Marsilio Ficino’s Neo-Platonist Concepts of Power As Represented in Selected Paintings by Sandro Botticelli: A Study in Representation, Iconography, Iconology and Reasoning

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Marsilio Ficino’s Neo-Platonist Concepts of Power As Represented in Selected Paintings by Sandro Botticelli: A Study in Representation, Iconography, Iconology and Reasoning

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my parents, Mr. & Mrs. Frank C. Martin, in recognition of their unwavering love and support of each of my endeavors, and to my uncle & aunt, Dr. & Mrs. Edward W. Martin, in acknowledgement of their extraordinary embodied examples, in my formative years, of cultivation, awareness, and proceptive understanding; and finally, to Shirley Fields-Martin, who, better than most, grasps the extraordinary power of Socratic irony.

“Αυτό που δεν ξέρω, δεν νομίζω ότι το ξέρω”¹

¹ A paraphrase from Plato’s Apology, or the Ἀπολογία Σωκράτους, with an English translation by Harold North Fowler, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1999, pp. 82-83,
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A debt of gratitude is owed to the individuals and institutions cited below. Although this list is long, it is yet abbreviated. To all of my many supporters who may not have been included here due to limitations of space, I also offer this heartfelt, “Thank You”:

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ABSTRACT

Marsilio Ficino's Neo-Platonist assessments of differing aspects of powers or capacities associated with the human soul (spiritual, conceptual, influential, and the capacity to engender effects upon material reality), as represented within selected religious and secular paintings by Sandro Botticelli, are discussed in this study for an analysis of the innovative, syncretic conceptual unity of ancient North-African, Middle-Eastern, Greco-Roman and early Christian and Medieval philosophical and theological traditions which are advocated by Ficino’s theoretical formulations.

Botticelli's paintings are considered for the manner in which they may be understood, within the context of Ficino's conceptual systems, as externalizing, serving as a catalyst for, demonstrating, or disseminating philosophical activity by means of stimulating responses via the perceptions of unique, individual perceivers. Individual works of art are discussed as potentially active, rather than passive agents for engagement with cultural ideas and ideals, serving to promote Platonic concepts in accord with Ficinian Neo-Platonist metaphysical and theoretical structures.
PREFACE

This study of the influences of philosopher, Marsilio Ficino upon the ideas and themes presented in seven images created by painter, Sandro Botticelli, discusses the role such works of art may have played in support of the dissemination of philosophical reasoning, in this instance, particularly Ficino’s Neo-Platonist formulations, to a larger public discourse. The included pictures identify, and in some instances provide demonstrations of particular powers associated with the soul, that correspond to discussions in Ficino’s essays and commentaries. Ficino’s ideas and responses to pre-Pythagorean, Platonist, and Neo-Platonist approaches to metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, and aesthetics help us to understand the evolution of the complex iconographic imagery based in Western visual traditions, and the iconological references based in literature and documents.

Ficino’s theory of active, extromissionist perception inheres the possibility of perceiving a painted image, by means of its presence and theme, as a stimulus participating in an active edification of the perceiver, producing an impact or effect as a consequence of its contemplation by that perceiver. For the purposes of this study, I have narrowed my scope of consideration, to the extent possible, in seeking to avoid the many controversies associated with this particular area of study (i.e., Renaissance philosophy, the idea of “meaning” in art images by Botticelli, and the role of Ficino as an influence upon Botticelli’s development of themes in his works of art). I may have failed in
avoiding controversy, but certainly it has not been my intention to introduce new ideas, so much as to understand how claims of talismanic power for art images, as discussed in Ficino’s works (particularly the *Three Books of Life*), may have had a meaningful social function during Ficino’s time in supporting his circle in their advocacy of philosophical engagement.

Thus, this study concentrates upon the idea that images by Botticelli, whatever their various, iconological, iconographic, indexical, or symbolic interpretations by different scholars in different areas of academic endeavor may be, are indeed agents of philosophical engagement, not merely by allusion, but also by demonstration within the largely Ficino-directed or inspired, Renaissance-Neo-Platonist structures within which they had been conceptualized.

The method of analysis employed here has not been in accordance with an analytic, linguistic, logical, or communications-based theoretical frameworks, although it is an accepted component of the operant thesis for this research that the images identified are understood to be functioning as a form of (Austin-like) conversational implicature.\(^2\) That is to say that if we focus upon an image “X”, it may be understood to propose a statement in the form of “P”, and then imply a request for confirmation or accord: “This is a representation of Venus/Beauty, which is itself, ‘beautiful,’ is it not?” As we, in response, observe a work of art and its configuration of lines and shapes, in tandem with its denotative and connotative or implied forms, its use of color, or representation of

identifiable objects, we may begin the process of constructing meaning. In this action of meaning construction, the process will be both a social and an individual one. As a result, I have concentrated upon a phenomenological and intuitive approach to this subject matter, which I consider appropriate to the theoretical framework within which I am attributing the motivations of my visual subject, Sandro Botticelli, and the individual I am claiming as an important catalytic resource for his creations, Marsilio Ficino. Certainly Ficino was not by any means an individual with any exclusive intellectual or inspirational impact upon Botticelli; however, I am claiming that Ficino’s ideas were an important and powerful influence, both directly upon the artist and others who may also have influenced Botticelli in the creation of his works of art.

If we examine the works of the many dedicated scholars, beginning perhaps with Aby Warburg, or Ernst Cassirer, and review the ideas of many others; luminaries such as E.H. Gombrich, Erwin Panofsky, Charles Dempsey, or Phillipa Berry, all of whom discuss particular literary and poetic sources for the imagery we may see in certain paintings by Botticelli, the fact is simply that those congruences or divergences in accord regarding sources are not the principal area of interest, here. I have, instead chosen to focus upon the processes of aesthesis in accordance with Ficino’s Neo-Platonist interpretation of perception theory and how those processes, support the teleological claims within the metaphysical theses of Marsilio Ficino. Therefore, I propose that the paintings, on many differing levels of meaning and signification are concerned with the dissemination of philosophical reasoning and are intended as tools within the larger project of the circle of thinkers, patrons, poets, and scholars in mid-15th-century Florence,
who proactively sought to create a Renaissance of conceptual engagement with classical and pre-classical reasoning. The scope of interest, lead by Ficino, at the time, was not merely in the tenets of Platonism, or Neo-Platonic ideas, but in a holistic understanding of the contemplation of divinity with Plato as the focus of a claim of *prisci theologi* extending backward to Zoroaster, Hermes Tresmigestus (who is perhaps in fact Thoth the ancient Egyptian three-in-one. Priest-Philosopher-Healer), through a chain of thinkers including Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato, as well as Aristotle, Theophrastus, Plotinus, Iamblichus, Porphyry, Proclus, Augustine, Aquinas and to Ficino, who is likely to have styled himself as a hierophantic prophetic contemporary voice.

Images, such as the Columbia Museum’s *Nativity*, not only initiated the processes of this journey for me personally, but also represents the reasoning for engaging in the activity of contemplating the painter’s works which provide edifying themes from religion, mythology, history, or human experience. Contemplation in Neo-Platonism is the first act of God leading to diversification and the generation of all phenomena in the Universe. Emulation of this activity in an aspiration to discover truth and divinity is suggested as the process which initiates the aesthetic experiences that are intended to edify us.

Contemplation is understood to arouse a response, or emotion a *patheia* such as adoration, devotion, or some form of motivational power, which may lead to the generation of actions, and in this study, the image of the Uffizi *Adoration of the Magi* (c.
shows the evocative power of devotion, reminding us that beauty may be deeply felt as well as seen.

The arousal of emotion by a stimulus produces an *Influxus* or “influence” upon the spectator, highlighting the capacity of the sentient precipitant to be affected by input, particularly of emotion, and as a subsequent demonstration of the taking in of new information, which transforms the thinking subject. The powerful arousal of emotion engenders an internal action, and the Washington *Nativity & Adoration* (c. 1478-1482) is included as a representation of the idea of the *influxus* of *energeia*; the internal action which represents inner power capable of eliciting action, and the inner force which may transform us for better or worse.

Actions, such as the creative generation of works of art align with the concept of *genesis*, and this form of creativity is not merely the power to generate material things, but is the generative power of ideas and of concept dissemination. In this regard, the image of *The Primavera* (c. 1483-1486) is discussed as an image of generative power, an aspect of the power the soul’s capacity for Love and the fecundity not merely of the material generation of things but also for the sharing of *spiritus*, life-force and the generation of ideas, of complexity, and of emanationist increase outward from some source.

Excellence in action is one of the attributes of Virtue and the power of integrity, excellence and inner strength use of exemplum of Botticelli’s *Camilla/Pallas and the*
Centaur (c. 1482) as the embodiment of Arete- the power of virtue and the force of *phronesis*, that power of wisdom in action which is goodness an emulative act of aspiration toward God and Beauty.

The brute physical power or *dynamis*/*kinesis*; consideration of our ability to move and affect the material world, is implied in Botticelli’s *Mars and Venus* (c. 1483), however–consideration of the power of physical force and the capacity of the motivational power of love/eros to mitigate and arrest physicality is an implication conveyed by the representation of sleeping Mars with vigilant Venus; mere physical force overcome by Love

Finally, our capacity to perceive Beauty, to inform the mind by sense perception, the capacity of making judgments, of *Aestheis* is celebrated by the image of the Birth of Venus, an allusion to the soul’s capacity to perceive phenomena and process judgments informing an internalized reality: *The Birth of Venus* (c. 1483-1486); an homage to consciousness, *per se*, to perception, proception, and reception and all activities of judgment signals the final stage of the journey through which we recognize the processes of internal change, culminating the study with the donation of *Humanity* to humanity citing the parallel sacrifices of Ouranos, god of the sky (space), and the Christ, both of whom experience tragedy for the benefit of human kind. The study intentionally uses an homage to Pythagorean and Platonic conventions of number; the Introduction is pentagonal, composed of five segments; there are seven paintings in seven short
chapters; the intention is to propitiate the heavenly forces by using numbers symbolizing perfection.

Meaning, in this study, is constituted as a multivalent contextual, and even opportunistic construct: The images do not necessarily “mean” for their perceivers in univocal, fully coherent ways, but sustain their roles as catalytic devices for thought. Indeed, the information consulted as part of the research for this project confirms that even as modern viewers, we are in the continuing process of socially constructing meanings for these objects that have been preserved for over 500 years. We continue to cogitate over the connotative and denotative significations of these images as as did the original viewers at the time they were created. This use of the image as a form of oikonomic conversational implicature, based in a networked, socially constructed matrix of meaning(s) generated in the act of functioning is an important part of the role of art as it may be understood here.

Ficino’s own soteriological, eschatological (i.e., in the case of Ficino, the juxtapositioning of Saturn and Jupiter of 1484, which astronomical event set the stage for Renaissance transformations creating the ambient in which the possibility of producing something new occurred) and hierophantic esoteric principles – provided guidance to the new divinity claims of continuity. The subsequent meaning of “meaning” discourse based in a method stemming from understanding a living universe, the source of Warburg’s “bewegtes Beiwerk” or “animated details” within Botticelli’s images, which may have been a means of signifying the activity of “spiritus”, and a method to assure the
engagement of the spectator’s awareness, is understood here as a purposive social function of art images.³

I apologize to my readers for the inadequacies of this study as it stands, yet it is best to allow my critics and detractors access the ideas offered here in order to gain access to those ideas which may improve the quality of this endeavor by adding their voices to this discussion as an important component of the socially-motivated construction of meaning this research is intended to both articulate and celebrate. I have achieved what I could with the limited resources currently at my disposal. Admittedly, I have had some unavoidable constraints of time and resources. I sincerely regret these shortcomings but am unable to mitigate their effects at this time.

I am deeply grateful to the members of my committee for their support. I also wish to thank the Philosophy program at The University of South Carolina for what, at times, has been the pro-active defense of my very being through many challenges at various stages of my study. I would like to acknowledge also the former African

³The foundational study by Abraham (Aby) Moritz Warburg, Sandro Botticelli “Geburt der Venus” und “Frühling”: Eine Untersuchung über die Vorstellung von der Antike in der italienischen Frührenaissance (1893), established the method of engaging with art imagery within a social context which informs the approach of the works discussed here. Warburg’s dissertation on Botticelli concentrates more upon the impact of Angelo Poliziano’s poetry as an influence upon the painter, and the importance of Leon Battista Alberti, particularly in the application of the concept of the “animated details”. Warburg’s work in translation was consulted in Aby Warburg, Sandro Botticelli: Nacimento de Venus y Primavera, versión de Jürgen Diffenthal con Jorge López Anaya, Casimiro libros, Madrid, 2010, which notes on p. 47: “En el estudio de la Primavera también deberemos tener en cuenta esta búsqueda del “influjo” dell’antico en la representación de los detalles animados; y, también en este caso, al indagar sobre el origen del concetto y sobre quién mandó pintar ese quadro, deberemos tener presente, antes que nadie, a Poliziano, y a los Medici.” More discussion of this contextual approach to the interpretation of works of art and Warburg’s interest in art and empathy is provided by Matthew Rampley, in “From Symbol to Allegory: Aby Warburg’s Theory of Art,” The Art Bulletin, 79:1, 1997, pp. 41-55.
American Professors’ Program, now the Grace McFadden Doctoral Scholars’ Program at The University of South Carolina, for their exceptional support and guidance in helping me to navigate a maelstrom of potential difficulties. Both have contributed to my study in very tangible ways, including a trip to Florence in 2012 to view the Uffizi Adoration and the three mythological paintings, and in addition support for a visit to England in 2014 to present at the conference of the Arts in Society and see the Mars and Venus in the National Gallery in London. I am also very grateful to every member of the dissertation committee for the continued commitment to a complicated, extended project, and I must single out for special praise, Dr. Jeremiah Hackett, a tireless resource of infinite and indefatigable knowledge, the close reading and absolute dedication of Dr. William Eiland, whose suggestions were invaluable, the rich intellectual interrogations of Dr. Martin Donougho, and the supportive optimism of both Dr. Jerald Wallulis and Dr. Ann Bezuidenhout, who has served as my mentor, and logistical expert for much of this project.

In an paraphrase of Aristotle’s concept of phronesis, true wisdom would be a capacity to offer the right thing in the right way to the right person at the right time; certainly, I have not achieved this aim, but I continue, inspired by my mentors, conscientiously, to work toward it.

FM
August 16th 2018
Orangeburg, South Carolina
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**DEDICATION** ............................................................................................................. iii

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** ............................................................................................... iv

**ABSTRACT** .................................................................................................................. v

**PREFACE** ..................................................................................................................... vi

**LIST OF FIGURES** ..................................................................................................... xvii

**INTRODUCTION** ......................................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER I ~ The Columbia *Nativity* ........................................................................... 127

CHAPTER II ~ The Uffizi *Adoration of the Magi* ......................................................... 156

CHAPTER III ~ The Washington *Adoration of the Magi* .............................................. 180

CHAPTER IV ~ The *Primavera* ...................................................................................... 206

CHAPTER V ~ Camilla/Pallas/Minerva and the Centaur ................................................. 250

CHAPTER VI ~ Mars and Venus .................................................................................... 268

CHAPTER VII ~ The *Birth of Venus* ............................................................................ 283

**SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS** ............................................................................... 303

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** ....................................................................................................... 308

**APPENDIX A:** LETTER OF MARSILIO FICINO TO LORENZO DI PIERFRANCESCO DE’ MEDICI ........................................................................................................... 315

**APPENDIX B:** LETTER OF MARSILIO FICINO TO GIORGIO ANTONIO VESPUCCI ................................................................................................................................. 317

**APPENDIX C:** LETTER OF LORENZO PIERFRANCESCO DE’ MEDICI TO PIERO PAGAGNOTTI .................................................................................................................... 318
APPENDIX D: THE LETTERS OF MARSILIO FICINO TO IACOPO BRACCIOLINI

APPENDIX E: MARSILIO FICINO’S LETTER TO PEREGRINO AGLI
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 The Columbia Nativity, c. 1473-1475, dimensions: 64 ½ x 54 inches (161.3 x 137.2 cm)…………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………146

Figure 1.2 The Columbia Nativity c. 1473-1475The detail: original dimensions: 64 ½ x 54 inches (161.3 x 137.2 cm) The central section of the overall composition, showing two figures in contemporary dress who may symbolize the presentation of the Christ to the Gentiles………………………………………………………………………………147

Figure 1.3 Columbia Nativity c. 1473-1475 detail: original dimensions: 64 ½ x 54 inches (161.3 x 137.2 cm) Clouds being trodden upon by angels with golden radiances……………………………………………………………………………..148

Figure 1.4 The Columbia Nativity c. 1473-1475 detail: original dimensions: 64 ½ x 54 inches (161.3 x 137.2 cm) image of the base of the clouds with golden radiances and the descent of the golden radiance toward the Infant Christ; the head of St. Joseph, with partial images of the Ass, Ox, and The Virgin Mary…………………………………………………………149

Figure 1.5 The Columbia Nativity c. 1473-1475 detail: original dimensions: 64 ½ x 54 inches (161.3 x 137.2 cm) detail showing the descent of golden connective species……………………………………………………………………………………………………150

Figure 1.6 The Columbia Nativity c. 1473-1475 detail: original dimensions: 64 ½ x 54 inches (161.3 x 137.2 cm) The Infant Christ in a radiance, with young St. John the Baptist……………………………………………………………………………………………………151

Figure 1.7 The Columbia Nativity c. 1473-1475, detail: original dimensions: 64 ½ x 54 inches (161.3 x 137.2 cm) Problematic perspective orthogonals and concentric circular patterns overlapping a series of squares. ……………………………………………………………152

Figure 1.8 The Columbia Nativity c. 1473-1475, detail: original dimensions: 64 ½ x 54 inches (161.3 x 137.2 cm) (Pentagonal geometric form within the composition………153

Figure 1.9 Portrait of Marsilio Ficino by Domenico del Ghirlandaio; detail from a fresco, the Church of Santa Mar Novella, Capella Tornabuoni , 1486-1490………………154

Figure 1.10 Portrait of Saint Augustine in His Study. by Sandro Botticelli; detail from a fresco, the Church of the Ognissanti, Florence, c. 1480……………………………………155
Figure 2.1 The Guaspari del Lama *Adoration of the Magi*, Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1475-1476, dimensions: 44 x 53 inches (111 x 134 cm) ...............................172

Figure 2.2 The Guaspari del Lama *Adoration of the Magi*, Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1475-1476, detail: dimensions: 44 x 53 inches (111 x 134 cm) central composition including Cosimo de’ Medici grasping the foot of the Infant Christ, utilizing the humeral veil...173

Figure 2.3 Detail of the Guaspari del Lama *Adoration of the Magi*, Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1475-1476, detail: dimensions: 44 x 53 inches (111 x 134 cm) 2.3 detail: probable portrait of Sandro Botticelli from the viewer’s right of the original artwork; dimensions: 44 x 53 inches (111 x 134 cm). ..........................................................174

Figure 2.4 The Guaspari del Lama *Adoration of the Magi*, Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1475-1476, detail: Golden Section composition - dimensions: 44 x 53 inches (111 x 134 cm) ........................................................................175

Figure 2.5 The Guaspari del Lama *Adoration of the Magi*, Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1475-1476, detail: dimensions: 44 x 53 inches (111 x 134 cm) elliptical formation of compositional group. ..........................................................176

Figure 2.6 The Guaspari del Lama *Adoration of the Magi*, Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1475-1476 detail: dimensions: 44 x 53 inches (111 x 134 cm) compositional pyramid within concentric squares.................................................................177

Figure 2.7 The Guaspari del Lama *Adoration of the Magi*, Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1475-1476, detail: dimensions: 44 x 53 inches (111 x 134 cm) intersecting sight lines and triangular forms, within the compositional focus area. ..............................................178

Figure 2.8 The Guaspari del Lama *Adoration of the Magi*, Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1475-1476, detail: dimensions: 44 x 53 inches (111 x 134 cm) : equilateral triangular compositional element within the square. .................................................................179

Figure 3.1 *The Adoration of the Magi*, Washington, D.C., c. 1478-1482, dimensions: 26 ¾ x 40 3/16 inches (68 x 102 cm). .................................................................198

Figure 3.2 *The Adoration of the Magi*, Washington, D.C., c. 1478-1482, dimensions: 26 ¾ x 40 3/16 inches (68 x 102 cm) repeat of the elliptical composition.............199

Figure 3.3 *The Adoration of the Magi*, Washington, D.C., c. 1478-1482, original dimensions: 26 ¾ x 40 3/16 inches (68 x 102 cm) repeat of the elliptical composition – detail. .................................................................200

Figure 3.4 *The Adoration of the Magi*, Washington, D.C. c. 1478-1482, original dimensions: 26 ¾ x 40 3/16 inches (68 x 102 cm) replicated pentagram within a pentagonal composition -detail.................................................................201
Figure 3.5 *The Adoration of the Magi*, Washington, D.C. c. 1478-1482, original dimensions: 26 ¾ x 40 3/16 inches (68 x 102 cm) central Golden Section compositional detail. ................................................................. 202

Figure 3.6 *The Adoration of the Magi*, Washington, D.C. c. 1478-1482, original dimensions: 26 ¾ x 40 3/16 inches (68 x 102 cm) lateral replications of the Golden Section within the composition – detail. ................................................................. 203

Figure 3.7 *The Adoration of the Magi*, Washington, D.C. c. 1478-1482, original dimensions: 26 ¾ x 40 3/16 inches (68 x 102 cm) compositional detail of rearing and docile horses; An interesting visual allusion to the character of the Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux. ................................................................. 204

Figure 3.8 Leonardo da Vinci, *Adoration of the Magi*, Galleria degli Uffizi, (c. 1481) This composition may have influenced the Washington image........................................ 205

Figure 4.1 *La Primavera* Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1482, dimensions: 80 x 124 inches (202 x 314 cm) ........................................................................................................ 243

Figure 4.2 *La Primavera* Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1482: dimensions: 80 x 124 inches (202 x 314 cm) From right to left: Zephyr, Chloris, Flora...an example of the *primum in aliquo genere*. ........................................ 244

Figure 4.3 *La Primavera* Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1482, dimensions: 80 x 124 inches (202 x 3.14 cm); detail of central, triangular composition. ................................................................. 245

Figure 4.4 *La Primavera* Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1482, dimensions: 80 x 124 inches (202 x 314 cm); use of the Golden Section................................................................. 246

Figure 4.5 *La Primavera* Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1482, dimensions: 80 x 124 inches (202 x 314 cm): inversion of use of the Golden Section. ................................................................. 247

Figure 4.6 *La Primavera* Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1482, dimensions: 80 x 124 inches (202 x 314 cm); lateral replications of the Golden Section................................................................. 248

Figure 4.7 *La Primavera* Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1482, dimensions: 80 x 124 inches (202 x 314 cm) Image of compositional geometry copied from Umberto Baldini, *Primavera: The Restoration of Botticelli’s Masterpiece*, pp. 98 & 99. ........................................ 249

Figure 5.1 *Pallas/Athena/ Camilla and the Centaur*, c. 1482, Galleria degli Uffizi; dimensions: 80 x 58.1 inches (204 x 147.5 cm) ................................................................. 263

Figure 5.2 *Pallas/Athena/ Camilla and the Centaur*, c. 1482, Galleria degli Uffizi; dimensions: 80 x 58.1 inches (204 x 147.5 cm) detail of Pallas/Camilla grasping the forelock of the Centaur................................................................. 264
Figure 5.3 Pallas/Athena/ Camilla and the Centaur, c. 1482, Galleria degli Uffizi; dimensions: 80 x 58.1 inches (204 x 147.5 cm) foundation for subdivisions within the Golden Section (a symbolic imposition of reason upon chaos) .................265

Figure 5.4 Pallas/Athena/ Camilla and the Centaur, c. 1482, Galleria degli Uffizi; dimensions: 80 x 58.1 inches (204 x 147.5 cm) compositional subdivisions within the Golden Section. .................................................................266

Figure 5.5 Pallas/Athena/ Camilla and the Centaur, c. 1482, Galleria degli Uffizi; dimensions: 80 x 58.1 inches (204 x 147.5 cm) compositional subdivisions within the Golden Section. .................................................................267

Figure 6.1 Mars & Venus, c. 1483, National Gallery, London, dimensions: 2ft 3 inches x 5ft 8 inches (69 x 173cm) .................................................................277

Figure 6.2 Mars & Venus, c. 1483, National Gallery, London; dimensions: 2ft 3 inches x 5ft 8 inches (69 x 173cm); detail of Mars asleep; playful satyrs and wasps above the head of sleeping Mars. .................................................................278

Figure 6.3 Mars & Venus, c. 1483, National Gallery, London; dimensions: 2ft 3 inches x 5ft 8 inches (69 x 173cm); overlapping examples of the Golden Section.................279

Figure 6.4 Mars & Venus, c. 1483, National Gallery, London; dimensions: 2ft 3 inches x 5ft 8 inches (69 x 173cm); compositional design with overlapping examples of the Golden Section without figures. .................................................................280

Figure 6.5 Mars & Venus, c. 1483, National Gallery, London; dimensions: 2ft 3 inches x 5ft 8 inches (69 x 173cm); compositional design with mirrored vertical inclusions of the Golden Section with figures. .................................................................281

Figure 6.6 Image of a Roman sarcophagus, Second Century AD, showing the reclining Venus and Mars with Putti (taken from E. H. Gombrich, fig. 47). .........................282

Figure 7.1 The Birth of Venus, c. 1484-1486, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence; dimensions: 67.9 x 109.6 inches (172.5 x 278.9 cm) .........................................................294

Figure 7.2 Lorenzo Ghiberti, Baptism of Christ, Florence Cathedral, Baptistery of San Giovanni, North Doors 1404-1424.................................................................295

Figure 7.3 Figure 7.2 Lorenzo Ghiberti, Baptism of Christ, Baptistmal Font, Siena, 1427.................................................................296

Figure 7.4 The Birth of Venus, c. 1484-1486, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence; dimensions: 67.9 x 109.6 inches (172.5 x 278.9 cm); equilateral triangular composition bracketed by two scalene triangular shapes and with the central triangle subdivided into two right triangles. .........................................................297
Figure 7.5 *The Birth of Venus*, c. 1484-1486, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence; dimensions: 67.9 x 109.6 inches (172.5 x 278.9 cm); composition showing mirrored images of the Golden Section flanking the figure of Venus/Aphrodite. .................................298

Figure 7.6 *The Birth of Venus*, c. 1484-1486
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence; dimensions: 67.9 x 109.6 inches (172.5 x 278.9 cm); multiple reflected iterations of the Golden Section, with overlapping examples anchoring the composition of the figure of Venus/Aphrodite. ...........................................299

Figure 7.7 *The Birth of Venus*, c. 1484-1486
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence; dimensions: 67.9 x 109.6 inches (172.5 x 278.9 cm); multiple reflected iterations of the Golden Section, with overlapping ascending spiral archs extending from the figure of the Hora, toward Venus/Aphrodite, and Zephyrus with Chloris. .................................................................300

Figure 7.8 *The Birth of Venus*, c. 1484-1486
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence; dimensions: 67.9 x 109.6 inches (172.5 x 278.9 cm); use of the Golden Section, with spiral arch extending from the figure of the Hora, toward Venus/Aphrodite, and Zephyrus with Chloris engulfing the entire composition, observed from viewers’ right to left. .................................................................301

Figure 7.9 *The Birth of Venus*, c. 1484-1486;
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence; dimensions: 67.9 x 109.6 inches (172.5 x 278.9 cm); use of the Golden Section, with an inversion of the spiral arch extending from the symbolic bullrush to the figures of Zephyrus with Chloris/Flora, toward Venus/Aphrodite and terminating in the Hora, engulfing the entire composition, observed from the viewers’ left to right. .................................................................302
INTRODUCTION:

I. Statement of Purpose

Platonic theology forms the foundation of the philosophy of Marsilio Ficino and constitutes the basis of this inquiry into conceptual and interpretive intentions stemming from seven images attributed to noted Renaissance artist, Sandro Botticelli. The discussion presented here supports the thesis that Ficino’s complex interpolation of the Platonic and Neo-Platonic views of God, beauty, Love, and his apologia for a hierarchical explanation of the nature of “being,” explains both formal and theoretical aspects of the design and configuration of figures in several of Botticelli’s works. The evolution of Ficino’s ideas and the increasing complexity of Botticelli’s iconography incorporate meaningful insights into a theory for a simultaneous, corresponding aesthetic development between the writings of the philosopher, and the images of the painter. The earliest painting cited here is a Nativity from the Kress Collection of ca. 1475, acquired by the Columbia Museum of Art in 1954, and the last work in the group under

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4 The research for this study was precipitated in 2009-2010, by an examination of the iconographic significance of an image of the Nativity in the Columbia Museum of Art attributed to Sandro Botticelli. The correspondence between the composition of the painting and the symbolic significations of the figures with philosophical commitments of Marsilio Ficino’s Neo-Platonist ideas and ideals led to a search for commonalities with other Botticelli works and an interest in determining if or how other artworks might exemplify philosophical and conceptual values. Consequently research on the Uffizi Adoration, the Washington Adoration, the Uffizi La Primavera, The Pallas and The Centaur, The Mars and Venus in London, and the Birth of Venus seemed to demonstrate a correspondence between increasing complexity in Ficino’s philosophical system, coordinated coincidentally with compositional and iconographic evolution in Sandro Botticelli’s paintings. All of the paintings noted above are included in this assessment.
consideration is, *The Birth of Venus* of c. 1486 in the collection of the Galleria degli Uffizi, in Florence.⁵

Ficino’s ties to Platonic thought and his influence upon Botticelli’s conceptual process as the artist works through the content and context of his images, is discussed in consideration of the different levels of signification the paintings may entail. This assessment will include some consideration of how the concepts of the powers of perception and their relationship to what Ficino described as the purpose of the human soul, extends from the Columbia *Nativity* (as an exemplification of Platonic and Neo-Platonic ideas) to the philosophically complex iconographic and iconological references of the *Birth of Venus*, one of Botticelli’s most recognized works.

