse for being. He did not, of course, mean secular power, but eternal power. The Renaissance had as lively a sense of the evils inherent in absolute secular power as had Lord Acton, as the various Mirror, Casibus, and Dial books and the political villains of the Elizabethan stage attested. Ulysses had called it a universal wolf that ends by devouring itself.

1. Troilus and Cressida, I, iii, 121-124.

and Greville asserted that it "straight drownes in a gulfe of vast affections/ Faith, truth, worth, law, all popular protections." On the other hand, eternal power—the true

2. Caelica, Sonnet LXXVII.

absolute power—sublimes absolutely. It is, moreover, the ultimate reward of the elect. It is not enough simply that we should be made fully aware of Divine glory; we must share infinitely in Divine power. For Greville that is the
central meaning of the Second Coming, "When Gods All-might
doeth in thy flesh appeare" (Sonnet LXXXVIII). "Our glori­fication," said Milton (Christian Doctrine, I, 33), "will be accomplished by the renovation of heaven and earth, and of all things therein adapted to our service or delight, to be possessed by us in perpetuity." His authority for this observation is Isaiah, lxv, 17: "For behold I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind." It is notable, however, that Isaiah makes no point of the heavens' serving mankind, nor does Holy Writ emphasize energetic participation in Godhead. Subordination of the renovated cosmos to the regenerate spirit and the dynamic application of this service for spiritual delight might be inferrable from the Apocalypse (especially iii, 20-21) and from the pronouncements on the glass of liberty in James and Paul; but implications not infrequently lie fallow for centuries, awaiting the development of such instruments of tillage as are most effectively applicable to their cultivation. To nurture to a full-blown doctrine the suggestion that absolute power is virtue's absolute reward required a special engine. That engine was the microcosm-become-the-micro-deity. Like the clear spirit it represented a fusion of originally disjunct elements in the history of thought, a fusion which did not materialize until the close of the Middle Ages. These elements were 1) microcosmism, 2) the idea of correspondence, 3) Christian anthropomorphism, 4) the idea
of an ordered and graduated existence. Organized as a coherent system of belief they upheld the tenet that the mind can transmute the objects of thought into the energy of spirit, so that, in arriving at omniscience it arrives simultaneously at "power's eternity." Because it was a concept almost universally acknowledged to be valid from the early fifteenth century to the end of the Renaissance, it lies at the base of the Renaissance understanding of the dignity of man, and, in the world of the Renaissance poet, it represents at times the soul in action of man dignified or of man casting his dignity away.

The idea that man is a microcosm, the universe writ small, is at least as old as Anaximandros' and probably


as old as the human capacity for drawing analogies. Originally it was little more than a set of pedantic similitudes designed to show that man and nature are parallel manifestations of the will of God, and that the same scale of values, laws, and substances informs both. Among pre-Christian and early medieval commentators such observations constituted a lesson in humility, for they were contrived into a system of correspondences to show that the intellects and spirits which governed the cosmos enjoyed a qualitative superiority over the soul of man in the same ratio as the physical cosmos outweighed the body of man. Such correlations
of the substantial with the accidental figure importantly in Plato's notion of cosmic order:

The materials of which our own body is made are only small parcels of the great cosmic masses of similar materials, and these constituents are found in a much higher degree of purity elsewhere in the universe than in our bodies. The 'fire' in us is small in bulk and 'impure' in substance compared with the fire in the sun. And again the 'fire' or 'water' in us is fed and kept up by that in the larger world. And generally our little body is fed by the mass of body without. By analogy, we may infer that since there is soul in us, we see in our own case that when things are amiss with the body, it is the intelligence, resident in the soul, which reestablishes order by means of the medical art. So we may hold that there are super-human souls, and that it is their intelligence which is the cause of cosmic order. 4

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One may infer an additional analogy from Plato's position: if "our little body is fed by the mass of body without," our souls are fed by, and hence are under the command of, superior cosmic intelligences. By a reverse analogy, if superior cosmic intellect commands the mind the impure properties of the body will be correspondingly controlled by the refined elements of the macrocosm. Such additional inferences—they were not stressed by Plato—became the philosophical basis for judicial astrology in the early Middle Ages. The impure properties in man are, of course, the four elements in various degrees of inharmonious admixture. This concept of the chemistry of man is of pre-Socratic origin: Anaximandros, Empedocles, Heracleitus, and Thales resolved the universe into earth, air, fire,
and water and postulated a hypostatical fifth force to underlie them. For Heracleitus this force is an especially pure fire; for Thales it is water. This ultimate substance informs alike the little world and the great and hence invites comparison between the two. By Aristotle's time such comparisons (though the notion of first matter underwent, meanwhile, a series of radical reinterpretations) were an old saw requiring no special discussion or defense. In the *Physics* (VIII, 2) Aristotle makes perfunctory use of the doctrine of correspondence (i.e., of analogies between the little world and the great) to support his theory of motion: "Now if ((motion)) can occur in an animal, why should not the same be true also of the universe as a whole? If it can occur in a small world it could also occur in a great one: and if it can occur in the world, it could also occur in the infinite." Here the face of correspondence is taken for granted. Aristotle, however, (though perhaps unwittingly) made an important contribution of his own to the scope of correspondence. To the four elements of the pre-Socratics and to the intellect of Plato he added the generic attributes of the soul, i.e., the vegetative, the sensitive, the appetitive, the locomotive, and the intellectual (*De Anima*, II, 3), which correspond in the Medieval mind to the gradations in the chain of being of the macrocosm.
To the classical idea of the microcosm Medieval science and theology affixed notions which would help rationalize their own peculiar premises and objectives. Astrologers and alchemists found in correspondence a philosophical basis whereon to formulate their special concepts of astral influence and the elemental virtues. The relatively simple analogies expressed in Plato and implied in Aristotle are expanded by the Medieval scientist to an immense catalogue of specific and generic similitudes, schemes, congruities, proportions, and equations. The purport of the enlarged system remained, however, identical with its pre-Christian predecessor. It was simply this: if man indeed were a little world and if both the great and little worlds were governed by the same forces, then a sympathetic bond united the two. If they exist in sympathetic union, what occurs in the greater will be reflected in the smaller, for the smaller feeds upon the greater and is in all ways inferior to it. Upon this proposition astrology advanced its claims to be a valid system and set about drawing spectacular parallels between the celestial bodies and man, in an effort to predict or account for all the vicissitudes in human experience. This expansion of the original analogies was dictated by the disciplines of the science, for it was necessary to determine the specific correspondence between a certain organ and a heavenly body, or a certain complexion and a certain climate. Moreover, the humors were thought to correspond with the elements and combine in man to
produce effects analogous to those wrought by the elements along the earth; and, of course, both the humors and the elements corresponded in any given combination with a specific planet or star in a specific house of the Zodiac.

Perhaps the fullest illustration of the complicated parallelism which Medieval correspondence produced is set forth by Hildegard of Tübingen in the Causae et Curae (ca. 1150) and in the Liber Divinorum Operum (ca. 1170). Professor Thorndike has provided a summary account of these:

She compares the firmament to man’s head, sun, moon, and stars to the eyes..., "the sides of the world" to the arms and sense of touch..."The sun spreads its rays from the brain to the heel, and the moon directs its rays from the eyebrows to the ankles...."The eyebrows of man declare the journeyings of the moon, namely the one route by which it approaches the sun in order to restore itself, and the other by which it recedes after it has been burnt by the sun." From the top of the cerebral cavity to "the last extremity of the forehead" there are seven distinct and equal spaces, by which are signified the seven planets which are equi-distant from one another in the firmament.... As the three intervals between the top of the human head and the end of the throat and the navel and the groin are all equal, so are the spaces intervening between the highest firmament and lowest clouds and the earth’s surface and center....As the heart is stirred by emotion, whether of joy or of sorrow, humors are excited in the lungs and breast which rise to the brain and are emitted through the eyes in the form of tears. And in like manner, when the moon begins to wax or wane, the firmament is disturbed by winds which raise fogs from the sea and other waters.5

century when she wrote. The burden of these was that man, compounded of the four elements, was ruled by the stars, which were purer and more potent compounds of the same kind. This is the position of Julius Firmicus Maternus, in whose Mathesis (ca. 335) is the central notion that God created man a microcosm of the four elements after the fashion of the macrocosm, which serves as an intermediary or agent of the will of God "who composed all things by the arrange­ment of everlasting law." 6 Isidore of Seville (De Natura

6. Thorndike, ibid., I, 530.

Rerum, ca. 612) upholds a similar doctrine, explaining that "the planets are called errantia, not because they wander themselves but because they cause men to err." He invokes another fourth-century commentator, Rufinus, translator of the Recognitions, a discourse on magic of earlier date, 7

7. The original is a Greek text brought out some time in the second or third century A. D. It is a composite of dialogue, narrative, and polemic concerning Peter, Simon Magus, and the family of Clement of Rome. It is possible that Shakespeare was familiar with the Recognitions or, at least, with the legends arising therefrom. Simon Magus, like Prospero, was a magician who decided to abjure the practice of magic, and, to make head with this resolution, sunk his magical apparatus and books of magic into the sea. See Thorndike, I, 400-427 (though Thorndike does not notice the interesting parallel).

to support this contention. 8 By the middle of the ninth

8. Thorndike, ibid., I, 632-633.
In the tenth century any discussion of the four elements is apt to evoke comment on the microcosm, and the mere juxtaposition of these two topics ought in itself to persuade readers that man is subject to the rule of the stars—this according to the Mathematica of Alhandreus.9 In the tenth century correspondence becomes more complicated. Gerbert (Liber de Planetis), asserting that man is a microcosm, expounds correspondence between the four humors and the four elements and the "harmony of the elements, climates of the sky, and times of the year"—all interrelated by the qualities they have in common: hot, moist, cold, dry.10

9. Thorndike, ibid., I, 712. The Mathematica is of uncertain date: "Sometime before the tenth century."

10. Thorndike, ibid., I, 709.

In the twelfth century specific parallels are drawn between creatures of the earth and the physical functions and personality of man:

There is nothing in the world which has not its correspondences in man. He is like the corporeal world; he consists of the four elements...he has the nature of the plants and animals; he is similar to things: upright like the terebinth, his hairs like the grass and weeds, the arteries like the rivers....He is courageous like the lion, timorous like the hare, patient like the lamb, clever like the fox.11

Generic correspondences are also stressed: man is endowed with "essentiam cum lapidibus, vitam seminalem cum herbis et arboribus, vitam sensualem eandemque cum pecudibus, vitam rationalem cum angelis."\(^{12}\) This seems to be an adaptation of the Aristotelian categories. Like the Animate in Plotinus it makes of man a little chain of being, a phenomenon frequently noted but never elaborated on by the Medieval commentator. Alanus de Insulis (De Planctu Naturae) stresses that capacity in the soul of man, corresponding with the divine ordering of the objective world, to compel to submission those elements which, left to themselves, would war against one another and threaten the universe with chaos. Man, he says, is the glass of nature; in him one may behold the harmonious arrangement of naturally dissonant forces:

\[\text{Sicut enim quatuor elementorum concors discordia, unica pluralitas, consonantia dissonans, consensus dissentien\textsuperscript{s}, mundialis regiae structuras conciliat, sic quatuor complexionum compar disparitas, inaequilis aequalitas, deformis conformitas, diversa identitas aedificium coporis humanis compaginat.}\]

\(^{13}\) Allers, \textit{ibid.}, 345.

Other correspondences obtain among relatively abstract disciplines of the reason and imagination. Michael Scot (\textit{Liber Introductoribus}, ca. 1200) submits that grammar,
music and the theology are generically allied through the number eight (i.e., the parts of speech, the octave, and the eight beatitudes), a common denominator which proceeded ineluctably, albeit unconsciously, from man's predisposition to harmony, which predisposition is an integral part of the minor mundus. 14


This growing complex of analogies and epitomizations, as long as it accorded man a passive role in the cosmos, as long as man was, in effect, a little world in terms of cosmic significance, as long as he was simply a convenient map by which to read and interpret the signatures of God in the great world—as long, in short, as the complex supported a belief in fatal necessity—was in danger of overthrow by more creatively aggressive and optimistic beliefs. Moreover, the system was inherently self-contradictory: the notions of Isidore and his predecessors which happily supported and therefore dignified the metier of the judicial astrologer—and did so till the very end of the Renaissance—could hardly be reconciled with the notion that the soul exercises a mastery over the four elements within the microcosm, or with the notion that man is possessed of the "intellectuals" of angels: in so far as he is endowed with the latter he is not in all respects subordinate to the stars, hence need not err through their
influence. Again, if man is a little world, the miniature embodiment of the chain of being, that ladder of existence becomes of less importance than the soul which encompasses all its ramifications; for, in so far as it is assimilated to the psychophysical entity of man it assumes a vitality, energy and capacity for dynamic application of which it is wholly devoid in any other context outside the bosom of Deity. Medieval temperaments, however, found passive

15. Even within the bosom of Deity the archetypes of existence were accorded a passive character as often as an active one. Professor Lovejoy remarks this paradox as follows: "It was a conflict between two irreconcilable conceptions of the good. The final good for man...consisted in some mode of assimilation or approximation to the divine nature, whether that mode were defined as imitation or contemplation or absorption....But the God in whom man was thus to find his own fulfilment was, as has been pointed out, not one God but two. He was the Idea of the Good, but he was also the Idea of Goodness; and though the second attribute was nominally deduced dialectically from the first, no two notions could be more antithetic. The one was an apotheosis of unity, self-sufficiency, and quietude, the other of diversity, self-transcendence, and fecundity....The one God was the goal of the 'way up', of that ascending process by which the finite soul, turning from all created things, took its way back to the immutable Perfection in which alone it could find rest. The other God was the source and the informing energy of that descending process by which being flows through all the levels of possibility down to the very lowest." See A. O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being, Harvard University Press, 1936, 82-83.

microcosm more congenial to the rationale of their science and to the idea of Christian humility than the active.

Accommodating the system to these practical considerations most early Medieval commentators emphasized the harmony of correspondence as such and neglected the
philosophical dilemmas which it posed. Suffering this neglect the system was unaesthetic: in terms of its emphasized functions it was unwieldy and it was static; for what these functions pointed up as the ultimate fact of correspondence was that man by knowing himself knew also his universe and that this knowledge was a good in itself. So long, however, as this good remained unassessed it was a dead end to the entire system; the question why should man know? could, in fact, be given no satisfactory answer as long as knowledge and action dwelt apart. As it turned out, a satisfactory answer required the combination of microcosmism and Christian Platonism. It required specifically the recognition of man as a free and active epitome of divine plenitude and power. Steps to the recognition of this micro-deism may be conveniently charted in the teleologies of three philosophers importantly representative of the combination we have just mentioned. The first two are Plotinus (A. D. 203-262) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). The third is Nicholas of Cusa (De Docta Ignorantia, 1430), who assimilated microcosmism to the metaphysics and theology of the former two in a manner to produce the dynamic microcosmism of the Renaissance.

As was noted elsewhere, Plotinus went thoroughly into the problem of knowledge, his fundamental purpose being to show how man can translate himself to the seat of Godhead. The basis of this epistemology differs in name only
from the basis of correspondence: Plotinus does not speak in terms of microcosm and macrocosm, but his diffusion of soul through the graduated scale of existence nevertheless made man a little world and hence made possible the soul's knowledge of the great. His evaluation, therefore, of the end of knowledge is immediately relevant to the basic aims of microcosmism. For Plotinus the ultimate reward of knowledge is mystic experience, which lies in the contemplation of supreme unity. Knowledge of the good and the exercise of virtue are indispensable in attaining to this degree of contemplation: Dialectic must treat of the "Good and the not-Good" before it abandons the "realm of deceit and falsity and pastures the Soul in the Meadows of Truth." Dialectic as discipline is virtue in action.


It makes possible at last a union of the divided soul with the soul as Divine Hypostasis, which union enables the former to contemplate Divine Mind. This hypostatical soul "may be thought of as a powerful light," beyond the influence of which there must be darkness:

Once this darkness exists the Soul must see it, and, by seeing it, give it form....The Kosmos, the ordered and patterned system thus produced, becomes like a stately and varied mansion not disowned by its architect though not identical with him; it is judged worthy in every inch of all its builder's care in adding beauty to its being.... Thus is the All ensouled, with a spirit not its own but communicated to it: governed by Soul, not governing it; not so much possessing as possessed by Soul. For the Universe lies within this maintaining Spirit and no recess
of it is wholly void of Soul....The Soul, outside all the limits of space and quantity, is able to embrace within its unvarying force the entire body of the All, and is ever at the furthest and nearest point which the All includes. (IV, iii, 9.)

