

## Selections from *Oration on the Dignity of Man and Conclusions*

### *Oration On the Dignity of Man\**

I once read that Abdala the Muslim, when asked what was most worthy of awe and wonder in this theater of the world, answered, "There is nothing to see more wonderful than man!" Hermes Trismegistus concurs with this opinion: "A great miracle, Asclepius, is man!" However, when I began to consider the reasons for these opinions, all these reasons given for the magnificence of human nature failed to convince me: that man is the intermediary between creatures, close to the gods, master of all the lower creatures, with the sharpness of his senses, the acuity of his reason, and the brilliance of his intelligence the interpreter of nature, the nodal point between eternity and time, and, as the Persians say, the intimate bond or marriage song of the world, just a little lower than angels as David tells us. I concede these are magnificent reasons, but they do not seem to go to the heart of the matter, that is, those reasons which truly claim admiration. For, if these are all the reasons we can come up with, why should we not admire angels more than we do ourselves? After thinking a long time, I have figured out why man is the most fortunate of all creatures and as a result worthy of the highest admiration and earning his rank on the chain of being, a rank to be envied not merely by the beasts but by the stars themselves and by the spiritual natures beyond and above this world. This miracle goes past faith and wonder. And why not? It is for this reason that man is rightfully named a magnificent miracle and a wondrous creation.

---

\*Selections from *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (Paragraphs 1 - 7).  
Translated by Robert Hooker  
(<http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/REN/ORATION.HTM>).

What is this rank on the chain of being? God the Father, Supreme Architect of the Universe, built this home, this universe we see all around us, a venerable temple of his godhead, through the sublime laws of his ineffable Mind. The expanse above the heavens he decorated with Intelligences, the spheres of heaven with living, eternal souls. The scabrous and dirty lower worlds he filled with animals of every kind. However, when the work was finished, the Great Artisan desired that there be some creature to think on the plan of his great work, and love its infinite beauty, and stand in awe at its immenseness. Therefore, when all was finished, as Moses and Timaeus tell us, He began to think about the creation of man. But he had no Archetype from which to fashion some new child, nor could he find in his vast treasure-houses anything which He might give to His new son, nor did the universe contain a single place from which the whole of creation might be surveyed. All was perfected, all created things stood in their proper place, the highest things in the highest places, the midmost things in the midmost places, and the lowest things in the lowest places. But God the Father would not fail, exhausted and defeated, in this last creative act. God's wisdom would not falter for lack of counsel in this need. God's love would not permit that he whose duty it was to praise God's creation should be forced to condemn himself as a creation of God.

Finally, the Great Artisan mandated that this creature who would receive nothing proper to himself shall have joint possession of whatever nature had been given to any other creature. He made man a creature of indeterminate and indifferent nature, and, placing him in the middle of the world, said to him "Adam, we give you no fixed place to live, no form that is peculiar to you, nor any function that is yours alone. According to your desires and judgment, you will have and possess whatever place to live, whatever form, and whatever functions you yourself choose. All other things have a limited and fixed nature prescribed and bounded by our laws. You, with no limit or no bound, may choose for yourself the limits and bounds of your nature. We have placed you at the world's center so that you may survey everything else in the world. We have made you neither

of heavenly nor of earthly stuff, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with free choice and dignity, you may fashion yourself into whatever form you choose. To you is granted the power of degrading yourself into the lower forms of life, the beasts, and to you is granted the power, contained in your intellect and judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms, the divine.”

Imagine! The great generosity of God! The happiness of man! To man it is allowed to be whatever he chooses to be! As soon as an animal is born, it brings out of its mother’s womb all that it will ever possess. Spiritual beings from the beginning become what they are to be for all eternity. Man, when he entered life, the Father gave the seeds of every kind and every way of life possible. Whatever seeds each man sows and cultivates will grow and bear him their proper fruit. If these seeds are vegetative, he will be like a plant. If these seeds are sensitive, he will be like an animal. If these seeds are intellectual, he will be an angel and the son of God. And if, satisfied with no created thing, he removes himself to the center of his own unity, his spiritual soul, united with God, alone in the darkness of God, who is above all things, he will surpass every created thing. Who could not help but admire this great shape-shifter? In fact, how could one admire anything else? ...

For the mystic philosophy of the Hebrews transforms Enoch into an angel called “Mal’akh Adonay Shebaoth,” and sometimes transforms other humans into different sorts of divine beings. The Pythagoreans abuse villainous men by having them reborn as animals and, according to Empedocles, even plants. Muhammed also said frequently, “Those who deviate from the heavenly law become animals.” Bark does not make a plant a plant, rather its senseless and mindless nature does. The hide does not make an animal an animal, but rather its irrational but sensitive soul. The spherical form does not make the heavens the heavens, rather their unchanging order. It is not a lack of body that makes an angel an angel, rather it is his spiritual intelligence. If you see a person totally subject to his appetites, crawling miserably on the ground, you are looking at a

plant, not a man. If you see a person blinded by empty illusions and images, and made soft by their tender beguilements, completely subject to his senses, you are looking at an animal, not a man. If you see a philosopher judging things through his reason, admire and follow him: he is from heaven, not the earth. If you see a person living in deep contemplation, unaware of his body and dwelling in the inmost reaches of his mind, he is neither from heaven nor earth, he is divinity clothed in flesh.