Ficino’s Neo-Platonist conceptualizations revolutionized philosophical praxis in the 15th and 16th centuries. His assessments of differing aspects of power (spiritual,

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⁵ See the website of the Columbia Museum of Art for further details. The *Nativity* is dated c. 1473-1475; fresco transferred to canvas; Gift of Samuel H. Kress Foundation; CMA 1954.29. The following narrative is taken from the Columbia Museum site: “This delicate painting was painted by the master, Botticelli, and is filled with the charm of Renaissance Florentine art. Painted as a fresco, it was detached early in the 20th century and mounted on a canvas support. It is one of the artist's early works and is considered a very important piece because of its aesthetic value as well as its historical significance in regard to the development of the style of the master. It shows the influence of two artists - Fra Filippo Lippi (1406-1469), a teacher of Botticelli and Lippi's son Filippino (1457/8-1504), one of Botticelli's students.” For additional information, see https://www.columbiamuseum.org/art/artwork.php?collID=4. Accessed June 7, 2014. For the *Birth of Venus* in the Uffizi from the Medici Collections, see Roberto Salvini, *Tutta la Pittura del Botticelli*, volume secondo 1485-1510, Rizzoli Editore, Milano, 1958, pp. 41-42, who notes that the *Birth of Venus* was among the works of art noted in the Castello Villa of Giovanni delle Bande Nere as noted by the Anonimo Gaddiano, later reported by Vasari (1550) and which arrived in the guardaroba of the Uffizi in 1815. See Ronald Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work*, Abbeville Press Publishers, 1978, pp. 152-163, and Frank Zollner, *Sandro Botticelli*, Prestel Verlag, Munich, 2009, pp. 132-141.
material, and conceptual) as represented in the selected religious and secular works by Alessandro di Mariano di Vanni Filipepi, better known as Sandro Botticelli, will be evaluated. The selected examples of Botticelli’s paintings serve to symbolize, exemplify, represent, and demonstrate Ficino’s ideas, and are intended to advocate for an innovative, syncretic conceptual unity of ancient, Greco-Roman, and Christian philosophical and theological traditions. Analysis of Ficino’s ideas pertaining to varying iterations of powers of the soul, intended to be understood within the context of Ficino’s theoretical system of metaphysical functioning, alluded to or represented in the selected works of art, is undertaken. This analysis, in the interest of understanding whether these works of art may have been intended to externalize into visible form, an explanation for the activity of unique individual souls, which through contemplation of art images, would generate activity within the percipient souls aligned with the true aims of philosophy and religion.

Platonic theology synthesized with Christian dogma infuses Ficino’s aesthetics and offers interpretive insights for Botticelli’s works. Ideas based in Platonic thought,

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6 Of particular interest is the idea that Ficino may have been advocating a theory of how individuals could be influenced by material images based upon a naturalistic, and intuitive explanation, relying solely on nature for understanding the possibility of how material images may affect transformations within a soul through the transmission of simulacra, obviating the need for explanations of transformation due to supernatural, or daemonic interventions. More on this idea is discussed below in the sections on Ficino’s metaphysical ideas, particularly the residual influences of Lucretius and Epicurean atomistic materialism on the formation of Ficino’s ideas from the *Platonic Theology*. For more on Ficino’s ideas pertaining to an explanation of influences on the soul, see Mary Quinlan-McGrath *Influences: Art, Optics, and Astrology in the Italian Renaissance*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2013, see also James G. Snyder, “Marsilio Ficino’s Critique of the Lucretian Alternative,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, The University of Pennsylvania Press, Vol. 72, No. 2, April 2011, pp. 165-181.

7 For instance, in the compositional structure of the first image, the Columbia *Nativity* of 1473-75, Botticelli repeatedly uses groupings of three and this usage is considered here as stemming, ultimately from Plato, who noted that odd numbers were favored by the gods of the heavens, while even numbers were used to propitiate gods of the lower world: For additional information
and stemming, in part, from the influences of Plato’s principal early interpreters, the philosopher Plotinus and his followers, will be discussed as supporting the modes of representation employed by Botticelli which were created under the powerful intellectual and creative influence of Ficino’s philosophical interpretations and discussions of Platonic and Neo-Platonic systems for assessing the nature of reality.

Botticelli’s images are discussed as visual realizations and demonstrations of Ficino’s intention to offer a coherent integration of Neo-Platonic theology, with traditional, Christian symbolism. Ficino’s interpretations of Platonic concepts and the influence of his ideas on Botticelli’s works, specifically discussion of how the selected art images exemplify Platonic and neo-Platonic ideas, are employed to discuss the importance of these images for their roles as active rather than passive agents working in the interest of the dissemination of Platonic, and Neo-Platonic philosophical ideas.

regarding Plato’s claims pertaining to odd and even numbers, see Marsilio Ficino, *All Things Natural: Ficino on Plato’s Timaeus*, translated by Arthur Farndell, notes with additional material by Peter Blumson, Shepheard-Walwyn Publisher, Ltd., 2010, pp. 71-75, noting in *Chapter 34: The main points about the harmonic numbers which lead to the composition of the soul*, which states on page 71 that “Three signifies its return to unity, both its own unity and the divine unity.”; See also, Plato, *The Laws*, Jowett translation, V, 100 and pp. 17-18 of David Eugene Smith’s, *History of Mathematics: The Evolution of Arithmetic, Geometry, Trigonometry, Calculating Devices, Algebra, The Calculus, with a Wealth of Problems, Recreations, Constructions, Applications Explained and Illustrated*, Dover Books, New York, Vol. II, 1958, online at: http://books.google.com/books. Smith notes that the ancient belief that odd numbers are fortunate and even ones unfortunate stems from the assumption that even numbers, which contain other numbers are thus “feminine,” while odd numbers are “masculine”; because of these beliefs, odd numbers were considered “divine” and even numbers were considered “human” and material, or “earthly”. The configuration of the Botticelli composition, by using repeated exemplifications of the number three, utilizes an important metaphorical device to propitiate the upper reaches of the divine realm. This image also shows the act of contemplation, through which the rational component of the soul rises to engage with divine mind in accordance with the metaphysical structures of the Neo-Platonist system.
Marsilio Ficino (October 19, 1433 - October 1, 1499) was the son of a physician from the region of Val d’Arno, in Tuscany. Considered perhaps the most significant Florentine humanist of the 15\(^{th}\) century, in combination with Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Angelo Poliziano, Ficino remains one of the originators of a comprehensive system of Renaissance thought transforming the philosophy of the Cinquecento and Seicento and creating the basis for later thinkers such as Giordano Bruno and others.

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8 See The Letters of Marsilio Ficino: Translated from the Latin by Members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, London, preface by Oskar Kristeller, Shepheard-Walwyn, London, Vol. I, 1975, page 21, which notes the name of Ficino’s father as Diotifeci, who was doctor to Cosimo de’Medici, and the authors suggest that Ficino’s mother, Alessandra, was clairvoyant.

9 For some discussion of the extent of Ficino’s influence upon contemporary and later humanists, see Frances A. Yates, Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1964, 1991 reprint, for a discussion of Ficino’s early influence on the development of both Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, an important humanist thinker and a practical Cabalist magician (see pp. 62-83 discussing Ficino’s natural magic, and pp. 84-116 assessing Pico’s Cabalistic associations), and both in the context of their likely influences on the thinking of Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), a Dominican friar, philosopher, cosmologist and heliocentrist who supported Copernican models of the earth’s relation to the sun and even more controversial ideas pertaining to the stars, who was burned at the stake by the Inquisition in 1600. See also Stephane Toussaint, Société Marsile Ficin, http://www.ficino.it/ficino.htm. The site indicates “Figlio di un medico della Val d’Arno, Marsilio Ficino nacque il 19 ottobre 1433, a Figline. È il massimo rappresentante di quell’Umanesimo fiorentino che, con Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, rimane all’origine dei grandi sistemi di pensiero del Rinascimento e della filosofia del Seicento, basti pensare a un Giordano Bruno o a un Campanella” (unpaginated). The last reference is to Tomasso Campanella (1568-1639), a Dominican friar, born Giovanni Domenico Campanella, who took the name Tommaso in honor of Thomas Aquinas. Campanella was an astrologer and follower of the teaching of Giacchino da Fiore (1135-1202), whose prophecies caused Campanella to be imprisoned when he sought to undermine the government. Imprisoned for more than 20 years, Campanella was also known for his written defense of Galileo Gallilei. Another scholar of importance influenced greatly by Ficino was Angelo Poliziano (whose given name was, Angelo Ambrogini, 1454-1494) a close contemporary of Ficino’s, a classical Italian scholar, and Renaissance poet, who was tutor to the Medici family and an important Renaissance philologist.
After having studied the texts of Galen, Hippocrates, Aristotle, Averroes, and Avicenna, Ficino came under the protection of Cosimo di Medici, Il Vecchio, noted by the philosopher as his “second father,” and it was Cosimo who designated the task to his protégé, the young Ficino, to bring the Platonic tradition to Florence. In conjunction with this mission to bring or to return to the importance of Platonic ideas over a thirty-year period, Ficino added translation of the Corpus Hermeticum, the writings of Hermes Trismegistus, Plotinus’ Enneads and various Neo-Platonic texts.


See Michael Allen, Marsilio Ficino: The Philebus Commentary, University of California Press, 1975 pp. 1-58 and the marginal commentary appended to Giovanni Corsi’s biography, The Life of Marsilio Ficino, translated by members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, London which notes that Ficino’s translation of the Pimander (Poiemandres) by Hermes Trismegistus was begun in 1463; Xenocrates de Morte dedicated to Piero de Medici, in 1464 (on the occasion of Cosimo de’Medici’s death); The Symposium Commentary from Plato, in 1468-1469, The Platonic Theology 1469-1474; The Treatise on the Christian Religion 1474; and Plotinus Enneads commentary 1490.; see also Toussaint, who notes: “A tale missioni si aggiunse per Marsilio, nell'arco di trent'anni, l'incarico di tradurre il Corpus Hermeticum, ossia gli scritti del leggendario Ermete Trismegisto, le Enneadi di Plotino e altri testi neoplatonici ancora.”
After the death of Ficino’s principal patron, Cosimo de’ Medici, *Il Vecchio*, who was designated as *pater patriae* by the Florentines, his son Piero and then later his grandson, Lorenzo, *Il Magnifico* sustained the translation efforts of Ficino’s works.¹² Between 1474 and 1497 Ficino translated into Latin, the Greek texts of Plotinus, Proclus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Pseudo-Dionysios.¹³ Ficino’s works were understandably destined to revolutionize Western culture which had become estranged from the original Platonic texts and their ideas, as well as introducing Neo-Platonic interpretations of Plotinus, Proclus and above all, reviving the interest in Platonic theories in the wake of the powerful influence of Aristotle.¹⁴

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¹² The ongoing Medici support of Ficino’s translation project is discussed in Paul Michael Allen, *Philebus Commentary*, pp. 1-58; see also Toussaint, who notes “Dopo la morte di Cosimo, furono Piero, suo figlio, e poi Lorenzo il Magnifico a sostenere l'opera di traduttore e di pensatore del Ficino.” Cosimo was referred to as the “father of the Florentine Republic” or *pater patriae* and as *Il Vecchio* to distinguish him from his 16th-century descendant, Cosimo I, First Grand Duke of Tuscany. See “Cosimo de’Medici,” *Encyclopædia Britannica* online, accessed 8-9-2018, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Cosimo-de-Medici.


¹⁴ For a discussion of the struggle to establish the proofs for the claim that the human soul does not perish with the body, taken up by René Descartes in the transition from the Renaissance to the seminal discoveries of the Baroque that would lead to the Enlightenment and the dawn of the “Age of Reason” and Ficino’s significance in framing the reasoning sustaining this discourse and its struggle against the more materialist claims of Aristotle, see Brian Copenhaver, “Ten Arguments in Search of a Philosopher: Averroes and Aquinas in Ficino’s Platonic Theology”, in *Vivarium*, No. 47, Brill Publishers, Leiden, 2009, pp. 444-479; See also, Stephane Toussainte, who notes: “Non è difficile capire come l'opera di Ficino fosse destinata a rivoluzionare una cultura occidentale fino a poco in gran parte estranea al Plotino ed al Proclo «originali», a «tutto» Platone così come al Corpus Hermeticum.” Also see Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, translated by Hugh Bredin, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1986, pp. 64ff –
It is evident from suggestions in Ficino’s commentaries in the *Platonic Theology* and *Symposium* that his own original thought proposes a vision of humanity with powerful cosmic and magical affinities in the midst of a providentially directed world, highly animated with its own proper spiritual ethos.\(^\text{15}\)

A fundamental function of humanist thought is to achieve, via an imaginative illumination utilizing “spiritus” and “fantasia,” a sense of the rational and intellectual self-sufficient consciousness of one’s own immortality and to acknowledge human grace using signs and symbols of the soul’s celestial origin. The aggregate human experience in

\(^{15}\) See Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, translated by Michael J. B. Allen with John Warden, and Latin text edited by James Hankins with Wiliam Bowen, The I Tatti Renaissance Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001, Vols. I-VI, but particularly Book IV, Chapter I for some of the discussions pertaining to considerations of a living Cosmos in which movement of the planets is motivated by their being ensouled, a notion attributed by Ficino to both Plato and Aristotle (p. 283, paragraph 22, and p. 291, paragraph 25, specifically) and further discourse on the gradations of souls from the celestial realm to the animation force that moves animal life on earth. The souls animating planets (including that of the earth, are assumed to be rational, while the souls animating animals, fish for example, are assumed to be irrational. Daemons also inhabit the various realms, offering a magical component. Being able to manipulate the events dependent upon pre-established patterns of the activities of the celestial spheres or being able to motivate or influence the daemonic forces that infuse the various hierarchical realms requires supernatural intervention, and thus the magical associations with astrology and sorcery (from the Latin *sortarius*; “sors” meaning “fate” a *sortarius* being “one capable of influencing fate”), roughly synonymous with the Greek *magikos* (μαγικός) used in reference to the "magical" arts of the Persian Magicians (Greek: *magoi*, singular *mágos*, μάγος), the Zoroastrian astrologer priests (affiliates of whom are thought to be identified with the Three Wise Men associated with Christian traditions pertaining to the nativity of Christ). See also Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium on Love*, an English translation by Sears Jayne, Spring Publications, Inc., Dallas, Texas, 1985, for example Ficino’s syncretist employment of Aristotelian mechanics with Platonist theology (p. 13) or the relationship between Love and sight, and the logical extensions derived from this relationship and other arguments taken from Socrates’ account of Diotima’ explanations for Love logically extended character, based in his origins from Poros and Penia, pp. 83 ff, see also Toussainte, op. cit.
its combination of artistic, technical, philosophical and religious elements of existence expresses at its depth the divine presence of an infinite, universal mind motivated by a cyclical vision of history based in the grand Platonic myth of reincarnation and rebirth which humanists intended to harmonize with the Christian view of resurrection and renewal.\footnote{Intimations of the complexity of this resurrection of the \textit{prisci theologi} are considered in many texts; a particularly interesting summary is given by Frances Yates in \textit{Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition}, pp. 76-79 where she notes Ficino’s devotion to Orphic magic, based in an understanding of Orpheus as a \textit{priscus magus} antecedent to Plato whose melodic hymns incorporated the celestial music of the heavenly spheres cited by Pythagoras. By participating in the methods of these ancient theologians, including figures like Hermes Trismegistus, Ficino’s idea was to return to the practices that anticipated and predicted the coming of the Christian Holy Trinity. Aspects of this idea were grounded in some historical errors pertaining to the historicity and chronology of the figures venerated within the Ficinian system. The goal was to utilize the magic of the \textit{spiritus mundi} which infused with life everything on earth, since every element of the Universe was en-souled, to group natural forces in order to produce beneficial effects. Yates, pp. 72-73 notes that Ficino considered the cross a talismanic device with foundations in the magical evocations of the ancient Egyptians who used a form of the cross on Serapis, thus offering a kind of prophetic anticipation of the coming of Christ, since the cross symbolized future life. Talismans were considered a standard part of medical practice in Ficino’s time, as was the appropriate use of astrology. See also Toussainte, op. cit., ibid.}

An important aspect of Ficino’s significance is the transformation in emphasis from Aristotelian-based scholasticism to a more intuitive, humanist Platonism his aesthetic and intellectual innovations generated, which permeated the late-Medieval Italian and European sensibility. Eco has written convincingly on the differences between ancient, classical aesthetic concentration upon the natural world as contrasted with Medieval adherence to and inspiration from the classical tradition \textit{per se} rather than its sources in nature.\footnote{See Umberto Eco, \textit{Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages}, translated by Hugh Bredin, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1986, pp. 4 – 7.} Ficino’s concern for the importance of intelligible beauty combined with a true appreciation for sensible beauty, is an innovation to the medieval
preoccupation with internal experience which signals a new understanding of how the ancient, pagan material and natural considerations of beauty could be philosophically applicable for reinterpreted, spiritual, immaterialist neo-Platonic/Christian synthesis of disparate traditions into what gave every appearance of being an harmonious unity of vision.  

Ficino appears to have had a mistaken interpretation of the works of Averroes, whose ideas he may have primarily encounterd mediated through the writings of Thomas Aquinas; it was Ficino’s personal mission to move beyond the Medieval and scholastic preoccupation with Aristotelianism and to shift humanist concerns to Plotinian-inspired interpretations of Platonic, hierarchical, transcendent conceptions of “the beautiful,” which retained the didactic preoccupations of medieval sensibilities, but reconsidered the rejection of ornament and artifice, subordinating these devices in a structured universal order, and placing sensual beauty in the service of divine purposes by elevating the aspirations of the human soul.

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18 Ibid, 1986, pp. 4-16; See Eco’s essay, “The Medieval Aesthetic Sensibility” in Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages, which cites the concentration, during the Medieval era, upon internal conceptions of the beautiful privileged over sensual, representations of beauty. Eco makes the important distinction that the Scholastics and Medieval scholars, citing passages from St. Bernard in particular, showing that the Medievals were powerfully susceptible to sensual beauty, but the demands of their asceticism often precipitated its rejection in order to avoid the confusions engendered by distractions from devotion provoked by excessive ornament, and material wealth.

19 Much of Ficino’s contra-Aristotelianism takes the form of counter-Averroesism, provided particularly in Book XV of the Platonic Theology (Harvard, 2005 edition, op. cit), in Chapters 10-19, pp. 109-227. Further consideration is given to this problem by Brian Copenhaver in his article, “Ten Arguments In Search of a Philosopher,” (op. cit) which assesses what may have been Ficino’s mistaken interpretation of Averroes based in arguments culled from St. Thomas Aquinas. For more on Ficino’s commitment to renew philosophical theology, see Paul Oskar Kristeller, The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino, 1943, pp. 346 -350, who notes particularly on p. 347 the tensions between the Aristotelians of the University of Padua and Ficino’s defense of a Christian/Platonist dogma of an immortal, eternal soul. Ficino discusses the character of Beauty extensively in his Commentary on Plato’s Symposium on Love, translated by Sears Jayne (op. cit.), pp. 87-95ff. James Hankins “Marsilio Ficino,” Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Routledge, New York, 1998, pp. 653-659, who notes Ficino’s counter cultural challenge to the dominance of Aristotelianism using Platonic and neo-Platonic concepts in an effort to undermine
Ancient thinkers had undertaken the discourse on the relative merits of philosophy contrasted with visual or the poetic arts in the human search for truth. Plato suggests differing theories of the role of art in his various dialogues, with the most famous contrast stemming from the suggestions of a divinely inspired idea in the early Socratic conversation of the *Ion*, to the later rejection of the potentially dangerous (deceptive), mimetic character of art, widely acknowledged in *Book X* of the *Republic*.

Contrasting with these Platonic formulations, the neo-Platonic suggestions advanced by Plotinus’ emanation theory, imply that we may discern the consequence of a material contact with the One presented as an extension of the idea of beauty within a form, which is not itself the beautiful, but is an indication of the presence of the beautiful, referring us to the origin of beauty within the One. That is to say that Plotinus, contrasting with his perception of a movement away from piety within philosophical tradition; see particularly p. 654.


21 Plotinus’ metaphysical structures depend upon an emanationist account of being hierarchies, wherein derived phenomena, the things that appear to us in existence, emanate or flow from eternal pre-noumena or the divine, absolute One, which is understood to be precedent to being itself and any subsequent aspects of being. Emanation suggests a descending hierarchical structure from the perfection of initial spiritual, noumenal presence, thrown off from the One, and the Nous gives being to succeeding degrees of materiality which incarnate descending shades of the ultimate reality of the One. See “Emanation,” *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, http://www.iep.utm.edu/emanatio/. April 13, 2001. For the Plotinian idea of the referential character of perceived beauty, that is, an aspect of true beauty taking some specific form or shape, see, *Plotinus*, pp.164-167, *Ennead VI*, 31,32,33, in which Plotinus discusses the idea that in the realm of process, what exists exists as a something specific in its appearance or shape, but that true beauty is nothing that exists materially, but is instead limitless and the perceived thing being subsequent to the conceptual reality of the beautiful elevates those who may perceive it by its reference to its source. This idea suggests then, that for Plotinus, beautiful art has a rich, spiritual
Plato’s suggestion of art as a form of deception, instead posits that art is an indexical sign within a form of the presence of the One, and may thus be understood as an extension of what is divine.

II. Ficino’s Metaphysics

An introductory assessment of Ficino’s philosophical system, its metaphysics, his theory of perception and the essentials of his theory of Love, which supports and infuses the structural, hierarchical relations and metaphysical claims of the philosophical system as a whole, is crucial to evaluation of the role of art as a means of disseminating philosophical consciousness within Ficino’s Neo-Platonist interpretation of the concepts of knowledge, understanding, and awareness. This foundation will then be discussed for its relationship to the images claimed here, to both reflect and inform Neo-Platonist ideas, summarizing the roles of those concepts within the telos of the philosophical system’s goal of the soul’s return to its source. This discussion will be followed by a brief, concluding statement for the Introduction, prior to investigating the individual pictures and how each may be categorized for relevance within the Ficinian system. It should be clear from the complexity of the iconographic and iconological source materials that Botticelli is by no means to be construed as a mere minion of Ficino’s ideas, a pawn who undertakes to “illustrate” a text; instead Botticelli is understood as a proceptive contributor; a visually oriented collaborator who “articulates”, clarifies, demonstrates and

function, closer to the Platonic interpretation of the role of art as a means to a more profound insight into truth as formulated in the Ion, although this Platonic/Socratic discussion may be intended as ironic, rather than adhering to the insidious interpretation of mimetic art as essentially deceptive, offered in the Republic (and elsewhere among the Platonic dialogues). Ficino will propose a third way of understanding art that both accepts Plato’s Republican formulation, but supports the Plotinian reference to divine origins.
represents to our consciousness now (as he did to the members of the society of his own
time) the extensions and powers of the soul as explained within the hierarchical
metaphysics of Ficino’s philosophical discourse.22

Botticelli was an important presence in Ficino’s Medici-influenced circle and the
increasing complexity, refinement and nuance of Ficino’s ideas, which emerge as his
philosophical system works through and responds to his translations of Plotinus, Hermes
Trismegistus, readings of Augustine and Aquinas and translations of Plato, appears to
find a true correspondence in Botticelli’s works; images that offer a natural, organic, and
a more than merely serendipitous or coincidental conceptual evolution. As Ficino
provides his hermeneutic insights through conversations, lectures, publications, and
letters to the members of his intellectual circle, Botticelli’s works appear to demonstrate a
systematic increase in conceptual complexity, possibly suggesting a response culled from
the likely interactions, discourses on varied topics, and probable exchanges that were a
part of the closely-knit Florentine society in which both the philosopher and the artist
were profoundly engaged. This comparatively small group of friends within which both
individuals communicated, served as a kind of intellectual conservatory. Although it is
likely to be the case that these developments are fully intentional, that is not necessarily
an argument that must be made here, instead, I am suggesting that a form of contextual

22 The use of the term “proceptive” refers, here, to an application of consciousness to the elements
of an environment in such a manner as to maximize the positive or life-enhancing effects of
awareness. This idea is the rationale in part for Ficino’s Three Books of Life, which is concerned
with the application of awareness directed toward extending the life of the scholar. See Marsilio
Ficino, De Vita in Tres Libros Divisus, a critical edition and translation with introduction and
notes by Carole V. Kaske and John R. Clark, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance
infusion occurs quite naturally as the consequence of an organic, and largely social process through which the increasingly complex iconographical components of Botticelli’s images, stemming from his likely discourse with patrons and friends, appear to evolve within the selected works, which are themselves indeed intentional representations and embodiments (or rather demonstrations) of certain philosophical ideas. Although the infusions of philosophical commitments could be accidental or incidental outgrowths of a process rather than intentionally instrumentalist propaganda, the point suggested here, is that a simultaneous, corresponding evolution of philosophical discourse and iconographic complexity is evident. The Botticelli works show representations of particular philosophical commitments, but may also simply be suffused with ideas derived from the ambient discourse of the social and professional circles of the artist stemming from the era within which the works selected (c.1475-c.1486) were actually generated. This period is an important time during the shift from the early stages of the developing Renaissance of the second half of the 15th century, toward its ultimate expressions and most noted achievements of the first quarter of the 16th century, and Botticelli may be responding to the impact of the social and cultural developments of this burgeoning intellectual influxus in large part less by intention of either philosopher or artist, and possibly more due to the intellectual and social outcomes of a peculiarly Hegelian form of cultural Zeitgeist.

23 The suggestion that a parallel development in Ficino’s philosophical complexity corresponds to the iconographic and iconological complexity indicate in Botticelli’s images is not one I am aware of having been made elsewhere as a speculative explanatory rationale for how artworks may be understood to function within the Ficino-inspired, Neo-Platonist philosophical systems of the Renaissance.