This world soul is a mighty instrument of God and is, in its own right, a God-like entity; but wherein, exactly, lies the "We" in this cosmic psyche--where the celestial seat of the triumphant, clear-spirited dialectician? It would seem to lie in awareness of the shaping power and orderliness of its cosmic self and of its divine procreator. It would seem to consist wholly in passive contemplation of that "calm eternal Identity":

Eternally identical this Principle must be, for what change or 'otherness' could be sought There where all is Well? Whither could that Being move outside Itself, having all within Itself? What increase (and, therefore, diversity) could the Most Perfect Desire? In Him, in all ways consummate, all things are consummate; of all that He has, all is perfect: and of all that is within His being all is perfect. (V, i, 4.)

This picture of eternal blessedness no doubt has its attractions (and it is one, we should remember, which Plotinus claims to have beheld in a mystic rapture): it has harmony and serenity and epic magnitude. But it has no future: in it man has no will of his own. His God is static and his adoration of Him supine. The reason for this almost frigid repose and supinity was simply that Plotinus was constrained to evaluate knowledge in terms of itself. Immortality is hence perpetual contemplation of the species and genera of being. Plotinus' view of heaven becomes quickly abhorrent to the imagination of one
schooled in such theologies as stress the role of the will, but since dynamism was not a notable characteristic of Medieval thought, it is not surprising that the Plotinian view of the good for man persisted for centuries without significant modification. It is the teleology implicit in Firmicus, in Isidore, in Claudianus, and in Alanus—even as, in the pre-Christian era (not to forget the father of the Archetypes), it had been that of Plato himself.17

17. Perhaps the liveliest picture of immortality in Plato is Socrates' projection of it in the Apology, but even here it is notable that knowledge, not power or knowledge in union with power, is the good for man: "I shall then be able to continue my search into true and false knowledge; as in this world, so also in the next; and I shall find out who is wise, who pretends to be wise, and is not. What would not a man give, O judges, to be able to examine the leader of the great Trojan expedition; or Odysseus or Sisyphus, or numberless others, men and women too? What infinite delight would there be in conversing with them and asking them questions." But this is the un-metaphysical Plato, the young Plato still heavily under the influence of Socrates and his contemporaries. The later Plato, like Plotinus, reposes the Soul's happiness in contemplation of the First Forms (Phaedrus). In the Timaeus the soul views these passively from the vantage point of a star: "(God)...assigned each soul to a star; and having there placed them as in a chariot, he showed them the nature of the universe, and declared to them the laws of destiny."

One reason, perhaps, for the endurance of the Plotinian system was that it provided a thorough-going justification of correspondence. One element in the common ground of Platonism and Christian theology was microcosmism, and it was perhaps for this reason that Platonism was so early recognized by the Church Fathers.
St. Augustine (345-430) noted significant parallels between Platonism and Christianity; he was not, however, inclined to credit exponents of the former with divine insight: "If those who are called philosophers said by chance anything that was true and consistent with our faith, we must claim it from them as from unjust possessors" (Christian Doctrine, II, 40). St. Thomas explains how Augustine managed these arrogations:

Whenever Augustine, who was imbued with the doctrines of the Platonists, found in their teaching anything consistent with faith, he adopted it; and those things which he found contrary to faith he amended. Now Plato held that the forms of things subsist of themselves apart from matter. These he called Ideas, and he said that our intellect knows all things by participation in them; so that just as corporeal matter, by participating in the Idea of a stone, becomes a stone, so our intellect, by participating in the same Idea, has knowledge of a stone. But it seems contrary to faith that the forms of things should subsist of themselves without matter outside the things themselves, as the Platonists held, asserting that life-in-itself and wisdom-in-itself are certain creative substances. Therefore, in the place of the Ideas defended by Plato, Augustine said that the exemplars of all creatures existed in the divine mind. It is according to these that all things are formed, as well as the human soul knows all things.  


These are not particularly substantial objections to the Platonic system; had Augustine and St. Thomas read carefully the Timaeus (30) they probably would have withdrawn them, for in that dialogue Plato intimates that the exemplars of all creatures do exist in the Divine mind:

Let me tell you then why the creator made this world of generation. He was good, and the good can never have any
jealousy of anything. And being free from jealousy, he desired that all things should be as like himself as they could be. This is in the truest sense the origin of creation and of the world.19


Certainly, Augustine's exemplars do not differ by a hair from Plotinian Authentic Existence. The significance, therefore, of Augustine's objection is not that the early Church derogated from Plato but that they found themselves in the same epistemological camp as Plotinus: we know the world because everything in the world corresponds to some faculty in the soul. As was pointed out in the study of the clear spirit the only difference between the two systems of knowledge was that in the Christian view man could not pyramid his learning to omniscience, because he could not know himself. This limitation on human science does not, however, in any way affect the basic aims of the two epistemologies. Similarly, Original Sin in no way influences the teleology of the Christian view. Given the Plotinian means to blessedness, the Plotinian restrictions on beatitude would haunt the Christian heavens, and passive contemplation would persist as the ultima thule of human experience. We see it persisting in St. Thomas, eight hundred years after the Bishop of Hippo had brought out his Christian doctrine.
"The intellectual light," observed the Angelic Doctor, "is nothing else than a participated likeness of the uncreated light, in which are contained the eternal exemplars.... By the seal of the divine light in us, all things are made known to us." This is correspondence in a scriptural frame of reference: "The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us" (Psalms, IV, 6, 7). Thus effortlessly do microcosmism and the First Forms of Plotinian dialectic merge with the sacred principle that man was created in the image and similitude of God.

St. Thomas does not recognize Plotinus as an epistemologist, crediting his ideas to later Christian philosophers, notably to Augustine and the pseudo Dionysius. Despite his censure of Platonism, however, he sets as much store by dialectic as did his unbaptised predecessor: "The more simple and the more abstract a thing is, the nobler and higher it is in itself" (82, 3). "The intellect has an operation extending to universal being" (79, 2). Anatomizing the soul in terms of the Aristotelian categories, St. Thomas observes that the powers of the soul are three fold:
For in the soul there is a power whose object is only the body that is united to that soul; and the powers of this genus are called vegetative, for the vegetative power acts only on the body to which the soul is united. There is another genus in the powers of the soul which regards a more universal object—namely, every sensible body, and not only the body to which the soul is united. And there is yet another genus in the powers of the soul which regards a still more universal object—namely, not only the sensible body, but universally all being.

(78, 1)

The soul inclines to all being; it desires it through the will and achieves it through the intellect. Ultimately will is the subservient handmaid of intellect, for its primary purpose is to drive the mind up the chain of being to its passive goal; that goal achieved the will is no longer relevant in Thomistic teleology as a positive force. The achievement is possible in the first place because what is extrinsic to the soul "has a natural aptitude to be united to the soul, and to be by its likeness in the soul" (78, 1). We can infer from even this scant resume of Thomas' theory of knowledge three traditional ideas: 1) faculties in the soul correspond with things external to them; 2) the soul is a little chain of being; 3) the intellect poses universal being--comprehended through dialectic--as its object. Each one of these principles, of course, brings forth the other two; and each suggests, or at least supports, the notion that man is a little world. The measure of the little world's perfection is the capacity of its intellect to understand universal being, that is, its capacity to use dialectic. Perfection
consists in unity; omniscience in the understanding of it: God is absolutely perfect "by the fact that all things are precontained in Him, not as component parts, but as united in one simple whole" (91, 1). This emphasis on unity as perfection in the Godhead is neo-Platonic; the Thomistic God approached through Thomistic metaphysics is the Plotinian Divine Mind. The angels are accorded His perfection to the degree that they are able to comprehend it through dialectic; that is, "according as all things which are produced by God in nature through diverse forms come under their knowledge" (91, 1).

The human mind ranks beneath the angelic mind because man "does not possess a natural knowledge of all natural things." Angelic apprehension is immediate and intuitive; divorced from body angels are divorced from the necessity of abstracting intelligible species from things (55, 2). The human soul, however, being a "lower intellectual substance," must proceed discursively through the examination of accidents to a knowledge of substance. In doing so it must work with more faculties than are necessary to angelic apprehension, that is, in addition to will and intellect, which are the sole instruments of cognition among angels, the human mind must call upon memory, imagination, and discursive reason to arrive at substantial knowledge. In Plotinian terms it must apply dialectic to the phantasms crossing the Animate. This multiplicity
of function reminds St. Thomas that man is a composite of cosmic substance and accident:

Man is in a manner composed of all things, since he has in himself a rational soul of the genus of spiritual substances, and in likeness to the heavenly bodies he is removed from contraries by an equable temperament....So, too, man is called a miniature world, because all creatures of the world are in a way to be found in him.

Implicit in these comparisons of angelic with human personality is a paradox which Thomas is at some pains to resolve. He is careful to point out, first of all, that the angelic mind is closer to God than is the human. It is simpler than the human mind, and "The established order of things requires that higher beings be more perfect than lower, and that whatever is contained deficiently, partially and in manifold manner in the lower beings should be contained in the higher eminently and according to a certain fullness and simplicity" (93, 4). On the other hand, man is a microcosm and the angel is not. Undeniably, in terms of accidental qualities, man is more nearly in the image of God than the angel. However, since the "notion of image" chiefly consists in substance, that is, in the intellectual nature, "we must grant that, absolutely speaking, the angels are more to the image of God than man is, but that man is relatively more like to God" (93, 4). The distinction between relative and absolute, however, becomes tenuous when one recalls that the purpose of intellection in both man and angel is the same, i.e., to realize the inclination of the will toward the absolute good—although, to be sure,
no mortal man reaches the final perfection of will. There are, Thomas observes, three kinds of good men, the rational, the just, and the blessed. These correspond to three aspects of the Godhead: creation (of the understanding), re-creation (i.e., redemption), and likeness. The latter image is wrought through knowing God actually and loving Him perfectly; it consists in the "likeness of glory" (93, 4). In the blessed state (not conferred until He passes into immortality) man is as much "to the image of God" in an absolute sense as the angel. The assertion that he is absolutely superior to the angel is not to be found in the Summa Theologica, but the notion that he is a little world, a little chain of being potentially capable of divine glory is enough to suggest that possibility to later commentators. Nicholas of Cusa, at the close of the Middle Ages, makes it the basis of his creed.

In the De Docta Ignorantia (1430) Nicholas initiates his search for wisdom with the axiom that if a thing is not purely its own essence it suffers limitation. Since God alone subsists in Himself, God alone is free. All things else are inhibited by the union of form with matter; that is, matter is potentially anything; form restricts it to something finite. The act of union between form and matter
Nicholas terms motion, or the spirit of connection. It is the "third something" between body and soul, power and act, matter and manner. In man its function is precisely that of the Plotinian Animate. Acting universally it is nature: "Donc, la nature est... ce qui enferme toutes les choses qui se produisent grace au mouvement."\textsuperscript{23} The

\textsuperscript{23.} Moulinier, \textit{ibid.}, 147.

investiture of matter by form "procede a la fois de la possibilite et de L'ame du monde," which last proceeds from the exercise of the maximum will. Nicholas' nomenclature for divine mind is "le maximum absolu, un, incommunicable, immersible et irrestrictible a ceci ou cela." This, he goes on, "existe en soi toujours le meme eternellement, egalement, dans l'immobilité." As such it represents the perfection of each of the materialized entities which subsist in nature. These being subsumer under its unity, it follows that no two of them are precisely identical with one another:

...toutes les choses different mutuellement, ou en genre, espece, nombre, ou en espece et nombre, ou en genre et nombre, pour que chacune subsiste dans son nombre, son poids et sa mesure propres. C'est pourquoi les objects de l'univers se distinguent les uns des autres par des degrés, pour que nul d'entre eux ne coince avec un autre. Donc, aucun objet restreint ne peut participer precisement du degré de restriction d'un autre.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{24.} Moulinier, \textit{ibid.}, 168.
The chain of being is hence precontained in the divine mind. It is to be noted that Nicholas' observations on divine unity and on "dialectical" classification are in accordance with Platonic and Thomistic metaphysics. His concept of limitation is also recognizably of the older schools: the lower the degree on the dialectical scale the more restricted the substance. This rule of thumb is inferable from Plotinus. Within the framework of this preliminary summary of Cusa's *De Docta Ignorantia*, however, lies the basis for a revolutionary departure from earlier philosophers. This basis is Nicholas' treatment of the earlier metaphysics in terms of freedom and its privation. Emphasis, not innovation, makes his approach important: initial equating of freedom with the relative purity of essence leads him to consider the ascent of man through the scale of dialectic not as progress toward omniscience but as an advance toward uninhibited and limitless power. This consideration leads to a second departure: Nicholas affirms the potential superiority of man over the angel. He ignores the Thomistic distinction between relative and absolute. The microcosm is an unequivocal determinant of a transcendent human glory. That which most closely simulates the plenitude of the Maximum is most capable of emulating the Maximum's perfection:

Or, il est manifeste, d'abord, que l'ordre des choses demeure nécessairement que certaines soient d'une nature inférieure en comparaison d'autres, comme celles qui n'ont ni vie ni intelligence, que certaines soient d'une nature
supérieure, celles qui comprennent, et que certaines soient intermédiaires. Si donc la maximité absolue est de la façon la plus universelle l'entité de toutes choses, et non pas de l'une plutôt que d'une autre, il est clair que cet être peut mieux s'associer au maximum, qui est plus commun à l'universalité des êtres.25

25. Moulinier, ibid., 177.

Thus intermediate nature, which serves to link inferior with superior nature, can alone be elevated to the Godhead "in a fashion which suits God." This intermediary is human nature, which in its mortal condition, is "placée audessus de toutes les œuvres de Dieu et peu au-dessous des anges." It "encloses" intellectual and sensibl nature, summarizing the universe within itself. "Elle est un microcosm, ou petit monde, comme l'appelaient les anciens avec juste raisón."26 Raised to union with the Maximum, humanity becomes the plenitude of universal and particular perfections. Only the "veritable" man is capable of such union, however; that is, only that man who can free himself from restriction in the accidental. Such freedom is attainable through contemplation of the ascending scale of essences, which lead to the divine unity. The capacity and willingness to comprehend these ultimate relationships distinguishes the veritable man. He will subsist in unity with infinite power, in the "equality" of maximum being, restricted only in that he embodies the hypostatical nature of all being.

In short, the veritable man is the Word, the Man-God:

Or, la puissance maximum n'a de limite dans aucune créature sans que, en lui donnant quelque chose, la puissance infinie puisse la faire meilleure et plus parfaite. Mais si un homme est élevé à l'unité avec la puissance elle-même, de telle sorte que l'homme ne soit pas une créature qui subsiste en soi, mais en unité avec la puissance infinie, cette puissance n'a pas son terme (i.e., limits) dans la créature mais en elle-même.*

27. Moulinier, ibid., 183.

Nicholas does not explicitly equate the elect with Christ in terms of wisdom and power, but the notion is undeniably there, that the true man will be of the Trinity. The Word, indeed, draws its strength from that same multiplicity and variety which characterize the microcosm; this notion is evidenced in Nicholas' projection of post-millennial beatitude:

...ainsi, d'abord, il y aurait le Dieu créateur; secondement le Dieu homme, qui aurait assumé dans son unité a lui d'une façon suprême l'humanité créé, qui est, pour ainsi dire, la restriction universelle de toutes les choses, unie d'une manière hypostatique et personnelle à l'égalité d'être tout, de sorte qu'elle soit, grace au Dieu infiniment absolu et par la médiation de la restriction universelle, qui est l'humanité; en troisième lieu toute chose entrait dans l'être restreint afin de pouvoir être ce qu'elle est dans un ordre et d'une manière meilleurs....Ce maximum est Jésus, l'être béni, l'Homme-Dieu.28


For Nicholas the final lesson of the Incarnation is that God saw fit to materialize Himself in the most perfect of His creatures, man. The superiority of man over the angels consists in the plenitude which foregathered to
his composition. Christ is the Son of Man in so far as he assumed the microcosm; man is the son of God in so far as he is able to command his own plenitude, that is, work it up the ladder of dialectic to an intellectual unity wherein the principle of the Word (that is, the energy behind Creation) will be his own to command. This spiritualized microcosm, in short, will unite with the spiritualized macrocosm to establish man as a peerless ruler of infinity. Union with the Word is the final lesson of the Resurrection. Here the role of will is coextensive with that of intellect, for infinite action, the power infinitely to redispose and control the matter of a renovated cosmos is a principle inherent in the doctrine that divine power suffers no limitation in the microcosm. Significantly the microcosm alone is capable of this inventiture of limitless power:

...la nature suprême...n'embrasse pas la nature inférieure sinon en ce sens qu'il y a plutôt union que séparation de l'infini et du supérieur. Or, au maximum, avec qui coïncide le minimum, il conviendra de n'embrasser une chose qu'à condition de n'en pas abandonner une autre, mais de tout embrasser à la fois. C'est pourquoi la nature intermédiaire, qui est le moyen de connexion de l'infini et du supérieur, est, seule, celle qui peut être élevée au maximum, d'une façon qui convient, par la puissance du maximum infini, Dieu; en effet, comme elle enferme en elle toutes les natures, comme le suprême enferme celle de l'infini, et l'infinie celle du supérieur, se elle-même avec tout ce qu'elle est s'élève jamais à l'union avec la maximité, il est certain que toutes les natures et l'univers entier seront parvenus en elle dans toute la mesure du possible au degré le plus élevé.29

29. Moulinier, ibid., 177.
Here one notes, on the threshold of the Renaissance, the traditional metaphysics so construed as to endow man with a significance and dignity impossible to surpass. The chain of being, the principle of divine plenitude, the concept of man as microcosm, and the nobility of dialectic might at the outset of the Christian era have been so shuffled and combined as to express the supreme optimism of Nicholas; but so fixed was the notion that man as microcosm is the patient on the cosmic wheel that not until the century before Nicholas did commentaries on the microcosm as such begin to explore the little world for any evidences whatever of human dignity. At the close of the fifteenth century, however, the Cusan idea of the man-god had taken a firm hold on the philosophic mind. In the Renaissance, as has been already suggested concerning the orations and encomia of Pico, Ficino, Lord Herbert, and Milton, it emerges as a basic tenet of Christian Humanism. It is not the purpose of this investigation to determine precisely what wrought this revolution in teleologies; let it suffice to point out that correspondence as a philosophy of fatalism was neither appealing nor logical and the good for man predicated on it designed a heaven that perpetually begged the question of destiny: knowledge, like the stone of Sisyphus, was rolled up the hill of being only that it might roll down again; in the infinite repetition of which exercise the early Scholastics and Platonists sought to find their reward. Nicholas, on the
other hand, posited dialectic and contemplation as handmaids of the will, so that the good for man lay in the uninhibited application of infinite creative energy projected through infinitely diversified media; his teleology is hence dynamic and hence diametrically opposed to the concept of the earlier heaven.