Who would not admire man, who is called by Moses and the Gospels “all flesh” and “every creature,” because he fashions and transforms himself into any fleshly form and assumes the character of any creature whatsoever? For this reason, Euanthes the Persian in his description of Chaldaean theology, writes that man has no inborn, proper form, but that many things that humans resemble are outside and foreign to them, from which arises the Chaldaean saying: “Hanorish tharah sharinas”: “Man is multitudinous, varied, and ever changing.” Why do I emphasize this? Considering that we are born with this condition, that is, that we can become whatever we choose to become, we need to understand that we must take earnest care about this, so that it will never be said to our disadvantage that we were born to a privileged position but failed to realize it and became animals and senseless beasts. Instead, the saying of Asaph the prophet should be said of us, “You are all angels of the Most High.” Above all, we should not make that freedom of choice God gave us into something harmful, for it was intended to be to our advantage. Let a holy ambition enter into our souls; let us not be content with mediocrity, but rather strive after the highest and expend all our strength in achieving it.

Let us disdain earthly things, and despise the things of heaven, and, judging little of what is in the world, fly to the court beyond the world and next to God. In that court, as the mystic writings tell us, are the Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones in the foremost places; let us not even yield place to them, the highest of the angelic orders, and

not be content with a lower place, imitate them in all their glory and dignity. If we choose to, we will not be second to them in anything.

### **The 13 *Conclusions* condemned by the Church\***

T = Theological Conclusions; M = Magical Conclusions; P = Paradoxical Conclusions

1. Christ did not truly and in respect to his real presence descend into hell as Thomas and the common way propose, but only in effect. (T8)
2. [If sayings of the saints did not exist whose language seemed to clearly state the opposite, I would firmly assert...] ... that for a mortal sin of a finite time an infinite temporal penalty is not due, but only a finite penalty. (T20)
3. Neither the cross of Christ, nor any image, should be adored with the adoration of veneration, even in that way that Thomas proposes. (T14)
4. I do not agree with the common opinion of the theologians saying that god can assume any nature, but I concede this of the rational nature. (T13)
5. There is no science that assures us more of the divinity of Christ than magic and the Cabala. (M9)
6. If the common way is maintained concerning the possibility of assumption in respect to any creature, I say that without the conversion of the bread into the body of Christ, or the annihilation of the breadness, the body of Christ can exist on the

altar in accordance with the truth of the sacrament of the Eucharist. This is said speaking of what is possible, however, not of what is so. (T2)

7. It is more rational to believe that Origen is saved, than to believe that he is damned. (T29)
  8. I state as a probability, and if the common way of speaking of theologians were not in opposition I would assert firmly; nevertheless, I assert that this saying is probable in itself: that just as no one holds an opinion that something is so precisely because he wills to hold that opinion, so no one believes that something is true precisely because he wills to believe that it is true. (T18)
- Corollary: It is not in the free power of man to believe that an article of faith is true when it pleases him and to believe that it is false when it pleases him.
9. Whoever says that an accident cannot exist unless it exists in something can uphold the sacrament of the Eucharist, even maintaining that the substance of the bread does not remain as the common way holds. (T1)
  10. Those words: *This is my body*, etc., which are spoken in the Consecration, are held in a material and not indicative sense. (T10)
  11. The miracles of Christ are the most certain argument of his divinity, not because of the things that he did, but because of the way in which he did them. (M8)
  12. It is more improperly said that God is intellect or that which has intellect, than that the rational soul is an angel. (P49)

---

\*Translations from S. A. Farmer (1998) *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486)*, MRTS.

13. The soul understands nothing in act and distinctly except itself.  
(P60)

### More *Conclusions*\*

M = Magical Conclusion; C = Cabalistic Conclusion; O = Orphic Conclusion;  
H = Hermetic Conclusion

pp. 87-88

- M1. All magic that is in use among the moderns, and which the church justly exterminates, has no firmness, no foundation, no truth, because it depends on the enemies of the first truth, those powers of darkness, which pour the darkness of falsehood over poorly disposed intellects.
- M2. Natural magic is permitted and not prohibited, and concerning the universal theoretical foundations of this science I propose the following conclusions according to my own opinion.
- M3. Magic is the practical part of natural science.
- M5. No power exists in heaven or earth seminally and separated that the magician cannot actuate and unite.
- M13. To operate magic is nothing other than to marry the world.
- M24. Out of the principles of the more secret philosophy it is necessary to acknowledge that characters and figures are more powerful in a magical work than any material quality.