24 This passage refers to the fecund period particularly between the time Leon Battisa Alberti published his work De Pictura of 1435 and then De re aedificatoria in 1452, through the
It is important to these developments that the reader understand how the Ficinian system is predicated upon the assumption of a divinely determined, \textit{a priori} - “essence-before-existence”, eternal, individual, persistent, immortal soul, derived from God. The soul has an \textit{appetitus naturalis}, that is to say, a “natural appetite” to return to its source. The return to its source is a unique, teleological function of this immortally constituted soul, and this function is its ultimate goal (the system is thus purposive and teleological, and we may infer that the soul exists for a reason; that reason being, to return to its origin). The return to God is therefore also the source of the soul’s ultimate happiness and the Ficinian system is thus fundamentally \textit{eudaimonic}. The activities of a soul (directing a florescence of exceptional works by Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo Buonarotti, and Raphael Sanzio, which are considered among the greatest of the Renaissance period. This particularly rich era of Renaissance creativity concluded with the death of Leonardo in 1519 and the death of Raphael in 1520 and began the transformation from a Renaissance to a Mannerist sensibility. The use of the term \textit{Zeitgeist}, here, roughly translated as “time spirit” or the “spirit of an age” is attributed to German philosopher, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, who actually used the phrase: “\textit{der Geist seiner Zeit}”; or “the spirit of its time” in his \textit{Lectures on the Philosophy of History}. Hegel suggests that works of art intrinsically reflect certain preoccupations and characteristics of the times during which they were created. See \textit{Lectures on the Philosophy of World History} (German: \textit{Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte}), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), originally given as lectures at the University of Berlin in 1821, 1824, 1827, and 1831. The Hegelian philosophy indicates that history is thought to follow the dictates of reason and that the natural progress of history is due to the expression of absolute spirit. As an important component of this particular moment within the Florentine “time spirit”, reference to a significant astronomical and astrological event anticipating a transformation of human consciousness was part of the discourse in Ficino’s ambient intellectual circle, pertaining to the Great Conjunction of Saturn with Jupiter of 1484. In this planetary event, Ficino likely understood a heretofore unprecedented association of \textit{wisdom}, the province of Chronos-Saturn with \textit{power}, the province of Zeus-Jupiter. This anticipation is discussed by Philippa Berry in “Voice of the Daemon: Inspiration and the Poetic Arts in Botticelli’s ‘Primavera’”, \textit{Sillages Critiques}, en ligne, Document 2, Poétiques de la Voix, Revues.org No. 7, 2005, pp. 6-7 [mise en ligne le 15 janvier 2009; consulte le 15 Juin 2014]. Some of the implications of this event are discussed below in Chapter IV for their relationship to an enhanced understanding of some possible significations associated with the image of \textit{La Primavera}. 
body) thus stem from desires to return to and rest within God. Subsequently, the works of art would be in the service of this teleological structure.\(^\text{25}\)

In Ficino’s conception of the cosmos, the life force of celestial bodies, which were not considered inanimate entities, but vital, living forces, as was indeed the earth itself, could have a powerful interactive effect, one upon the other, and of course these powerful, en-souled entities could also have an impact upon the life force of things on earth.\(^\text{26}\) Thus, transitively, celestial entities could have an impact upon the lives of individuals on earth, moved by and infused with *spiritus*.\(^\text{27}\) This universe, described by

\(^{25}\) See Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium On Love*, (op. cit.), pp. 89-95 pertaining to the spiritual nature of vision, and on page. 90, Jayne translates Chapters 4, 5, and 6, in which Ficino specifies how beauty is perceived as an incorporeally motivated process directed by the presence of light and that the perception of the world is not in the form of bodies but is determined by the light which is infused into the eyes of the perceiver reflected from corporeal bodies. The resultant, incorporeal nature of vision, is what permits the recognition of truth transferred from within the Divine Mind to the rational soul and then to the individual perceiver (depending upon his or her receptivity and soul preparation or power/capacity to receive “truth”.

The spiritual role of vision offers a logical association with the importance of art as a means of concept transmission, working in tandem with Ficino’s Metaphysics of imagination, soul, and interactions as were prefaced by St. Augustine. See also David Summers, “Augustine on inspiration and vision,” in Summers’ Chapter 6 pertaining to *spiritus*, in *The Judgment of Sense*, 1987, pp. 112-117.


\(^{27}\) Ficino remarks more than once upon the living force of the celestial spheres and of the element of the earth itself, noting in the *Platonic Theology*, IV, I, 25, p. 291 among many other citations that not only the Platonists but all of the Aristotelians claimed that the heavenly spheres were ensouled. “Caelestes sphaeras habere animas, non modo Platonici, sed omnes etiam Peripatetici confinentur. Quod Aristoteles docet libro *De caelo* secundo, rursus septimo et octavo *Naturalium*, secundo *de Anima*, undecimo *Divinorum*; Theophrastus etiam discipulus Aristotelis libro *De caelo*.” He notes however, that “Augustinus Aurelius in libro *Enchiridion* et Thomas Aquinas in libro *Contra gentiles* secundo tradunt nihil, quantum ad Christianam doctrinam spectat, interesse caelestia corpora animas habere vel non habere”…that is to say, in paraphrase, that Augustine and Thomas Aquinas considered it unimportant for Christian teaching whether celestial bodies might be considered to have souls or not. Thus as a tenet of Christian dogma, the two most respected authorities evidently considered this a moot point, thus its acceptance, though not ordained, seems certainly permissible.
Ficino, suffused with life force, emanating from God, could be interpreted as sending forth soul energies that could influence being, and consequently, any means through which this energy might be purposively directed for benefit would be considered a “good”; that is to say that, as the influences of the celestial bodies radiated downward toward earth in a graded structure affecting earth and the materials of earth, as well as the entities of earth composed of body (material entities composed from any earthly materials), and all were therefore derived from and filled with earth’s God-given life force. Ficino’s discussion of the structure of reality and role of sense and judgment pertaining to determining what actually exists and what does not exist, or what is or is not a simulation of existence (for Ficino), provides clarification for the role of art within the Ficinian system overall.  

In accordance with the thinking of Neo-Platonist metaphysicians, Ficino considered being as a graded, cosmic structure, which descends or emanates outward from God, growing in material presence as it progresses, or in fact “descends,” away from its ultimate source within the intelligible realm of divine thought. This graduated concept of being gains in coarseness as it radiates farther and

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28 See Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1964, rpt. 1991, pp. 62-83 for a more extended discussion of the vital forces of the planetary bodies and stars upon the earth and the role of these influences upon Ficino’s theory of natural magic, which he tried to concord with Thomas Aquinas regarding the potentially beneficial effectiveness of talismans, used at the time for medicinal purposes, as being based upon the powers of the natural elements connected to the God-given forces of the earth and natural influences rather than relying on the efficacy of images per se or daemonic effects.

29 Ficino’s ideas pertaining to the cosmic structure are explained in the eighteen books of the *Theologica Platonica* written between 1469-1474, and first published in 1482, referred to here as the *Platonic Theology*, the version most often used for this study being the full Latin text, with an English translation by Michael J. B. Allen with John Warden, Latin text edited by James Hankins with William Bowen, The I Tatti Renaissance Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, in 6 Vols, 2001-2006. Michael J. B. Allen discusses the importance of the Neo-Platonic philosopher, Proclus of Athens (412-485 CE) an earlier author of a text commentary entitled the *Platonic Theology* in the unique hypostases derived by Ficino from his ideas and those of Plotinus of Lycopolis and Alexandria (204/5-270/271 CE) that was formulated by Ficino with
farther outward from God in a complex interaction of hierarchical levels of the transformation from the abstraction and immateriality of an intelligibility that slowly grades into perceptibility and material presence. In the Third Book of the *Theologia Platonica*, Ficino draws an analogy between the planets and the hierarchy of being as well as offering an argument by analogy showing the relations between the various elements and the levels of being. In the opening section of the First Book, and repeated


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Descensus per quinque gradus fit, per quos est factus ascensus. Qui gradus invicem congrue comparantur. Ascendimus hactenus a corpore in qualitatem, ab hac in animam, ab anima in angelum, ab eo in deum unum, verum et bonum, auctorem omnium et rectorem. Corpus appellant Pythagorici multa, qualitatem multa et unum, animam unum et multa, angelum unum multa deum denique unum.
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Allen’s translation reads:

“We descend through the five levels by which we ascended and set up an appropriate comparison between them. So far we have made our ascent from body to quality, from quality to soul, from soul to angel, and from angel to God, the one, the true and the good, author and ruler of all things. The Pythagoreans describe body as “the many,” quality as “the many and the one,” soul as “the one and the many,” angel as “the one-many,” and God as “the one.””

The analogy between being and the planets is drawn in Book III, Chapter I, pp. 229-331 in which the Sun represents God, the planet Mercury represents Angelic soul (or Angelic Mind) and the Moon represents Soul. The analogy between the elements and being is drawn in Chapter II of Book III, pp. 235 and here, the air understood as an intermediary between fire (God, the Sun) and water, world soul that animates earth, matter is suggested as the connective tissue that passes between the divine and the material realms. The implication here, explained in greater detail later in Ficino’s work, is that humanity, being in possession of a rational soul which is capable of
in the Third Book, the five categories of being are listed, essentially moving backward from the confines of our earthly experience as bodies, ascending upward toward God. The five components in reverse are body, quality, soul, angel, and then the source of all, God. All existing reality in Ficino’s system is understood as some aspect of expression within this cosmic structure. In this system, formal abstraction is the most authentic mode of reality, and is coequal to the presence of God. Material existence is a kind of “reflected” even secondary form of being and is represented as a form of degradation from the perfect abstraction and conceptual being of intelligibles. Ficino’s concern with form and matter, that is to say, with a concept of the persistence of conceptual reality and intelligibility, may derive from and be informed by his rejection of Epicurean and Lucretian materialism, ideas he entertained as a young philosopher, an approach to reality which challenged the possibility of mankind possessing an autonomous, eternal human soul. Kristeller notes that the influence of Lucretius remains present in Ficino’s philosophical ideas throughout his career. This presence takes both a negative and an affirmative form, in that Ficino valued friendships, simple pleasures, and quiet activities very much in the Epicurean vein (Epicurus providing a kind of anticipation of Christian concepts of “fellowship” perhaps?), but Ficino’s overall philosophical project, as stated quite clearly in Book I, Chapter I, paragraph II is to “show clearly how best the minds of communicating between the divine and the material realms serves in a connective capacity as does the element, air between fire (abstraction and volatility) and water.


men can unlock the bars of mortality, witness their own immortality and thus, achieve a state of blessedness."

In Ficino’s ontology of being, the cosmos is a living entity itself, and the celestial spheres are understood to be en-souled due to the fact that they move by means of their

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Ceterum, ut evidentur appareat qua ratione potissimum mentes hominum mortalia claustra resolvere, immortalitatem suam cernere, beatitudinem attingere valeant, conabimur sequenti disputatione pro viribus demonstrare, praeter pigram hanc molem corporum qua Democritiorum, Cyrenaicorum, Epicureorum consideratio finiebatur, esse efficacem qualitatem aliquam atque virtutem ad quam Stoicorum Cynicorumque investigatio sese contulit. Supra qualitatem vero, quae cum materiae dimensione dividitur et mutatur omnino, formam quondam praestantior formam esse, licet mutetur quodammodo, divisionem tamen in corpore non admittit. In ea forma rationalis animae sedem veteres theologi posuere.

Michael Allen’s translation of the complete Latin quote is as follows:

“In order to clearly show how best the minds of men can unlock the bars of mortality, witness their own immortality and thus achieve a state of blessedness, I shall try, as best I can, to prove in the following discussion: [first] that besides this inert mass of our bodies, to which the Democriteans, Cyrenaics, and Epicureans limit their consideration, there exists an active quality or power to which the Stoics and Cynics direct their investigation; and [second] that beyond quality, which is divisible along with matter’s dimensions and subject to all manner of change, there exists a higher sort of form, which, though it is in a certain sense changeable, admits no division in a body. In this form the ancient theologians located the seat of the rational soul.”

On page 323 in notes 3 and 4 Allen contextualizes the references to Democritus of Abdera (born c. 460 BCE), Aristippus of Cyrene (who was not actually the founder of the Cyrenaics) and Epicurus of Samos, a materialist, atomist and hedonist who posited that the soul was atomic in nature and thus, died with the body, allowing for no afterlife or possibility of immortality. It was particularly this idea of a mortal soul *against* which Ficino’s theories were formulated, to a great extent, as refutations; thus the logical extensions of Epicureanism form a kind of motivating impetus for much of his work. Proving the existence of an immortal soul was of particular interest to Ficino’s early principal patron, Cosimo de’Medici, *Il Vecchio.*
own intrinsic power. Suggesting that the heavenly spheres have souls, Ficino notes that the world has three “chief rulers, Oromasis, Mitris, and Arimanis.” These rulers are in fact, “God,” or “unity”, “mind” or “order” [logos?], and “soul” or “movement”. By means of transitions through and within this hierarchical structure of unity, order, and movement, the phenomenological effects we are able to perceive are produced, and it is due to the hierarchy of this structure that the interactions of essences may produce effects

34 See the Platonic Theology, particulary Book IV, Chapter I, pp. 287ff, where Ficino discusses the world soul which is infused into plants and rocks and which is responsible for their growth (pp. 285-286); on page 291 he notes:

“Caelestes sphaeras habere animas, non modo Platonici, sed omnes etiam Peripatetici confitentur. Quod Aristoteles docet libro De caelo secundo, rursus septimo et octavo Naturalium, secundo De anima, undecimo Divinorum; Theophrastus etiam discipulus Aristotelis libro De caelo.”

Allen translates this sentence as:

“Not only Platonists but all of the Aristotelians [(Peripatetics) parenthesis added are my own] too say that the heavenly spheres have souls. Aristotle teaches this in the De caelo Book II, in the Physics Books VII and VIII, in the De anima Book II, and in the Metaphysics Book XI, as does Aristotle’s pupil, Theophrastus in his De caelo.”

The influences of these ensouled planets upon the immaterial souls and the material bodies of humanity are among the powers affecting the role of art within the Ficinian system, and the iconographic significations of the Botticelli images considered below.

35 Platonic Theology, Book IV, Chapter I, p. 289. Oromasis is an elemental being of fire, a salamander within the hierarchy of salamanders (beings of fire), sylphs (beings of air), ondines (beings of water), and gnomes (beings of earth); Mitris (Mithras?) is a Zoroastrian angelic divinity (yazata), designated as “Protector of The Waters” and is native to the Persian culture and was passed into veneration by association, in ancient Rome; Arimanis ( in French Arimane) was a deity of shadows discussed by Francois Noel in Dictionnaire de la Fable, ou Mythologie Grecque, Latine, Egyptienne, Celtique, Persanne, Syriaque, Indienne, Chinoise, Scandinave, Africaine,Americaine, Iconologique, etc., Chez le Normant, Imprimeur-Libraire, rue de Prêtres-St. Germain-l’ Auxerrois no. 42, Paris 1801, pp. 108-110, described as a being that “n’était autre chose que les ténèbres” a god or demon of shadows, dedicated to an oppositional (balancing?) malice or evil in Persian tradition intent upon generating oppositional, malevolent genies. See the article pertaining to divine beings, at Elizabeth Clare, “Ascended Master Index” http://www.ascendedmasterindex.com/elemental.htm., accessed August 21, 2014. For the Noel, Dictionnaire available online, see : http://books.google.com/books?id=YlfXmane%3F&f=false., accessed August 21, 2014.

36 Platonic Theology, Ibid. p. 289.
in the lower material components in the form of movement, transformation, and change. Ficino’s ontology posits a symmetrical, hierarchical reality composed of twelve ensouled spheres (eight planets and four elements) with a corresponding hierarchical gradation of being, transitioning from matter and body which is inert, tangible, has extension and is therefore divisible and multiple; followed by soul, which is mobile and indivisible; above soul is angel which is immobile (eternal) and indivisible; and all is sustained by a unity that is God, which is unmoving and indivisible unity in act, and the cause for all below and within its realm.37

The importance of internal experience in Ficino’s metaphysical system has been quite extensively discussed by Kristeller.38 This fluctuation within the consciousness is used as an explanation for the aspiration of the human soul toward divinity and perfection and is an indication of the assumed significance of the existence of the human being within a purposive, Ficinian ontology. It is the human soul which moves between the upper realm of true freedom, and divinity and the demands and limitations of a cumbersome body.39 Ficino explicitly states that the rational soul, which, within the

37 See the _Platonic Theology_ Vol. I, Book III, pp. 212-247, and in addition the implications of this metaphysical structuring pertaining to mutable matter, emanating outward from an immutable, unified God are compared to Nicolas of Cusa’s roughly contemporaneous metaphysical concepts in an article by Marc Bensiman, “Modes of Perception of Reality in the Renaissance,” in _The Darker Vision of the Renaissance_, edited by Robert Kinsman, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1974, pp. 239ff.

38 See Paul Oskar Kristeller, _The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino_, pp. 208ff. Kristeller notes that in Book 14 of the _Platonic Theology_ Ficino explains that melancholy is a kind of impetus toward searching for fulfillment and return of the soul to its source in God. The insufficiency of temporal material things to provide human satisfaction is cited by Ficino as evidence of an essential spiritual need that can only be satisfied by the soul’s return to its origin. (see p. 209)

39 In the _Platonic Theology_, Book III, Chapter II, Ficino discusses the role of the soul in uniting the extremes of upper and lower reality and its binding function in his Neo-Platonist ontology in
hierarchy he proposes, holds a middle position uniting the heavenly and the material worlds, is the sustaining, connective tissue of the very universe itself.\footnote{See Marsilio Ficino, \textit{Platonic Theology}, English translation by Michael J. B. Allen with John Warden, Latin text edited by James Hankins with William Bowen, The I Tatti Renaissance Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, Vol. I, Book I, 2001, pp. 14-17. In particular, see paragraphs 2 and 3 which which read:}

Ficino’s extromissionist, radial concept of perception provides an explanation for how images may be considered to influence individuals by means of generating an effect upon the soul through the imparting of an image into the \textit{spiritus}.\footnote{For an exhaustive discussion of the concept of \textit{spiritus}, and specifically how this concept is used, in context, by Ficino, see the doctoral dissertation of Cynthia Bruner Bryson, \textit{Marsilio Ficino’s “Triple Spiritus”: Towards A Coherent Theory}, The University of South Carolina, 2003.} In Ficino’s

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Huius denique mentis oculo, qui cupit veritatis lumen et capit, solem ipsum praesesse divinum, in quem Plato noster purgatam mentis aciem dirigere iussit, docuit et contendit.

Proinde cum huc ascenderimus, hos quinque rerum omnium gradus – corporis videlicet molem, qualitatem, animam, angelum, deum-invicem comparabimus. Quoniam autem ipsum rationalis animae genus, inter gradus huiusmodi medium obtinens, vinculum naturae totius apparat, regit qualitates et corpora, angelo se iungit et deo, ostendemus, id esse prorsus indissolubile, dum gradus naturae connectit; praestantissimum, dum mundi machinae praesidet; beatissimum, dum se divinus insinuat.

Allen’s translation of this text is as follows:

But [however] the eye of angelic mind, which seeks for and finds the light of truth is ruled by the divine Sun itself. It is towards this that Plato urges, instructs and enjoins us to direct the gaze of the mind, once it has been purified.

Once we have ascended so far, we shall compare in turn these five levels of being: body (bodily mass), quality, soul, angel, and God. Because the genus of rational soul, which occupies the mid-point of these five levels, appears to be the link that holds all nature together – it controls qualities and bodies while it joins itself with angel and with God – I shall demonstrate: [first] that it is completely indissoluble, because it holds together the different levels of nature, next, that it is preeminent, because it presides over the framework of the world; and finally, that it is most blessed when it steals into the bosom of the divine.”
commentary on Plato’s *Timaeus* he observes that the *spiritus* or “animal spirit” or “spirit of life” is an instrument of the senses, and is solar and ray-like by nature, reaching outward from the eye’s pupil and combining in the air with the external, natural light (which is solar and thus like itself). If this *spiritus*’ ray touches upon anything that resists it, it rebounds directly back into the *spiritus* and from the *spiritus* to the soul.\(^42\) Ficino offers an explanation of the functional logistics of the progression from sense impression to imagination to the immaterial mind (and vice versa) a process crucial to grasping how celestial rays fixed in images may have an influence upon *spiritus* of the perceiver and

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\(^42\) See Marsilio Ficino, *All Things Natural: Ficino On Plato’s Timaeus*, translated by Arthur Farndell, with notes and additional material by Peter Blumson, Shepheard-Walwyn Publishers, Ltd., London, 2010, pp. 127-132, where in Chapter 30, Ficino discusses the “solar” “airy” spirit, its radiance concentrated within the eye. Mary McGrath, *Influences: Art, Optics, and Astrology in the Italian Renaissance*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2013, pp 68-71 and Ficino’s *Platonic Theology*, Vol 4, Book XII, Chapter V pp. 60-63. See also Paul Michael Allen, *Icastes: Ficino’s Sophist Commentary*, p. 184, and his quote from Ficino’s commentary in note 15 pertaining to how external sight results from an inner ray of the perceiver’s spirit (“inner fire”) which transmits “spirit images” back to the perceiver, communicating the image to the soul. On page 190, Allen discusses Ficino’s extramissionist theory of vision, and theory of process that follows upon the act of vision, indicates the primacy of vision in affecting (and thus “educating”) the soul by means of the imagination because images are “particular and natural effluences from things in nature, and thus possessed of their own nature.” ; See also, David Summers, *The Judgement of Sense*, pp. 108-109, for a discussion of Ficino’s theory of sense and judgment which provides clarification for the role the senses within the aesthetic process, and here the eyes, have significance as merely a means to convey images to the soul’s imagination, for it is the soul which distinguishes among the sensations and permits reflection upon experience. This quality of reflection upon experience is the very foundation for any activity of “education”. For further discussion of extramissionist theories of vision contrasted with the opposing intromissionist theories, see the work of David Lindberg, *Theories of Vision: From Al-Kindi to Kepler*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1976, who offers an interesting suggestion regarding Leon Battista Alberti’s theory of vision, based in geometry, noting Alberti’s avoidance of any commitment to either the intromissionist or extramissionist view of vision as being of little value for his treatise on painting, which would have been used by Botticelli, and probably read by Ficino; Alberti intentionally avoids discussion of the role of the eye in vision, defaulting instead to discussion of the theory of perspective, which for his intents and purposes, required merely, as Lindberg notes on p. 149, “the mathematics, but not the physics or physiology of vision.”
the connection between the *spiritus* and the physical material reality. The activity of sensing in Ficino’s view is concentrated not in the properties of organs, but is centered within the percipient qualities of the soul, itself. A properly trained magus is capable of using the ideas subsumed within a material image to affect first, the eyes and via the eyes, the *spiritus*, and via the *spiritus* the mind, and via the mind the actions of a person.

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43 Marsilio Ficino, *The Book of Life (De Vita Triplici): The Long-Suppressed Renaissance Work on Health, Demons, and the Practical Life*, translated with a New Introduction by Charles Boer, Spring Publications, Woodstock Connecticut, 1980, rpt. 1996, pp. 138, where Boer’s translation reads “Who will deny that the hidden powers of things which the doctors (scholastics?) call special, are not accomplished by an elemental nature but by a heavenly one? Such rays, therefore, can impress on images (or so they say) hidden and marvelous powers beyond what we see, in the same way that they put their powers in other things. For these rays are not immediate, like the rays of a lantern, but like wines, and like sensual things they shine through the eyes of living bodies …”; (the implication here being that the celestial bodies sending forth the “rays” are themselves living bodies which create effects in the recipients of their ray-like emanations). An important second analogy on p.139 is Ficino’s observation that “If you have considered these things carefully, perhaps you will not be skeptical when it is said that with a a certain hurling of rays these powers are impressed onto images, and different powers with a different hurling…”…(in other words the temporal and spatial circumstances of the emanation may have some effect upon its results)…further Ficino observes the…“extremely poignant cases where love is suddenly kindled by the rays of the eyes – these too, a kind of enchantment- which I recommend you get from my book on love “; (this latter being the commentary on Plato’s *Symposium*). See also Mary McGrath, *Influences: Art, Optics, and Astrology in the Italian Renaissance*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2013, pp. 67-89 on the nature of vision in Ficino’s system.

44 See David Summers, *The Judgment of Sense*, pp. 108-109 for a discussion of Ficino’s elaboration on the views of Aristotle of the organs as channels of information that relay data to the soul which makes judgments through comparison to ideas in the intellect which has access to standards of “truth”. We judge by a power of the soul of perfect fantasy and opinion through which human souls have access to a power to “judge essence, unity, number, sameness, otherness, similitude, dissimilitude, beauty, ugliness, good, evil, usefulness, and uselessness.” This capacity is not shared by all animals and Ficino advances the theory of Plato in denying that such a capacity is innate, allowing that the kind of knowledge gained from memory, reflection, and cogitation is attained only via experience and education.

45 See Mary McGrath, *Influences: Art, Optics, and Astrology in the Italian Renaissance*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2013, pp. 72-73 for discussion of Ficino’s assumption of a unified cosmos in which emanation from the divine to the earthly provides a “long continuous succession” of material things descending through layers of reality from the divine realm. By means of this theory, we may be made to understand that material things that convey spiritual messages may be used to directly engage the immaterial *spiritus* which motivates the inert matter of bodies to action.
processes of perception affect the soul via images taken in through the eyes, impressed upon the *spiritus*, refined there, and then translated to the rational soul, referred to the intellect or *mens*, judged by the intelligence and then assessed for action or effect relayed back to the body. In his late work, *De Vita Triplici*, or the *The Book of Life*, Ficino offers commentary on the importance of proception as a contributing factor for sustaining the quality of life based in the perception of one’s environment. The responsibility of the perceiver to be a proceiver, to control the quality of experiences in order to facilitate the ascendance of the soul toward the One, and toward God was a holistic approach to sustaining vital force which made Ficino’s work popular for over a century.

In the *Platonic Theology*, Ficino explains the logic of his claims for the imprint of a concept of perfection within the soul, based in the rational faculty, which guides the judgments of mere sensual perceptions. It is the rational soul that Ficino understands to

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46 While Ficino certainly does not cite the term “proception” or refer to a “proceptive” engagement with the environment *per se*, his *de facto* approach in the *De Vita Triplici* regarding control of stimuli and the interactive importance of inner awareness and the external environment, seems to embrace the idea not merely that life force could be attracted from the heavens, and, transitively, understanding the importance of astrology as a function within astronomy, but that by looking at the stars and constellations, and also by the thoughtfully considered introduction of objects and elements from the environment into one’s ambient (such as the use of jewels and specific plants, or the use of incense and certain woods, the use of nourishing odors, the use of songs “full of feeling and conceived in reason”, and the engraving of images), one could seek to improve the spirit. In fact, Ficino develops a thoroughly aesthetic approach to health and sustaining life, which is provided with magical formulae in the pages of the *De Vita Triplici*, as we may see by consulting *The Three Books of Life*, translated by Charles de Boer. See also Ficino’s ideas on proceptive engagement with the environment as translated by Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clarke, *De vita libri tres (Three Books on Life, 1489)*, The Renaissance Society of America, Tempe Arizona, 2002. With notes, commentaries and Latin text on facing pages. ISBN 0-86698-041-5.

move beyond the elementary sensing of “sensibles” (material stimuli), moving beyond access to appearance, the province of sight *per se*, to judgment concerning what is *being* seen. This capacity of the rational soul to assess leads Ficino to the conclusion that since the eyes (as instruments) are capable of reporting information, they do not provide the faculty of assessment of that information, which is actualized in the realm of the rational soul with its access to divine mind. Thus: “*Igitur rationalis vita sensuali praestat*”: Reason supervenes above sensuality. 48 Some suggestion of how concepts of symmetry, proportion and ratio may be applied is given in the same section of this discourse in which Ficino suggests a universal pleasure derived from symmetry extending from the arts. 49 Ficino implies that the perception of beauty (a unity derived from similitude to the

48 Ibid., Vol 4, Book XII, Chapter V, 2004, pp. 62-63, Hankins’ transcription of Ficino’s Latin text noting the capacity of mind to recognize illusions, the text reads:

Non solum autem rationalis vita de sensibilibus, sed de ipsis quoque sensibus iudicat: Cur in aqua remum fractum oporteat apparere, cum rectus sit, er cur ita per oculus sentiri necesse sit. Nam ipse aspectus oculorum renuntiare id potest, iudicare autem nullo modo. *Igitur rationalis vita sensuali praestat.*

which Allen translates as:

“But rational life makes judgements not only about sensibles, but also about the senses themselves – why an oar has to look bent in the water when it is in fact straight, and why the eyes have to see it thus. For the eyes’ vision can report the information, but not judge in any way. Therefore rational life is superior to sensuality.”