II

Nicholas integrated the study of the little world with the study of plenitude. This integration seems to have been an emergence, not only from Thomistic reflections on the relative and the absolute in divine similitudes, but, more importantly, from an inversion governing the rules of correspondence, which became evident in post-Thomistic alchemy. In the fourteenth century the alchemist found it convenient to make the microcosm agent rather than patient in the cosmic scheme. We can discern the causes of this change by reviewing Plato's theory of creation in the Timaeus and the Scholastic idea that man is relatively most like to God. Plato, like the pre-Socratics, had held that a "first matter" underlies the four elements. Upon this hypostatical substance God impressed the reflected pattern—the "imitation"—of the archetypes. The first matter is hence "the receptacle, and in a manner the nurse, of all generation." It is space, the only thing in nature which is constant: "for, while receiving all things, she never departs at all from her own nature, and never in
any way or at any time, assumes a form like that of any
of the things which enter into her; she is the natural
recipient of all impressions, and is stirred and informed
by them, and appears different from time to time by reason
of them. But the forms which enter into and go out of her
are the likenesses of real existences modelled after their
patterns in a wonderful and inexplicable manner" (49, 50).
The manner is inexplicable because it involves a superimposition of the ideal upon the material:

Wherefore, the mother and receptable of all created and
visible and in any way sensible things, is not to be termed
earth, or air, or fire, or water, or any of their compounds
or any of the elements from which these are derived, but
is an invisible and formless being which receives all
things and in some mysterious way partakes of the inte-
telligible, and is most incomprehensible.30

(51)


Hence, the ideas of God, in some incomprehensible way,
inform first matter with the elements and the elements
with the infinitely various patterns which constitute
nature. One can perceive here a close resemblance between
first matter and the Plotinian first forms: the human
understanding must apply dialectic to the determination
of either. It became the mission of alchemy to isolate,
by means of its own peculiar dialectic, this hypostatical
substance, so that it might recast the elements in patterns
nearer to the heart's desire. In the fourteenth century
and later this hope was founded on the speculation that if
man is in the image of God why may he not impress his own
ideas of the good upon first matter? Here we see the
correlation of knowledge and power: a mastery of dialectic
yields the opportunity to subordinate the forces of nature
to the human will. This correlation shifted the emphasis
in correspondence from notions of passive conformity of
the little world with stellar patterns to considerations
of how man might impose his will and intellect upon the
materia prima of the cosmos. Englebert of Admont, for
example, early in the fourteenth century, explained fas­
cination as one result of the soul's power to make an
impression on first matter "by the vehemence of its affec­
tion and intention." He adds that the soul, which is in
the image of the universe," is agitated by the light of
the intellect universally and expands to affect all nature."


Manifestly, the correspondence between divine and human
mind suggests to Englebert a correspondence between the
creative powers of man and God.32 If the alchemist's dream

32. Grillot de Givry calls attention to the importance
of analogy in particular and of the microcosm in general
to the alchemist: "The universe, or Cosmos, is an immense
organic being, all the parts of which are interlinked.
It is the Macrocosm, or Great World, in contrast to man,
who is the Microcosm, or Little World. All the parts of
the Great World are subject to the same laws; they function
in similar ways, and it is thus easy to arrive at compre­
hension of them by means of analogy, "Divine Analogy,"
the universal law which governs all beings. That which
is above is like that which is below. The lower is like
the higher. In consequence, whoever knows one part of the
Macrocosm knows, by analogy, all the parts. He also knows the microcosm, which is like the Macrocosm and has a corresponding part for every like part of it. The adept can thus arrive at a perception of hidden things not known to the vulgar by the synthetic method put at his disposal by the universe itself, and this method raises him to such a height of knowledge as makes him almost a god: Witchcraft, Magic and Alchemy, tr., J. Courtenay Locke, London, 1931, 221. M. de Givry fails to notice the union in later alchemy of correspondence and dialectic.

of abstracting that substance in nature which serves as the "knot and band" of all phenomena, both material and spiritual, is evidently an adaptation of the Platonist's dream of mastering dialectic, his belief that this substance could assume whatever nature he might will it to assume is an application of the turn-about in correspondence. In later centuries the analogy between divine and human intellect is adduced to explain the efficacy of incantation, the power of sympathetic medicine, and even the rotation of the earth. These Faustian hypotheses and

33. Pompanazzi, De Incantationibus, 1520; Paracelsus, Labyrinthus, ca. 1565; Cello Calcagnini, Letters to Jacob Ziegler, 1544: summarized in Thorndike, op. cit., V, 101, passim.

asseverations are in effect "preventions of their time" in respect to the Cusan teleology: they arrogate to the mortal what is reserved for the immortal, and in this misappropriation of eternal power they come within command of the flaming swords. They were not, to be sure, in such impressive muster as the mirror polishers: Lord Bacon deals with them as with a minor sect:
...they did insinuate, that no distance of place, nor want or indisposition of matter, could hinder magical operations; but that (for example) we might here in Europe have sense and feeling of that which was done in China; and likewise we might work any effect without and against matter; and this not holpen by the cooperation of angels or spirits, but only by the unity and harmony of nature. There were some also that stayed not here; but went further, and held that if the spirit of man (whom they call the Microcosm) do give a fit touch to the spirit of the world by strong imaginations and beliefs, it might command nature; for Paracelsus, and some darksome authors of magic, do ascribe to imagination exalted, the power of miracle-working faith. With these vast and bottomless follies men have been (in part) entertained.34

34. Works, op. cit., II, 640-641. Bacon in the above passage implies disbelief in the microcosm. He did, however, approve the principle of microcosmism if not literal application: "for though the alchemists, when they maintain that there is to be found in man every mineral, every vegetable, etc., or something corresponding to them, take the word Microcosm in a sense too gross and literal, and have so spoiled the elegance and distorted the meaning of it, yet that the body of man is of all existing things both the most mixed and the most organic, remains not the less a sober and solid truth": Works, VI, 747.

The importance to the Cusan teleology of such "scientific" propositions as were advanced by Paracelsus and others is that they persistently associated the microcosm with creative power and the power to order and control what it did not create. Though their assertions were demonstrably ridiculous, they yet served eloquently to remind readers of what plenary blessings awaited those who did not "prevent" the renovated cosmos. The magician's fire, a lie in itself, was yet something on which the imagination might draw to suggest the holy light of man become the Word. In short, a figurative prevention of time
in the rhetoric and poetic of such an exultant theology might legitimately draw upon the schemes of magic to adumbrate the kingdom of heaven. Indeed the rewards of virtue had grown immeasurably in their appeal to the imagination since the time of Plotinus: what, after all, can the imagination do with unity and infinite variety in repose? What, on the other hand, can it not do if upon these one imposes the mobility of the human will? One suspects that Dante exhausted the artistic possibilities of the Plotinian and Thomistic heavens: he brought the glory of supernal stasis to its apogee:

O grace abounding, wherein I presumed to fix my look on the eternal light so long that I consumed my sight thereon! Within its depths I saw ingathered, bound by love in one volume, the scattered leaves of the universe; substance and accidents and their relations, as though together fused, after such fashion that what I tell of is one simple flame. The universal form of this complex I think that I beheld, because more largely, as I say this, I feel that I rejoice.  

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Thus he portrays Being upgathered into Unity. The sainted elect find their happiness in contemplating, and the angelic host in swarming in and out and about this Unity:

In form, then, of a white rose displayed itself to me that sacred soldiery which in his blood Christ made his spouse; but the other, which as it flieth seeth and doth sing his glory who enamoureth it, and the excellence which hath made it what it is, like to a swarm of bees which doth one while plunge into the flowers and another while wend back to where its toil is turned to sweetness, ever descended into the great flower adorned with so many leaves, and reascended thence to where its love doth ceaseless
make sojourn....When they descended into the flower, from rank to rank they proffered of the peace and of the ardour which they acquired as they fanned their sides. 36


Dante's heaven is notably pre-Cusan; certainly, whatever action he attributes to the elect is uncompelling and even degrading if taken at face value: though blessed, how do the saints differ outwardly from statues, or the angels, in Dante's own words, from a swarm of bees? Their blessings, of course, are interior, consisting in that serenity won of contemplation of the All. To this the sphere of action is meaningless; hence the symbols of mobility are at best irrelevant in the portraiture of glory. Dante's supreme achievement in the Paradiso is his recreation of the Platonic and Thomistic teleology in still-life tableaux, the object of which is to materialize for the imagination the idea of a transcendent peace. Freedom and the necessity of action and of change normally implicit in the concept of freedom are better suited to Medieval notions of chaos and anarchy than to the ordered hierarchies and the All.

But at the close of the Middle Ages freedom--the glass of Liberty--had become the pre-eminent attribute of the soldiery of Christ, and if this were to be accorded the emphasis it deserved, animation had to supplant still life. In the early Renaissance one finds the philosopher-rhetorician casting about for symbols that would properly body forth the Cusan teleology to the imagination--for
ways to paint the true religion lively before our eyes.
If there is a fundamental difference between the work of
Nicholas and the Italian humanists it lies not in the cen­
tral notions of their several metaphysics but in the tone
which informs them. Exposition and argument in Nicholas
yield to oratory and evangelism in the Italians. In their
zeal to emulate the eloquence of Plato and at the same
time preserve the new micro-deism, Marsilio Ficino and
Giovanni Pico sought to dramatize plenitude and dialectic
and to construct images which would somehow assert the
domination of the human psyche over the macrocosm.

Ficino's efforts in this direction unfortunately do
not go beyond a series of trite personifications. In
keeping with the Cusan theory of plenitude Ficino asserts
that the mind becomes that which it knows, an idea which
he ritualizes in an effort, doubtless, to give it "tone!"

Wisdom, sprung from the crown of the head of Jove, creator
of all, warns her philosophical lovers that if they truly
desire ever to gain possession of their beloved, they should
always seek the highest summits of things rather than the
lowest places; for Pallas, the divine offspring sent down
from the high heavens, herself frequents the high citadels
which she has established. She shows, furthermore, that
we cannot reach the highest summits of things unless, first,
taking less account of the inferior parts of the soul,
we ascend to the highest part, the mind. She promises,
finally, that if we have concentrated our powers in this
most fruitful part of the soul, then without doubt by
means of this highest part itself, that is, by means of
mind, we shall ourselves have the power of creating mind;
mind which, I say, is the companion of Minerva herself
and the foster-child of highest Jove.37

37. Epistolae (1495): See The Renaissance Philosophy of
Man, Ed., Cassirer, Kristeller, et al., University of Chi­
cago Press, 1948.
The child of highest Jove is the realm of ideas which under-lies creation; as participants in the Word the elect will be able to enclose the deep with ideas of their own (i.e., Jove's foster-children)—will have themselves "the power of creating mind." Ficino's use of classic deities to adorn his teleology, though making a little less remote by making a little more picturesque the dynamism of mind, is only slightly less abstract than the airy realm it seeks to embody. Nevertheless, the sensible affection and familiarity which Ficino manages for Pallas and Jove's foster-children serves at least as vehicle for his enthusiasm, which, where the symbols themselves are inadequate to do so, contrives (albeit dimly) to suggest the energy implicit in the system he seeks to portray. His contemporary, Giovanni Pico, is equally given to ritualizing and mythologizing the abstract. Apollo, as was noticed elsewhere, in the Oration becomes genius of dialectic in ascent, the Holy Ghost the less austere Cherubic Spirit, the Titanic power of dialectic in descent the god Osiris. Man, endowed with the seeds of every way of life, is a chameleon or a mixed bowl (here Pico exhibits a more fanciful turn than Ficino) and the connecting link of all nature: "For he who knows himself in himself knows all things.... When we are finally lighted in this knowledge by natural philosophy, and nearest to God are uttering the theological greeting... 'Thou Art,' we shall likewise in bliss be
addressing the true Apollo on intimate terms."38 Apollo

38. Cassirer, Kristeller, et al., ibid., 235.

is hence the Word, the Master Dialectician. The inference
that bards in fealty to him ought above all else abstract
universals from the accidents of nature and human ex­
perience is not drawn by Pico, but it was there—or
something very like it—for Sidney, Chapman, and Milton
to exploit: Sidney's architectonics, Chapman's heaven­
high thoughts, and, above all, the Phoebus in Lycidas
(who, as emissary from All-Judging Jove, is indistinguishable
from Urania) are strongly reminiscent of the Mirandolan
symbolism. The symbol in itself, however, is not more
effective than are kindred ones in Ficino; it serves with
dubious success to familiarize the remote. But Pico's
enthusiasm pushes him beyond the myth in his search for
the appropriate image, and if he never finds it he does,
in effect, point to the geometry upon which such images
might be projected. To be sure, he explains in the
Heptaplus (1489), man is all little chain of being: "Homo...
inse omnia continet uti omnium medium....Homi manci-
pantur terrestria, homini favent coelestia, quia et coe-
lestium et terrestrium vinculum et nodus est."39 Signifi-


cantly, however, Pico nowhere stresses the linear aspect
of graduated existence. The number of potent metaphors to be mined from the image of a straight line is, of course, severely limited; it is restricted, in fact, to figures in repose—to ladders and stairways, knots and bands, Homeric suspensions, and Dante-esque hierarchies. These, one supposes, are the grist for ecstasy (or the correlates thereof) in the mystic experience; but however dynamic their appeal to the initiate, they are not similitudes with which persuasively to exercise the heavy-laden. Pico may or may not have realized these inhibitions in the Chain, but he does accord it relatively little emphasis. He is more intrigued by the circular nature of the cosmos:

The heaven is circular and the soul also is circular. Nay more...the sky is a circle because its soul is a circle. The heavens move in a circle; the rational soul, transferring itself from causes to effects and again recurring from effects to causes, is revolved in an orb of ratiocination.40

40. Thorndike, op. cit. IV, 510.

Such a context freights the soul with energy; circles and orbs provide outlines for the imagery of motion. These superimposed on the familiar matter of the cosmos become the copia of microdeism. The superimposition came about through the association of the microcosm with the orderliness of creation, itself a traditional commonplace to prove the existence of God by the argument from design.