---

\*These are the *Conclusions* that appear in F. Yates (1964) *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, Chapter 5. Page numbers refer to Yates (1964). Translations from S. A. Farmer (1998) *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486)*, MRTS.

pg. 91

- M15. No magical operation can be of any efficacy unless it has annexed to it a work of Cabala, explicit or implicit.
- M22. No names that mean something, insofar as those names are singular and taken per se, can have power in a magical work, unless they are Hebrew names, or closely derived from Hebrew.
- O21. The work of the preceding hymns is nothing without a work of Cabala, whose property it is to practice every formal quantity, continuous and discrete.

pg. 95

- C1. Whatever other Cabalists say, in a first division I distinguish the science of Cabala into the science of *sefirot* and *shemot* [names], as it were into practical and speculative science.
- C2. Whatever other Cabalists say, I divide the speculative part of the Cabala [the science of names] four ways, corresponding to the four divisions of philosophy that I generally make. The first is what I call the science of the revolution of the alphabet, corresponding to the part of philosophy that I call universal philosophy. The second, third, and fourth is the threefold *merkabah* [chariot], corresponding to the three parts of particular philosophy, concerning divine, middle, and sensible natures.
- C3. The science that is the practical part of the Cabala practices all formal metaphysics and inferior theology.

pg. 98

- M6. Whatever miraculous work is performed, whether it is magical or Cabalistic or of any other kind, should be attributed principally to God the glorious and blessed, whose grace daily

pours supercelestial waters of miraculous power liberally over contemplative men of good will.

M25. Just as characters are proper to a magical work, so numbers are proper to a work of Cabala, with a medium existing between the two, appropriable by declination between the extremes through the use of letters.

M26. Just as through the influence of the first agent, if that influence is individual and immediate, something is achieved that is not attained through the mediation of causes, so through a work of Cabala, if it is the pure and immediate Cabala, something is achieved to which no magic attains.

pp. 99-102

C11. The way in which rational souls are sacrificed by the archangel to God, which is not explained by the Cabalists, only occurs through the separation of the soul from the body, not of the body from the soul except accidentally, as happens in the death of the kiss, of which it is written: *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.*

C48. Whatever other Cabalists say, I say that the ten spheres correspond to the ten numerations like this: so that, starting from the edifice, Jupiter corresponds to the fourth, Mars to the fifth, the sun to the sixth, Saturn to the seventh, Venus to the eighth, Mercury to the ninth, the moon the tenth. Then, above the edifice, the firmament to the third, the *primum mobile* to the second, the empyrean heaven to the tenth.

C66. I adapt our soul to the ten sefirot thus: so through its unity it is with the first, through intellect with the second, through reason with the third, through superior sensual passion with the fourth, through superior irascible passion with the fifth, through free choice with the sixth, through all these as it converts to superior things with the seventh, through all these

as it converts to inferior things with the eight, through a mixture of both of these - more through indifferent or alternate adhesion than simultaneous inclusion - with the ninth, and through the power by which it inhabits the first habitation with the tenth.

C56. Anyone who knows how to unfold the quaternarius into the denarius will have the method, if he is skilled in the Cabala, of deducing the name of seventy-two letters from the ineffable name.

pg. 104-105

O4. Just as the hymns of David miraculously serve a work of the Cabala, so the hymns of Orpheus serve a work of the true, permitted, and natural magic.

M9. There is no science that assures us more of the divinity of Christ than magic and the Cabala. [Yates mistakenly refers to this as the 7th Magical Conclusion.]

C7. No Hebrew Cabalist can deny that the name Jesus, if we interpret it following the method and principles of the Cabala, signifies precisely all this and nothing else, that is: *God the Son of God and the Wisdom of the Father, united to human nature in the unity of assumption through the third Person of God, who is the most ardent fire of love.*

C15. By the name *Yod he vav he*, which is the ineffable name that the Cabalists say will be the name of the Messiah, it is clearly known that he will be God the Son of God made man through the Holy Spirit, and that after him the Paraclete [Holy Spirit] will descend over men for the perfection of mankind.

pg. 106

M7. The works of Christ could not have been performed through either the way of magic or the way of Cabala.

pg. 109

H9. With each thing there exist ten punishers: ignorance, sorrow, inconstancy, greed, injustice, lustfulness, envy, fraud, anger, malice.

H10. A profound contemplator will see that the ten punishers, of which the preceding conclusion spoke according to Mercury, correspond to the evil order of ten in the Cabala and its leaders, of whom I have proposed nothing in my Cabalistic conclusions, because it is secret.