49 Ibid., Vol 4, Book XII, Chapter V, 2004, pp. 64, Hankins transcription reads:

*Sed cum in omnibus artibus convenientia placeat, qua una servata pulchra sunt omnia, ipsa vero convenientia aequalitatem unitatemque appetat vel similitudine parium partium vel gradatione disparium, quis est qui summam aequalitatem vel similitudinem in corporibus inveniat audeatque dicere, cum diligenter consideraverit, quodlibet corpus vere ac simpliciter unum esse, cum omnia vel de specie in speciem vel de loco in locum transeundo mutentur et partibus constant sua loca obtinentibus, per quae in spatia diversa dividuntur? Porro, ipsa vera aequalitas ac similitudo atque ipsa vera et prima unitas nullo sensu sed mente intellecta conspicitur.*

Allen’s translation reads:

“Since it is symmetry that gives pleasure in all the arts, and all things are beautiful if this is preserved intact, but since symmetry itself desires equality and unity, either in the
One or to God) is intelligible to rational beings because the mind, via the rational soul, has had access to perfect equality, previously imprinted upon the soul, posing the rhetorical question: “From whence would our [human] desire for some kind of equality in bodies derive, and how would we be convinced it differs so very much from perfect equality, if our mind had not seen perfect equality?” 50 Based upon this theory of how the mechanics of perception, as a mind-driven activity functions, we could assume that works of art requiring comparisons of ratio, and proportion, thus incorporate processes that cause the mind to call upon its image of perfection and thus remind itself of its own awareness, thereby producing a philosophical effect through the contemplation of images that re-mind the mental faculty of its awareness of perfection even if the examples presented in images are not themselves perfect. Moreover, comparisons of ratio and proportion are mathematical in character, and such actions would involve mental reflections upon rational forms and figures; again, directing the mind toward a contemplative, philosophical activity.

Ficino’s reception theory, which is integrally assimilated within his theory of vision, relies heavily upon Platonic commitments to an extromissionist view as is

50 Ibid., Vol 4, Book XII, Chapter V, 2004, pp. 64-65:

Unde enim qualiscumque appeteretur in corporibus aequalitas, aut unde convinceretur longe plurimum differre a perfecta, nisi ea quae perfecta est mente videretur?”
evidenced in his commentary on the *Timaeus*. In the *Platonic Theology*, he posits his ray-based concept of perception in the eye which mirrors the ray formations of the sun, creating a pyramidal or rather conical radiation from a source. As the sun’s rays would pass through the opening in the eye’s pupil, they would radiate directly into the *spiritus* in a conical formation creating an image mirroring the source of the reflected objects. This is the means through which the soul gains access to the possibility of gauging distance and measure (and of course, thus, proportion). The symmetrical character of Ficino’s vision is revealed in his suggestions concerning the ancient Egyptian belief that the soul had to reside in heaven because the distance from the soul to the pupil of the eye had to be equal to the distance of the sun to the pupil, placing the soul and the sun equally distant from the earthbound eyes. An extraordinary dual benefit may be derived from exercising the power of vision specifically with regard to the contemplation of the heavens, for as Plato informs us in the *Timaeus*, “each man should follow (the natural harmonious motions of the heavens) and by learning the harmonies and revolutions of the universe, should correct the courses of the head which were corrupted at our birth and


52 See, *The Platonic Theology*, and a related discussion offered by John Shannon Hendrix, “Alberti and Ficino,” (2012). *School of Architecture, Art, and Historic Preservation Faculty Papers*. Paper 25. http://docs.rwu.edu/saahp_fp/25 accessed July 24, 2014. Hendrix provides convincing arguments regarding the influences upon Ficino by Leon Battisa Alberti as a mentor and theorist, discussing correspondences between the concepts of the two thinkers. On p. 11, Hendrix notes that Alberti also posited a pyramidal theory of vision in his treatise on painting *De pictura*, later translated into Italian as *Della Pittura*, or *On Painting*, and it is likely that the older architect’s concepts may have influenced the ideas of the younger philosopher, who was a correspondent and friend despite the twenty-nine year difference in their ages. The closeness of their association is also recorded by Ficino’s contemporary, Cristoforo Landino, which Hendrix discusses on pp. 1-2 of his article.

53 See Hendrix, p. 11 who quotes Ficino from the *Platonic Theology*. The source of this idea is likely to be grounded in Ficino’s reading and translation of Hermes Trismegistus *Pimander*. 

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should assimilate the thinking being to the thought (of God), renewing his original nature, so that having assimilated them he may attain to that best life which the gods have set before mankind, both for the present and the future.”

Vision, and specifically looking toward and contemplating the heavens refined the immortal components of the soul in preparation for their return to God. As McGrath writes, “Plato affirms that, insofar as immortality is possible, the return to the divine is achieved through the pursuit of wisdom. This is formed by the mathematical study of the heavens with their perfect revolutions that nurture the intellectual soul, readying it for its return to the divine.”

It may also be via this mathematical transmission of forms that ideas are conveyed from material images and, thus the abstractions from art may provide a means for how the works of art may affect the non-material soul.

Ficino’s theory of vision is intimately allied to the activities of cognition, since the eyes, as channels of sensate data must relay the images to the spiritus for transfer and refinement by the rational soul which presents them (the images) for judgment to the mens, that portion of the soul closest to the divine truth. In the De Amore, Ficino elaborates on the process, which requires that what is perceived and cognized must be a construction judged in the mind. Thus, an important consideration is the inner light of

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55 McGrath, pp. 21 and 210, note 33, citing Plato’s *Timaeus*, 47c, 90d.

56 See McGrath, 210 ff.

57 Ficino, translated by Sears Jayne, Commentary on *De Amore*, VI.13, pp. 134-135.
reason, which is a kind of complement to the external light of the sun, both functioning to reveal the character of what is right, or true, or just to the perceiver whose access to assessment is via a relay of data from the senses to the rational soul and the mind. The rational soul and intellect (which may be translatable to contemporary concepts of consciousness) are the source of the divine ray which emanates from the eye to objects, transferring data back to the *mens* for assessment and judgment. Consequently, vision is understood as a crucial component for education and the inner transformation of the individual. 58

Ficino’s association with Leon Battista Alberti may offer us some idea of how art, and particularly painting may have been perceived for its importance within the theologically inspired Platonist philosophical motivations adhered to in Ficino’s theorizing regarding the immortality of the soul. John Hendricks suggests that during this period of the mid-to-late 15th century, the “visual arts must have been seen in the Renaissance as a talisman as well, an instrument to connect the harmony of the spheres with the harmony of the soul.” 59 Hendricks further cites Alberti’s *De Pictura*, noting that the architect and writer indicted that painting “possesses a truly divine power” 60 and further suggesting that “sculpture and painting originated together with religion.” 61 We have already seen above, that Ficino’s perception theory designates an indispensable role

58 See Ficino Sears Jayne, *De Amore*, VI.13, pp. 134-135, and Hendricks, p. 10.

59 Hendriks, p. 6.

60 Hendricks p. 6 quoting from Alberti *De pictura*, II.25

61 Ibid., Hendricks, p. 6, quoting from Alberti, *De pictura*, II.27.
to the conveying and assessment of images as intrinsic to the processes of the acquisition of knowledge. In Ficino’s perception theory, which inheres his ideas pertaining to aesthetics and the nature of consciousness and awareness, we also find a means to avoid the necessity of engaging the forces of magic and or daemons as necessary considerations in the logistics of the transmission of ideas from material images into consciousness. The acceptance of a naturally occurring, interactive, logistical structure for how images move into the *spiritus* would have been important as an explanation to allow Ficino to evade likely accusations of undue, even daemonic influence in commissioning images and poetry, which produced both pleasure and conceptual richness in the revivification of the ideas from antiquity during the Renaissance in literary, musical, and visual imagery.⁶²

Despite the longstanding friendship between Ficino and Alberti, their ideas of the fundamental character of beauty seem to vary along the lines of differences between Platonic idealism and Aristotelian proportional and mathematical harmonies of parts. Like Plato, Ficino’s ultimate beauty must be a spiritual, non-material, or conceptually ontological reality, while Alberti seeks harmony, or as Hendricks describes, it, the principal of *concinnitas* within beautiful things; a principal based in relational harmonics,

⁶² See Mary McGrath, *Influences: Art, Optics, and Astrology in the Italian Renaissance*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2013, pp. 74-75ff for a discussion of Ficino’s probable desire to offer an explanation for how material images could affect and transform the soul without the need for a supernatural, daemon-based explanation, rather effects might be achieved by means of a purely scientific and natural process which evades the need for daemonological considerations of influence, although these were part of Ficino’s repertoire of knowledge and praxis as is explained in his *De Vita Libri Tres, The Three Books of Life*. Translated by Charles de Boer. See also a version translated by Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clarke, *De vita libri tres (Three Books on Life, 1489)*, The Renaissance Society of America, Tempe Arizona, 2002, particularly pp. 45-55 and pp. 63-70, on Ficino’s ideas regarding magic and daemonology, and Chapters XII-XXIII, with notes, commentaries and Latin text on facing pages. ISBN 0-86698-041-5; See also, Cynthia Bruner Bryson, *Marsilio Ficino’s “Triple Spiritus”: Towards A Coherent Theory*, The University of South Carolina, 2003, pp. 92-113.
proportional rationalism, and numerical comparisons. Despite, the apparently irreconcilable opposition between these differing conceptions of what is “beautiful”, manifestations of Ficinian-Platonic non-material beauty, as a concept, could be understood as motivations for the harmonic material actualities that are appreciated by Alberti.  

Ficino’s account of the importance of art appears to be a consequence of his assumptions concerning the immortality of the soul in an over-arching theological schema. Drawing upon diverse sources such as Plato, Plotinus and Augustine, Ficino strives to harmonize with Augustine’s view that Plato is the closest of the pagan philosophers to the ideas of Christian theology.

The philosophical appeal of visual art and of the metaphysical role of artists as generators of illusions and ideas is understandable in Ficino’s system if we study his works translating the antique masters, particularly his responses pertaining to the making of icastic contrasted with the fantastic images noted in the commentary on Plato’s Sophist. The differences noted by Plato between the icastic artist or eikastês, an

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63 See Hendriks, p. 6ff. for discussion of the divergence between Ficino’s conceptual beauty and Alberti’s beauty grounded in the harmonies among particulars.


65 Ibid., p. 655.

individual committed to creating a mimetic likeness, which attempts to represent its subject with precision, and the more deceptive work of an illusionist creating a “semblance” based upon inaccuracies of the imagination generated from a phantasm (the phantastês being an artist who manipulates the perceptions of the spectator to produce particular effects), thus falsifying truth (in Plato’s assessment) by moving away from exactness, undermining the integrity of the representation, are significant. Here resolution of the complex sophistical role of artists is explored by Plato who notes that sophists (like artists) not only create idols (eidolopoис) but are also “purifiers of souls” (kathartes), who work through the generation if images, at continually separating souls from contrary reasoning that impedes access to true knowledge. This role of the artist as a “soul shaper” is easily associated in particular with the works documented, here and elsewhere, as Ficino’s principal collaborative efforts conducted in association with Botticelli, specifically, the Primavera and the later image of The Birth of Venus, discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters of this study. Ficino’s theories offered the artist a new status within the emerging Renaissance conception of society; a status superior to the medieval conception of the artist as a skilled craftsman. Rather, Ficino’s ideas regarding the differing roles of imitative or icastic images contrasted with phanstasmic, or imagined illusory creations stemming from Plato’s comments.

67 Michael J.B. Allen, Icastes: Marsilio Ficino’s Interpretation of Plato’s Sophist (Five Studies and a Critical Edition with translation), University of California Press, Berkeley, 1989, pp. 117-204, for Allen’s extended discussion of Ficino’s responses to and commentary on Plato’s distinction, which may seem problematic to contemporary readers, because the illusionism of fantastic art may be understood to better convey the appearance of truth even if it denies the actuality. This distinction works quite differently, for example upon the art forms of painting and sculpture. A painting made upon a two dimensional surface may require some manipulation of the spectator’s perceptions in order to preserve the appearance of truth, while a sculptor, working in three dimensions, may reproduce the appearance of an object fully realized in all three dimensions and have less need of illusionistic deception.

68 Ibid., pp. 108, citing Ficino’s Commentary on Plato’s Sophist, line 239D3 and 231E5-6.
engagement with art and artists (and particularly with Botticelli) transforms the social perception of the artist as a conceptualist equal to, if not perhaps in some instances, even more skilled than the poet, in devising a power to envision abstractions with which the very soul of the spectator could engage.  

Ultimately, it was Ficino’s intention to employ Platonic thought as a means to inspire and revitalize the Christian faith and the concept of the soul’s immortality, which had come under fire by the Aristotelian and Averroist inclinations of the university-led discourses in the wake of Scholasticism.  

While the theoretical formulations justifying connections between the images created by Botticelli and the mechanics of Neo-Platonist metaphysics may not be explicitly stated either by Ficino or members of his circle, perhaps due in part to the Pythagorean-based mystical aspects of Platonic and Neo-Platonic revelatory educational structures, and in part due to a desire for the avoidance of any undue or unnecessary religious or theological controversy regarding the influence of images, it is plausible to propose that Botticelli’s representations could have been understood as components within a larger system of support structures peculiar to Neo-Platonist metaphysics,

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69 See E.H. Gombrich, Symbolic Images: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance, Phaidon Press, 1972 (repts 1978 and 1993), pp. 76-78, for a discussion of Ficino’s theoretical infrastructure which offered to artists ready tools intended to free them from the constraints of perception as, and, association with “craft” and simple manual skill to equality with the achievements of science and the “invenzione” of poetic visualization.

intended to serve a catalytic function regarding the inner movement of [the souls of] the observers of these works of art. Images, which, could have been understood to serve as a stimulus, to remind the viewer of first principles, eliciting a response via, first, the act of the contemplation of the image, and then engagement with the elevated, morally efficacious ideas it might inhere, thus could be understood to act upon the observer, moving the *spiritus* of the viewer through the hierarchical structures of what were understood by Neo-Platonists to be the processes intrinsic to the soul’s desire to return to its source.\(^{71}\) The idea that the material image could influence the immaterial soul would have had validity because, although the painted image itself is a material thing, its abstract representations of line, color, and composition, demonstrating both mathematical ratio, as well as proportional, numerical allusions, and representing philosophical or moral ideas, would communicate directly to the soul through these non-material, conceptual means. Images within the Platonic hierarchy thus could be construed as having a role in directing the soul toward its highest aim. Although images and reflections are noted by Plato in the *Republic* as attributes within the lowest realm of reality, if we follow the structure of the hierarchy, the reflection or image is a means to direct the soul to awareness of the material level of the art object itself, and further to the configurations within Botticelli’s compositions, which are based in proportion and

\(^{71}\) Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, English translation by Michael J.B. Allen, Latin text by James Hankins with William Bowen, The I Tatti Renaissanc Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts., Vol 4, Book XVI, Chapters I & II, pp. 222- 229 in which Ficino culminates a discourse on the object of the highest power of the human soul as the search for universal truth and “universal good entire” and that this search is a search for God: “Summae autem potentiae nostrae sunt mens mentisque caput atque voluntas. Summum harum obiectum est commune verum bonumque commune et integrum, id est autem deus.” Allen’s translation: “But our highest powers are he mind and the head of the mind and the will. Their highest object is the universal truth and the universal good entire, that is God.”
geometry and are thus, conceived in number. Number, of course, directs the mind toward abstraction, or idea and thus, the properly composed image supports movement through the metaphysical hierarchy at least to the level of idea. Idea, in turn, must then be considered for its truth content by the rational soul, and thus, is ultimately directed toward, first, Divine Mind (Nous) and finally, the source in the One...God.  

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72 See, Plato, Republic VI, p. 745, 509d-510a, in The Collected Dialogues of Plato Including the Letters, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Bollingen Series LXXI, Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey, 1961, rpt., 2005. In the Republic VI, the Allegory of the Divided Line presents its subdivisions with proposed levels of engagement with reality. The discourse of the allegory centers on the differences between the visible (the perceptible world) and the intelligible (the realm of understanding awareness and knowledge. Plato uses Socrates in conversation with Glaucn (and Adeimantus) to create a dialectical assessment of the character of reality. Plato using the voice of Socrates writes: “...You surely apprehend the two types, the visible and the intelligible.” Glaucn responds, “I do.” Socrates continues: “Represent them then, as it were, by a line divided into two un-equal sections and cut each section again in the same ratio- the section, that is, of the visible and that of the intelligible order – and then as an expression of the ratio of their comparative clearness and obscurity you will have, as one of the sections of the visible world, images. By images, I mean, first, shadows, and then reflections in water and on surfaces of dense, smooth, and bright texture, and everything of that kind, if you apprehend.” To which Glaucn responds: “I do.” Socrates continues: “As the second section, assume that of which this is a likeness or an image, that is, the animals about us and all plants and the whole class of objects made by man” [FM note: this would include paintings and works of art which are also reflections but are tangible, material ones]. Glaucn responds “I so assume it, he said”. Socrates continues: “Would you be willing to say, said I [Socrates or Plato using the character of Socrates] that the division in respect of reality and truth or the opposite is expressed by the proportion- as is the opinable to the knowable so is the likeness to that of which it is a likeness?” Glaucn responds:”I certainly would.” Socrates continues: “Consider then again the way in which we are to make the division of the intelligible section.” Glaucn asks: “In what way?” Socrates responds;” By the distinction that there is one section of which the soul is compelled to investigate by treating as images the things imitated in the former division, and by means of assumptions from which it proceeds not up to a first principle but down to a conclusion, while there is another section in which it advances from its assumption to a beginning or principle that transcends assumption, and in which it makes no use of the images employed by the other section, relying on ideas only and progressing systematically through ideas.” From this point Socrates explains using the example of geometry that the ultimate goal is to not merely consider the representations that demonstrate the proofs but to access and grasp the conceptual, mathematical truths these representation make visible, but which may only be apprehended by the mind, which is his goal. Plato uses Socrates to reiterate his idea of continuous geometric proportion between the whole and its parts as a metaphor for the very structure of reality.

Scott Olsen in The Golden Section: Nature’s Greatest Secret, Wooden Books, Somerset, 2006 p. 54 in discussing the enigma of the Indefinite Dyad (the uneven division of unity [the line]) notes Plato’s division as an intention to generate continuous geometric proportion between the whole (the line) and its parts (its subdivisions) by creating the Golden Cut or the ratio of the Golden...
Using the analogy of the divided line, Plato employs Socrates as the voice of his metaphysical formulations in *Republic VI* 509d-511e, for how we may come to understand the existence of the idea or form of the Good.\(^{73}\)

As a component within the reception framework of the intended audiences for Botticelli’s images, the use of number would have had particular significance for the wealthy merchant class of early Renaissance Florence due to the transactional culture

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See also, Plato, *Timaeus*, 31b-c & 32a p. 1163, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato Including the Letters*, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Bollingen Series LXXI, Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey, 1961, rpt., 2005. Plato specifies: “...And the fairest bond is that which makes the most complete fusion of itself and the things which it combines, and proportion is best adapted to effect such a union. For whenever in any three numbers, whether cube or square, there is a mean, which is to the last term what the first term is to it, and again, when the mean is to the first term as the last term is to the mean, - then the mean becoming first and last, and the first and last both becoming means, they will all of them of necessity come to be the same, and having come to be the same with one another will all be one.” This geometric self-reflective return to the One takes on considerable metaphysical significance based in the idea of number. Thus the use of geometry has powerful symbolic importance. Using sections AB as \(1/f\) and section BC as a value of 1 with section CD having the same value as BC (1) and section DE having a value of \(f\) determine that AC = \(f\) and DE = \(f\) such that CD = \(f\) squared and AC = \(f\) thus the entire line = \(f\) cubed (to the third power). The AB section is the relation of shadows to the totality of reality: BC is material things that are reflected in shadows: CD is mathematical reasoning while DE is philosophical understanding of intelligible ideas (Justice, Truth, Beauty).

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dependent upon quantifications for its prosperity. Michael Baxandall explains the cultural ambient for the reception of experiences modulated by a pervasive mathematical sensibility within 15th-century culture, and the use of proportion to solve problems, noting that:

“…fifteenth-century people became adept through daily practice in reducing the most diverse sort of information to a form of geometric proportion: A stands to B as C stands to D. For our purpose, the important thing is the identity of skill brought both to partnership or exchange problems and to the making and seeing of pictures. “74

Chastel discusses Ficino’s comments pertaining to the influential character of images as an ancillary component of the assessment of Orphic magic, which in essence, is a discussion pertaining to the power of art (in the instance of Orpheus, particularly music and poetry; however, pictures may easily be understood as a kind of poetry made visible, and certainly this was the center of the Renaissance discourse on the Paragone). 75

74 See, Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1972, pp. 96-97. The idea here is that Florentines were especially predisposed to perceiving information mathematically, and would have been sensitive to the geometric figures imbedded within Botticelli’s works and with their symbolic significance within a theoretical framework inspired by or infused with Neo-Platonist concepts. The Rule of Three was the means by which Florentines and other Italian merchants in particular were able to deal with the varying currencies, measures, and weights peculiar to individual cities, which generated considerable complexity in structuring exchange. The treatises on arithmetic of the period are devoted to application of the Rule of Three which stated according to Baxandall on p. 95, in an explanation taken from the painter Piero della Francesca, (document of original source not cited) that “…one has to multiply the thing one wants to know about by the thing that is dissimilar to it, and one divides the product by the remaining thing. And the number that comes from this is of the nature of that which is dissimilar to the first term; and the divisor is always similar to the thing which one wants to know about. For example: seven bracci of cloth are worth nine lire; how much will five bracci be worth? Do it as follows: multiply the quantity you want to know about by that quantity which seven bracci of cloth are worth – namely, nine. Five times nine makes forty-five. Divide by seven and the result is six and three sevenths. ”

75 Leonardo da Vinci offers in his *Treatise On Painting* his particular contributions to the intellectual discourse on the Paragone, or comparing differing modes of perceiving Beauty (Music, Poetry, Painting, or Sculpture) via imagination and imaging intended to direct the contemplative, intellectual soul toward a greater appreciation of God and of Unity. Leonardo
Chastel repeats Ficino’s comments regarding the dual character of the soul and the
tension inherent in the complexity of the soul’s yearning toward both intellect, or the
realm of ideas (ruled by the deity, Saturn/Chronos), and the poetic melancholia of
attraction to the world of materiality and “sensibles”, controlled by daemonic entities that
are invisible yet present (and under the control of Jove/Zeus), to which we have access
via science and through images. While Ficino often discusses the Platonic conception
of the image as merely instrumental; that is to say, images are a subordinate form of
the reflection of, or reminder of conceptual Truth. Real power and influence are ascribed to
images and figures on the basis of their material content, as influenced by the effects of
the stars upon the materials that may constitute the medium in which an image is made,

boasts of the supremacy of sight, however, music and voice (rhetoric) were other contenders for
supremacy in directing the soul toward fulfillment. Ficino vacillates between sound and sight
depending on the source used; for example in the Commentary on Love, responding to Plato,
Ficino notes sight as important in receiving the beauty of the soul of the beloved. However, in the
Three Books on Life, Ficino often defers to sound, voice and music as superior forms for
engaging the soul. For Leonardo’s commentary, see “The Making of an Artist: Leonardo On
Painting versus Poetry,” Italian Renaissance Learning Resources in Collaboration with the
National Gallery of Art, accessed on March 18, 2018:
http://www.italianrenaissanceresources.com/units/unit-3/sub-page-03/leonardo-on-painting-
versus-poetry/

76 See André Chastel, Marsile Ficin et l’Art: Ouvrage Publié Avec Le Concours du Centre
National de la Recherche Scientifique, Librairie R. Giard, Lille, 1954, p. 71 where Chastel echoes
the sentiments provided by Ficino in a letter to Jacopo Bracchiolini the son of Ficino’s friend, the
orator, Poggio Bracchiolini (the Bracchiolini letter is translated in The Letters of Marsilio Ficino,
translated from the Latin by members of the Language Department of the School of Economic
Science, London, Vol. I, preface by Paul Oskar Kristeller, Columbia University in the City of
New York, Shepheard-Walwyn Publishers, London, 1975, pp. 160 -161. See also Appendix D in
this study). Chastel notes:

L’Intelligence (Mens) est la puissance intermédiaire entre l’âme humaine et Dieu, que
symbolize Saturne: elle en acte dans les visions de l’ordre poétique; l’Ame (Anima) est
inversement la puissance intermédiaire entre les êtres invisibles mais présents, qui sont
les demons, liés aux astres, et nous entrons en contact avec ces forces par la science,
c’est-à-dire la magie. L’activité humaine va naturellement à la rencontre de ces deux
règnes; elle y circule grâce à certaines propriéties des images.
and thus the influential forces of the image may be traced to a scientific (or medicinal) capacity.\footnote{Ficino sought to remain publically somewhat equivocal regarding the likely influences of images although he clearly seems committed to the talismanic and evocative powers of images in connection with astral energy. See De vita libri tres: Three Books on Life: A Critical Edition and Translations with Introduction and Notes, 1489, translated by Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark, The Renaissance Society of America, Tempe Arizona, 2002 particularly pp. 333-343. Ficino cites Thomas Aquinas as “dux in theologia noster” (“out leader in theology) as being fearful of the practice of talismanic image engraving based in astrological influences, noting that daemonic forces may be at work in images. Ficino concludes by making a claim of placing his trust for influence in medicines (science) rather than in figures, with the caveat that if images have power, they do so via the materials of their composition and their process, not due to the fact of any given image \textit{per se}; this caution is necessary because “Praeter enim id quod inanes esse figuras suspicor, haud temere vel umbram idolatriae debemus acceptare” ….translated in Kaske and Clark as “For besides the fact that I suspect the figures to be useless, we ought not rashly allow even the shadow of idolatry.” This seems an attempt to deflect and pre-emptively evade the exigencies of any sustainable accusations of heresy.}

Hankins notes the importance of the quality of mutuality in love for the Platonic and Neo-Platonic systems which could be applied in the context of Christian theology as a moral invocation to “love one another”.\footnote{James Hankins “Marsilio Ficino,” Routeledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Routeledge, New York, 1998, p. 658.} This idea is reinforced by formal arrangements and the use of diverse compositional elements in the Columbia Nativity, Uffizi Adoration, Washington Adoration, and their thematic and iconographic correspondences with the series of images on purportedly pagan topics centered on the goddess of Love, Venus (and her cognates) discussed below. Indeed, this study proposes that the selected works, while not conceived as part of a single philosophical “programme” do in fact function as elements in an over-arching philosophical impetus intended to demonstrate a harmony between enlightened, pagan applications of reason, and the development of Christian love. In defense of this claim, the trajectory of the developing philosophical system as its arguments are shown in, or perhaps demonstrated
through painted images moves the viewers of these images through a process of discovery, which includes, the revelation of the Christ to the Jewish people in the first image cited here, *The Columbia Nativity*, with its inclusion of an “annunciation to the shepherds” and showing the Virgin, St. John the Baptist, and St. Joseph in adoration of the Christ child; to a second image in which the de’ Medici family is represented in the role of the Magi, the first, enlightened gentiles who become aware of the importance of the Holy Infant, beautifully realized in *The Uffizi Adoration*. The theme of the enlightened, even the pre-figurative pagan tradition is implied by *The Washington Adoration*, which suggests an anticipation in pagan religion of the dual-natured, divine/mortal being, through inclusion of allusions to the myth of Castor and Pollux and the sacrifice one divine brother proffers to his mortal sibling; and from these origins, examples of the impetus toward pre-Christian virtue and the belief in transformative encounters with divine beings in *The Primavera* will culminate through a consideration of the exemplifications of pagan virtue in the form of *Pallas/ Camilla and the Centaur*, which alludes to the supremacy of Love and Wisdom over War, with *Mars and Venus* (the strength of love over strife), and finally, the donation of Love to humanity in the *Aphrodite Ouranous*, more commonly referred to as *The Birth of Venus*. For Ficino, the elevation of the human soul through the employment of philosophical reasoning and the intuitive grace of divine love is seen as a single seamless aspirational journey of the soul in an intention toward returning to its source in divine love; this, for Ficino, is the purpose of the soul and the true goal of all philosophy. Arguments in support of these claims will be presented in the following pages.
III. Ficino’s Intellectual Circle & Artist Sandro Botticelli

Florentine artist, Alessandro di Mariano Filipepi (c. 1444-1510), better known by his more informal “nickname,” Sandro Botticelli, was a painter of exceptional cultural significance during the transitional period from the early to the high Renaissance. Botticelli’s beautiful images were among the earliest examples of the significant reintroduction of pagan theological iconography into post-Medieval works of art on a grand scale, and he is perhaps most famous for his compelling representation of the Birth of Venus (the birth of the pagan goddess of Love) a theme which would have exercised a powerful attraction for Ficino.\(^\text{79}\)

There is no shortage of instances demonstrating the persistent presence of Botticelli, a brilliant painter and creator of highly original, visual istoria, within Ficino’s circle of friends and patrons. As an example, Lorenzo de’ Medici, whose close association with Ficino, initially as a pupil, a friend and subsequently, also as an important patron, is well documented, and the humanist even included affectionate satirical references to Botticelli in his humorous literary works.\(^\text{80}\) This is important in that


\(^{80}\) See Umberto Baldini, *Primavera: The Restoration of Botticelli’s Masterpiece*, with essays by Ornella Casazza, Mauro Matteini, Guido Moggi, Arcangelo Moles, and Maurizio Seracini, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, New York, 1986 in the chapter on The Medici and Florentine Humanism, p. 30 where the satire pertaining to Botticelli is reproduced. The text provided by Baldini reads:

Botticel, la cui fama non è fosca,  
Botticel dico, Botticel ingordo
the jocular account of the painter as a friend who was welcomed to the banquets and activities of the Medici inner circle provides a context for conversation, exposure, and the possibility of a frequent, informal exchange of ideas, based solely on possible proximity, for the philosopher, Ficino and the visually “philosophizing” painter, Botticelli.81

Ch’è piú impronto e piú ingordo ch’una mosca
O di quante sue ciance mi ricordo!
S’egli è invita non lo dice a sordo.
Non s’apre allo invitare la bocca appena,
Che dal pappar la bocca sua non sogna;
Va Botticello e torna botte piena.