One notes it in the Philebus (28d-30c) and in the Planctu Naturae of Alanus, who argues that man is in the image of
the Lord if only because he is capable of harmonizing the
elements within him as God harmonizes them in the macrocosm.
Such control of the elements within the microcosm is, of
course, not involuntary; it is achieved fully only by
the sternest discipline long applied to the "affections."
The danger is ever present that the emotions uncontrolled
will induce chaos in the spirit and make man a discord
in nature. In the Renaissance the inversion of the rules
of correspondence gradually shifted attention from the
obligation of man to dominate the passions of his little
world to his obligation to preserve the harmony of the
cosmos itself; for, certainly, man, the *nodus et vinculum*
of heaven and earth, could theoretically by his defection
so disturb the fine and delicate balance which keeps the
elements at heel as to return the world to chaos. The
seeds of such a doctrine are observable in Bembo's oration
on Order:

Behold the state of this great engine of the world, which
God created for the health and preservation of everything
that was made: the heaven round beset with so many heavenly
lights; and in the middle the earth environed with the
elements and upheld with the very weight of itself; the
sun, that compassing about giveth light to the whole, and
in winter season drawth other part; the moon, that of him
taketh her light, according as she draweth nigh or goeth
farther from him; and the other five stars that diversely
keep the very same course. These things among themselves
have such force by the knitting together of an order so
necessarily framed that, with altering them any one jot,
they should all be loosed and the world would decay. They
have also such beauty and comeliness that all the wits
men have cannot imagine a more beautiful manner. Think
now of the shape of man, which may be called a little world,
in whom every parcel of his body is seen to be necessarily
framed by art and not by hap.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{41.} *The Book of the Courtier* (Hoby's translation), ed.,
Walter Raleigh, Tudor Translations, London, 1900, 321. The Courtier was published in 1528, or thirty-four years after the death of Giovanni Pico; Hoby's translation appeared in 1560. Bembo's oration is a catalogue of commonplaces, most of them doubtless borrowed from Pico and Picino. Castiglione stresses dialectic, using the imagery of the stairway as the means of ascent to heavenly love. The lover, he says, "will gather in his thought by little and little so many ornaments that meddling all beauties together he shall make a universal concept, and bring the multitude of them to the unity of one alone." Compare Plotinus on the "born lover" (Enneads, I, iii, 2).

That the world should decay if its elements be altered "any one jot" was a contingency which proved fascinating to the Renaissance mind. The obvious variation on this theme, that the microcosm is subject to decay and disorder and that consequently this imperfection will be reflected in nature and hence sow disorder throughout the cosmos was not expounded by Castiglione. Yet the juxtaposition of order in man and order in nature together with the interdependency of the parts of a mobile cosmic pattern (and one may note the dominance of the orb and sphere in Bembo's observations on order) constitute materials for the imagery of plenitude in action. If to these are added the figurative prevention of time and the great catalog of specific correspondences between the two worlds, one sees emerge all the necessary components of a rhetoric for the man-god philosophy. If, as Hildegarde and other Medieval commentators had pointed out, man's blood corresponds to rivers, his tears to rain, his passions to the weather or the sea, a reversal in the currents of influence between man and
his world in the figurative present would make his tears start rain-storms, his blood empurple rivers, his passions confound earth and sea, and any of these threaten the whole of nature with imminent disintegration.42 Again, if his

42. The Renaissance preserved the Medieval catalogs of correspondence, which were just as important to the concept of man active as they had been to the concept of man passive. Chapman and Raleigh were particularly given to composing lists of specific correspondences between the two worlds. See below, pp. 153-155.

eyes correspond to sun and moon, his head to the heavens, and his body to creation, then in the figurative present he is the cosmos and his features the most lordly of its bodies. Such is the logic that runs through Cleopatra's description of her lover, whose "rear'd arm crested the world"43 Finally, if a man can dominate his own passions,

43. See above, p. 13.

he can restore to their proper courses the elements in a macrocosm out of balance. Such powers imputed to the human condition must needs be figurative; but to those who embraced the religion of Nicholas, Pico, and Ficino they were but faint promises of the kind of magnificence awaiting the elect. In adumbrating this reward hyperbole was virtually impossible; the difficulty lay inwedding the image to the promise, in catching in the glass of art the cataracting energies of the man-god. According to the Christian Platonists these energies are made known to man
through dialectic in ascent, through the Apollo of Pico's oration. But if Apollo is genius of the matter of the man-god rhetoric, Osiris must be the genius of its manner: after the artist has spiraled up to the highest arcs to apprehend the universals, he must then look for ways to come thundering down; that is, he must find among the lower flights of the stairway the accidents which in combination would most happily materialize the Apollonian vision.

In England Apollo's quest for Osiris began shortly after Hoby's *Courtier* made Christian Platonism popular in that country. 44

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44. Strong interest in the metaphysical aspects of Italian humanism seems not to have developed in England until some time after 1560. More, to be sure, was acquainted with Pico's commentaries and thought enough of him to publish a life of Pico in English. Labored ingenuity might discover parallels between the right reason of More's Utopians and Pico's orbs of ratiocination; but certainly More does not invoke the aid of microcosmism or dialectic to ennoble the citizens of his commonwealth. His fellow humanists, Erasmus, Grocyn, Linacre, Colet, and Lupset, were apparently too preoccupied with problems of translation, textual criticism, the renovation of sound classical styles, pedagogy, and politics to transmit to their countrymen whatever metaphysical they might have garnered from Ficino or Pico. Sir Thomas Elyot (a generation later) draws upon microcosmos and correspondence in enunciating the high purpose of government and the governor, the position of the latter being analogous to the sphere of fire, which dominates the spheres elemented of earth, water, and air. The governed, Elyot is reminded, are a king of macrocosm, the soul of which is the governor. But the latter, exalted though he is over the political macrocosm, is never endowed with those lordly dignities—cosmic intellect and will—which distinguish the courtier or the Mirandolan dialectician. Dialectics have no part in Elyot's figures of thought. Of the *Knowledge That Maketh a Wise Man* (ca. 1537), his major attempt to popularize Platonism, is largely a catalogue of pre-Renaissance banalities, the theme of which is "Know Thyself." To know the world one
must know the man; but this axiom Elyot nowhere developed
to assert the ascendancy of man over nature. What the
Governor and the Wise Man accomplished as commentaries on
the nature of being and knowing was simply to keep before
the reading public of England the bare bones of humanistic
idealism, applying to things mundane the more modest of
its claims. Some few commentaries between Elyot's time
and Sidney's drew upon microcosmism to expound practical
ethics, politics and pedagogy, more or less in Elyot's
conservative vein. The most widely diffused of these
treatises was Barnabe Googe's translation of Palingenius'
Zodiac of Life Droomme of Doomes Day (1576), since it
anticipates the fideism of later skeptics, implies an ac­
quaintance with various continental orations on the dignity
of man: readers might have inferred the Italian position
from his nebulous opposition to it.

III

In his translation of Mornay's Christian Religion
Sidney reminded English readers—a generation after Hoby
had given them the Courtier—that the interdependence of
natural forces is as meaningful to the will of man as to
the will of God:

If yee looke upward, yee see there infinite bodies and
infinite movings; divers, and yet not trubling one another.
If yee looke downeward, yee see the Sea continually threat­
ening the Earth, and yet not passing his bounds: and like­
wise the Earth altogether heavie and massie, and yet not­
withstanding settled or rather hanged in the Ayre, so as
it stirreth not awhit....But when wee enter afterward intoo
our selves, and finde there an abridgement of the whole
universall; a bodie fit for all sorts of movings, a Soule
which (without removing) maketh the bodies to move which
way it listeth; a Reazon the rein which guydeth them every­
chone in their dooings; and yet notwithstanding, this Soule
too bee such as wee can neither see it nor conceive it:
It ought in all reazon too make us all too understand,
that in this great universall masse, there is a soveraigne
Spirite which maketh, mooveth, and governeth all that wee
see there; by whom wee live, move and bee; who in our bodies
hath framed a Counterfet of the whole world, and in our Soules hath ingraven an image of himself. 45


One notes in this exposition of order an emphasis on movement and on the energy necessary to initiate and restrain it. More significant, however, than what was—in effect—a calling attention to Peter Bembo's conceits was the kind of imagery Sidney worked out of Mornay's denunciation of the faithless. Magnitude in the geography of will and intellect was an attribute of soul long before noted by Ficino and Pico. These writers had been content, however, to correlate it with such abstractions as the infinite, the circle, the orb, and the heavens. In Sidney things at once vast but comprehensible and familiar become the implied similitudes of landmarks in the soul:

Some busie themselves so much about their pleasures, that they can never find anie leisure, not to mount up unto God, but onelie so much as to enter into themselves: in so much that they become strangers to their owne nature, to their owne Soules, and to the things which concerne them most neerlie and peculiariie, than they bin either to the Deserts of Inde, or to the Seas that are worst to be haunted & least known. 47

47. Feuillerat, ibid., III, 249.

In the above passage one sees Osiris beginning to stir.

English commentators after Sidney make colorful geography and astronomy the sine qua non of disquisitions on order; mobility becomes increasingly pronounced, and the
figures of order assume an increasingly familiar habitation and name (as befits the Osirian Progress down the ladder). In invariably, as in Sidney and Castiglione, the microcosm is associated with the orderliness of creation.

One sees these developments in Hooker, along with the popular observation on the interdependence of the elements:

Now if nature should intermit her course, and leave altogether though it were but for a while the observation of her own laws; if those principal and mother elements of the world, whereof all things in this lower world are made, should lose the qualities which now they have; if the frame of that heavenly arch erected over our heads should loosen and dissolve itself...if the prince of the lights of haven, which now as a giant doth run his unwearied course, should as it were through a languishing faintness begin to stand and to rest himself; if the moon should wander from her beaten way, the times and seasons of the year blend themselves by disordered and confused mixture, the winds breathe out their last gasp, the clouds yield no rain, the earth be defeated of heavenly influence, the fruits of the earth pine away as children at the withered breasts of their mother no longer able to yield them relief: what would become of man himself, whom these things now do all serve? 47

47. *Ecclesiastical Polity*, I, ix, 1

Hooker is perhaps the first Englishman to call explicit attention to man's responsibility in helping preserve these "wonted motions": "...is it possible, that Man being not only the noblest creature in the world, but even a very world in himself, his transgressing the Law of his Nature should draw no manner of harm after it?" Elsewhere he observes that no sin can be committed "without the singular disgrace of Nature, and the utter disturbance of that divine order, whereby the pre-eminence of chiefest acceptation
is by the best things worthily challenged." 48. Hooker thus


emphasizes what Sidney and Castiglione had overlooked, that
nature may reflect disorder in man—something, of course,
that it could not do until the currents of influence
between man and his world had been reversed. Hence, if
disorder in nature were the most graphic means to point
up human malevolence, it was equally the most graphic means
to point up human power and the potentialities of the Man-
Word, the effects of whose puissance we may most clearly
perceive when it abdicates from its responsibilities: when
"as it were through a languishing faintness it begins to
stand and to rest itself." To the sober theologian, of
course, such intermissions of the law of nature in the
human breast work their effects on nature imperceptibly
and gradually: the utter decay of the world will have been
the responsibility of all mankind and is a long time coming
to pass. But on the little chain of being the damage will
be radical and pervasive and immediate, and the best way
to dramatize the consequence of this is to envision cata-
clysms in the great chain.

Those seas in Sydney which "continually threaten the
earth," and are "worst to be haunted & least known" be-
come of all links in the macrocosm and of all accidents
in the stairway the most called-upon symbol of disorder
in man. English familiarity with the sea, especially in
an era of great maritime expansion, naval conquests, and exploratory voyages, made this preference a quite natural one; moreover, the disciplined sea had been adduced in Scripture as evidence of God's power. Hooker quotes Jeremiah to that effect: "God gave his decree unto the sea, that the waters should not pass his commandment." 49

49. Ecclesiastical Polity, I, iii, 2. The King James version is much more potent: "Fear ye not me? saith the Lord: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that I cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?" Jeremiah, V, 22.

Mornay had evidently alluded to the same passage, as, indeed, had Calvin before him (Institutes, I, v, 6). After Hooker descriptions of the sea's gaining advantage on the kingdom of the shore epitomize—or, at least, provide the climax to—arguments for the importance of order. Ulysses, who paraphrases Hooker, going from the untuned spheres to the microcosm, fixes his imagination on the unbridled sea and attendant dislocations:

...but when the planets
In evil mixture to disorder wander,
What plagues and what portents, what mutiny,
What raging of the sea, shaking of earth,
Commotion in the winds, frights, changes, horrors,
Divert and crack, rend and deracinate
The unity and married calm of states
Quite from their fixture!...
Take but degree away, untune that string,
And hark, what discord follows! each thing meets
In mere oppugnancy: the bounded waters
Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores,
And make a sop of all this solid globe.50

50. Troilus and Cressida (I, iii, 94-113). Hamlet
paraphrases Castiglione, going from "this majestical roof fretted with golden fire" to "this quintessence of dust," i.e., to the epitome of universal nature (II, ii, 309-325). This mock-moralistic address to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern suggests that the practice of setting man against the sky the better to glorify him was a threadbare scheme by 1603—the sort of thing that Polonius would have Laertes "character." On the other hand, setting the microcosm against an angry universe the better to illustrate the magnitude of his distemper (Lear), malevolence (Macbeth), or sheer power (Prospero) persist for Shakespeare unwithered and unstaled and hence unsuitable for ridicule.

Ulysses, too, alludes to Jeremiah and appeals to his auditors to visualize the cataclysm in the great world in order to appreciate the disastrous effects of degree untuned in human society. Lesser figures than Calvin, Sidney, Hooker and Shakespeare strove to make capital of the same Biblical passage. Thomas Heywood uses it, along with the microcosm, as the most cogent proof of the existence of God:

Observe the Sea when it doth rage and rore,  
As menacing to swallow up the Shore;  
For all the Ebbs and Tydes and Deeps profound  
Yet can it not encroach beyond his bound....  
Do but, 0 man, into thyself descend,  
An thine owne building apprehend;  
Comprise in one thy Body and thy Mind,  
And thou thy self a little World shalt find.51


In Heywood's day juxtaposition of commentary on the little world and the circumscribed though menacing sea was a commonplace, and the continual association of the two served continually to remind poet and moralist alike that there was that in man which corresponded to the wild strength of the Main Deep. Benjamin Whichcote (Christian
Religion) having summarized Hooker's reflections on cosmic disorder ("Now you would think it monstrous, prodigious and unnatural, for the Sun to give over shining, for heavy things to ascend," etc.) and having observed—again echoing Hooker—that "it is more prodigious for any one that is an Intelligent Agent and voluntary, not to comply with the Reason of things," concludes that the undisciplined affections make a man to "be Hot with the Fervours of Hell; and, 'like the troubled Sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up Mire and Dirt.'"

52 Phineas Fletcher, who

personified (as a principal devil) the equivoque which was said to have presided over the defense at the Gunpowder Trial, finds in the angry sea the proper similitude for hellish opposition to Divine decree. Equivocus, head of the locust horde, proclaims that devils never will submit or yield:

But, as when stubborn winds with earth ralli'de
(Their Mother earth) she ayed by her sonne
Confronts the Seas, beates off the angry tide:
The more with curl'd-head waves, the furious maine
Renues his spite, and swells with high disdain,

52. See The Cambridge Platonists, ed., E. T. Campagnac, Oxford University Press, 1901, 20. The "troubled sea" passage is taken from Isaiah, lvii, 20. Hamlet's "sea of troubles" is possibly an allusion to the same text, even as his "outrageous fortune" might possibly allude to the sea unleashed, i.e., raging outward "to make a sop of all this solid globe." In any case, the former image follows hard upon the latter and the idea of disorder implicit in both recurs in "mortal coil," and "puzzles the will," and finally in another water image, "their currents turn awry."
Oft broke, and chac't as oft turnes, & makes head againe:
So rise we by our fall.53


Milton thought enough of Fletcher's similitude to apply it to Satan's vain attempts to seduce Christ:

((As))...surging waves against a solid rock,
Though all to shivers dash't, the assault renew,
Vain battrey, and in froth or bubbles end;
So Satan, whom repulse upon repulse
Met ever; and to shameful silence brought,
Yet gives not o're though desperate of success,
And his vain importunity pursues.

(P. R., IV, 18-24)

The watery main is not, however, a figure appropriate exclusively to Satan and his crew. Adam, when he has had time to reflect on his transgression, is (Hamlet-like)

"in a troubl'd Sea of Passion tost" (P. L., X, 718);
he and his consort suffer minds "now tost and turbulent" (IX, 1126). In what is perhaps the most majestic similitude in the rhetoric of disorder, Milton selects the sea to embody the infinite chaotic Deep, as it is viewed by "The King of Glorie in his powerful Word/ And Spirit coming to create new Worlds:

On heav'nly ground they stood, and from the shore
They view'd the vast immeasurable Abyss
Outrageous as a Sea, dark, wasteful, wilde,
Up from the bottom turn'd by fulous windes
And surging waves, as Mountains to assult
Heav'ns highth, and with the Center mix the Pole.