The poem may be roughly translated as: “Botticel (little barrel) whose fame is not obscured (not gloomy)
“little barrel” I say, “fat” little barrel
You, who are more persistent and more greedy than a fly:
Oh how many of your pranks do I recall!
If he’s invited, the invitation does not fall on deaf ears,
One’s mouth is not just opened in vain for the invitation,
One can hardly imagine (dream) how (to what extent) he’ll eat his fill (pack his mouth)
He comes the little “empty” barrel and returns fat and full!...”

The translated rendition above is my own interpretation, however in the Baldini text a translation is provided: “Botticelli, little barrel...Where do they get the “little” from? Cramming food and talking nonsense, Fat and full and quite at home; Here to luncheon, here to dinner, Never misses,...Never doubt, Here’s Botticelli on arrival, Whole hog rolling out “: this translation appears to have taken a good deal of poetic license in capturing a spirit if not the letter of the translation. A very different translated version of the same passage with the rest of the poem) is given in Guido Guarino’s, The Complete Literary Works of Lorenzo de’Medici, Italica Press, New York, 2016, see p. 307 beginning with line 58 and the pertinent section referred to above translates through line 66. The Guarino translation reads: “I do mean Botticel, whose fame is bright; Yes Botticel, the hungriest one around, Hungrier and more persistent than a fly. How many of his tricks do I remember. If one does him invite to lunch or supper, He will not speak in vain, or to deaf ears. Barely can one pronounce the word “invite”, That he is dreaming how his mouth he’ll fill. Empty he goes, but then returns well filled. “

The salient feature in the varying versions here is the difficulty of translating a 15th-century comic poem into comprehensible modern English. But most importantly we do understand the idea that Botticelli appears to have been a bon vivant, a joker and prankster and a healthy eater.

81 See Umberto Baldini, Primavera: The Restoration of Botticelli’s Masterpiece, with essays by Ornella Casazza, Mauro Matteini, Guido Moggi, Arcangelo Moles, and Maurizio Seracini, Harry
Botticelli was instrumental in the revitalization of interest in the classical and overtly pagan themes stemming from ancient literature. Perhaps the most important pupil of Fra Filippo Lippi, Botticelli was an integral contributor to the highly educated group of antiquarians many of whom were supported in part by the patronage of the Medici family. Botticelli communicated extensively with Ficino, and other Neo-Platonist scholars, including Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, and Angelo Poliziano (Angelo Ambrogini), employing concepts in his works which were formally somewhat medievalizing, portraying a gothic gracefulness which utilized an idealized aesthetic approach interpolated from Platonic ideology. Possibly more than other artists of his era, Botticelli envisioned an approach to artistic representations of form that cogently expressed the intellectual ideas and ideals of the Ficino/Medici reinterpretation of a model of exchange based on interpretations of a concept of the Platonic Academy (modified by Christian religious syntheses) intended to achieve a universalized, transcendent expressiveness.

The early works by Botticelli most heavily influenced by pagan literature and ideas were repudiated by him later in his career, when, perhaps in partially mystical response to the horrors of the Black Plague, he fell under the compelling (if somewhat

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82 Botticelli was sufficiently important to have been mentioned in Leonardo da Vinci’s Trattato della pittura (1651; A Treatise on Painting, 1721).
stifling) influence of fire and brimstone cleric, Girolamo da Savonarola.\(^83\) Savonarola’s fiery preaching may have propelled Botticelli into destroying some evidence of the secular, pagan influences in his works, reverting solely to devotional images, and employing strictly Christian religious themes. Although his secular works demonstrate the most obvious iconographic references to ancient Platonic and Neo-Platonic influences, there is clear evidence of an intriguing conflation of Christian themes with the mythology and theology of antiquity. His works combine the complex conflicts and harmonies to be found between sensual, pagan ideals, a vision of material or sensual beauty, and the Platonist/Christian integration of an immaterialist, ideal of reference to a heavenly, beatific vision of intelligible beauty\(^84\). Although Botticelli’s religious imagery incorporates aspects of the artificial character of medieval aesthetic responses to the representation of form, his works represent elevated and harmonic attitudes toward representations of beauty. Botticelli also builds upon the medieval interweaving of ethics and religion in represented imagery such that form transmits ideological content. As part and parcel of his Ficino-inspired conception of beauty, Botticelli took the liberty of

\(^{83}\) See Steven Kreis “Girolamo Savonarola” *The History Guide, Lectures in Modern European Intellectual History*, http://www.historyguide.org/intellect/savonarola.html, 2004, for a brief, synoptic overview of the unusual career of the Dominican monk who, born in 1452, was ultimately burned in 1498 for his alleged claims to have prophetic visions and for what came to be considered by the Church as seditious religious practices. Savonarola is particularly remembered for his “bonfires of the vanities” at which adherents to his compelling preaching would come, throwing their jewelry, finery, books, and anything deemed a “vanity” upon an open fire; this included a number of works by Botticelli destroyed in compliance with the monk’s zeal for evading any compromise with worldliness and sin. See http://www.casasantapia.com/art/sandrobotticelli/ sistenechapel.htm, note 2, paragraph four, indicating that Botticelli burned his works in the “bonfires of the vanities”. See also note 129 below.

\(^{84}\) See Botticelli’s three Venuses, *Venus and Mars, The Birth of Venus*, and *The Primavera (or Allegory of Spring)*, which, along with his *Pallas*, may not merely symbolize pagan dieties, but may also allude to private events in the lives of the Medici family.
consciously manipulating space and perspective using form instrumentally as much more than a representation of nature.

Through the conduit of Ficino to Botticelli, the Plotinian-post-Hellenic influences of the Renaissance infiltrated and were thoroughly integrated within the depths of Western artistic praxis, providing a rich and durable legacy. Among the earliest Renaissance artists to offer significant innovation to the traditions of the West, Botticelli should be recognized for his role in precipitating the wide dissemination of pagan imagery and iconography in post-Medieval art, culminating in the crystallization of a new form of visual expression, integrating the traditions of the ancient pagan past, with contemporaneous religious imagery. This new, syncretism became the foundation of a transformative component of the revitalized Western representational tradition.

The intellectual association of Ficino with the artist as a significant influence, working as a kind of librettist or theorist in devising imagery for painted works by Botticelli (particularly for diverse Medici projects), is well established.\textsuperscript{85} Botticelli is especially known for having collaborated with Ficino on his famous \textit{La Primavera}, and it is certainly reasonable to consider that for early religious allegories Botticelli may have sought Ficino’s suggestions and advice since Ficino had become a priest in 1473 and was

\textsuperscript{85} See Frederick Hartt, \textit{The History of Italian Renaissance Art}, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, Harry Abrams, New York, 1983, pp. 330-346 (including an image by Botticelli on a theme featuring the ancient painter Apelles) for an extended discussion of Ficino’s role in devising allegorical themes for Botticelli works commissioned by the Medici family, and for Hartt’s discussion of other noted scholars, such as E. H. Gombrich’s suggestions concerning the significations of and neo-Platonic emphases in Botticelli’s and the \textit{fratelli} Pollaiuoli (Antonio and Piero) images in particular. Specific mention is also made in the introduction to \textit{The Letters of Marsilio Ficino}, op. cit., pp. 19 and 20 of the association between Ficino and Botticelli.
eventually made a Canon of Florence of the famous Duomo, or Florence Cathedral.\textsuperscript{86} The Columbia Nativity is a work placed relatively early in Botticelli’s career, just as he would have been approaching the peak of his creative powers at a bit past the age of 30.\textsuperscript{87} Indeed, the Columbia painting seems to anticipate certain stylistic developments, a concern with grace and refined line, a restrained and thoughtfully proportioned presentation, and a predisposition to highlight use of geometric perspective in religious scenes of the Nativity, qualities that characterize several more famous Botticelli works.\textsuperscript{88}

Arguments for Ficino’s association with Botticelli prior to the period of the 1480s seem to be based almost entirely upon circumstantial evidence. Thus, while these circumstances will be cited here as possible, or, even likely opportunities for some form of exchange between these two important Renaissance figures, it is not feasible to offer any ostensive proof (in the form of specific documents exchanged between our two principals) of their early contact other than citation of a shared group of acquaintances in a comparatively small, Renaissance community in Florence which permitted both proximity and opportunity.\textsuperscript{89} Botticelli’s interest in philosophical works may be

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\item \textsuperscript{86} See \textit{The Letters of Marsilio Ficino: Translated from the Latin by Members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, London}, preface by Öskar Kristeller, p. 20.
\item \textsuperscript{87} Botticelli’s Columbia Nativity is dated by Charles Mack as having been painted between 1473 - 1475, p. 91 in the Columbia Museum’s catalogue of \textit{European Art in the Columbia Museum of Art}, University of South Carolina Press, 2009.
\item \textsuperscript{88} See and compare for example the later representation of the Nativity in the collection of the National Gallery in Washington as well as the beautiful work, also later than the Columbia image, in the collection of the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. Both later images use the geometric harmonies of linear perspective to place the figure of Christ at the center of the painted world and make additional inferences consistent with neo-Platonist metaphysical intellectual alliances.
\item \textsuperscript{89} See Appendix B of this study, which provides Ficino’s correspondence with Naldo Naldi and Antonio Vespucci, Botticelli’s neighbor. The presence of Botticelli in the circle of Medici
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supported by his own witty remarks implying a respect for the importance of both discretion and intelligence.\textsuperscript{90} It is even possible, if perhaps unlikely, that Botticelli was a student of Greek, although he produced an extensive prophetic Greek inscription (described by Silvia Malaguzzi as “Sybilline”) in his early 16\textsuperscript{th} century painting, the \textit{Mystical Nativity} of c.1501 (The National Gallery, London), an image made during the period when he was heavily influenced by the preaching of Girolamo da Savonarola.\textsuperscript{91}

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\textsuperscript{90} See Ronald Lightbown, \textit{Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work}, University of California, Berkeley, vol I, 1978, pp. 128 with a reproduction of the content of Botticelli’s written document on p. 158 for the letter cited from Magliabechiano in which Botticelli notes, per Lightbown’s description, that the artist curtly responded to a man who in “the magniloquent language of ancient poetry said to him [Botticelli] several times in conversations that he wished for a hundred tongues, Sandro retorted: ‘You ask for many tongues, and already have half more than you need: ask for a brain, poor man, for you have none’”. The transcription of Botticelli’s note: “Et auno che piu volte nel ragionare secho gli haveva detto che harebbe volute cento lingue gli rispose, tu chiedj piu lingue, et hane le meta piu che il bisogno, chiedj cervello poveretto, che non haj niente.”

\textsuperscript{91} A translation of the inscription reads: “This picture, at the end of the year 1500, in the troubles of Italy, I Alessandro painted. In the half time after the time, during the fulfilment of the eleventh chapter of St. John in the second woe of the apocalypse”; or another version taken from the National Gallery of London’s weblink to the image of the \textit{Mystic Nativity} reads: “This picture, at the end of the year 1500, in the troubles of Italy, I Alessandro, in the half-time after the time, painted, according to the eleventh [chapter] of Saint John, in the second [sorrow] woe of the Apocalypse, during the release of the devil for three-and-a-half years[when the devil was freed for three and a half years?]; then he shall be bound [enchained, according to] in the twelfth [chapter] [of John’s Revelation?] and we shall see [him buried] or [fallen] ? as in this picture”… A recent episode of a BBC series, “The Private Life of a Masterpiece,” highlighted a discovery by SU Florence (Syracuse University in Florence), professor Rab Hatfield, who found the key to some cryptic details hiding a dangerous message in Botticelli’s “The Mystic Nativity.” See http://www.syr.edu/news/articles/2010/botticelli-mystic-nativity-02-10.html. However, Frances Ames-Lewis in \textit{The Intellectual Life of the Early Renaissance Artist}, Yale University Press, pp. 22-23, suggests that the unusually long Greek inscription no matter how comparatively learned Botticelli could have been in comparison with other artists of the early Renaissance, appears to have been written out by a native Greek speaker or a scholar, and then copied by the artist without any understanding of its actual content. See also Silvia Malaguzzi, \textit{Botticelli}, Giunti Editore, Firenze Musei, 2004, p. 115.
While many of the connections between the philosopher and the artist seem oblique, or at best, indirect, a conspiracy of circumstantial evidence weaves a highly plausible narrative for the possibility, even the likelihood of their having a far more extensive interaction than is made evident by surviving documents. For example, Ficino’s frequent correspondence to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici, Botticelli’s patron, offers at least one particular example that clearly refers to themes envisioned in Botticelli’s works. Moreover, Ficino was in frequent correspondence with Botticelli’s neighbor, Giorgio Antonio Vespucci and his family, who were business partners of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici and the three, Vespucci, de’ Medici and Ficino, exchanged letters over a lifetime mutual friendship. Finally, there is at least one documented example of Ficino providing a philosophical programme or concetto for a commissioned work of art, specifically a wall painting on allegorical themes installed in his own gymnasium at Villa Carreggi in which the philosophers, Democritus and Heraclitus, were depicted interpreting opposing views of reality. This active support of the visual arts, the small

92 See Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, p. 41, provides a translation of Ficino’s letter of 1477-1478 (copied in Appendix A of this study) written during the period generally accepted as the period of Botticelli’s creation of the *Primavera*.

93 Ibid., pp. 64-66 Gombrich documents the extent of the relationships between Ficino, the Vespucci, Botticelli and his patron, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici. See also p. 214 and notes 116-118 of Gombrich’s text.

94 Ibid., pp. 77-78, for reference to a letter from Ficino’s *Epistolarium* in which he discusses a painting, which Gombrich speculates could perhaps have been by Botticelli (the creator of the art image is not mentioned in the letter), but its allegorical theme is certainly in keeping with the types of secular works that were being executed by Botticelli in a mundus novo of large scale secular art with powerful intellectual, philosophical and spiritual implications. This testament to Ficino’s own patronage of the visual arts is important and is tied by Gombrich to Ficino’s discussion on diverse aspects of causes and effects pertaining to the theme of Apelles painting a field of flowers. It is interesting that Botticelli later elects to represent a theme taken up by Apelles (considered one of the greatest Greek painters from antiquity, on the theme of *The Calumny of Apelles* (Florence, Uffizi Gallery), of c. 1495. Ficino specifically refers to the Pre-Socratic philosophers, Democritus and Heraclitus, in his opening arguments of the *Platonic*
circle of intimately involved friends and acquaintances all point to a likely frequent, socially driven interrelationship for Ficino with Botticelli in particular among the other noted artists of the Renaissance who would have been in the circle of talented Florentines under the patronage of the Medici family, and who would have been attracted to the Ficinian reinterpretation of classical texts.95

Speculations on Botticelli’s intellectual proclivities and receptivity to Ficinian philosophical concepts is discussed extensively in the literature concerning various works by this artist, but perhaps, such discussions have been most closely associated with the iconography of his mythological images, some of which are included in this study. Liana Cheney correctly indicates that much of the speculation concerning Botticelli’s adroitness with regard to the philosophical content of his pictures cannot be confirmed from documents by his hand.96 However, the intricacy of Botticelli’s ideas and scholarly allusions is manifest (perhaps as it should be) primarily through the complexity of his iconographic imagery. Mary Quinlan McGrath has, however, indicated that one of the most powerful demonstrations of philosophical associations with images by Botticelli is in his commission of an image of Saint Augustine of c. 1480, in the Church of the Theology (see Ficino, translated by Micheal Allen, pp. 14-18. Ficino criticizes the limitation of the Democriteans, Cyrenaics, and Epicureans solely to the mass of what Ficino considers to be essentially inert bodies and he praises the commitments of Heraclitus, Marcus Varro and Marcus Manilius for admitting the existence of a “higher sort of form” than the mere material with its seat in the rational soul.

95 The importance of Ficino’s ideas for other Florentine artists including Leonardo, who had worked with Botticelli in the studio of Andrea del Verrochio, and Michelangelo, who asked Botticelli to serve as a go-between when Michelangelo was in Rome and Botticelli was leaving Rome to return to Florence. (citation in Lightbown letters)

Ognissanti, thought to be for his neighbor, Giorgio Antonio Vespucci, Marsilio Ficino’s intimate associate.\textsuperscript{97} The painting is in fact an argument for the primacy of vision in providing a foundation for awareness, study, and understanding, allowing the forming (or possibly the re-forming?) of the soul in preparation for its return to its source.\textsuperscript{98}

Charles Dempsey cites various sources thought by scholars to inform the complex network of significations associated with Botticelli’s \textit{Primavera} in particular, while offering insight into the multivalent allusions common to the literature and discourse of the circle of patrons and associates shared by Ficino and Botticelli in general.\textsuperscript{99} In

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\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., McGrath describes Botticelli’s representation of St. Augustine as “transfixed” while staring at an armillary sphere, described in Ficino’s \textit{De Vita}, 3.19. noting that “Golden rays of light flow through the sphere and enter the eyes of the saint, who is surrounded by time-keeping instruments and texts illustrating “Number and…the notion of Time but also the means of research into the nature of the Universe.” As Plato had written, the chief reason why the Creator gave people eyes was for the benefit of study aimed at understanding. The person sees and, after study, comes to understand the great cosmic order.” Quinlan notes in her text (p. 211, note 41), that Ficino dedicated the first book of the \textit{De Vita} to Giorgio Antonio Vespucci, who was the uncle of Amerigo Vespucci the explorer, and who was also his nephew’s tutor. Interesting arguments are made by Michael Allen, based upon Ficino’s discussion in the \textit{Sophist Commentary}, Epilogue, pp. 207-208, and taken from arguments also offered in the the \textit{Platonic Theology} , that pertain to the possibility of the icastic rather than the phantastic character of the work of the painter. Of importance is Allen’s notation that Ficino acknowledges the activity of demonstration as superior to mere dialectic, as is exemplified in Plato’s \textit{Parmenides}, citing the Ficino quote:

“Divisivam [artem] quidem et diffinitiviam in \textit{Philebo et Politico atque Sophiste}, demostrativam in Parmenide similiter copulat cum divinv.” This superiority rests in the power of demonstration to lead the spectator directly to the Ideas in Mind itself. From this we could extrapolate that an image, which shows or demonstrates the relationships between ideas, allowing easy access to intuitied knowledge, in the service of understanding, plays a crucial role in philosophical reasoning.

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agreement with the fundamental identifications of *persona* by scholar Aby Warburg for the *Primavera*, and concurring with Warburg’s identification of textual sources, Dempsey cites contemporaneous author, Angelo Poliziano, and his work, *Sylvae* as well as his poem, *Stanzetta per la giostra*, in tandem with the fifth book of philosopher Lucretius’ science poem, *De rerum natura*, Book V of Ovid’s *Fasti*, Book I of the *Carmina* of Horace, and the essay by Roman philosopher, Seneca entitled *De beneficis*, as the principal, combined sources for the imagery and ideas demonstrated in the Botticelli *Primavera*.100 Dempsey argues that Botticelli’s narrative invention, or *favola*, is in accord with the concept of “painting as poetry” advocated by Leon Battista Alberti in *De pictura*; and it is Alberti who suggests that painters, orators, and poets have in common the need for inventiveness as an occupational requirement.101 Dempsey points out that the *Primavera* does not literally illustrate any ancient or contemporaneous text, but rather belongs to the genre of paintings known as *poesie*, a type of image generated by the

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100 Ibid., see pp.24-36ff.

101 Ibid., see pp. 29-30. Dempsey quotes extensively from Alberti’s text noting:

I want the painter, so far as he is able, to be learned in all the Liberal Arts, but especially in geometry…Next, it will be of advantage if [painters] take pleasure in poets and orators, for these have many ornaments in common with the painter. Literary men, who are full of information about many subjects, will be of great help in preparing the composition of a representation, and the great virtue of this consists primarily in its invention…..I therefore advise the studious painter to make himself familiar with poets and orators and other men of letters, for he will not only obtain excellent ornaments from such learned minds, but he will also be assisted in those very inventions which in painting may gain him the greatest praise”

This passage is cited by Dempsey as taken from L. B. Alberti, *De pictura*, p. 53ff in L. B. Alberti, *On Painting and On Sculpture: The Latin Texts of De Pictura and De Statua*, ed. C. Grayson, London, 1972, pp. 95f. The use of the term *favola* noted on p. 27 of Dempsey’s text is cited as signifying paintings or poetry with “mythic subject matter in the Renaissance..”.

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artists own independent mythological invention. This attribute of inventiveness, which accrues to the well-trained painter, established as part of the appropriate methodology for the creation of images of originality by Alberti, requires familiarity with literature and familiarity with the classical *trivium*, citing the Renaissance acceptance of painting as a liberal art, predicated upon Alberti’s precepts with *poesia* as a component arising from “grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic”. Dempsey offers a philosophical role for Botticelli’s works within a larger conceptual, epistemological structure, based in the paradoxical discovery of objective truth via subjective, individual experience as discussed by Poliziano in the *Panepistemon*. Dempsey suggests that for Poliziano, grammar and rhetoric preceded logic in linguistic inquiry, and that the inquiry into letters rests in neither the contemplative nor the active intellects, rather in the Aristotelian deliberative intellect, the repository of rational power, which is embodied by dialectic, or the “concept of humanist dialectic (mythos) set at war with the philosophical dialectic (logos) of the

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102 Ibid., see p.27ff.

103 Ibid., see pp. 25-28, and particularly the citation of painter, Jacopo de’Barbari’s letter of 1501, explaining the definition of *poesia* on p. 27 in note 21:

“Oltra di questo necessita la poesia per la invention de le hopere, la quale nase da gramatica e retorica ancor dialetica. E de istorie convien essere pitori copiosi.”


Schoolmen.\textsuperscript{105}

While we cannot know with precision without testimony or documentation exactly which texts or what versions of those texts Botticelli himself may have read, contrasted with what has been integrated within his works due to the visual evidence of his conversations or exchanges of ideas with scholars and associates, it is clear from the demonstrations of a free, interpretive familiarity with texts, that Botticelli was an individual of considerable intellectual curiosity and inventiveness. Thus his body of images, mythological and religious, are not necessarily slavish illustrations by any means, but, instead, form amplifications, and informed interpretations of the texts to which he so frequently refers.

Demsey provides a contextual rationale for Botticelli’s intellectualism and inventiveness in his work on the shifting emphasis of Renaissance humanism, entitled, 

\textit{The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli’s Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent}.\textsuperscript{106} Quoting in the first chapter of his text from Alberti’s invocation to young artists in his \textit{De Pictura}, Dempsey notes Alberti’s emphasis upon knowledge of geometry, and the need for painters to be aware of the works of poets and orators.\textsuperscript{107} Alberti discusses the importance of “invention”, meaning by this perhaps the idea of originality in devising an \textit{istoria} or a “narrative invention”, and Dempsey cites

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., see pp.26. Dempsey ties the idea of \textit{mythos} with \textit{fabula/ favola}..narrative or the organizing power of human imagination and the foundation for the relation between painting and poetry as “sister” arts both of which allow for an “imaginative process of discovery”. See p. 27, ibid.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., see p. 29, note 24.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.,, see p. 29.
Alberti’s dependence upon the Byzantine rhetoricians, from whom the derivation of this particular application of the term “ιστορία” to the art of painting, originates, as he notes. The power in this citation is substantiated by Dempsey’s noting of Alberti’s description of Lucian’s *Calumny of Apelles*, a subject later specifically treated by Botticelli, followed by Alberti’s allusion to another subject developed by Botticelli for the *Primavera*, which includes three female figures often accepted as representations of the Three Graces.

Dempsey touches upon the conflations of identity in the symbolic representations in poetic works of lovers using various instances of this practice, including the example of Lorenzo de’Medici’s own love poetry. The diverse individuals presented as

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108 Ibid., see p. 29, note 24.

109 Ibid., see p. 29, and note 24. The identification of the three female figures as the Three Graces is contested by Rab Hatfield in his article, “Some Misidentifications in and of Works by Botticelli,” in *Sandro Botticelli and Herbert Horne: New Research*, edited by Rab Hatfield, Syracuse University in Florence, Florence, Italy, 2009, pp. 18ff, where the figures are identified as the Hours, citing philological arguments based in the Platonist poet, Poliziano’s interpretation of Ovid’s *Fasti* as the likely “source” for the Botticelli painting. Botticelli’s *invenzione* however, may entail multiple sources and while certainly Hatfield is correct in his arguments, I suspect that while Botticelli has been influenced without question by Poliziano’s work, the painter’s intentional employment of multiple sources is itself a meaningful amplification of the painting’s inventive istoria, and this idea is discussed further in Chapter IV, where the *Primavera* is discussed more extensively, beginning on page 177ff., below. Botticelli painted the ekphrastic *Calumny of Apelles*, based on Lucian’s description of the lost painting by the famous ancient Greek painter, Apelles in or around 1494-1495; it is thus much later (by approximately ten years) than the latest of the images discussed in this study of the transition from religious, mystical, and somewhat Medieval themes of the religious images to more secular and humanist Renaissance themes in Botticelli’s works.