(P. L., VII, 210-215)

This in effect is a reduction of earlier catalogues of
nature's "intermission of her course" to the one most vivid entry. In the hands of Milton it materializes for the imagination the terrible power of plenitude ungoverned; by implication it asserts the supremely stupendous power of One able to bring such outrage to heel.

Implications and comparisons cannot, however, serve in lieu of forthright assertion. To suggest the potency of God through the turbulence of a God-withdrawn nature is not to visualize omnipotence; to say that man untuned is like the troubled sea or that the Devil's pride swells like the sea with high disdain, though setting for the intellect the micro-god in the foreground of his macro-world (the sea serving as metonymic agent of the latter), does not succeed in fusing the two for the imagination. In that realm they remain in their divided worlds: man is still man, the devil the devil, God God, and still "the sea is everywhere the sea." To assimilate the puissance of this disorder to the soul of man in such fashion as to sensualize the energy of the Cusan or the Christian-Platonic man-god required metaphors which in some way would express the command of the man-god over the great chain of being. To the rhetoric of the Cusan teleology the sea image as such had contributed mobility, the kind of mobility which would serve the imagination as effectively as Dante's vast still-lifes had served it in the interests of plenitude in repose. But as a similitude the troubled sea remained an energy unharnessed, a figure often admirable in itself but
one which focused the imagination one-sidedly upon the macrocosm while God or the microcosm remained pictorially in abeyance. If the poet were, in Sidney's words, to make us "see God coming in his majestie," or if the voluptuous, the covetous and the ambitious were to be persuaded of the joy, gain and glory of the heavenly estate, man or God or both had to be centered on the animated screen. To put them there and keep them there evidently required the highest order of creative imagination, for they are sustained in the center only in Shakespeare and Milton. Marlowe, Donne, Herbert, and Sir Thomas Browne achieve comparable effects only in a fleeting line, rare bursts of invention, in which, for a moment, they are allowed to outdo themselves. To bring the man-god or his Creator into focus the poet had to avail himself of the turn-about in correspondence, of the figurative preventions of time (where man was concerned) and of the recreation of the objects of thought into the energy of spirit (where both man and God are concerned). Among lesser writers of the period expositions of one or another of these components are commonplace. A review of these will help to show what lies behind the more compressed and vivid utterances of the two major writers.

IV

That geography of soul implicit in Sidney's reflections on man's ignorance of himself finds its way into the
philosophical poem of Sir John Davies, who restates it in almost precisely the same terms:

We seeke to know the moving of each spheare,  
And the straunge cause of th'ebs and floods of Nile:  
But of that clocke within our breasts we beare,  
The subtill motions we forget the while.  
We that acquaint our selves with every Zoane,  
And passe both Tropikes, and behold the Poles,  
When we come home, are to our selves unknowne,  
And unacquainted still with our owne Soules.

It thereupon occurs to Davies to express this geography forthrightly:

...what vast bodie, must we make the mind?  
Wherein are men, beasts, trees, towns, seas, & lands,  
And yet each thing a proper place doth find,  
And each thing in the true proportions stands.54

Davies' explanation of this "vast bodie" is twofold: man as microcosm ia naturally endowed with all the elements, combinations, and proportions of the great world; more significantly, however, he absorbs through his perceptions and his intellect the essences of the macrocosm:

Doubtlesse this could not be, but that ((the mind)) turnes  
Bodies to spirits by sublimation strange;  
As fire converts to fire the things it burnes,  
As we our meates into our nature change.

This "sublimation strange" is dialectic: from gross matter the mind "drawes a kind of Quintessence from things" by abstracting universals from accidents:

She goddesses, and powers divine abstracts,  
As Nature, fortune, and the vertues all.55

55. Howard, Ibid., 136.
Sublimation of the macrocosm in the mind gives the soul complete freedom in time and space: "She is nigh, and farre, beneath, above, in point of time." Lord Bacon, in his review of the "vast and bottomless follies" of the alchemists noted their contention that "we might here in Europe have sense and feeling of that which was done in China." Davies removes this contention from its gross and literal context, and, having "sublimated" it, presents it as follows:

\[
\text{((The soul)) is sent as soone to China, as to Spaine, } \\
\text{And thence returns, as soone as she is sent; } \\
\text{She measures with one time, and with one paine } \\
\text{An ell of Silke, and heavens wide-spreading Tent.}\]

56. Howard, ibid., 137.

This mystic discarnation and resurrection in the soul (through the agency of mind) of the physical cosmos stresses again the potential cosmic scope and power of the little world's plenitude. In terms of this cosmic renovation, as Milton had observed in his prolixions, the spirit of man may fill the world with the expansion of itself. William Drummond (The Cypress Grove, 1623), whose reflections on death seem to have derived largely from the Italian humanists, is even more explicit than Davies in asserting the potential magnitude of the soul, which he thus apostrophises:

Thou seemest a world in thyself, containing heaven, stars, seas, earth, floods, mountains, forests, and all that lives; yet rests thou not satiate with what is in thyself, nor with
all in the wide universe,...until thou raise thy self to
the contemplation of that first illuminating Intelligence,
far above time, and even reaching eternity itself, into
which thou art transformed; for, by receiving, thou, be-

beyond all other things, are made that which thou receivest. 57

57. The Poetical Works of William Drummond, ed., William

"Thou art made that which thou receivest": for Lord
Herbert of Cherbury this is the raison d'être of the inquiring
mind, for which omniscience is possible because its little
chain of being corresponds in posse, in all infinite de-
tails, with the great chain. It is the mission of mind
first to make its faculties (its little chain) conform with
the great chain without; second to sublimate the great
chain, and third, to use this sublimated macrocosm for its
own delight. 58  "God alone," he says, "is the eternal and

58. See above, pp. 61-64.

universal object" of the internal senses, i.e., of those
faculties which seek to conform with the divine attributes
and which we designate as "peace, faith, hope, joy, and
love." Lord Herbert expounds the mystery of the flesh made
spirit as the result of persistent application of these
intellectual faculties to the body, upon which they can
in an inexplicable fashion impress their "ideas." Moreover,
"through free will or the infinity which is inscribed within
us, we can apply these faculties to perishable objects."
The perishable objects are the objects of perception, of
the "external senses," and encompass, or are capable of encompassing, the entire macrocosm: "Man, then, is infinite in so far as he is free; for what is free or infinite has no limit."59 This is not to say that man is physically infinite; it means simply that man, having sublimed the macrocosm within his soul through the process of dialectic, can, as it were, emanate his faculties so as to establish dominion over the renovated, infinite cosmos without him. Herbert's concept of the resurrection does not differ substantially from St. Paul's or from Calvin's or Donne's or Milton's commentaries on Paul's interpretation60: "I

60. I Corinthians, xv, 38-54; cf. Calvin, Institutes, III, 25; Donne, Sermon XXVI: Death's Duel; Milton, Christian Doctrine, I, 33. The miraculous reassembly of all the atoms belonging to a long-dead body, together with the simultaneous putting on of incorruption, was perhaps the most frequently-cited illustration in the Renaissance of the superiority of revealed to natural theology: it was an intelligence beyond the faculties of the wisest philosopher independently to propound: See especially Hooker, Ecclesiastical Polity, I, x, 12.

assert that when we have thrown off our earthly chains, a new and more amenable matter, consisting of new elements, will be supplied, so that we shall appear clothed throughout in heavenly glory....It may be that we shall break forth into our own country, agile, perfect and divine, throwing off our past states with our body, like cast-off
One notes here the emphasis on man in action, on the supernal elan of the soul unbound, on la puissance maximum. Lord Herbert performs the turn-about in correspondence in his effort to explain the power of the soul over nature. If the internal senses are capable of sublimating things, the emotions are capable of transubstantiating them:

...inner consciousness...shows that the whole of what affects us exists within us, external perception on the other hand teaches that these feelings are not confined to us, but are capable of extension outside us. The infinite is everywhere and every part refers to some element of the whole.

The sentient being is analogous to the world at large, even as his intellect is analogous to God. The former analogy reminds Herbert of the analogy of cosmic to microcosmic disorder:

I may add something concerning the analogy between the microcosm and macrocosm, a subject of which recent writers have notably treated, especially in medical matters. We may notice that the agitations of passion, anger, suspicion, envy, etc., which are rebuked as evil by conscience when it is in due conformity, are analogous to that region in which hurricanes, whirlwinds, and meteors rage; only they fall upon the body instead of upon the earth when they are set in motion.

62. Carre, ibid., 168, 169. "Recent writers": Evidently Lord Herbert has Paracelsus in mind, since he was by far the most widely-read of the medical writers who put a "gross and literal" construction on the microcosm (see Thorndike, V, 101 ff). What Bacon scorns as "bottomless folly" Lord Herbert applauds, a difference in viewpoint which, perhaps as well as anything else, serves to illustrate the cleavage between the champions of right and of
natural reason, who examine respectively primary and secondary laws.

Nowhere in Herbert do such analogies become successful figurative identities wherewith to paint lively the "form and system of the infinite" in man. In one of his poems (A Description, 1-8) he combines the enumerative technique for the geography of soul as Davies and Drummond use it with the analogical technique; nevertheless, the two worlds fail to fuse:

I sing her worth and praises hy,
Of whom a Poet cannot ly,
The little World the Great shall blaze;
Sea, Earth, her Body; Heaven, her Face;
Her Hair, Sun-beams; whose every part
Lightens, enflames, each Lover's Heart;
That thus you prove the Axiom true,
Whilst the Sun help'd Nature in you.63

63. The Poems of Lord Herbert of Cherbury, ed., G. G. Moore Smith, Oxford University Press, 1923. "The Axiom": Sol et homo generant hominem (Herbert's note). "The little World the Great shall blaze": of Lycidas, 73-74: "But the fair Guerdon when we hope to find/ And think to burst out into sudden blaze..." The clear-spirited little world seeks to fill the great one with its light. Chapman (Bussy, V, iv) is more explicit: "Spread to a world of fire, and the aged sky/ Cheer with new sparks of old humanity."

It is interesting that a philosopher so fully persuaded of the greatness of man could do no better than this to materialize that dignity. It is probable that he was nothing satisfied with his ventures into poetry and that he was secretly censuring himself when, in his Elegy for Doctor Dunn (17-22) he said that the words of poetasters

...either be by some dark Cloud o'ercast,
Or wanting inward sustenance do devolve,
And into their first Elements resolve.

On the other hand, he felt that Donne's words had the power
of dialectic and could sublume the great world they spoke of:

...thou did'st so refine
Matter with words, that both did seem divine,
When thy breath utter'd them.

(61-63)  

64. Donne, in his letter To Sir Edward Herbert, pays
the philosopher the compliment of summarizing his account of
the infinity of man's faculties (33-38):

Since then our business is to rectifie
Nature, to what she was, wee're led awry
By them, who man to us in little show;
Greater then due, no forme we can bestow
On him; for Man into himself can draw
All; All his faith can swallow, or reason chaw.

He might have set an equally high appraisal on the
diction of his brother George, for George Herbert was cap-
able of materializing the "soul's dimensive lines." In
his first poem on The Temper (a small Badecker on the
peregrinations of the soul in agony) he limns the vistas
of the cosmos and then binds himself simultaneously upon
them all (5-9):

Although there were some fourtie heav'ns, or more,
Sometimes I peere above them all;
Sometimes I hardly reach a score,
Sometimes to Hell I fall.
0 rack me not to such a vast extent.  

65. One should point out that without Kent's help--
without that beautiful and terrible epitaph which seals off
Lear's tragedy--Herbert might never have "found" the rack
image: "Vex not his ghost: 0 let him pass! he hates him
much/ That would upon the rack of this tough world/ Stretch
him out longer."
The effect here is not to reduce the cosmos to the size of a rack but to magnify the victim to the size of the cosmos and to do so without losing sight of him. In essence these lines are a beautiful compression of the traditional discourse on cosmic order and the equally traditional discourse on man's potential infinity. That Herbert had the latter tradition particularly in mind he makes clear in a subsequent stanza of the same poem:

> Whether I flie with angels, fall with dust,  
> Thy hands made both, and I am there:  
> Thy power and love, my love and trust  
> Make one place ev'rywhere.  
> (25-28)

In both passages the mobility depicted by the images to catch the energy of both the sinner and his God is allied to that of the troubled sea, the swooping altitudes and upheaving abysses of which threaten to mix the center with the pole.

Discussions by the English commentator of sublimation of matter into spirit and of the mystic recreation of intellectual abstractions into spiritual energy did not supersede or obscure the traditional ideas of correspondence. Ralegh and Chapman set them forth with an elaborate care reminiscent of Hildegard. Man said Ralegh, is "an abstract or model, or brief story of the universal":

For out of earth and dust was formed the flesh of man, and therefore heavy and lumpish; the bones of his body we may compare to the hard rocks and stones....His blood, which disperseth itself by the branches of veins through all the body, may be resembled to those waters which are carried by brooks and rivers over all the earth; his breath to the
air; his natural heat to the enclosed warmth which the earth hath in itself...; the hairs of man's body, which adorns, or overshadows it, to the grass, which covereth the upper face and skin of the earth; our generative power, to nature, which produceth all things; our determinations, to the light, wandering, and unstable clouds, carried everywhere with uncertain winds; our eyes, to the light of the sun and moon; and the beauty of our youth, to the flowers of the spring...; and, Lastly, our immortal souls... are by God himself beautified with the title of his own image and similitude.66

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The complexions, he goes on, are like the four elements and the seven ages of man like the seven planets. He concludes with a digression on the vanity of these seven ages, which move him to point out, as they did Touchstone and Jacques, that "the life of man...is always either increasing towards ripeness and perfection, or declining and decreasing towards rottenness and dissolution."67 Ralegh's melancholy (one must remember the imminence of the chopping block) finds small solace in correspondence: misfortune put him out of joint with the times and made him a patient rather than an agent of the macrocosm.

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Chapman, on the other hand, develops correspondence into the traditional man-god schemata:

The two vast lineaments, the sea and earth
Are to the world, as to a humaine birth
The ventricle, and bladder, and the Moone,
Being interposd, betwixt the Earth, and Sunne;
Is as the liver, plac't betwixt the heart
And ventricle: if these then we convert
To a resemblance, with our bodies powres:
Shall not our bodies Queene, this soule of ours,
For her use finde, as serviceable parts
In her comand with use of all her Arts?
All which are livers to inflame desire:
And Eagles eyes to take in three forck't fire,
(That doth the dazeling Trinitie intend)
T'enflame her love thereof; in sacred end
Her selfe being th'Eagle; and the Queene of Kings
That of our Kings King, beares beneath her wings
The dreadfull Thunder, the Almighty word;
All which (called fiction) with sure Truth accord. 68

68. Eugenia, 727-745. "The soule, Mythologised is the
Eagle which Is said to bear the thunder under her wings;
The lightning (which is called Trisulcus figuring the thrice
sacred Trinitie) in her eyes. The word, intended by the
Thunder; which divine Scripture calls Gods voice." (Chap­
man's note). Chapman's "ventricle" is the stomach.

This is an elaborate way of submitting that to command
one's little world is ultimately to command the great.
The key to such command is "art": "Learning and impulsion"
Chapman elsewhere terms it, which "invest Man with Gods
forme...By cutting from his Body the excesses of Humors,
perturbations and Affects. 69 These crabbed abstractions


on correspondence and the microcosm Chapman is capable of
enlivening for the stage. The Duke of Byron, whose great
mistake was that he prevented his time, or, as Chapman
puts it, "grew great, not good," having heard an augury
that he would lose his head, determines to pit his will
against the stars:
I am a nobler substance than the stars....
I'll change my course,
I'll pice-meal pull the frame of all my thoughts,
And cast my will into another mould.

Byron is evidently reminded that the "frame of all his thoughts" corresponds with the objects of the great world, that if he can shatter and reassemble the former, he can dispose as he pleases of the latter. Thus of the stars he forthwith declaims:

I'll wear those golden spurs upon my heels,
And kick at fate; be free, all worthy spirits,
And stretch yourselves for greatness and for height,
Untruss your slaveries; you have height enough
Beneath this steep heaven to use all your reaches.

His peroration is Faustian:

There is no danger to a man that knows
What life and death is; there's not any law
Exceeds his knowledge; neither is it lawful
That he should stoop to any other law.
He goes before them, and commands them all,
That to himself is a law rational.70

70. Byron's Conspiracy, III, iii, 26-134.

These sentiments in one important respect accord with Chapman's own: they assert uncompellable power and freedom as the good for man. Homer and Bussy, noble spirits both, enjoy these as their just reward; one lords it over Time and the other "makes the vast crystal crack with his receipt."

Both, we may take it, "beare beneath their wings the dreadfull Thunder, the Almighty word." Byron's difficulty is that he does not know what "life and death is." He is of Eve's and the Devil's persuasion that a clear spirit is easily come by, and so he fecklessly jousts with fate before he has unseated his "perturbations and affects."