110 Ibid., in particular Dempsey’s discussion in the chapter dedicated to “Poetry as Historical Fiction: Lorenzo de’ Medici, Simonetta Cattaneo, and Lucrezia Donati,” pp. 114-139, and how these identities may have been conflated with Semiramis Appiano (Simonetta’s niece and the betrothed of Lorenzo di PierFrancesco de’ Medici) and representing an allusion to the couple’s wedding held in 1482.
embodiments of differing aspects of Love…or personifications of the goddess of Love, ranging from Albiera degli Albizzi, to Simonetta Cataneo, and/or Lucrezia Donati, all cited by Lorenzo as differing guises of the venereal goddess, providing a model for the sophistical conflations of identity which themselves serve as demonstrations of Love’s variable iterations and aspects, whether manifested as a divine spiritual experience, or understood as the material connective power which replenishes life itself, and the living things that exist in material reality.111

Dempsey’s carefully reasoned and well documented philological assessments of the possible meanings of Botticelli’s Primavera and its relationship to Ficino’s ideas, and the ideas of his followers, Poliziano and Pico della Mirandola, suggest that for the intricate interpretive Neo-Platonist framework within which Botticelli was operating, that for the circle of Lorenzo de’Medici, within which intellectual enclave Botticelli and

111 For Plato’s discussion in the Symposium (taken from the speech of Pausanias) on the dual character of love, see Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, editors, Plato: The Collected Dialogues –Including Letters, Bollingen Series LXXI, Princeton University Press, 1989, pp. 534-539. In lines 180d – 185b, Pausanias gives an overview of the differences between the older divine Venus/ Aphrodite Ouranos, or Uranian Venus, born from a tragic act rather than generated by sexual means, and her younger, earthly iteration, the Venus genetrix/Aphrodite Pandemos, generated from the union of Zeus and Dione. The love of philosophy, wisdom, and ideas stems from the former, the love of bodies, sensual love, and sexual love, stem from the latter, who governs “vulgar” passion. Ficino comments upon the dual character of Venus and of love and upon Venus as both a spiritual being and as the material genetrix. The heavenly Venus is the embodiment and capacity of and for intelligence, and is also associated with or perhaps even conflated with the goddess, Minerva by Ficino, who shows parallels between Aphrodite Ouranos and Minerva, goddess of Wisdom in his essay on “Five Questions Concerning the Mind” found in Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr., The Renaissance Philosophy of Man, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1956, pp. 193-194, and in Ficino’s commentary on Plato’s Philebus, see Ficino, Marsilio, The Philebus Commentary, a critical edition and translation by Michael J. B. Allen, Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1975, Chapter 11, pp. 136-141. See also, Marsilio Ficino, Commentary on Plato’s Symposium on Love, Speech VI, Chapter 7, translated by Sears Jane, Dallas, Spring Publications, 1985, p. 118.
Ficino are acknowledged to function, that “meaning” was indicated by means of an elaborate colloquy of interrelated signifiers and artistic conversations. This highly faceted, shifting, interactive formulation of “meaning” suggests that the Botticelli paintings, rather than being in any sense, mere illustrations, are instead powerful demonstrations of philosophical interpretations of Truth, which may be quite paradoxical, in that, a truth may be both particular and, thus specific, while also being general and universal. This rather complicated, relational idea of Truth (and Beauty, and Goodness) shows, by using simultaneity of significations, that what is being experienced may function on multiple levels at once, thus Venus may signify love in triumph over strife, while also indicating intellect in triumph over ignorance, or reason surmounting chaos and calamity.\footnote{See the discussion of Mars and Venus offered by Ernst H. Gombrich, Symbolic Images: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance, II, Phaidon Press, E. P. Dutton, New York, 1978, see pp. 66-69 and the related themes of intellect in triumph in the discussion of Pallas and the Centaur on pp. 69-72.; See also the highly relevant translation of Ficino’s essay, “Five Questions Concerning the Mind” found in Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr., The Renaissance Philosophy of Man, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1956, pp. 193-194.} Moreover, Dempsey notes Lorenzo de’ Medici’s own explanation for the use of multiple iterations of love simultaneously as a representation of the philosophical idea that the “corruption of one thing is the creation of another.”\footnote{See Charles Dempsey, The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli’s Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent, Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 127, where Dempsey cites Lorenzo de’ Medici’s, Comento sopra alcuni de’ suoi sonetti, pp. 347ff, in which Lorenzo employs inversions of identity taking an example which in a complex colloquy of meaning, employs the poetry of Angelo Poliziano’s Stanze on the legendary love supposedly kindled between Lorenzo’s brother, Guiliano and the noted beauty, Simonetta Cattaneo, the wife of Marco Vespucci, who is assumed to be the inspirational ideal for several female figures represented by Botticelli, including representations of the goddess Venus. Lorenzo’s idea is to show how one instance of seduction by the powers of Venus may be used to represent her inspiration of affection in other instances. Dempsey explains that one instance of Venus prepares the way for others (see pp. 124-130).} The concept of generation from degeneration, a form of birth being generated by or through
death, offered by Lorenzo is attributed as originating from Ficino’s *Platonic Theology*, Book 4, by Guido Guarino.\(^{114}\)

Despite the multi-layered complexity of Allen’s argument for the possibility of an icastic interpretation of the painter’s art, it seems that the painter may be confined to solely phantastic representations. This suggestion is based upon supposing the assumption of an ontological existence for the idea of the imitation of the Form of an object (X), as translated into a painted image, which is in fact the painter’s own representation of his or her idea of the Idea of a Form, which is translated into an image, and is thus on equal footing with the work of sculptors or architects and furniture makers (in contrast with Plato’s own apparent condemnation of the painter as an artist who is a particular kind of “deceiver”. If the painter is confined solely phantastic representations, the reason for this constraint may be subsumed within the character of the tools of illusionism in the simulation of a reality which the painter must use, unlike a sculptor who is capable of imitating in three dimensions the precise proportions of an object (X),

\(^{114}\) See Guido Guarino, *The Complete Literary Works of Lorenzo de’Medici*, Italica Press, 2015, p. 90. The Guarino translation also cites Ficino’s *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium On Love* translated by Sears Jayne, Spring Publications, Dallas Texas, 1985, particularly Speech II, Chapter 8, pp. 54-57, in which the bitter-sweet, oppositional character of love, grounded in death (in fact a metaphor for “change”) is discussed. The idea of change and of one entity’s transition giving metaphorical “birth” to another, new entity is crucial for the contextual and colloquial idea of meaning that the images by Botticelli exemplify and demonstrate for the philosophical Neo-Platonist system posited by Ficino in response to his interpretations of thinkers such as Hermes Trismegistus, Plato, Plotinus, and Pythagoras. Ficino in *Book IV* of the *Platonic Theology*, English translation by Michael J.B. Allen with John Walden, and Latin text edited by James Hankins with William Bowen, The I Tatti Renaissance Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., vol. I, 2001, pp. 250 and 251 note the idea of life generated from decay and putrefaction: “Quapropter herbae animantesque quae sola putrefaction nasci videntur in terra, non minus a propriis causis oriri debent quam propagatione nascuntur.” This text has been translated by Michael Allen and John Warden as “Therefore plants and living things, which appear to come to birth only as the result of putrefaction, must arise from their own causes no less than things born from propagation.” This theme is continued in the chapter.
and thus a direct simulation of the earthly model may be taken from the divine Form. While it is true that the act of representing an idea of a Form, \( X \), allows the painter to remain one level of abstraction above the sculptor in imitating the non-material conceptual realm, it remains the case that the painter must, even in the two-dimensional representation, distort the image in the mind in order to render it visible, using the tricks of perspective illusion rather than being capable of showing actual Truth. Thus, while the image in the mind of the painter may be closer to the true Form of \( X \), the actuality of the representation must distort \( X \) in order to be shown as if real. This interesting paradox of greater abstraction with simultaneous increased distortion indicated the limitations of any material representation of conceptual or intelligible truth and is a means of pointing the spectator of the work and the artist toward the true beauty of the adequate idea as compared with its inevitably inadequate representation. A viewer, educated in the complexities of Neo-Platonist paradigms would be able to understand this value of art as a deception which in fact points the individual who contemplates the image appropriately, toward conceptual truth and a more correct intellectual Beauty of which the representation is a third level shadow, and yet a reminder of what is more “real.”

The painter is then, a true Sophist, and an imitator of the philosopher, who is in his or her turn, a sophistic imitator of the generative demi-urgos. Each level of removal from an ultimate formal reality also points to its generative source and thus, points backward (or upward in an ascending hierarchy of being) toward Truth. This cyclical return to the source renders painting an important tool, which functions through implicature, within the arsenal of Ficinian mechanisms understood as having the power to
turn the soul toward contemplation of ideas, and thus, toward the possibility of its own improvement. Thus, while paintings are at a greater level of abstraction than the representation of ideas in three-dimensional objects, the painter’s art is fundamentally illusionistic, and, therefore, based in sophistical deception. However, this deception points its perceiver toward a conceptual ideal, and the image in the mind of the perceiver, provided the perceiver’s imagination is sufficiently powerful, could and would engage with the rational soul with the ideal already posited there. In other words, as a perceiver, if in my imagination of the conceptual Form of X, I am closer to an approximation of that ideal, the the painting, which points me toward my own inner image is indeed a boon to striving toward Truth.

Based upon this rather convoluted process, a justification of the contemplation of paintings that offer proper themes with which the soul ought to be concerned (ideas above the level of the *logoi* such as Truth, Justice, Love, Beauty, Courage, Virtue, and etc.), would make the activity of contemplating images as a means of engaging the soul with the ideas represented through those images, an important component within Ficinian Neo-Platonist metaphysics. This justification, is however mitigated by the connection between the influence of the painted image, and the activity of light daemons, which would have to be down-played due to the contemporaneous fear of the possibility of the working of daemons within physical images.  

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115 See Mary McGrath, *Influences, Art, Optics, and Astrology in the Italian Renaissance*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2013, and for a discussion from Chapters 7 & 8 of her book, particularly pp. 120-165 which analyzes the “Hidden Power of Images” and the theme of “Look, Reflect, Be Changed”. The threat of idolatry was a significant concern for Ficino in the claims made in his *De Vita*, or *Three Books of Life*, (op. cit), where much of the discourse pertaining to daemonology and magic and the talismanic importance of images is provided. So
Kristeller’s well-organized account seeks to provide a coherent organizational form for the intuitive structure of Ficino’s *oeuvre* motivated by immediate insights and insights undertaken by Ficino making his “occult” system more accessible to the contemporary reader. Most important is Kristeller’s evaluation of Ficinian ontology and the causal coherence of the Renaissance innovations to NeoPlatonic infrastructure in an attempt to reconcile the post-Thomist account of Aristotelianism with the Christianized reconfiguration of post-Augustinian Neoplatonism. This shift of power leading from the Medieval sensibility to the burgeoning modernism of the Renaissance is an important component of this study. While the project to reconcile the disparate character of the Aristotelian aesthetic, entrenched in particulars, with the aesthetics of the Platonists based in participation in extra-mental universal forms, is synthesized within a concept of the *primum in aliquo genere*, this solution seems an insoluble choice. Ficino attempts to reconciles the disparity of participation in abstract forms with an appeal to the Albertian mixture of particulars of numerical harmony, combined with participation in universalized concepts of the “beautiful”; these are the elements synthesized within a concept of the *primum in aliquo genere* (the first thing of its kind which embodies the qualities in which the further representations of each example of a thing of its kind will also participate).\(^\text{116}\)

\(^\text{116}\) See Paul Oskar Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, Columbi University Press, New York, 1948, pp. 146-170; The philosophical complications of Ficino’s *primum* concept are
The themes of beauty for ideas with such radically differing ontologies are unlikely to find an adequate mutually harmonious point of conciliation as a result of the fundamental character of their differences. For Aristotle, beauty is a quality resulting from a tangible harmony among particulars, while Plato understands beauty as an independent existing conceptual form providing a model in which its exemplifications participate in a direct communication; the *primum in aliquo genere*, as an ideal without being an Idea, an ideal that is not necessarily thought, but may be tangible, seems an inadequate solution to the challenges of this problem.

What is being cited here is a claim for the existence of a pattern of correspondence between the chronology of the works by Sandro Botticelli and the theoretical and philosophical complexity of their respective messages corresponding with the developing works of Marsilio Ficino’s philosophical system in a parallel and synchronous, even if imperfect, chronology. This idea is being presented as a demonstration of how the Love relation of “desire seeking after Beauty” as described by in part due to its shifting character. The *primum* example is both a universal within itself and a particular example of the kind of thing it both demonstrates and anticipates. On p. 148, Kristeller describes the concept as offering:

“…a speculative identity of the universal and of the particular; for while the *primum* is a particular and a privileged member of its genus, at the same time it translates the whole fullness of the universal into reality, and conversely, the universal in itself, is no longer placed, by thought, outside the sphere of existing things, but as *primum* it is included among the real objects, without any necessary relation to thought.”

This would make the *primum* an “ideal” without necessarily being an “Idea” (in the Platonic sense), and this challenge seems to be the difficulty for the coherence of the entire concept. However, an analysis of the logic of Ficino’s suggestion for the concept is not the rationale for its discussion here, and the idea is accepted *prima facie* for its application as a model of how we may think contextually of Botticelli’s works in the ambient of Florence in the late 15th century.
Plato (see Diotima’s definition in the symposium) intended, especially in this instance—to “procreate” ideas between men (in lieu of the more materialistic generation of bodies between man and woman) which idea of procreation is further extended by artists through physical objects that relay the ideas, engendering an ongoing activity of contemplation, and thus immortalizing the access to the forms of Beauty by generating Love (for ideas) *ad infinitum* as a kind of Ficinian continuing theoretical praxis, extending into a world made receptive to sustaining the nuance and subtle intentions of the Neoplatonist method. The somewhat covert nature of the messages conveyed in art works and rooted in Neoplatonist ideas of contemplation generated ideas. Thus, we move through the themes of the works beginning with *contemplatio* (stretching through a hierarchy of being with *dynamis, patheia*, and etc.), ending in the actualization of divine love as shown in the final work discussed in this study on the *Birth of Venus* (Aphrodite) considered as a material representation (in the form of the painting) of the idea of the divine connective tissue or energy circuit a *circuit spiritualis* of the entire ontological system of the Ficinian Neoplatonist universe.\footnote{The idea suggested here is that the paintings in this study, without necessarily being a planned cycle, do provide a journey of spiritual development reflecting the growth in complexity of both the philosopher, Ficino and the painter, Botticelli, with the works forming a *circuit spiritualis*, a circuit or cycle, or circle of spiritual meaning connected by conceptual relationships that are an outgrowth of Ficino’s overall philosophical trajectory of an eudaimonic, teleological, system for the journey of the soul toward its source.} Venus is a representation of the generative source for the search for Beauty-in-being and absolute goodness and is thus, the last work considered in the overarching pattern of our chronology, which resolves its circuit of assessments of varying forms of power in this most recent of the included
The culminating image of Love envisioned as divinely beautiful woman, appears to unite sacred and profane (heavenly and mundane) aspects of Love within a metaphorical allusion through which a female pagan image may be, in fact, a reference to the figure and effects of the Christ, and via this earthly representation of God, to God himself. The Venus, as goddess of procreation, evokes the idea of Biblical Eve and simultaneously alludes to the general idea of generative activity, a woman without an earthly mother (in the form of Aphrodite Urania) creating a parallel with Christ, a man without an earthly father, and providing a propaganda image for a conciliation between the Platonic and Aristotelian, Plotinian, Augustinian, Thomistic, and Ficinian synthesis of ideas within a single source.

The thesis suggested here is, that through considering the relationships between the philosophical ideas of Marsilio Ficino, as they appear to be represented, demonstrated, or symbolized in the works of art by Sandro Botticelli discussed in this study, the contextualizing framework of Ficino’s Renaissance Neo-Platonist philosophy provides contemporary interpreters with a meaningful, significative coherence for the diverse image themes, and offers a possible interpretation for understanding the interrelated relevance of their conceptual continuity as a collection of artifacts.

118 The possessive “its” in this sentence is intended to suggest the idea that within the chronology of images selected for this study, the work made closest to our own time is the image of the Birth of Venus, which serves as the last work in the proposed spiritual circuit of this proposed journey of the souls of perceivers of the images included in the study.
IV. Ficino’s Aesthetics & Role of Art

Art, as an outward indication of an internal, metaphysical experience of the soul, is an important component of Ficino’s conceptual approach in his overarching philosophical project. Although Kristeller suggests that Ficino offers no aesthetic

119 See The Letters of Marsilio Ficino: Translated from the Latin by Members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, London, preface by Oskar Kristeller, Shepheard-Walwyn, London, Vol. I, page 20. Although André Chastel, Marsile Ficin et l’Art, Librairie Droz, Geneve, 1954, p. 59 notes that Ficino only describes one particular work of art in any detail (this is quite different from the discussions below, examined later pertaining to how Ficino’s own ideas may have inspired works of art, here we are discussing his extrapolation from a work the concept of a mechanistic universe), and Chastel writes, “La seule œuvre d’art que le philosophe ait décrit en détail, est en effet un de ces montages d’automates, comme on fabriquait déjà beaucoup dans les pays du Rhin….Ficin avait eu l’occasion d’en examiner un à Florence même en 1475, et il s’est plu à y découvrir l’image même de l’ordre cosmique….” Chastel provides a translation of Ficino’s observations of the mechanical work. Ficino’s description is also provided in Paul Oskar Kristeller’s transcription of Ficino documents, the Supplementvm Ficinianvm, Leo Olski Publisher, vol. II, 1973, p. 13: “Vidimus Florentiae….motibus agebantur, op. Quem locum hunc in modum exhibet cod: Venit Florentiam anno 1475 mense Februario Germanus quidam faber erarius. Tabernaculum quotidie vulgo monstrabat suis manibus fabricatum, in quo ut ipsi bis vidimus eneae statue plurime cernebantur hominum equorum avium et serpentem omnes ad unam quandam pilam ita connexe atque librate, ut ad illius motum singule diversis motibus agerentur.” We observe in Florence ... (the manner in which the work provides the location of the line of the codex offers this passage in the following way): A treasured smith (craftsman) of German extraction came to Florence in the year 1475 in the month of February, excitement surged daily as his work was shown, a “tabernacle” commonly made with his own hands, in which we saw many statues (marionettes) of men, horses, dogs, birds and snakes, all so connected and by a single ball delivered movement to each of the different operations (of the component sculptures) proceeded.” This is a very rough translation. Chastel proffers a likely identification of the craftsman as the knowledgeable German artisan, Jöhn Müller of Königsberg or Regiomontanus who visited Rome in the course of the summer of 1475. The name of the artisan was not mentioned by Ficino, Chastel indicates, but his association with both Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), a relationship discussed more extensively in later chapters, and the astronomer and mathematician, Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli (1397-1482), also the son of a physician, and an associate of the philosopher, Nicolas of Cusa is discussed; For more information pertaining to the importance of Toscanelli see also Friedrich Streicher, Friedrich. "Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli." The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 14. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912. 14 Sept. 2014 http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14786a.htm. (accessed 9-14-14). Streicher’s commentary, taken slightly out of context notes that “Toscanelli had a thorough knowledge of the writings of Ptolemy, he had studied the travels of Marco Polo, and had gained personal information from merchants and seamen, above all from the Italian traveller Nicolò Conti. All that he had thus learned had brought him to the conviction that the transverse extent of Europe and Asia covered nearly two-thirds of the earth, that is 230 degrees of latitude, so that the western route across the ocean could only cover 130 degrees. For a half century the Portuguese had sought to sail around Africa towards the east. Toscanelli seems to have made them repeated proposals as to the possibility of a western route, without, however, being able to convince the Portuguese of the feasibility of his theory... If we may believe the tradition connecting Toscanelli and Columbus, then Toscanelli wrote, in answer to repeated
theory *per se*, I am positing, as a consequence of this study, that Ficino’s ideas pertaining to perception inhere his concepts regarding aesthetic motivations for internal transformations affecting the human psyche, synonymous here with the idea of “soul”, and that within the logic of the mechanics of vision we are left to infer an operant aesthetic theoretical framework. A narrow definition of aesthetics as the forming of judgments of beauty pertaining to phenomenal appearances is not quite what is meant here by the application of this term. If we consider the term “aesthetics” to embrace

120 See Paul Oskar Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, Columbia University Press, 1943. P. 304 for his denial of a developed aesthetic theory for Ficino, and, who notes that the task of aesthetic interpretation is “confined to a significant collection of isolated passages.” Kristeller also suggests that the non-existent concept of “pure” art and the lack of distinction between and among the various arts compared to handcrafts among the full diversity of creative human activities in the period of the early Renaissance gave the significations of the term “art” a broad series of differing definition for Ficino. Kristeller writes, “This whole system of arts is based on the contemplative experience, since every creative work in an art is made possible by an act of internal concentration and elevation.” This contemplation is the means through which the artist gains insight into and access to the possibility of “truth” which may be translated into a corporeal or material reality via the contemplated object or be relayed in words to the consciousness of other human beings.

121 Meaningful philosophical discourse on aesthetics post-Aristotle is a bit challenging. Indeed according to James, Shelley, in "The Concept of the Aesthetic", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/aesthetic-concept/. The category of the aesthetic had not even been introduced into the philosophical lexicon until the advent of the 18th century, at which time, the term “aesthetic” came to be used to designate, among other things, a kind of object, a kind of judgment, a kind of attitude, a kind of experience, and a kind of value (generally about art and/or beauty or the sublime. According to Shelley, “For the most part, aesthetic theories have divided over questions *particular* to one or another of these designations:
and refer to all of the activities of consciousness, proception, perception, reception, awareness of, and judgments concerning phenomenal appearances and the intelligible implications of noumenal actualities, then, such a definition better describes the intention of what is undertaken to be understood within and, is perceived as a motivation for this study. Often using metaphors for painting in his writings, specifically, in the Platonic

whether artworks are necessarily aesthetic objects; how to square the allegedly perceptual basis of aesthetic judgments with the fact that we give reasons in support of them; how best to capture the elusive contrast between an aesthetic attitude and a practical one; whether to define aesthetic experience according to its phenomenological or representational content; how best to understand the relation between aesthetic value and aesthetic experience.” See also, Hannah Ginsborg, pertaining to a conscientious engagement with aesthetics as a philosophical topic by Immanuel Kant in, "Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/kant-aesthetics/, article in Stanford Encyclopedia, at http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-aesthetics/. definition accessed, 2-8-14

Aesthetics comes to the fore philosophically in the 18th century, particularly with Kant’s Critique of Judgment. Aesthetics was not considered as central to philosophy as ontology, metaphysics, epistemology and its close philosophical relative, ethics. Ginsbourg suggests: “An aesthetic judgment, in Kant's usage, is a judgment which is based on feeling, and in particular on the feeling of pleasure or displeasure. According to Kant's official view there are three kinds of aesthetic judgment: judgments of the agreeable, judgments of beauty (or, equivalently, judgments of taste), and judgments of the sublime. However, Kant often uses the expression “aesthetic judgment” in a narrower sense which excludes judgments of the agreeable, and it is with aesthetic judgments in this narrower sense that the “Critique of Aesthetic Judgment” is primarily concerned. Such judgments can either be, or fail to be, “pure”; while Kant mostly focuses on the ones which are pure, there are reasons to think that most judgments about art (as opposed to nature) do not count as pure, so that it is important to understand Kant's views on such judgments as well.”


I am suggesting that for Ficino, as is exemplified by how we may individually engage with the images created by Botticelli, the perceiving agent is assumed to engage in a proactive use of all aspects of his/her psychological awareness and reasoning capacities (via contemplation) in the act of seeking meaning that will direct us toward the One (toward God and resolution or rest for the soul) when in the process of seeking meaning or beauty or truth via experience. This expansive holistic engagement in forming judgements requires a proactive use of our environment, of which the images by Botticelli may form a component. Buchler applies the use of the term "proception"
Theology, Ficino describes a theory for the process by which the ancient painter Apelles is moved (inspired) to paint by a self-generated activity of soul.\textsuperscript{123} Ficino’s concern in the

in his discussion of the metaphysics of judgment within his overall theory of communication. The aspects of proception are manipulation and assimilation; in the former phase, the agent or actor is identified, and in the latter stage, the patient or spectator functions as the recipient of a communicated message. Buchler’s proceptive idea is clearly applicable to the use of works of art as manipulative and communicative tools directing messages to recipients over or through time and space. According to Buchler, "To say that an individual necessarily has a proceptive direction means, then, that certain potentialities of doing, making, and saying, and certain potential relations to other things, are excluded from his future while others are included in it, all by virtue of the cumulative power of his past in total relation to his world." (taken from Buchler’s *Nature and Judgment*, 1955, p. 114). Proception combines directness and content without necessarily entailing purposiveness for every human experience or assumption of a pervasive teleological universal structure. The proceptive domain does not require awareness but is a form of emanation from within the proceiver's world extending through concentric relationships. This concentric outward and inward extension is a proper theoretical formulation for the claims made in this research for how Botticelli's works combine with Ficino's philosophical system to create an interactive effluent/influence relation which was complementary in its relationships and interactive character.


\begin{quote}
Si deus et angelus movent aliquid, atque anima illus subiicitur, ab illis utique agitatur quomodo igitur a se movetur? Respondeamus in hunc modum. Cum suspiceret pratum Apelles, conatus est ipsum coloribus in tabula pingere. Pratum quidem totum subito se monstravit et subito appetitum Apelles accendit. Demonstratio huiusmodi et accensio actus quidem dici potest, quoniam agit aliquid, motus vero nequaquam, quia non peragitur paulatim. Motus enim est actus per temporis momenta discurrens. Actus vero considerandii atque pingendi, qui in Apelle fit, motus ideo dicitur quoniam transigitur paulatim. Modo enim alium florem inspicit, modo alium pingitque similiter. Pratum profecto facit ut anima Apellis videat ipsum et appetat pingere, sed ut subito. Quod autem per diversa temporis momenta nunc herba alia, nunc alia videatur et similiter exprimatur, non ipsum efficit pratum, sed Apellis anima, cuius ea natura est ut non simul inspiciat varia referatque sed paulatim. Ergo motionis huius quae in vedendo est atque pingendo initium et finis est pratum. Inde enim pictoris coepit consideratio; eodem tendit et appetitio. Sed fons, per quem talis actus paulatim fit et tempore motusque dicitur, est pictoris ipsius anima.
\end{quote}

Allen’s translation reads as follows:

\begin{quote}
If God and angel move something, and soul is subordinate to them and assuredly rouse to action by them, how then is it moved by itself? Let us answer in this way. When Apelles admired a meadow, he tried to paint a picture of it with colors. All the meadow instantaneously appeared and instantaneously excited Apelles’ desire [to paint it]. This
passage is with the nature of immediate internal activity, noting that both God and angel within the hierarchy of being may have the capacity to move the subordinate human soul, but that direct action of the soul may be engaged by a confrontation with rapturous beauty (in the instance provided, Nature in the form of a meadow) which inspires an internal movement in the artist (here Apelles) stimulating him to create, or more accurately, to re-create what has been seen directly by his soul establishing a yearning to paint this vision of a scene in the natural world. Thus, the resultant work of art becomes an expression of the divine.  

 instantaneou
s appearance and incitement can be called act it is true, since it does something, but not movement, since it does not act step by step; For movement is act that traverses moments in time. But the [subsequent] act of observing and painting, which occurs in Apelles is called movement because it does take place gradually. He looks first at one flower, then at another, and he paints them in the same way. To be sure, it is the meadow that makes Apelles’ soul see it and yearn to paint it, but it does this instantaneously. It is Apelles’ soul, not the meadow, that makes him look first at one blade of grass then at another over various moments of time and to depict them in the gradual way. And it is the nature of his soul not to examine various blades of grass and represent them all at once but to do so gradually. The beginning and end of this movement which consists in seeing and painting is the meadow; for the painter’s observation began with the meadow and his desire is directed towards it. But the source by means of which such an act occurs gradually over time and is called movement is the soul of the painter himself.