Fate, needless to say, takes off his head—a demonstration
(of ecumenic consequence, since the continents do not shrink beneath his punishment—as they do beneath the burden of Eve's ruinous appetite) that his spirit is black, and that no hyaline is going to crack with his receipt.

The irony of Byron's Conspiracy and Tragedy is that the hero to secure power perverts that in his nature which alone can give it him: himself he sought, so lost himself, as Fletcher said of the Devil. Anticipation—not the power and the glory he sought to arrogate—was his hamartia.

Yet however his heart may contrive, his imagination catches at the heaven-high thought, though the dimensive line seems always to elude its net. His imprecation, for example, against the astrologer who foretells his death applies the turn-about in correspondence to the "intermission of nature's course"; but the shout upsent therefrom is rather fustian than sublime:

...Witch, fiend, accurs'd
For ever be the poison of thy tongue,
And let the black fume of thy venom'd breath
Infect the air, shrink heaven, put out the stars,
And rain so fell and blue a plague on earth,
That all the world may falter with thy fall.71

71. Byron's Conspiracy, III, iii, 29-35.

This outburst is notably similar in mood and theme to Macbeth's conjuration of the witches in the cavern:

Though you untie the winds and let them fight
Against the churches! though the yesty waves
Confound and swallow navigation up;
Though bladed corn be lodged and trees blown down;
Though castles topple on their warders' heads;
Though palaces and pyramids do slope
Their heads to their foundations; though the treasure
Of nature's germins tumble all together,
Even till destruction sicken; answer me
To what I ask you. 72

72. Macbeth, IV, i, 52-61. Chapman's Conspiracy and
Tragedy was published in 1609. When this double tragedy
was first produced is uncertain. Macbeth was probably
finished in 1606. It seems likely that one "rival poet"
borrowed the substance of the imprecation from the other,
though who from whom is as conjectural as a precise know­
ledge of the circumstances would be (perhaps) uninstruc­tive.
One similarity in diction is interesting: Chapman: "And
let the black fume of thy venom'd breath/ Infect the air";
Shakespeare: "Infected be the air whereon they ride" (IV,
1, 138). Since both curses are delivered with reference
to augurs who have augured ill (Macbeth has just been
shown the kings-to-be of Banquo's issue), it is difficult
to believe the similarity coincidental.

It is appropriate here to recall Hooker's sentence on moral
responsibility: "No sin can be committed without the singu­
lar disgrace of Nature, and the utter disturbance of that
divine order, whereby the pre-eminence of chiefest accepta­
tion is by the best things worthily challenged." 73 In the

73. See above, p. 138.

consciences of Byron and Macbeth the pre-eminence is
challenged by the worst things, by pride and ambition re­
spectively, and both--through their febrile imaginations--
are compelled to materialize the singular disgrace of nature.
The perverted "Word" of the microcosm (in this case the
astrologer and the witches) issuing from a disordered soul
will destroy what the Word of God created. The currents
of influence between the little world and the great ema­
nating from the former, the elements ought, in sympathy
with the microcosm's abdication from God, fly out in
disarray. Tourneur, in the *Atheist's Tragedy* (1611)
places intelligence of man's evil in a similar context.
Castabella, ward of the monstrous D'Amville, his inten­
tions having been revealed to her, is moved to declaim as
follows:

...Are y'an Atheist? Then,
  I know my prayers and teares are spent in vaine.
  O patient Heav'n! Why doest thou not expresse
  Thy wrath in thunderbots; to teare the frame
  Of man in pieces? How can earth endure
  The burthen of this wickedness without
  An earthquake? Or the angry face of Heav'n
  Be not enflam'd with lightning?74

74. IV, iii, 122-130.

Ruskin would probably have regarded these passages from
Chapman, Shakespeare, and Tourneur as expressions of the
pathetic fallacy. In a special sense, they are: in so
far as they express intense emotion they embody pathos;
in so far as nature is assumed to be capable of reflecting
man's distemper they are fallacious, not only in respect
to Ruskin's world picture but as regards the Elizabethan's
as well; for in terms of the latter this assumption is an
embodiment of an anticipation or prefiguration of that power
which, on the Last Day, will be awarded the elect and re­
fused the damned: the latter will then perceive what their
sin has cost them; they will see, in effect, that their
apostasy dissipated what otherwise would eventually have
been their due: hence, what better way did the poet have
of materializing the loss than by fallaciously imputing a power of this magnitude to the spirit of man sinning? The sin once consummated and the spirit ruptured, the power would escape; how better limn the magnitude of the loss than by showing it confounding earth and sea and rattling the orbs of creation? In respect to time present, nevertheless, the idea and the images are fallacious. But this is not the kind of fallacy that Ruskin had in mind: it was Ruskin's idea that the pathos bred the fallacy and that it did so merely because it required (among poets of the second rank and below) the imagery of nature for effective embodiment. The Renaissance poet, on the other hand, conceived the fallacy as the outward semblance of a profound philosophic truth. It was this truth, not pathos, that inspired the fallacy, which, on what critics of Scripture termed the anagogical level of interpretation, was no fallacy at all. It is in itself, of course, no measure of poetic excellence. In the above three dramatic passages it purveys the indifferent, the good, and the great: Castabella seems an enervated copy of Byron; beside Macbeth she is feeble stuff indeed.

V

One measure of Shakespeare's greatness is his power to recreate through the accidental (i.e., the specific image) the awful power (talked and talked about by Pico, Sidney, and Chapman, but never so well expressed) of the
universal. It may be that, like Chapman, Shakespeare posed a special dialectic for what we have termed the Osirian aspects of art, the object being to illuminate those essences residing on the apogee of creation by presenting the familiar and particular in such combinations that they must be, in an intuitive flash, raced up the Jacob's ladder to things divine. Certainly, unlike Chapman, he manages powerfully to incarnate Hooker's maxim. One notable difference between Shakespeare's presentation of "Nature's disgrace" and Chapman's and Tourneur's is that the former deals largely in things the destruction of which we can readily envision, e.g., churches, navigation, bladed corn, trees, castles, palaces, and pyramids. Compare these with Chapman's list: air, heaven, stars, world; or with Tourneur's: frame of man, earth, heaven. Because they cannot avoid the vague, the cumbersome, and the abstract, Chapman and Tourneur fail to recreate forcefully for the imagination a concept—an essence—pretty nearly universal to the moral philosophy of their time. Davies and Drummond fail to incarnate another aspect of this philosophy for the same reason. Sidney, we have noted, pointed the way toward a colorful depiction of the geography of soul. His "deserts of Inde" and his "seas worst to be haunted and least known" failed signally, however, to inspire the two later commentators, who content themselves with prosaic enumeration, drawn largely from the trite nomenclature of
astronomy. Sidney's conceit was to lie fallow for fifty years after he set it down. It was Sir Thomas Browne who finally made it flower:

I could never content my contemplation with those general pieces of wonder, the Flux and Reflux of the Sea, the increase of Nile, the conversion of the needle to the North; and have studied to match and parallel those in the more obvious and neglected pieces of Nature, which without further travel I can do in the Cosmography of myself. We carry with us the wonders we seek without us: there is all Africa and her prodigies in us; we are that bold and adventurous piece of Nature, which he that studies wisely learns in a Compendium what others labour at in a divided piece and endless volume.  


This seems to be a deliberate paraphrase of Davies, who speaks of the "Ebbs and floods of Nile" and of landmarks in the soul corresponding to poles, seas, lands, beasts, plants, and men. Yet whatever his debt to Davies, Browne's passage is justly famous and Davies' justly obscure.

Transmutation is all: Davies' dull list of the soul's parts becomes "all Africa and her prodigies"; his "little world" the "Cosmography of myself"; his great world a "divided piece and endless volume."  

76. See above, pp. 146-147.

Browne would "Use it but like my Globe, and turn it round sometimes for my recreation....Whilst I study to find how I am a Microcosm, or little world, I find my self something
more than the great. The globe image, like the rack

77. Works, op. cit., I, 22.

image in Herbert and Lear, somehow inspires the first-rate poet to materialize the "soul's dimensive lines." It was earlier used by Donne as part of a masonry which builds to one of that poet's finest lines:

On a round ball
A workeman that hath copies by, can lay
An Europe, Afrique, and an Asia,
An quickly make that, which was nothing, All.
So doth each teare,
Which thee doth weare,
A globe, yea world by that impression grow,
Till thy teares mixt with mine doe over flow
This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven dissolved so.

O more then Moone,
Draw not up seas to drowne me in thy sphære... 78


Here is a remarkable adaptation of the turn-about in correspondence: the lovers are microcosms, the tears of each reflecting the world of the other; the tears correspond to seas, hence the weeping woman to the heaven which sent down the flood and to the moon which draws the tides. Suddenly she is become that to which she corresponds and the tears to what they correspond. Being heaven, she is "more then Moone," but her office is that of the moon's, to draw up seas. This is "sublimation strange" magnificently materialized: it is the man-Word in all his power
centrally placed in a cosmos compact of energy and mobility, a liveliness inspired by the troubled sea. In all likelihood it was one of those lines which moved Lord Herbert to attribute divinity to Donne's diction. It is of the same kidney as "See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!"—though there is that in the sound of the latter—a kind of Apocalyptic ring—beyond the power of Donne.

Doctor Faustus (produced ca. 1588), like its less distinguished inheritor, Byron's Conspiracy and Tragedy, is a dramatic study in man's prevention of his time. Byron's boast that no law exceeds his knowledge, that "He goes before them, and commands them all/ That to himself is a law rational," is reminiscent of Faustus' abjuration of philosophy, physic, law, and divinity (the profits of which seem negligible) and a clear spirit in posse for the unclean spirit in actu and the magician's fire:

All things that move between the quiet poles Shall be at my command. Emperors and kings Are but obeyed in their several provinces,
Nor can they raise the wind or rend the clouds;
But his dominion that exceeds in this
Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man.
A sound magician is a mighty God.80

80. I, 55-61 (Faustus, a series of episodes, is not divided into acts).

He who would "raise the wind and rend the clouds" would be
like Calvin's, Job's and Jeremiah's God, and like Milton's
omniscient student. The fall of Faustus, like the fall
of man, stems from a misconstruction on the power of that
for which the laws of God are flouted. Magic, like the
apple, destroys what it purports to realize, namely, the
God in man. He would have his dominion stretch "as far
as doth the mind of man"; he envisions sublimation strange,
by which all objects of all thought will be resurrected
as the energy of spirit. To this end chiefly he will give
his soul to Lucifer, as witness the contract: "First,
that Faustus may be a spirit in form and substance"(V,
95-96); and to this end chiefly, as his Evil Angel tells
him, is he damned: "Thou art a spirit; God cannot pity
thee" (VI, 13). The rhetoric of Marlowe materializes the
power of a spirit that has put on liberty in these Faustian
boasts (III, 108-113):

...I'll be great Emperor of the world,
And make a bridge through the moving air,
To pass the ocean with a band of men;
I'll join the hills that bind the Afric shore,
And make that country contenent to Spain,
And both contributory to my crown.
The greatest of these are his words to Helen: "Yea, I will wound Achilles in the heel And then return to Helen for a kiss" (XIII, 104-105). The juxtaposition here of epic achievement and the courtly gesture heightens the power of the magician by making the fruits of it the products of a seemingly effortless command over nature and man. In essence it is but clothing the abstraction of omnipotence in the raiment of the familiar—an illustration of what the god Osiris can do in his progress down the ladder. Yet Faustus in boast and speculation is puny beside Christ in reality. That magical turn-about by which the humor of the Man-God transfuses the air and fire of creation discloses, in an awful burst, the abyss between him who prevents and Him Who abided his time. It is the genius of Marlowe that he can feelingly persuade us of the cleavage—that he can, in effect, "make us see God coming in his majesty." The destruction of Faustus was the destruction of the Platonic (perhaps, specifically, the Mirandolan) Apollo within him:

Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,  
And burned is Apollo's laurel bough,  
That sometimes grew within this learned man.  
(XIV, 139-141)

This is manifestly that Apollo who presides over dialectic in divinity and philosophy, the same whom Faustus subverted by abandoning those sciences for magic. Faustus, of course, is primarily a "learned man," not a poet, so that Apollo as genius of the latter would not be appropriate
in this context. He is that spirit in Pico which takes the soul heavenward and is indistinguishable from the Holy Ghost, the God in man.

Although Marlowe is thus notably capable of moralizing on the prevention of time and of limning the Cusan man-god, he is singularly free of the microcosmic designs and the images and schemes of order and disorder which almost invariably attend discussions of like theme among later poets. He had not, of course, the advantage of Hooker's eloquence on man's responsibility to nature (1595), nor, very likely, of Sidney's on order (not published until 1587—probably the year in which Marlowe composed Doctor Faustus). Whether the accident of chronology or his tastes in reading kept these resources from him or whether he was simply disinclined to use them, Marlowe avoids what Donne, Chapman, Browne, and lesser writers of their time thoroughly exploit, and what Shakespeare (who can do with words what Faustus hoped to do with things) forged into an instrument of monumental power.

Ulysses, we have noted, juxtaposes for comparison the disorders of the great and little worlds, most effectively materializing both through the image of the troubled sea; Cleopatra adapts the turn-about in correspondence to her vision of the dead Antony (i.e., what Hildegarde and Ralegh say man is like, Cleopatra says Antony is; this is also Donne's technique in "0 more then Moone..."); Macbeth
combines disorder and the turn-about in his speech to the witches and in "No, this my hand will rather...," where again the troubled sea is the focal image. Significantly, images in Macbeth's speech to the witches are reflected in Ulysses' discourse on order. Macbeth: "Yesty waves"; Ulysses: "raging of the sea." Macbeth: "Untie the winds and let them fight"; Ulysses: "commotion in the winds." Macbeth: "trees blown down"; Ulysses: "rend and deracinate." Macbeth: "Even till destruction sicken"; Ulysses: "the enterprise is sick." Disorder reflected from microcosm to macrocosm seems to be the thread on which these several images are strung. They recur in Lear and in The Tempest.

Shakespeare introduces the storm scenes in Lear with a description in which microcosm and troubled sea, etc. are expressly juxtaposed:

Kent: I know you. Where's the king?

Gentleman: Contending with the fretful elements; Bids the wind blow the earth into the sea, Or swell the curled waters 'bove the main, That things might change or cease; tears his white hair, Which the impetuous blasts, with eyeless rage, Catch in their fury, and make nothing of; Strives in his little world of man to out-scorn The to-and-fro-conflicting wind and rain. (III, i, 3-15)

This is a dramatic application of Ulysses' ideas of degree untuned and a restatement of his warning that "the bounded waters/ Should left their bosoms higher than the shores,/ And make a sop of all this solid globe." The "eyeless rage"
of the storm, of course, reflects that of the little world. In Lear's mind the agent of both is the same. Like Macbeth and Byron, who impute (figuratively) Apocalyptic power to the purveyors of ill omen, Lear sees the fretful elements as vaunt-couriers of his daughter's malice:

Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! Spout, rain!
Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters:
I tax not you, you elements with unkindness....
But yet I call you servile ministers,
That have with two pernicious daughters join'd
Your high-engender'd battles 'gainst a head
So old and white as this.

(III, ii, 14-25)

These servile ministers perform the offices assigned the witches in Hecate's cavern. The difference is that the hypothetical in Macbeth (Though you untie the winds...) becomes, in part, the actual in Lear. In the king's imagination his daughters have untied the winds, have set cataracts and hurricanes to spouting, have unleashed oak-cleaving thunderbolts (which, like Ulysses' untuned strings, "rend and deracinte"). The climax of Lear's adjuration to this chaos (III, ii, 1-9)—and again the similarity to Macbeth is notable—adumbrates the crack of doom:

And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Smite flat the thick rotundity o' the world!
Crack nature's molds, all germins spill at once
That make ingratitude man!

Shakespeare's delineation of the real crack of doom is given us by Prospero (Tempest, IV, i, 150-156), wherein it becomes apparent that the power figuratively wielded by the untuned microcosm—by the witches and Lear's daughters—is the power of God. Juxtaposing the Macbeth passage with
Prospero's speech will make the parallel clear:

Macbeth

Though castles topple on their warders' heads;
Though palaces and pyramids do slope
Their heads to their foundations;
though the treasure
Of nature's germins tumble all together,
Even till destruction sicken;
answer me
To what I ask you.

Tempest

The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind.

In both passages destruction proceeds from the monuments of man to the monuments of nature: nature's germins are indistinguishable from all which inherit the great globe. 81

81. Nature's germins perhaps needs a gloss. The seeds of nature were a symbol of becoming as distinct from being in Medieval and Renaissance ontology. Sir Thomas Browne (Religio Medici, Keynes, I, 63) develops the symbol in a clear and colorful way, though the ideas he expresses are at least as old as Nicholas of Cusa (On the Vision of God) and probably represent what Shakespeare had in mind: "In the seed of a Plant, to the eyes of God and to the understanding of man, there exists, though in an invisible way, the perfect leaves, flowers and fruit thereof; for things that are in posse to the sense, are actually existent to the understanding. Thus God beholds all things, who contemplates as fully his works in the Epitome, as in their full volume; and beheld as amply the whole world in that little compendium of the sixth day, as in the scattered and dilated pieces of those five before."

The difference in the two passages is chiefly one of mood: the consequence of malevolent destruction is confusion, but when God destroys, confusion abdicates. The first passage is tumultuous, the second serene. It is the difference between "tumbling all together" and dissolution.
Prospero himself wields the power of his God, though not on an ecumenic scale. Unlike the witches and Lear's daughters, however, he is a clear spirit, one on whom the poet has bestowed for a span a mysterious, benevolent prevention of his time. The description of Prospero's "rough magic" is perhaps Shakespeare's most powerful materialization of man become the Word. He draws again on disorder's traditional catalogue, the troubled heavens, the troubled sea, the shaken earth, and the riven and de­racinated trees. In the midst of these is the microcosm wondrously sublimed to manipulate these vast opprobriums, which are yet something less than himself. So he tells us, as in a voice from the whirlwind:

I have dimm'd  
The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,  
And 'twixt the green sea and the azured vault  
Set roaring war: to the dread rattling thunder  
Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak  
With his own bolt; the strong-based promontory  
Have I made shake, and by the spurs pluck'd up  
The pine and cedar: graves at my command  
Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let 'em forth  
By my so potent art.

(V, 1, 41-50)

Perhaps Shakespeare actually did have in mind Calvin's popular commentary on the Voice in the Whirlwind when he gave these lines to Prospero. There are provocative re­semblances between the two, in any case, though Calvin's God comes off second best: ..."now by his mere nod to shake the heaven with roaring peals of thunder, to consume whatever he choose with lightnings, and set the atmosphere on fire with the flame;...to restrain, suspended as it were
in air, the sea, which by its elevation, seems to threaten the earth" etc. 82 Whether the reminiscence is deliberate or not, it is significant of how the rhetoric of disorder, correspondence and sublimation (especially when meddled together in the crucible of the surpassing alchemist) brings mankind round the hyaline to the throne of God. Prospero in the figurative present, thanks to the teleology of Cusa and his successors, is His Co-supreme, even as, in the eternal present, his spirit is the Word. In these capacities, he is, of course, rather characteristic than unique: he shares his dignity with Pico's dialectician, with Davies', Drummond's, Herbert's, and Donne's idealized microcosms, with Faustus' and Byron's dream of the conqueror, with Cleopatra's Antony, Umbra's Bussy, and Chapman's Homer. If he is the successor to the throne of Calvin's God, he is equally the precursor of that Cambridge student who seemed to be "one whom winds and tempest serve"—in later years one who alone of all our poets had at once the vision, the courage and the skill to assume the Man-God as his manly due.

VI

Milton's concept of the dignity of man is that of Nicholas of Cusa, Pico, Ficino, and the English poets and
commentators we have so far reviewed. It is the microcosm with a clear spirit, the little world viewed in the glass of liberty, that constitutes his idea of man dignified.

True dignity is true liberty, he explains in the Tetra-chordon (1645), and both are dependent on "inward goodness and stedfast knowledge":

For nothing nowadayes is more degenerately forgott'n then the true dignity of man, almost in every respect....Although if we consider that just and naturall privileges men neither can rightly seek, nor dare fully claime, unless they be ally'd to inward goodnesse, and stedfast knowledge, and that the want of this quells them to a servile sense of their own conscious unworthinesse, it may save the wondring why in this age many are so opposite both to human and to Christian liberty, either while they understand not, or envy others that do; contenting, or rather priding themselves in a specious humility and strictness bred out of low ignorance that never yet conceiv'd the freedome of the Gospel.

83. Works, op. cit., IV, 74.

What are these "naturall privileges" which (we take it) the clear spirit "dare fully claime"; and what is this "freedome of the Gospel" which specious humility and low ignorance cannot conceive? They are the Pauline liberty, which, suffused with Spirit, is changed into the image of the Lord "from glory to glory." 84 It is our privilege to

84. A full explication of the Pauline passage (II Corinthians, iii, 17-18) appears under Milton's definition of Regeneration: "...that change operated by the Word and the Spirit, whereby the old man being destroyed, the inward man is regenerated by God after his own image, in all the faculties of his mind, insomuch that he becomes as it were a new creature, and the whole man is sanctified both in body and soul, for the service of God, and the performance of good works" (Christian Doctrine, I, xviii).
to undergo these changes and our freedom to rise beyond angelhood to Godhead. Eleven years before he set down the above invective on the ignorant, Milton had expressed a similar contempt for them and a hope for the elect, which hope will serve to gloss "naturall privileges." The benighted majority of mankind, says the attendant Spirit in Comus,

...with low-thoughted care
Confined, and pester'd in this pin-fold here,
Strive to keep up a frail, and Feverish being
Unmindfull of the crown that Vertue gives
After this mortal change, to her true Servants
Amongst the enthron'd gods on Sainted seats.

(6-11)

The "enthron'd gods" might simply embody a conceit spun out of "the Starry threshold of Jove's court," from whence the Spirit has issued, and mean no more than angels in Attic garb; but if such be the case they become, a few years later, angels of a superior order, as the poet informs us in his tractate on Reformation (1641); where he prophesies what lies in store for the clear spirits of Albion:

...They undoubtedly that by their Labours, Counsels, and Prayers have been earnest for the Common good of Religion and their Countrey, shall receive, above the inferiour Orders of the Blessed, the Regall addition of Principalities, Legions, and Thrones into their glorious Titles, and in supereminence of beatifick Vision progressing the dateless and irrevoluable Circle of Eternity shall clasp inseparable Hands with joy, and blisse in over measure for ever.


In the angelic hierarchy the Thrones (i.e., enthroned cherub and seraph) are supereminent, than whom, the Trinity except,
none higher sit. Milton takes liberties with the traditional hierarchies (as supposedly arranged in the fourth century by Dionysius the Areopagite), which divide the echelons into three "genera" of three "species" each: seraphim, cherubim, thrones; dominions, virtues, powers; principalities, archangels, angels. In Milton Thrones is the generic name of the three uppermost echelons. Thus Raphael, who is "A Seraph wingd" (P. L., V, 277), descends to Adam "from the Thrones above" (V, 363).

efficacious in their faith and works shall be seraphs—a prophecy reminiscent of Pico's concept of the final dignity of man, that we shall be "like burning Seraphim rapt from ourselves, full of divine power..."; and shall at last become "He Himself Who made us." Still, a Seraph is not a God, as those who were cancelled from Heaven belatedly discovered—those "potent Thrones that to be less then Gods/ Disdain'd, but meaner thoughts learnd in thir flight" (VI, 365-366). If Milton had seraphs in mind in the Comus passage (as seems likely from the epithet enthroned) his calling the servitors of virtue Gods appears at first sight infelicitous. It is not, for they are such by anticipation, as the God of Paradise Lost reveals to the heavenly hosts:

The World shall burn, and from her ashes spring
New Heav'n and Earth, wherein the just shall dwell,
And after all thir tribulations long
See golden days, fruitful of golden deeds,
With Joy and Love triumphing, and fair Truth.
Then thou ((i.e., Christ)) thy regal Scepter shalt lay by,
For regal Scepter then no more shall need,
God shall be All in All. But all ye Gods,
Adore him who to compass all this dies,
Adore the Son, and honour him as mee.

(III, 334-343; italics mine)

There will come a time when (to use Greville's expression)
God's all-might will appear in all. It is exquisitely appropriate that God, who at His pleasure sets aside chronology, should, upon the heels of this disclosure, elevate in the figurative present (i.e., figurative to us but real to Him) his angels to the Godhead: the elevation is at once sound ontology and sound dramatic anticipation. In this passage Milton reflects the climax to Pico's prophecy, that the elect will all be Gods. It is notable that for Milton this golden time will be "fruitful of golden deeds," when the spirit will have a divine aptitude for childing works and incarnating dreams, and when (to paraphrase Macbeth's misappropriated resolution) the very firstlings of the heart shall be the firstlings of the hand. As John Smith had said, the soul is blessed in actu and vigore: in "creating mind," as Ficino had put it. For (to conclude with Nicholas on the Man-God) "si un homme est élevé a l'unité avec la puissance elle-même, de telle sorte que l'homme ne soit pas une créature qui subsiste en soi, mais en unité avec la puissance infinie, cette puissance ((of God)) n'a pas son terme dans la créature mais en elle-même."
Like Nicholas, Milton expressly elevates manhood to the Deity: God's "all ye Gods" addresses itself to man redeemed as well as to angel. When Milton in the tract on Reformation predicted seraph-hood for the true warfaring Christian, he was thinking of the Millenium, not of the aftermath of the "general Doom": for consequent upon the latter man and angel will enjoy a puissance infinitely greater than the seraph's now. The Incarnation and the Resurrection mean for Milton what they mean for Nicholas, that the Word will be manhood's to command. So God explains to His Onlie-Begotten:

Nor shalt thou by descending to assume Man's Nature, less'n or degrade thine owne. ...because in thee
Love hath abounded more then Glory abounds, Therefore thy Humiliation shall exalt
With thee thy Manhood also to this Throne; Here shalt thou sit incarnate, here shalt Reign Both God and Man, Son both of God and Man, Anointed universal King, all Power
I give thee, reign forever, and assume Thy Merits.

(P. L., III, 303-319)

Such, then, are the "naturall privileges" and ultimate liberty to which the wise man (with Christ a co-supreme) dare lay claim.

If Milton took not the degree of his microcosmical circumference to be above three hundred and sixty, he took it, at least, to measure the outer magnitude of the hyaline. We have seen that "contemplation circling upward from the glassy sea whereon she stands" provides a clue to Milton's

88. See above, p. 30.
concept of the Pauline Mirror and reflects an indebtedness to an earlier epistemological idealism, particularly as it was embodied in Spenser. The sea figure itself, however, comes not from Spenser but from Revelation xv, 2, as does also the notion of something spiritual standing upon it:

And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.89

89. The opening line of Coverdale's version is even closer to Milton: "And I saw as it were a glassye see, mingled with fyre" (quoted from the O. E. D.).

Milton construes this sea of glass as the crystalline sphere which encases the universe. Thus the angels designate it in Paradise Lost in their hymn on the enclosure of the deep:

Witness this new-made World, another Heav'n
From Heaven Gate not farr, founded in view
On the cleer Hyaline, the Glassie Sea;
Of amplitude almost immense, with Starr's Numerous, and every Starr perhaps a World
Of destind habitation.

(VII, 617-622)

Hence the clear glass of mind corresponds to the "cleer Hyaline": circling upward, contemplation can go nowhere but from the floor of heaven--itself above creation--toward the throne of God. "Glassie sea" (as used in the Divorce Tract) is thus an image which meddles together the concept of the clear spirit (itself a fusion of spirit and glass) and the doctrine of correspondence, whereby the mind of man--the uppermost part of him--is likened to the frame of heaven, the uppermost part of creation. Moreover,
through a turn-about in correspondence, the clear spirit becomes the frame of heaven. "Glassie sea" is perhaps the only image in the literature of the Renaissance which simultaneously reflects the concept of knowledge and the concept of power. For the modern reader it is, of course, an obscure and devious reflection, but to the Bible-reading, microcosmical Caroline audience it must have been transparent.

For readers of our time Milton can be, nevertheless, much less dark and oblique in his use of microcosmism and correspondence than he is in the glassy sea passage. Adam tells Raphael that when he first discovered Eve

...what seemd fair in all the World, seemd now Mean, or in her summd up, in her containd...

(F. L., V, 471-472)

And Eve tells Adam, in a passage reminiscent of Herbert (The Temper) on the omnipresence of his God, and of Davies, Drummond, and others on the geography of soul, that Adam is her Paradise:

...with thee to goe, Is to stay here; without thee here to stay, Is to go hence unwilling; thou to mee Art all things under Heav'n, all places thou. (XII, 615-618)

Satan is even more explicit as to man's microcosmical significance. Having "compast the Earth, with meditations guile,"
he thus apostrophises the world:

As God in Heav'n
Is Center, yet extends to all, so thou Centring receav'est from all those Orbs; in thee, Not in themselves, all thir known vertue appeers
Productive in Herb, Plant, and nobler birth
Of Creatures animate with gradual life
Of Growth, Sense, Reason, all summ'd up in Man.
(IX, 107-113)

Correspondence turned about to dramatize man's responsibility to nature materializes in the Temptation scenes as thunder and quake, first when Eve transgresses (IX, 781-783): "Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat ((i.e., from her 'germins'))/ Sighing through all her Works gave signs of woe..."; and again when Adam falls:

Earth trembl'd from her entrails, as again
In pangs, and Nature gave a second groan,
Skie lowr'd and Muttering Thunder, som sad drops
Wept at compleating of the mortal Sin Original.
(IX, 1000-1004)

Adam's fall untuned degree, and the world has been in partial ruins ever since. Milton's exposition of this disorder follows the traditional pattern: like Ulysses' his catalogue begins with erring stars and ends with a contemplation of the microcosm; in between are the unharnessed winds and seas. Angels, now the agents of malediction, having first warped celestial orbits into "synods unbenigne," effect these additional derangements:

To the winds they set
Thir corners, when with bluster to confound
Sea, Aire, and Shoar, the Thunder when to rowle
With terror through the dark Aereal Hall.
...At that tasted Fruit
The Sun, as from Thyestean Banquet, turn'd
His course intended; else how had the World
Inhabited, though sinless, more then now,
Avoided pinching cold and scorching heate?
These changes in the Heav'ns, though slow, produc'd
Like change on Sea and Land, sideral blast,
Vapour, and Mist, and Exhalation hot,
Corrupt and Pestilent: Now from the North
Of Norumbega, and the Samoed shoar
Bursting thir brazen Dungeon, armd with ice
And snow and haile and stormie gust and flaw,
Boreas, and Caecias and Argestes loud
And Thrascias rend the Woods and Seas upturn.

...Thus began
Outrage from liveless things.

But the tasting of that fruit did more than untie the winds
and turn the sun: it correspondingly disordered the micro-
cosm:

...these were from without
The growing miseries, which Adam saw
Alreadie in part, though hid in gloomies shade,
To sorrow abandond, but worse felt within,
And in a troubl'd Sea of passion tost...

(X, 665-718)

Not only tossing seas beset him, "but high Winds worse
within/ Began to rise, high Passions, Anger Hate," etc.
(IX, 1122-1123).

The central point of these correspondences between
distraught man and nature is not that nature reflects the
state of man's psyche (i.e., it is not pathetic fallacy),
but that man causes nature to reflect it. The prelapsarian
Adam dominated and was responsible for his world: his
will and intellect held it together; when he weakened the
former, when "Understanding rul'd not and the Will/ Heard
not her lore," he weakened his hold on the latter, and the
consequence was, in Hooker's words, "the singular disgrace
of nature." The postlapsarian Adam, on the contrary, is
ruled by the world he disgraced, even as, in his little
world, will and understanding are

...both in subjection now
To sensual Appetite, who from beneath
Usurping over sovran Reason claimd
Superior sway.

(IX, 1128-1131)

Relinquishment of power over nature, that is, the power to will the enhancement of it to a heavenly perfection by willing this perfection in himself, was the penalty Adam had to pay for desiring in a single bound to leap up to his God. He lost the power of sublimation strange over first matter, the same which Lord Herbert claimed for the regenerate soul and toward which (in the words of the Spirit in Comus) the elect "with due steps aspire."

Although the zodiac of man is no longer capable in this world of the combinations and synods that will transfuse nature with his spirits or rattle earth's foundations with his will, a special malevolence is abroad still capable of working such effects, that is, of still further deteriorating the fabric of the world, though its power is temporary and the fabric recoverable from its influences. This power is Satan's, and disorder of the kind associated with Lear's daughters and the witches is its avatar. That which assisted the unhinging of Lear's mind the Fiend invokes in Paradise Regain'd "To tempt the Son of God with terrors dire":

...either Tropic now
'Gan thunder, and both ends of Heav'n, the Clouds
From many a horrid rift abortive pour'd
Fierce rain with lightning mixt, water with fire
In ruine reconcil'd: nor slept the winds
Within thir stony caves, but rush'd abroad
From the four hinges of the world, and fell
On the vext Wilderness, whose tallest Pines,
Though rooted deep as high, and sturdiest Oaks
Bow'd their Stiff necks, loaden with stormy blasts,
Or torn up sheer.