This passages has important indications pertaining to Ficino’s concept of process and inner transformation as the soul gradually incorporates the lessons of and ideas culled from Nature, here in the form of the meadow, which informs the re-presentation of the experience of the natural in the facsimile generated via art and artifice in colors. The soul uses Nature to gradually refine and enhance its awareness. In note 9 of his text, Allen indicates that the origin of the anecdote pertaining to Apelles is taken from Pliny’s Natural History, 35-97 (edited by Janus-Mayhoff, p. 265).

Ficino’s innovative contribution to this dialectical consideration, discussed by philosophers and artists of varying capabilities for centuries, is to allow for the acceptance of the Platonic idea that art is imitative in its character (although this term embraces variable extensions of the idea of imitation, both through actual resemblance, and through the idea of abstracting what exists into clearer, essential components, as a painting may both resemble some particular individual, and distill or comment via its formal arrangements on essential aspects of a person’s character as perceived and represented by a given artist). However, Ficino does not see this aspect of art as a rationale for necessarily rejecting mimetic creativity or creative artists (as Plato does from his utopian ideal state); instead, Ficino draws a parallel between human and Divine creative generation, and thus the painted image, if perceived as an externalization of (a proof of) the workings of the human soul, becomes, like the Plotinian formulation, a reflection of the Divine spark within the material thing, in this instance both the human being and the art object expressed by its human creator.125 This powerful idea engrosses the imaginations of the greatest of the Renaissance artists, and established a new relationship between appreciating human creativity and the ideas communicated via fabricated objects, texts, and the diverse results of creative enterprise.

125 See André Chastel, Marsile Ficin et L’Art, Genève, Librairie Droz, 1954, p. 65, Chapter II, Le Paradoxe Platonicien et la Psychologie de l’Art, where Chastel indicates, “On reconnait le langage de Platon: l’art s’attachant a l’apparence et ne reproduisant que l’ombre d’une ombre, ignore l’acces au plan des idées, mais la nocivité au meme l’inferiorité des arts d’imitation n’est nullement soulignée, car Ficin, renversant le point de vue, va utiliser leur exemple comme prévue privilégiée de l’activité de l’ame en face de la nature; et l’illusionisme qui était le fondement de la condamnation traditionnelle de l’art devient une des raisons de l’exalter.” Thus, what was the detraction of illusionistic imitation becomes the virtue of aspiration toward imitation of the Divine creations of the natural world. See also James Hall, A History of Ideas and Images in Italian Art, Harper and Row Publishers, New York, 1983, p. 259.
E. H. Gombrich suggests that Botticelli’s paintings, quite specifically the images predicated upon classical mythological themes, were recognized as a new kind of picture.\textsuperscript{126} This new kind of picture, fits rather neatly into the category of a physical iteration of the concept of the \textit{primum in aliquo venere}, an important philosophical category within the idiosyncratic structure of the peculiarly Ficinian interpretation of Neo-Platonist ideas addressed in some detail in Kristeller’s discussion of Ficino’s overarching philosophical system.\textsuperscript{127} The \textit{primum} is a foundational component of Ficino’s system and its innovations upon traditional Platonic concepts are in fact derived from the works of Aristotle, advancing an innovation upon the Platonic Theory of Forms, by suggesting that the first example, or chief example of a kind of thing is the cause of the possession of the qualities it brings to the fore by subsequent examples of similar things derived from the kind or specie of thing, such as \textit{fire} being a source and thus a cause for \textit{heat}.\textsuperscript{128}


\textsuperscript{127} See Paul Oskar Kristeller, \textit{The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino…Chapter IX}, pp. 146-170, where he discusses the \textit{primum in aliquo genere}. This Latin ablative phrase (as suggested to me by Michael Dodd) translates as “a first thing within its kind” or roughly a “first of a kind”, here implying the new form of imagery in art offering a fused pagan imagery with Christian implications generated by Botticelli, possibly at Ficino’s request, specifically to address a problem of influence upon the adolescent Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco cited above. See following discussion in the section on the image of Botticelli’s \textit{Primavera}, below.

\textsuperscript{128} See Aristotle, \textit{Metaphysics} a 993, b24. Aristotle does not make a claim that fire is, for example, the sole cause of every instance of the kind of \textit{hot} or \textit{heated things} as he specifies in \textit{de Generatione Animalium}; this idea was endorsed and supported by St. Thomas Aquinas, and Ficino, employing, St. Thomas as a guide for compliance with Christian doctrine, also adheres to and emphasizes this point as discussed by C.C. J. Webb in a review of Kristeller’s work on Ficino in \textit{Philosophy}, Vol. 19, No. 74, (November 1944), pp. 280-282.
In the selected paintings we as viewers are shown various stages within a process which is based within the natural attraction of the soul for its return to its source. The process is supported by the various aspects of and powers of the soul itself, of its capacity for love, and by the relationships of these powers to the stages of the soul’s journey. The reasoning that justifies the soul’s motivation and its impetus toward the return to its source is visually represented in Botticelli’s works. The natural attraction itself is a representation of the idea of the functions of Love in its changing character within the capacities and processes of the human soul and its desire or search for ultimate fulfillment in God. The selected paintings show the varying stages of the evolving processes of love throughout the selected examples. This idea is not intended to suggest that the paintings have been created as a “series” in the strict usage of that term (although certainly some indeed may be precisely intended by the artist and his patrons to be exactly that), instead, the claim here is that the representational works elucidate the philosophical system as the by-product of a natural, organic outgrowth of the philosopher’s developing thought and association with the artist, engendering a conceptual influxus stemming perhaps primarily from the artist’s social context and the largely circumstantial effects of the influences of Ficino’s philosophical system on the outward manifestations of the artist’s own internal transformation. The philosophical concerns that suffuse the thematic representations in the selected pictures are likely to stem from the generation of discourse within the artist’s circle of associates affiliated with the Medici as patrons and within the orbit of Ficino’s considerable intellectual influence. These ideas are thought here to have organically evolved within the works and the representation of the processes of varying forms of Love are simply revealed as a
natural outgrowth of the discoveries stemming from the discourses derived from Botticelli’s social context. Indeed, the painter’s works undergo a radical change when a new influence, Girolamo da Savonarola, emerges and partially displaces the earlier influences of intellectual complexity with a haunting piety and increasing conceptual grimness.

**Literature Review:** In addition to the works previously cited the following authors provide helpful insights into the complexity of either Ficino’s philosophical intentions or both Ficino’s ideas and their relevance to Botticelli’s images. These analyses provide, in some instances art historical context and in others, content pertinent to the integration of Neo-Platonist commitments with Botticelli’s Renaissance imagery.

In his article, “Transformations of Minerva in Renaissance Imagery,” *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Rudolf Wittkower provides a useful, very carefully reasoned history of identity conflation in Western art with a discussion of works that combine attributes of Minerva, goddess of wisdom and war, also known in antiquity in the guise of “Minerva Pacifica” or “Minerva as goddess of peace,” combined with attributes of “Venus Victrix” or “Venus Victorius,” and Minerva as embodiment of virtue and chastity, as a cognate identity for the Virgin Mary.129 Wittkower discusses

129 See Rudolf Wittkower, “Transformations of Minerva in Renaissance Imagery,” *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. II, January, 1939 (1938-1939): pp. 194-205: Prof. Wittkower’s discussion of the shifting identifications and particularly the combination of pagan and Christian religious identities is important as a precedent for why and how Botticelli may have been incorporating pagan deities for purposes of disseminating Christian doctrine in the Ficino-based project of reconciling ancient pagan wisdom with Christian teachings. Related in concept is Wittkower’s citation of a work attributed to Francesco Francia, which combines elements of Venus’ attire with attributes of Minerva (including her *aegis* and helmet, which is understood to
Botticelli’s image of Pallas/Minerva/ Camilla as an image intended to reconcile Castitas (Chastity-virtue) and Voluptas (pleasure) in a work understood to allude to the power of Lorenzo de’Medici in overcoming his own impulses and emerging in a triumph of strategy as a leader of Florence after the murder of his brother Giuliano, who was immortalized in the poem, *La Giostra* by Politian (Angelo Poliziano).\(^{130}\) Wittkower explains:

The reconciliation between Castitas and Voluptas forms the subject of a famous painting of Politian’s circle, executed by Botticelli in honour of Lorenzo il Magnifico. It shows Minerva gripping the hair of a centaur, whose face and gesture express subjection to her higher power (Pl. 38f). The centaur is the representative of lower instincts, and he is here equipped with quiver and bow, the symbols of earthly love. Pallas, adorned with olive branches as signs of virtue, holds the lance of Wisdom. Woven on her garment appear interlocking diamond rings, the emblems of Lorenzo de’ Medici. The picture therefore, represents the wisdom in Lorenzo which has overcome the centaur in him. As a secondary allusion Botticelli certainly meant to glorify Lorenzo’s virtuous government of Florence, the town of Minerva.\(^{131}\)

Wittkower notes the traditional natural opposition that had been understood from antiquity to separate Minerva/Athena and Venus/Aphrodite as the assumed opposition between the motivations of chastity and pleasure, explaining that it is one of the signal achievements of the Florentine philosophers to have found a point of reconciliation between the forces of virtue and the desire for pleasure, which we may understand as a represent “Minerva Pacifica,” “Venus Victrix,” and the Virgin Mary and “Religio”; See pp. 203-205).

\(^{130}\) Ibid., pp. 199-200.

\(^{131}\) Ibid., p. 200. In his notes, Wittkower cites a poem ascribed to Poliziano, in *Le Stanze, L’Orfeo e le Rime* edited by Carducci where the reference to Florence as the beneficiary of the “ingegni propizia” (propitious intellects) of her inhabitants, inspired by Minerva’s creativity and inventiveness.
likely, undergirding philosophical rationale for Botticelli’s Camilla/Pallas/Minerva, and the treatment of its theme, discussed further in chapter V of this study.

By his explanation of the varying guises of the goddess Minerva that had evolved through antiquity, into the Medieval period and which are reintroduced in their full complexity during the Renaissance, Wittkower offers a context in which Botticelli’s innovative works may be better appreciated through the lens of Neo-Platonist ideas, emphasis on knowledge, and renewed understanding of antiquity. Indeed, the role of medieval images in amplifying Renaissance understanding of complex inclusions of pagan deities is summarized in Wittkower’s discussion of a Botticelli preliminary drawing for a tapestry made for the Compte Guy de Baudreuil, showing Minerva holding her helmet.132 Wittkower notes the special significance of the Botticelli-inspired tapestry:

….sun and life and the side of shade and spiritual night are reconciled in the figure of “Alma Minerva,” the mother of art and science….As wisdom is not only the knowledge of divine but also of human things “cum sapientia non modo divinarum, sed etiam humanarum rerum scientia sit.”133

André Chastel, in Marsile Ficin et l’Art, discusses an assessment of the advances of Neo-Platonism over the ideas advocated by Averroeism, undertakes an explication demonstrating that Ficino’s new Neo-Platonist system’s intention was to absorb, rather than to destroy the Aristotelian arguments that had gained popularity (in part due to the University at Padua), as a trade in for the superior and not merely affirmative arguments

132 Ibid., pp. 196-198.

133 Ibid., p. 198. The latin phrase is a quote taken from Marsilio Ficino’s confabulatore Cristoforo Landino; Wittkower also provides the motto from the tapestry “Minerva mortals cunctis artibus erudiens” or “Minerva instructs humanity in all (skills) arts”.

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on the eternal character of the human soul inherent in Platonist and Neo-Platonist philosophical structures. The influence on Leonardo Bruni, and the contributions of Donato Acciauoli and Politian and a consideration of the contrasts between Ficino and Pico della Mirandola (and his connections to France and respect for Duns Scotus) contrasted with Ficino’s adherence to the ideas of St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. The Florentine scrutiny of a solution to the problems of materialism in classical ideas stemming from Origin, student of Ammonius Saccas (teacher also of Plotinus), Eusebius, and others of the Alexandrine school along with Augustine, and the Corpus Hermeticus that gives birth to the particularly Florentine version of Neo-Platonist interpretation. An important discussion of the *furor divinus* (inspiration) that suffuses the Ficinian system is fundamental to understanding the internally motivated inspiration driven, rather than logo-centric, organizing structure of Ficino’s philosophical system.\(^{134}\)

Noting that Ficino’s approach to cosmology proceeds from an aesthetic foundation, based in an assumption of the perfection of the world (a reflection of its perfect Creator), Chastel sees Ficino’s ontological model as noted in his Platonic commentaries as a confirmation of Divine organization; he explains:

> Par l’ordre admirable du monde, Ficin entend la structure du ciel et la hiérarchie des êtres, le réseau intelligible du reel, le déploiement des forms et des espèces, qui désignent leur auteur comme un artifex ou un architectus sublime…\(^{135}\)

Citing a passage from Ficino’s Platonic commentaries, Chastel quotes:

> ….par son utilité, son ordonnance, son décor, le monde témoigne d’un artiste divin et nous donne la prevue la plus manifeste que Dieu est l’Architecte du


\(^{135}\) Ibid., p. 57.
This last quote is followed by a citation from Ficino’s *Platonic Theology* which refers to the perfection of God’s creation:

Considère les plantes et les animaux: leurs membres sont organisés de telle sorte que chacun est placé là où il doit servir les autres; qu’on le supprime et toute la structure s’effondre. Tous les membres sont donc groupés en vue de l’ensemble. Ainsi toutes les parties du monde concourent en quelque sorte à la beauté de l’univers entier, de telle sorte qu’on ne peut rien enlever ni ajouter.\(^\text{137}\)

The metaphor of a “creator artisan, architect, artist” is thus an important philosophical argument for the inclusion of works of art within the Ficinian ontological system, because such works may be intended to engage the soul’s powers of perception in order to enhance its (the soul’s) interaction with and response to the Divine Intelligence, serving to stimulate emulation of Divine creativity in a material lower realm of cause and effect (within the embodied human, whose material presence is motivated by the movement of the soul).

Chastel notes Ficino’s respect for “…des Mages et de L’Egypte s’ajoutant à celui de Platon..” and his predisposition to displace dialectical reasoning with a form of visionary intuitive philosophical insight which Chastel refers to as “…la tendance du philosophe de Careggi à abandonner la dialectique pour l’ ‘élévation’ poétique…”\(^\text{138}\)

\(^\text{136}\) Ibid., p. 57

\(^\text{137}\) Ibid., p. 57 and p. 62, note 4, which provides the original Ficino citation from *The Platonic Theology*, II, 13, taken from the *Opera Omnia*, p. 110, which reads: “partes mundi cunctae ad unim quemdam totius mundi decorum ita concurrent ut nihil subtrahi possit, nihil addi.”..because of course perfection cannot be improved upon and thus nothing can be added to or subtracted from the creation of God the divine artisan.

\(^\text{138}\) Ibid., 1954, p. 45.
Chastel suggests that Ficino accepted the Platonic theory for the primacy of mimesis in art, and thus that works of art in their adherence to resemblance served as “…l’ombre d’une ombre..” and yet simultaneously, this very inferiority of mere imitation of the divine ideas provides for, and accrues to the arts, according to Chastel’s interpretation of Ficino’s ideas, an example of the proof of the activities of the soul in seeking perfection, provides a demonstration of humanity’s desire to emulate the divine by means of the perceptible, which permits inference of the intelligible realm. Citing Ficino’s passage pertaining to the painter, Apelles in a meadow, an ancient artist who would be used as a model by Botticelli in his noteworthy recreation of The Calumny of Apelles, Chastel suggests that the initial excitation of the soul is via sensation and the creations of the artist follow the internal rhythms of the sentient soul (and thus the imitation of nature is indeed also an expression of the soul per se and a response to the divine ideas, in this instance by implicature, permitting the spectator to infer the presence of the divine, based in the Ficinian proposal for the processes of perception.

While Edgar Wind confirms the importance of Ficino as an inspiration upon the arts and, of course, upon artists, and Botticelli in particular, he suggests in his Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance, that the philosopher did not have a truly well-developed “visual sensibility” and thus, his interest in the visual arts would very likely have been

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139 Ibid., p. 65. Chastel indicates that “…Ficin, renversant le point de vue, va utiliser leur exemple comme prévue privilégiée de l’activité de l’âme en face de la nature; et l’illusionnisme qui était le fondement de la condamnation traditionelle de l’art devient une des raisons de l’exalter.” This idea would explain in part the role within the Ficinian system for works such as those of Botticelli in allowing for the demonstration of the presence and powers of the sentient soul.

140 Ibid., p. 65.; Chastel writes: “En un mot, si l’excitation initiale vient de la sensation, la perception de l’artiste et surtout l’exécution qui se déploient dans la succession, suivent le rhythm particulier de l’âme…”
only in terms of their value in transmitting and demonstrating philosophical concepts.¹⁴¹ Ficino does frequently employ metaphors and allegorical references to the creation of works of art as analogous to the divine generative activities of God. This predisposition, however, does not preclude Wind’s reference to Ficino as speaking of painting “as though he were a stranger to it.”¹⁴² Wind notes that Ficino follows the convention of placing verbal expression above visual representation in the ontological hierarchy of his post-Plotinian, Ficinian-early-Renaissance aesthetic structure, a view which contradicts Gombrich’s suggestion that the “visual symbol…is superior to the name…”; this observation by Wind, having been established on the basis of the abstraction that is an intelligible construction of the Divine Being, having greater expressive actuality by an “…’artifice of mind than by manual works’…”¹⁴³ Wind notes that the early biographer and art historian, Giorgio Vasari specifically refers to Botticelli as a “persona sofistica.”¹⁴⁴ This reference to Botticelli’s learning, sophistication, and intelligence suggests that within the circle of Ficino, he would be a likely individual to appreciate the approach of the initiate into the more cryptic significations of Neo-Platonist interpretations of meaning. Ficino was a close associate of Leon Battista Alberti, who was, in turn, an associate of Nicolas of Cusa, and Wind makes note of the affinity of


¹⁴² Ibid., p. 127, see also note 9.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 127.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 126.
Ficino’s pupil, Pico della Mirandola and Nicolas of Cusa, and a shared predisposition to the mysterious character of profound knowledge. Wind writes:

In Cusanus and Pico, a sharp instinctive awareness of the rule, that any given knowledge may be transcended, was condensed into a mystical superstition: a belief that all important truths are cryptic. But from this bleak, retardative axiom of faith, perhaps the most perilous vestige of Neoplatonism, they drew a prophetic rule of learning: that it is more profitable to explore the hidden bypaths of knowledge than to tread the common highways. Enlightenment and obscurantism were tightly linked in the method of *docta ignorantia*.145

This view would appear to hold true also for the interpretation of Botticelli’s works in accordance with the strictures of signification derived from Ficino and his circle. Wind argues with the position assumed by Gombrich, which predicates a supremacy of sight upon the idea that: “…the sense of sight provides an analogue to the non-discursive mode of apprehension which must travel from multiplicity to unity.” 146 Whether Ficino’s commitment to auditory above visual reception as a supervening authority is so very clear may be less evident, considering commentary from the *Symposium* and the importance of vision in perceiving the beauty of the beloved’s soul, however, it seems reasonable to posit that the intellectual senses of hearing and vision were considered to be of an higher order than smell, taste, or touch.147

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145 Ibid., pp. 203-204. *Docta ignorantia* refers to the writings of Nicolas of Cusa and the underlying skepticism of a doctrine of “learned ignorance”. The hybridization of deities was a likely tool to guide the seeker of truth to greater insights into the humanist condition. In such a project, the paintings of Botticelli, which highlight philosophical contrasts using images as demonstrations, are certainly important components within a larger systematic structure for guiding an initiate through the hierarchical structure of experiences grounded in Neo-Platonist metaphysics.


147 See Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on the Symposium*, translated by Sears Jayne, Spring Publications, Inc, Dallas Texas, Chapter 9, 1985, p. 58 which suggests that “since love is nothing else except the desire of enjoying beauty, and this is perceived by the eye alone…” referring to perception of the beauty of bodies. But since the earlier principle is the divine intelligence, as
Ardis Collins, in *The Secular is Sacred: Platonism and Thomism in Marsilio Ficino’s Platonic Theology*, offers a helpful analysis of Ficino’s philosophical system’s integration of classical, Hellenistic, early-Christian, and medieval concepts into a structure acceptable to the strictures of Ficino’s contemporary Catholicism, utilizing the ideas of Thomas Aquinas as an arbiter of doctrinal coherence and compliance with religious dogma. Ficino’s arguments for acceptance and integration of classical ideas on love and its motivations are shown to draw upon the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (on the advice of St. Antoninus) in order to assure orthodoxy. This text offers a thorough comparison of excerpts from Ficino’s *Theologia Platonica* with references taken from Aquinas’ *Summa Contra Gentiles* with appendices which provide side by side indications of influence, borrowing, and quotations from the older Aquinas text as a source, translated and harmonized into the Ficinian attempt at reinvigorating Christian ideas against the materialist incursions of Aristotelianism and Averroesim.148

Collins cites Ficino’s metaphysical hierarchy of being, based in gradations of unity as the locus of efficacious power. For Ficino, as Collins notes, “unity is power”; thus the unified God is the most powerful existing thing, based in Truth itself, which is

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what provides God’s power of the capacity to inform all acts of “knowing”.¹⁴⁹ This idea would extend to the role of art, as a material thing which directs the activity of the soul toward conceptual truth as a powerful tool within the Ficinian metaphysical structure, which could support the soul in its quest for truth and thus for the soul’s desire to seek and return to God. Collins brings to the fore Ficino’s Platonic argument using the analogy of God to knowledge as the sun to sight.¹⁵⁰ Without light the dual action of sight involving the eye which sees and the thing seen, which is color and shape, etc., would not be possible, as perceivers in darkness we would see nothing.¹⁵¹ Comparably, the intellect receives both its capacity to know from God and its act of knowing, and the object receives its essence, intelligibility, and the act through which it moves the mind, all from God as the metaphysical “sun”.¹⁵² These arguments support the idea of art as a potentially significant aspect of the philosophical project to affect the soul by exposing it to images which would in effect re-mind the soul of ideas and abstractions alluded to by representations. Noting the Ficinian analogy between sight and understanding, Collins cites the threefold act of seeing as the motion by which color attracts or moves the eye, the act of seeing per se, and the presence of light which permits these acts.¹⁵³ Collins then

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 74; Collins notes that “According to Ficino, unity, like being, is identical with efficacious power……When he reviews the hierarchy in terms of potency and act, the identification is related to the lower levels. Act is efficacious power; potency is that which receives the influence of that power…The body with its qualities is determined to be a living thing, i.e., a substance which is self-moving, by the rational soul. The rational soul and the pure mind are dependent in knowing on truth itself which is their object. God, who is the first principle and dependent on nothing, is pure act or pure efficacious power.”

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 76.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 76.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 76.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 76.
compares these acts to the functions of the understanding and the role of truth, science, and God.\textsuperscript{154}

Collins also juxtaposes Ficino’s Thomist arguments directly with quotations from St. Thomas in the appendices to the text.\textsuperscript{155} The argument for the presence of works of art as a presupposition of or dependence upon nature is also an argument for the presupposition of the Divine presence, is a compelling justification for the incorporation of art images within a larger theologically-based philosophical approach to the analogy of the artist to the Divine Creator, directing the soul always toward the ultimate source of truth. St. Thomas wrote in Book III, part 65, of the \textit{Summa Contra Gentiles}:

\begin{quote}
Sicut opus artis praesupponit opus naturae, ita opus naturae praesupponit opus Dei creantis; nam materia artificialium est a natura, naturalium vero per creationem a Deo. Artificialia autem conservantur in esse virtute naturalium: sicut domus per soliditatem lapidum. Omnia igitur naturalia non conservantur in esse nisi virtute Dei.\textsuperscript{156}
\end{quote}

The passage from Ficino’s \textit{Theologia Platonica}, II, 7 appears to be based in the Thomist commitment to the reflected significance of both nature and art as extensions outward (emanations) from the true source of all existence and all being (God). Ficino is

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\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., see bottom of page 76 and first paragraph at the beginning of p. 77.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., with an argument for the relation of the artist to divine purpose offered in the passages on pp. 122-123, we are able to understand how employment of artworks within the Ficinian schema may be understood to amplify the soul’s search for God.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., pp. 123, quoted from St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles, III, 65, #2402, (6). This passage is translated by the University of Notre Dame at: https://www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/courses/301/scgiii65-70.htm accessed on March 6, 2018 as:
\end{flushright}

\begin{quote}
As a work of art presupposes a work of nature, so a work of nature presupposes a work of God creating: for the material of artificial things is from nature, and the material of natural things is through creation of God. But artificial things are preserved in being by virtue of natural things, as a house by the solidity of its stones. Therefore natural things are not preserved in being otherwise than through the power of God.*
\end{quote}
quoted by Collins:

Sicut se habet ars ad naturam, sic et natura ad Deum. Artium opera eatenus permanent incorrupta, quatenus vi naturae servantur ut statua constat diu per naturalem lapidis aut aeris soliditatem. Similiter naturalia quaeque eatenus manent, quatenus Dei servantur influxu. Et sicut natura operibus suis infert motum, sic Deus naturae praestat esse. Tamdiu opera naturae moventur, quamdiu natura movet. Tamdiu igitur existit natura, quamdiu Deus servat eam in existendo.157

Gertrude Hamilton, in *Three Worlds of Light: The Philosophy of Light in Marsilio Ficino, Thomas Vaughan, and Henry Vaughan*, offers an interesting account of Ficino’s theories of the metaphysics of light and of his sources, which inspire his syncretist accounts for the significance of light in both religion and natural magic. Light, as the highest element identified in the Neo-Platonist system with the One, and as the source of generative energy, is used as a metaphor for God in this discussion of Ficino’s vision of the universe as a hierarchy of Divine Light and the subdivisions within this hierarchy variously representing, God, Angelic Mind, Spiritus, World soul, and finally, material


The relationship of art to nature is the same as that of nature to God. Works of art remain uncorrupted as long as they are preserved by the power of nature; for instance how long a statue lasts depends on the natural solidity of the stone or bronze. In the same way, natural objects last as long as they are preserved by God’s divine influence. And just as nature gives movement to its works, so God gives nature being. The works of nature are moved as long as nature moves them. Nature exists as long as God keeps it in existence.

This quote echoes the graded importance of emanations of being and the significance of this hierarchy in returning to the source, thereby offering, by implicature, a role for art within the Thomist-Ficinian hierarchy; that is to say that, God generates nature (man) who/which generates art, which presupposes and refers back (by mere virtue of its presence) to an initial, authoritative, generative act of God. In this vein, art and images become a powerful means for the conveyance of ideas, purposed with directing the contemplative soul back to its Ficinian-Platonic (and Thomist) source.
body. Hamilton’s critical discussion of the logistics of Ficino’s emanation theory, based heavily upon the Plotinian model is helpful in contextualizing a probable role for celestial, daemonic spirits in images as beings of (and dependent upon) light who authorize the role of painting within Ficino’s aesthetically-based system for accessing knowledge.  

Hamilton’s discussion of the connection between, light, vision, and understanding further contextualizes how Botticelli’s paintings may be understood as contributions to a larger philosophical project supporting the journey of the human (and humanist!) soul in a search for truth and understanding. Providing a helpful summary explanation of why the metaphysics of light is of such significance for Renaissance Neo-Platonist thought, Hamilton begins her discourse with the use of the light analogy in Plato’s Republic (Book VI, 508, a, b, c, and 509 b) drawing a parallel between the role of the Good within the intelligible realm being comparable to the role of the sun in the realm of sensation.  