(P. R., IV, 409-419)

This is no prefiguration of the Apocalypse, to be sure:
germins are preserved and the world is not smitten flat;
still, the repercussions of malevolence retain here their
Shakespearean form and energy: they untie the winds, rend
and deracinate the oak and pine, spit fire, spout rain.
Like Prospero's, however, Satan's powers are limited to
the local scene. Like Prospero, too, by whose so potent
art graves oped and let their sleepers forth, Satan can
summon "Infernal Ghosts, and Hellish Furies" (IV, 422)
to climax his attempt to intimidate Christ. This having
failed he comes forward the next morning to admit his
weakness and incidentally to juxtapose, as the gentleman
in Lear had done, the little world and the world of storm:

I heard the rack
As Earth and Skie would mingle; but my self
Was distant; and these flaws, though mortals fear them
As dangerous to the pillard frame of Heaven,
Or to the Earths dark basis underneath,
Are to the main as inconsiderable,
And harmless, if not wholsom, as a sneeze
To man's less universe, and soon are gone.

(IV, 452-459)

So much for the awesome spectacle of plenitude un-
governed. Milton, like his predecessors, contrived that
such displays of grand, chaotic turbulence forcefully di-
rect attention to the potential or figuratively actual
influence of the microcosm on his universe. We cannot
appreciate the power of the atom--the microcosm with which
we now find ourselves preoccupied—until we see it disordered and destroying: only then do we perceive what other atoms are in posse for good or evil. So with the microcosm of the Renaissance: only when he is disordered and his energy released to fall on the vext wilderness or to incarnadine great Neptune's ocean are we to appreciate that he was, while he kept his orbits at heel, above Atlas his shoulders. Even Prospero and Calvin's God, clear spirits' both, must use disorder's properties to make us see their altitudes: the power to create is inferrable from the power to destroy; the power to control from the replications of anarchy. This principle is discernible, too, in Job's, Jeremiah's, and Isaiah's projections of Godhead, upon which Calvin's "lively adumbration" is based. It was for the Renaissance alone, however, to apply that principle to the apotheosis of the microcosm— to apply, in a sense, Old Testament vigor to New Testament ideas (principally the idea of a material resurrection and Christian liberty) through the agency of microcosmism, sublimation (i.e., a matter-resurrecting dialectic), and correspondence. Yet it remained for Milton alone successfully (if we exempt Marlowe's one line on Christ) to apply the energy and grandeur of the sulphurous and oak-cleaving Elohim to the creative benificence of the New Testament Logos— to the Son.

Girt with Omnipotence, with Radiance crown'd
Of Majestie Divine, Sapience and Love
Immense....

(P.L., VII, 194-196)

Him Milton plunges into the sea of outrage, "Farr into
Chaos, and the World unborn," and in the foreground of
these "fierce extremes contiguous," we watch Him--the Om-
nific Word--as he tunes degree:

He took the golden Compasses, prepar'd
In Gods Eternal store, to circumscribe
This Universe, and all created things;
One foot he 'center'd, and the other turn'd
Round through the vast profunditie obscure,
And said, thus farr extend, thus farr thy bounds,
This be thy just Circumference, O World.

....on the watrie calme
His brooding wings the Spirit of God outspred,
And vital vertue infus'd, and vital warmth
Throughout the fluid Mass, but downward purg'd
The black tartareous cold Infernal dregs
Like things to like, the rest to several place
Disparted, and between spun out the Air,
And Earth self ballanc't on her Center hung.

(VII, 225-242)

In the rhetoric of disorder there is nothing quite like
this for sublimity, not even in the speeches of Prospero
and Lear. It is not simply that the Son is omnifically
centered in a matrix pregnant with incomprehensible ener-
gies and vastnesses that makes this canvas "above heroic";

it is also --perhaps it is primarily--the ease and grace,
the gliding aplomb, the cadenced finality, with which He
disposes the arcs and hinges of creation. This passage
is surely among the foremost tributes which creative art
has paid to the Archtypal Creative Artist. Yet in it are
discernible the same basic ideas and techniques which
characterize the rhetoric of disorder: the same species
of mobility and energy is there, the same cosmic framework, the same order of potency in the hand of the agent who tunes or untunes it all. It is also a development of the turn-about in correspondence, of a reversal of those currents of influence between the little world and the great; for we must not forget that the Logos was for Milton, as He was for his predecessors, the Archtypal Man: Christ creating is above all the symbol and the omen of those "golden days, fruitful of golden deeds" when men and angels will be gods, when suffering humanity will be agile, perfect, and divine, and when (to make an end) Milton will himself take up those golden compasses and--surpassing artist that he will be then--create for his own delight another world in some vast profunditie obscure.
Peace is not a concept which figures profoundly in Renaissance teleologies; it is there, to be sure, because it is part of the Gospel teleology, but it is not something there, as it is in Dante, to give one pause. The idea of the dignity of man from the days of Nicholas of Cusa to the days of Milton found expression in the idea of Christian liberty, which, for the English Renaissance, was the idea of wisdom in action. The dignity of man, the good for man, is finally absolute power disposed to creative ends by discipline and clear intelligence. The objective of the magician, the moralist, the poet, and the saint is all one: it is to be the Artist-God. Peace (that is, calmness of mind induced by harmony and right order), though it is a necessary means to and a necessary concomitant of it, is not the essence of this objective. Action is its essence. True religion is lively: it envisions, as Lord Herbert said, the agile as well as the perfect. Nor was there any notable dissent from his view. Those who opposed the optimism and the methods of the mirror-polishers took no issue with their projections of man resurrected. The dignity of man for Hooker, Greville, Donne, and Browne, all of whom in varying measure contested the epistemological views of the Platonists, is the same as that for Lord Herbert, John Smith, John Davies, and
Milton. The good for man, Hooker proclaimed, arrives
"when fully we enjoy God, as an object wherein the powers
of our souls are satisfied even with everlasting delight;
so that although we be men, yet by being unto God united
we live as it were the life of God."

Delight is active,

1. Ecclesiastical Polity, I, xi, 2.

and so, we take it, is living the life of God. Phineas

Fletcher's view of this delight envisions creative energy:

Full of unmeasur'd bliss, yet still receiving,
Their souls still chiding joy, yet still conceiving,
Delights beyond the wish, beyond quick thoughts
perceiving.2


These are conventional views shared by everyone. The Cam­
bridge Platonist cannot muster an extravagance to outdo
them: he differs from them only in his pains to explain
the necessity of action. The spirit's happiness, he says,
does not consist merely in freedom from "disturbance or
molestation, so that it may eternally rest quiet within
itself":

A Mind and Spirit is too full of activity and energy, is
too quick and potent a thing to enjoy a full and complete
Happiness in a mere Cessation; this were to make Happiness
an heavy and Spiritless thing....There is infinite power
and strength in Divine joy, pleasure and happiness com­
mensurate to that Almighty Being and Goodness which is the
Eternal source of it.3

3. John Smith, The Noblemess of True Religion, Campagnac,
op. cit., 202-203.
Not peace merely, but infinite power and strength inform beatitude. This, too, is the View of Bacon, who (like Milton) saw in man's fall from grace a fall from power:

"For man by the fall fell at the same time from his state of innocency and from his dominion over creation. Both of these losses however can even in this life be in some part repaired" (italics mine).^ The natural inference from the latter statement is that after this life dominion over creation will be wholly repaired. Dominion is power and power is creative action: "On a given body to generate and superinduce a new nature or new natures, is the work and aim of human power."5 For Bacon as for Milton if the liberated spirit is to child joy it must child works. And this Necessity and ultimately supernatural privilege was by common consent in the English Renaissance that which wrought the dignity of man.

As we have seen, the enginry of mirror and spirit, and microcosmism, correspondence, and dialectic substantially assisted the poet of genius to sensualize that dignity—to give it avatars. It was an enginry so contrived as to distinguish the work of this poet from both earlier and later literatures. In viewing his high style and his high
theme we ought to keep the distinction in mind: it may save us from drawing foolish parallels between the literary monuments of one age and another. It may save us, too, from overemphasizing minor thematic influences and the inheritance of moral, social, and scientific impediments, together with stylistic formulae, stock characters, and other mechanisms which are in themselves not significantly directional; and from confounding substance and accident, from rendering unto convention the things which are vision's. For though a vision can be shared it cannot be borrowed, nor hence outmoded. Conventions are discarded, but visions are lost. The microcosm and the glass of intellect were conventions. The dignity of man, as the Renaissance conceived it, was a vision. The Renaissance borrowed the conventions from the Middle Ages, but it shared the vision (which the Middle Ages had lost) with John and Paul. The conventions long ago went stale. The vision long ago was lost. We can view the loss in Pope, who chatters of the conventions (order and the Great Chain) as though they were not the lifeless things they had indeed become; for in Pope man has ceased to be important:

Let Earth unbalanc'd from her orbit fly,
Planets and Suns run lawless thro' the sky;
Let ruling angels from their spheres be hurl'd,
Being on Being wreck'd, and world on world;
Heav'n's whole foundations to their centre nod,
And Nature tremble to the throne of God.
All this dread ORDER break--for whom? for thee?
Vile worm!--Oh Madness! Pride! Impiety!

What place in Pope's universe for Lear's daughters or Adam sinning? What here the significance of pride when the significance it had for Hooker, Chapman, Shakespeare, Browne and Milton is itself deemed mad and impious? What finally the significance of the Chain and Order themselves in the realm of art when they can no longer be dramatically related to things human? When prose and reason supersede vision, the avatars of dignity must abdicate or die. They are corpses in Pope. In the literature of England and America they are not again knowingly disinterred. Emerson, to be sure, speaks feelingly of dialectic (in the opening pages of the American Scholar), but his raptures are rather Plotinian than Miltonic; for in Emerson dialectic reverts again to a good in itself and has lost again the power to sublimate matter. Shelley (in Adonais) speaks of the clear spirit, but for him it is only a clever allusion to the mourner in Lycidas. In the realm of philosophy microcosmism is still of some importance, but in it man has become again a little world in all ways. Thus Lotze, the nineteenth-century German idealist, treats him (Microcosmos, 1853), and George Conger (Epitomizations, 1949) similarly confines him. Hegel, Marx, Kant, Comte, and Santayana have adapted dialectic in their several ways to their several systems, but none of these has flowered—or seems likely to flower—in the world of art. Art has discarded them.
Ghosts of the old magnitude occasionally materialize. We see them fleetingly in the beautiful opening lines of Robinson's *Man Against the Sky* (1916):

> Between me and the sunset, like a dome
> Against the glory of a world on fire,
> Now burned a sudden hill,
> Bleak, round, and high, by flame-lit height made higher,
> With nothing on it for the flame to kill
> Save one who moved and was alone up there
> To loom before the chaos and the glare
> As if he were the last god going home
> Unto his last desire.?


They return as bogus and meretricious Gods to Aiken's *Punch: The Immortal Liar*:

> ...they play
> A game of chess with stars for pawns
> And a silver moon for queen:
> Immeasurable as clouds above
> A chess-board world they lean,
> And thrust their hands amid their beards,
> And utter words profound
> That shake the star-swung firmament
> With a fateful sound;®


And in Jeffers' *Roan Stallion* they regain for a moment the old elan as they invest the modern god:

> ...he that walks lightning-naked on the Pacific, that laces the suns with planets, The heart of the atom with electrons.®

But these appearances are fugitive, almost, we might say, accidental; for that which originally sustained them is gone.

We have lost the vision: nothing, Milton would have said, is so degenerately forgotten. Our use of the phrase "dignity of man" he and Giovanni Pico and the Cardinal of Cusa would surely have regarded as a scurril travesty of their intent. Our notion of man dignified is man endowed with secular prerogatives which take the negative form of tolerations, social, political, and religious. But these, we say, free man to prosecute his destiny. What we mean is that they free him to realize his limitations; for absent from our concept of man dignified is the noble mind and the noble power. Today, as in the Middle Ages, the question of destiny is perpetually begged: man dignified, we say, exists to advance civilization, to preserve and improve its "values," to serve God, and, above all, to serve his country. Man dignified is a servant, a servant not to be trusted with a master's freedom: from absolute power, eternal or otherwise, he must shudder away. For power, we say, of any kind, will corrupt him, if it is not severely rationed. Power is absent from his teleology. So, too, is creative action, since that is something he leaves behind to the institutions he has served. What remains is peace, and--should he find himself immortal--supine adoration of his God. But this last, we say, is
something ineffable, meaning that it is not so bad as it seems. But since we do not feel the ineffable we do not much entertain it and turn instead to something we can understand, though we are told it passeth understanding. Our inclination makes us more spiritually akin to the Middle Ages than to the Renaissance. It may explain why our idealism has been almost hopelessly submerged by our materialism: it has no real energy (as indeed it had not in the Middle Ages) to surface with. The inclination may also in part explain our growing interest in things Medieval over the past century and why, in our study of the genesis of the Renaissance, we zealously push the frontiers back and back. There is much objectively, of course, to justify this backward pushing: throwbacks in the Renaissance and precocities in the Middle Ages abound, so that it is unreasonable to deem the former as anything but a slow emergence from the latter. On the other hand, a tendency to read our own teleologies into the literary monuments of the Renaissance incurs the danger of blurring and puddling together great Medieval and great Renaissance themes.

It is not surprising, for example, that a distinguished scholar and critic of our day should, in summing up his otherwise wholly excellent views on Milton, confuse Milton's theme with Dante's: "If the spirit of the revolutionary Milton partook of Constantine's vision...the theme of his
major poems is 'E la sua volontate e nostra pace'.


There are many lines, of course, in the major poems which would seem to bear out this observation: "Calm of mind, all passion spent"; "Subverting worldly strong, and worldly wise/ By simply meek"; "The World was all before them, where to choose/ Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide." But these do not point to the theme of his major poems. That theme—and one can trace it back to the *Prologues*—is the theme of Renaissance Christian humanism: man has dignity. There is as much difference between the theme of peace and the theme of dignity as there is between the tone of 'E la sua volontate...' and "One foot he centered and the other turned/ Round through the vast profunditie obscure"; or as there is between the weary posture of the Old English seafarer, "Wyrd bith ful arāed," and the tortured Herbert's "O rack me not to such a vast extent"; it is the difference between Paolo and Francesca, who are buffeted helplessly round and round the chasm in Hell, and the Weird Sisters, who can untie the winds and swallow navigation up; it is the difference between Plotinus' "Eternally identical this Principle must be" and Ficino's "We shall ourselves have the power of creating mind." It is the difference—for one can go forward as well as backward with these contrasts—between Swinburne's
"Even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea" and Prospero's "I have bedimmed the noontide sun"; it is the difference between pride in Mr. Eliot's house agent's clerk "on whom assurance sits/ As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire" and pride in Marlowe's Faustus, "Oh I'll leap up to my God!" It is the difference between Ruskin's calling a response in nature to human emotion a pathetic fallacy and Lord Herbert's calling it a promise of man's dominion over creation. It is, on the earlier side of the Christian era, the difference between the microcosm vassaled unto the zodiac and the microcosm "wearing stars upon its heels to kick at fate"; on the later side it is the difference between a suffocating and vitiated idealism breaking effete lances against materialism and ideas sublimating matter for the service of the soul.

Hence the man-god philosophy importantly distinguishes the Renaissance and its art from contiguous epochs: it was beyond the resources of Dante to provide the *Divine Comedy* with the theme of *Paradise Lost*, for the fruits of Christian humanism were not at his disposal. On the other hand, Milton could avail himself of these and of the conventions passed along by the Middle Ages which seemed best suited to express the high points of humanistic idealism. The microcosm in the similitude of the Lord, the macrocosm in sympathetic union with it, the mirror, the spirit, the divine imposition of spirit upon matter, the ascension
to heaven through dialectic--these were Medieval properties. But it was the peculiar genius of the Renaissance to adapt them--largely through the imagery of disorder--to a painting out of man's greatness. These composed Sidney's architectonics and Chapman's heaven-high thoughts and Milton's "that which is praiseworthy." These were the avatars of dignity; theirs was, in varying measure, the investing Spirit.

It would be rash--and in the last analysis untenable--to assert that the conjunction of the properties and the vision helped generate the power of the mighty line in England's two great poets and in some few of their contemporaries; but one can say that it provided matter worthy of their power and hence encouraged the use and development of it. Simultaneously, their power developed the matter, "so that both did seem divine." The union was unique, a phoenix and turtle affair. The flame it generated was singular: Homer, Virgil, and Dante had not beheld or generated its like. And when are we to look upon its like again?

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