The sun of the sensate world provides access to vision by its radiance and, comparably

158 See Gertrude Kelly Hamilton, Three Worlds of Light: The Philosophy of Light in Marsilio Ficino, Thomas Vaughan, and Henry Vaughan, The University of Rochester, Doctoral Dissertation, Language and Literature, 1974, pp. 115, ff.: “…Ficino’s rationale for his doctrine of natural magic, his metaphysics of light plays an essential role….Ficino uses the Plotinian concept of the World Soul in his interpretation of the Asclepius in order to show that Hermes does not involve daemonic power but rather attracts “power emanating from the nature of the world…..”……Ficino clearly identifies this cosmic force with the one underlying his own theory of natural magic—the active energeia of invisible light proceeding from the intellect of the World Soul and reproducing material forms in the image of the “seminal reasons” and ultimately of the divine Ideas. Such an interpretation allows the Renaissance Neo-Platonist to depict Hermes as the practitioner of an ancient and pure art of magic based upon a knowledge of the natural correspondences that link heaven and earth.” Page 121 explains the relationship between the heavenly bodies as outward indications of higher intellectual lights directing them making the stars visible symbols of the World Soul which could reveal to man patterns of causality and the operations of invisible light in directing the course of the universe.manifesting foreknowledge of human events envisioned by the celestial souls.

159 Ibid., pp. 9-10.
the soul (sees) “senses” truth via *the Good*, which provides access to Divine (inner) light. Hamilton’s succinct narrative for the relationship between the Platonic analogy of God and the light of the sun, the metaphysics of light of Plotinus and the connection to Ficino, draws clear parallels from one philosophical source to the next, beginning with Plato, showing the route to Ficino’s Renaissance Neo-Platonism via Plotinus and St. Augustine. The concept which emerges of a derivative sensate light as an evident echo of the presence of an intelligible, immaterial light as a principle of Neo-Platonist thought, offering a metaphor for the logistics of emanation as a model of the outward extensions of the hierarchy of being, is a model for how the soul remains in union with God while extended out from its source. The role of images, as agents of light and of celestial spirits is to transform the soul.

160 Ibid., pp. 9-10.
161 Ibid., p. 11.
162 Ibid., p. 11-12. Hamilton notes the role of Plotinus, who in his Fourth Ennead, is influenced by the Stoic philosopher, Posidonius for the model of the luminous source (the sun), which flows outward, sending its rays in all directions, which remain united with their source, countering the Aristotelian concept of light as a form of “actualization” to what Hamilton describes as “a form of activity spontaneously engendered by a luminous body.” Citing the Neo-Platonist idea that light “could not be a quality or accident added to the illuminated body, since it departs along with the luminous source; neither could light be a substance, since it is inseparable from its source. Therefore, it could only be defined as an Act of the illuminating source.” Hamilton gives the source for Plotinus’ discourse as *Enneads*, IV, 5, 6, from the English translation by Stephen MacKenna, 2nd edition, revised B. S. Page with a foreword by E. R. Dodds and an Introduction by Paul Henry (London, 1956), pp. 335-336.

163 For a lucid explanation of the role of daemons and spirits in Ficino, see James Hankins, “Ficino, Avicenna, and The Occult Powers of the Rational Soul,” in *Tra antica sapienza e filosofia naturale: La magia nell’Europa moderna, Atti del convegno* (Firenze, 2-4 ottobre 2003, *Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento*), a cura di F. Meroi, con la collaborazione di E. Scapparone, 2 vols. (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2007), I, pp. 35-52. p. 9: “Heavenly light is more powerful than fire, and spirit more powerful than the heavens, for spirit gives life to and moves the heaven, or at least accompanies them in their life and movement. These higher celestial spirits are also our consortes, and act on our souls through influx of images, like a faces in a mirror. In this way they make our souls resemble them, so that our souls operate in ways nearly
Eugenio Garin discusses Ficino’s evident ambiguity regarding the possible roles of astrology and magic in the functional metaphysics of reality.\(^{164}\) Garin notes that in the *Third Book* of Ficino’s *De Vita*, the scholar affirms the value of astrology for medicinal use, yet, following Pico della Mirandola’s condemnation of astrological praxis, Ficino offers agreement but retains a clearly ambiguous response to the renunciation of astrology as a useful component in the overarching construct of human knowledge. Garin eloquently discusses Ficino’s theory of universal harmony as a justification of the role of astrology and magic in addressing diseases of the body, coupling musical harmony with the figures, really configurations of the heavenly bodies, representing both beauty and truth, resolving all with music, a form of art which becomes a dominant theme in succeeding centuries. This “*de fabricanda universi figura*” (“making a figure of the universe”) posits the figured world, a living organism, as a living work of art, alive with demonic forces, which necessitates the incorporation of art into the psyche of the observer, uniting with the object of perception, for merely looking at figures or images is insufficient to the transformative task of art.\(^{165}\) Images thus, play an important role in the

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\(^ {165}\) Ibid., pp. 76-77, and note 23, p. 130, in which Garin cites Ficino’s *De Vitae Libri Tres, III*, 19 and he quotes: “On making a figure of the universe…‘Let him carve…a certain archetypal form of the world if it pleases him in bronze, which he should then impress on a gilded sheet of silver at an opportune moment…’” See also the version translated by Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clarke, *De vita libri tres (Three Books on Life, 1489)*, The Renaissance Society of America, Tempe Arizona, 2002, pp. 342-345.
synthesis of man(kind) within a universal harmony which connects images, astrology, magic, and microcosmic mankind integrated within a macrocosmic universality by the activity of contemplation and the soulful incorporation of painted images representing idealized universal reality. The images generated in paintings are thus part of a larger metaphysical philosophical system, through which the destiny of the soul (to return to its source) is to be accomplished.

Umberto Baldini provides important insights into the oral tradition, passed on largely by Vasari, of Botticelli’s playful, vivacious character and his significance within the development of the Florentine painting tradition, noting that his only truly important pupil was Filippino Lippi, but that the mantel of his artistic legacy is taken up by Michelangelo Buonarroti in terms of the vigor, dynamism, and formalist linearity of his images. Baldini discusses the identities of the dramatis personae of the Uffizi Adoration of the Magi, commissioned by Guasparri dal Lama, and restoration of the Primavera. Baldini notes the subtlety of Botticelli’s use of line, rhythm, and counterpoint offering an analogy to lyric poetry and chamber music. Baldini places Botticelli among the select company of Lorenzo Il Magnifico in conjunction with Luigi,

166 See Garin (op. cit.) , pp. 76-77: As Garin notes:”It is neither enough to build a perfect model of the world nor only to look at it: we must also bring it within ourselves through intense meditation (‘not only contemplating but also refuting it in the mind’) and the contemplation of its painted image in the rooms in which we live.”


168 Ibid., pp. 21-101.

Bernardo, and Luca Pulci, Bartholomeo Scala, Matteo Franco, Agnolo Poliziano, Girolamo Benivieni, Pico della Mirandola, Cristoforo Landino, Ugolino Verino, Alessandro Braccesi, Naldo Naldi, Niccolò Michelozzi, Paolo Dal Pozzo Toscanelli, and, of course, Marsilio Ficino, many distinguished scholars, and all to some degree aspiring poets, and it was among this company that the son of a leather worker was included, and indeed, embraced by Lorenzo for his “professional sensitivity, …original mind..” and charming personality. baldini provides important discussion of the restoration of Botticelli’s Uffizi Adoration and more extensive information on the restoration of the Primavera, and contextualizes how Ficino’s complex iconographic programmes may have functioned within the context of his peculiar cultural ambient and time, based on careful assessment of these objects and the information revealed by their conservation.

Liana Cheney’s key work, Quattrocento Neoplatonism and Medici Humanism in Botticelli’s Mythological Paintings, contextualizes the mythological subjects painted by

\[170\] Ibid., pp. 30-31. Luigi, Bernardo, and Luca Pulci from among whom Luigi (1432-1484) is probably the best known poet, satirist, and writer of the adventures of the giant Morgante; politician, Bartholomeo Scala (1430-1497) was also an historian and essayist, whose unfinished History of Florence is of note, Matteo Franco (1448-1494) whose letters have been published by Janet Ross, a chaplain and friend of both Poliziano and Ficino, Agnolo Poliziano (Angelo Ambrogini 1454-1494) poet, humanist and brilliant philologist, Girolamo Benivieni (1453-1552) poet and musician, Pico della Mirandola ( Count Giovanni Pico della Mirandola 1464-1494) philosopher and writer of the Oration On the Dignity of Man, Cristoforo Landino (1424-1498) writer, philosopher, and close associate of Marsilio Ficino, Ugolino Verino (1438-1510) poet and follower of Cristofor Landino, Alessandro Braccesi (1445-1503) humanist, poet, and Italian diplomat, Naldo Naldi (1439-1513) humanist, poet, and teacher, Niccolò Michelozzi (1447-1527) son of the noted Florentine architect, Michelozzo. A writer, and humanist; Michelozzi became a diplomat who succeeded Macchiavelli as Segretaria of Florence. He was later affected by the expulsion of the Medici; and finally, Paolo Dal Pozzo Toscanelli (1397-1482) an Italian astrologer, mathematician, and cosmographer, friends with Leon Battista Alberti and Filippo Brunelleschi as well as Marsilio Ficino. Toscanelli sent a proposal to sail West to discover the East to both Fernão Martins, who delivered his letter to the King Afonso V of Portugal, in his court of Lisbon, and to Christopher Columbus, who retained a copy of this proposal during his voyage to the New World.
Sandro Botticelli in terms of the significance of the integration of pagan, Platonic ideas reconciled in a Christian, post-Aquinas typology. The reinterpretation of classical myths as exemplifications of humanist ideals for correspondences with Christian moral and ethical teaching is an innovation specific to the Renaissance facilitated by Ficino and used as a literary source for Renaissance humanists such as Poliziano, Pico della Mirandola and others, who utilized the *paragone* in literature as Botticelli offers visual exemplifications that forge the relationships between the classical idea of man’s divine origin with comparable conceptions. Cheney provides documents and sources (following Gombrich and Panofsky) on the relationships between Ficino, the Medici (particularly Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco) and Botticelli.\textsuperscript{171} Valuable assessments of *La Primavera, Minerva and the Centaur, Mars and Venus,* and *The Birth of Venus* are included in this source.\textsuperscript{172}

Cheney acknowledges the difficulties of studies searching for the possible significations of components of Botticelli works primarily due to the paucity of documents that detail Botticelli’s own thinking about his works.\textsuperscript{173} She indicates a commitment to the idea that the four mythological paintings she discusses, which are also an important component of this study, probably are not intended as any form of directly interdependent “cycle” but instead she suggests that:

\[\ldots\text{each emerged as an independent work under the influence of the Quattrocento}\]

\textsuperscript{171} Liana Cheney, *Quattrocento Neoplatonism and Medici Humanism in Botticelli’s Mythological Paintings,* (University Press of America, Lanham, MD,) 1985.

\textsuperscript{172} Ibid., pp. 1-115.

\textsuperscript{173} Ibid. , pp. 85-86.
Florentine culture. There are several factors germane to this claim: (1) the various patrons for the paintings within the Medici family; (2) the different locations of the paintings; (3) the repetition of similar Neoplatonic ideas in each painting (for example, virtue over vice, twin Venuses, Platonic love); (4) the discrepancy of the commission dates; and (5) the order in which Botticelli painted the mythological works.\textsuperscript{174}

Assuming that the mythological works were commissioned either by Lorenzo de’Medici for himself or for his ward, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco, Cheney sees in the mythological works a tacit investigation of the challenges of learning itself, tying this subtext to the youth of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco and a possibility that his older cousin commissioned these particular works to guide his development.\textsuperscript{175} Aligning the themes of the mythological pictures to the political history of Florence, and simultaneously providing contextual commentary on the probable philosophical and talismanic intentions held for the four mythological works, Cheney also alludes to how the \textit{Primavera} image is connected to the poetry of Ficino’s pupil, Poliziano, as well as Ficino’s own astrological and allegorical ideas in the instance of the \textit{Primavera}, pertaining to generation, procreation, and fecundity (both in the material sense and in the sense of

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., pp. 85-86.

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., p. 86; however other scholars will disagree regarding the uniformity of patronage for these mythological images, with E.H. Gombrich and Rab Hatfield in particular suggesting the Vespucii family as patrons of the \textit{Venus and Mars} (see Gombrich \textit{Symbolic Images}, (Op. cit.) and Rab Hatfield, “Some Misidentifications in and of Works by Botticelli,” in \textit{Sandro Botticelli and Herbert Horne: New Research}, edited by Rab Hatfield, Syracuse University in Florence, Florence, Italy, 2009, pp. 7-62. These disagreements, pertaining to patronage, are discussed further in this study in the chapters specific to the respective paintings and their probable contextual significations.
ideas and Florentine intellectual fecundity).¹⁷⁶

Contextualizing the Minerva and the Centaur (or Pallas/Camilla/Minerva and the Centaur) in the aftermath of the Pazzi Conspiracy and Lorenzo, Il Magnifico’s extraordinary diplomatic expedition to Naples, Cheney suggests both a political rationale for this image, pertaining to the defeat of the Pazzi, and a philosophical allegory of reason (represented by the contentious figure who may be the Roman goddess of wisdom and war, Minerva, but who is quite convincingly described by Barbara Diemling as Camilla) triumphing over instinct and impulsiveness symbolized by a half-human, half-horse composite being, a centaur.¹⁷⁷

The theme of harmony over discord is also suggested by the Mars and Venus image, which, as Cheney notes, has been attributed to Vespucci patronage by both Gombrich and Lightbown.¹⁷⁸ The painting’s iconography is, however, a bit confusing in that Cheney refers to Gombrich’s citation of the presence of wasps, symbols of the Vespucci family, shown circling the head of Mars; the wasps being a symbol of discord, are fully appropriate to serve both as the evocative “vespa” or “wasp(s)” emblem associated with the Vespucci, and as symbols for the disruptive, aggressive, defensive character of the god of War.¹⁷⁹ Later in the same page, Cheney cites the identical

¹⁷⁶ Liana Cheney, Quattrocento Neoplatonism and Medici Humanism in Botticelli’s Mythological Paintings, (University Press of America, Lanham, MD,) 1985, p. 88.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 88-89. The differing identity for the female figure suggested by Barbara Diemling is discussed more extensively in Chapter V, pertaining to the symbolic significations for this image.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 66ff.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., Cheney also gives the term “vespuce” as “wasps”, p. 89 third paragraph.
creatures as industrious “bees”.\textsuperscript{180} The morphology of the insects shown makes it quite clear that the small creatures are wasps, not bees. When Cheney discusses the multiple possible symbolic readings of such an image, including the diverse aspects of Mars, and even the idea that the image of the sleeping god could allude to the symbolic representation of Lorenzo de’ Medici himself as an allegorical figure, a metonymic substitution for the city of Florence with Venus as the evocation of the concept of \textit{humanitas}, in which instance, the equivocal reading of the insects could have a sophistical, philosophical, or propagandistic rationale regarding the bustling, industrious Florentine community and their burgeoning prosperity and commerce as protected by the power and influence of the Medici leader.\textsuperscript{181} Thus, the shifting identity between war-like “wasp” and industrious “bee” may be connected to themes of \textit{humanitas} and harmony, emergent here, and which are taken up, to great effect, in the last of the four allegories, \textit{The Birth of Venus}.\textsuperscript{182}

Cheney suggests that \textit{The Birth of Venus} is the actualization of the Neo-Platonist

\textsuperscript{180} Ibid., p. 66, in the third paragraph of the same page, the creatures mentioned in the second paragraph as “wasps” are transformed into “bees”. The conflation could server a sophistical point, regarding the openness of the use of symbolism and Cheney notes the allusion to honey (sweetness of love) and industriousness (the prosperity of Florence) as part of the openness in the interpretation of what the small creatures may symbolize, but the insects shown are indeed wasps, not bees.

\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., see p. 90 for Cheney’s suggestion that the figure of Mars may be a dual allusion to his role as a god of agriculture and that his presence with the laurel trees are meant to evoke the idea of the protective presence of Lorenzo de’ Medici.

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., p. 92
intention to fuse ancient intellectual ideals with the tenets of the Christian religion.\textsuperscript{183}

Noting this work as “probably the most beautiful allegorical painting executed by Botticelli..”, Cheney suggests that the painter has generated “an ideal form which symbolizes a concept”, a bringing together of content and form, an indication of the union of “spirit and matter” and a metaphor for the Christian concept of “rebirth” which may feed the very designation of the term “Renaissance”\textsuperscript{184} The extended allegory identifies the city of Florence as the new, reborn Athens, achieved by means of the revival of the ideas and philosophy of antiquity (particularly Pythagoras, Plato, and Plato’s followers) and Venus, blown ashore by Zephyr and Chloris, is received by an Hora, cited by Cheney as the particular messenger of the Medici as suggested by the presence of the fleur-de-lis design, an insignia of Lorenzo de’ Medici, on the Hora’s garments.\textsuperscript{185} Philosophically, Cheney suggests that this image embodies reference to Ficino’s concept of the twin Venuses; here, heavenly Venus or “Venus Urania”, the representation of a being of the realm of the intelligible, and the idea of the emanation of beauty within the Neo-Platonic hierarchy of being; a symbol for the individual’s transcendence and rebirth-in-beauty (rebirth in spirit) generated by love for God.\textsuperscript{186}

In the article, “Renaissance Views of Active Perception,” from *Theories of Perception in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*, Leen Spruit suggests that theories

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., p. 92.

\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., pp. 90-91.

\textsuperscript{185} Ibid, p. 91-92.

\textsuperscript{186} Ibid, p. 91.
of perception formulated by Renaissance scholars, generally were subjected to greater conceptual constraints and restrictions in comparison with contemporary perception theories. The principal focus of these post-medieval theories was upon how a well-reasoned explanation for the inner processes and modalities that transformed experience in the material world into representations within of that external realm might be achieved. The linearity of causal concatenations were primarily perceived as moving from the world through sensory systems, to a soul-based perception, which relayed this data to a later level of cognition. Spruitt indicates that generally, Renaissance scholars, when considering possible or probable internal structures for perceptual schemata, such schemata were generally accepted as simply innate. Spruitt concords with earlier observations made in this study, that Ficino specifically, viewed perception as a “top-down, conceptually driven processing.” 187 Spruitt suggests that Ficino’s cognitive psychology assumed the existence of formulae which sub-serve actual intake of perceptual information and imagery. 188 Thus, Spruitt notes that for Ficino, sense perception was not understood as a simple process of storing descriptions of an external reality or experience, rather it was assumed to be an on-going process of the adaption of raw perceptual stimuli to the procedures of an inner schemata which specified how to direct the perceiver’s attention. These processes of controlled perceptual exploration permit the collection of information allowing the perceiver to cull from individual, vague,


188 See Spruit, p. 221, note 122 citing Ficino’s discussion in the Theologia Platonica, III, 2, pp. 231-247.
pre-attentive appreciation the existence of an external reality, an indication that something is "out there", proceeding via the schematic process eventually to a more detailed understanding of what that something may be or actually is. Cognition only occurs after the completion of moving through the varied stages of the attentive process, centered in searching out the distinctive features and feature-complexes of the phenomena directly in proximity to us that we may arrive at the stage of “recognition,” allowing the perceiver to categorize features of the phenomenon, and then to make judgments that permit the observer to perceive them as the distinctive individual things they may actually be.\textsuperscript{189}

Spruit also remarks upon the insistence of the Renaissance Peripatetics regarding human agency in perception based upon assumption of the presence of a human soul understood as having an active, operative, judging role in the processes of perception. The soul was understood to reconstruct the physical world based upon the information deposed within the given sense organ by the sensible species. Perception was regarded as an attentive awareness about the world in view of the stimulation of our sense-organs, and he includes Ficino in this category of theorists pertaining to perceptual process.\textsuperscript{190}

\textsuperscript{189} See Spruit (op. cit.) pp. 221, He then goes on to discuss Cusanus (Nicolas of Cusa–1401-1464), and Telesio (Bernardino Telesio – 1509-1588) whose process ideas differ from those of Ficino.

\textsuperscript{190} Spruit notes on page 209, that according to the Peripatetics, the “human soul knows bodily reality by means of images engendered by the senses.” He established Ficino as an early adherent to Peripatetic ideas since he had certainly studied Aristotle, possibly under Florentine physician, Nicolo Tignosi (1402 - 1474) at Bologna, noted in Corsi’s early biography of Ficino (or possibly in Pisa) when Ficino performed his medical studies.
Further, Spruit suggests that: "The commentaries and original treatises of Marsilio Ficino “exemplify the intensive assimilation and elaboration of Peripatetic elements in a strictly Platonic framework.”\(^{191}\) He concurs with the idea that the key to understanding Ficino's views on perception is consideration of his [Ficino’s] placement within his philosophical system in a central position of the connective role of the human soul within the functions of a structured sequence of interrelationships within the posited hierarchies of reality. It is the "soul's affinity to all other degrees of being", that “grounds its virtually infinite capacity for knowledge.”\(^{192}\) The intellect is understood to display its “cognitive activity by virtue of an innate spiritual force, and is connected to reality by species and rationes, also called formulae, representing the more narrowly defined perceptual and cognitive objects”\(^{193}\). Spruit notes that Ficino rejected the idea that these images or species and rationes or formulae; that is to say, “ideas,” are received from the sensible world. Instead, according to his theoretical formulations, the human soul, by virtue of its autonomy from the body’s materiality, must be self-sufficient in its knowledge of the sensible world. The soul should not require the intermediary of a body in order to be capable of receiving any impressed forms from any phenomenon.\(^{194}\) In fact, in accordance with the Platonic concept of a priori awareness, due to the potentiality of the

\(^{191}\) Spruit Ibid. p. 208.


\(^{193}\) Ibid., see Spruit, p. 208 (note 32).

\(^{194}\) Ibid., see Spruitt, (note 33), p. 208, citing both the Theologia Platonica, IX, 5, noting Ficino’s disagreement with the Peripatetics that the soul operates without the body, also XV, 3, supported by Plotinus, In Enneades, IV.6.1.
soul, its character must be such that it would not need to receive any forms from a body, for it would (due perhaps to its eternal nature) possess them in advance.\textsuperscript{195}

Ernst Gombrich’s ideas have already been discussed more extensively above and in Chapter IV for their particular relevance to the interpretations of the significance of the \textit{Primavera}. His seminal work, \textit{Symbolic Images: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance II}, which proposed a “coherent reading of Botticelli’s mythological paintings”...”in the light of Neo-Platonic interpretations,” is an extraordinary resource for establishing awareness of the iconological complexity of Botticelli’s inter-textual images. Excellent notes and insightful commentary with an appendix and the previously unpublished letters from Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici offering a motivational, contextual rationale pertaining to why Ficino would have become involved in devising a symbolic guideline for the representation of love as a means of mollifying the strained relations between Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco and his powerful political cousin, Lorenzo, \textit{Il Magnifico}, de’ Medici. Richly informative, this is a foundational study.

Ronald Lightbown provides an indispensable source of information on the works of Sandro Botticelli in two volumes, with sources and documents offered in appendices that demonstrate Botticelli’s connections to his teacher and patron, Giorgio Vespucci (Ficino’s close friend, fellow Neo-Platonist, and confidant, in whose arms Ficino is said to have died), discussion of Neo-Platonic sources for Botticelli’s images, including Poliziano (Politian), Ficino and possible classical, ancient inspiration including possible

\textsuperscript{195} Ibid., p. 209, but rather, " quod exercet nunc quam non exercebat ante (see note 34 from \textit{Exposition in interpretationem Prisciani Lydi super Theophrastum} in \textit{Opera} [Omnia?] p. 1829 see also Plotinus, \textit{Enneads} V, 3.4, p. 1759).
connections to the ancient painter Apelles and his image of *Venus Anadyomene* (as an allusion or inspiration for Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus* but not a direct connection due to the differences in the treatment of Venus as subject in both classically inspired Botticelli works). Lightbown’s extensive citations of sources, careful documentation of the provenance and stylistic evolution among Botticelli’s images and insightful commentary make this work an exceptionally valuable resource.\(^{196}\)

Lightbown discusses Botticelli’s life and his religious and secular works and notes the conundrum of motivation for the Guasparri dal Lama image of the late Cosimo de’ Medici and his dead sons as the Magi in the Uffizi *Adoration*.\(^{197}\) Lightbown indicates that the Uffizi Adoration is: “… Stylistically …the climax of Botticelli’s early manner.”, marking the beginning of his independence from the influence of Filippo Lippi and cites the praises for this work given by Vasari.\(^{198}\) Lightbown considers the Uffizi *Adoration* to be the work, which definitively gained Botticelli “universal admiration in Florence”. and implicitly this suggests a benefit to both the artist and his patron in devising a rationale for the selection and rather unusual characterization of his subject.\(^{199}\)

Regarding the Washington *Adoration*, Lightbown notes the powerful influence of posture on meaning, observing that:

…Here all the principal figures express a movement of devotion. No doubt one


\(^{197}\) Ibid., pp. 45-46.

\(^{198}\) Ibid., pp. 45-46.

\(^{199}\) Ibid., p. 44.
reason why this mellifluous picture was so admired is that each of them makes a different expression of his piety, with various postures of hand and body and countenance, so that we have fervency of prayer, depth of contemplation, serene devotion, eager exposition of the divine mystery, tender reverence...

Lightbown groups the secular pictures according to the designated patrons as confirmed by his research and indicates that both the Primavera and the Pallas and the Centaur (Camilla/Minerva/ Pallas and the Centaur) were commissioned for Lorenzo Il Magnifico’s young, second cousin, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici, grandson of the elder Lorenzo Il Magnifico’s grandfather’s (Cosimo Il Vecchio’s) brother, who was also named “Lorenzo.”  Lightbown notes the younger Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco as Botticelli’s “greatest patron”. Lightbown gives the Primavera as a work commissioned for the Florentine townhouse of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco as noted in inventories of the period, where it “hung or was fixed to a wall in the chamber next to Lorenzo’s bedroom.” Lightbown cites the Primavera’s Venus as “a matron, richly attired, so that it is as the goddess of love and marriage that she is represented...” Lightbown connects the Botticelli painting to a passage from Alberti in which he discusses the “seven moments which delight him in hair..” in reference to the representation of what Lightbown identifies as the Three Graces in this painting.

Quoting Alberti’s passage, Lightbown writes:

200 Ibid., p. 70.
201 Ibid., p. 70.
202 Ibid.p. 73.
203 Ibid., p. 75.
204 Ibid., p. 77. The identities of the figures referred to sometimes as Graces, sometimes as Horae (see Rab Hatfield, “Some Misidentifications “ 2009) are a point of contention among art historians as is the idea of which literary source may be of most significance.
Let it wind itself into a coil as if desiring to knot itself and let it wave in the air like unto flames: let part weave itself among the rest like a snake, part grow to one side, part to the other… Let no part of the drapery be free from movement. But I repeat, let its movements be moderate and gentle, such as proffer grace to the spectator rather than stir his wonder at the labour. But wherever we wish to give drapery its own movements, given that the drapery by nature is heavy and falls continually to the ground, for this reason it will be well to put into the painting the face of the wind Zephyr or Auster blowing among the clouds, showing why the drapery flutters. And thus another grace shall appear, in that on the side struck by the wind the bodies will show a good part of their naked forms, and on the other side the draperies blown by the soft wind will flutter through the air.  

Citing the “aesthetic of rational grace” as an essential element of the works by Botticelli, Lightbown concurs with Aby Warburg’s suggestion that the inspiration for the *Primavera* painting is Ovid’s *Fasti*, a work, that takes as its subject the Roman calendar. Lightbown suggests that the *Primavera* was painted in response to a pending marriage in May of 1482, of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici to Semiramide Appiano as an explanation for the complex imagery and even philosophical implications of this work. Lightbown does also cite the possibility that the *Primavera* could be interpreted as “a grave Neoplatonic allegory, invented by Marsiglio (sic) Ficino, in which Venus symbolises *humanitas*, the virtue which Ficino allotted to her planet in a letter of moral and religious exhortation written to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco c. 1477…,” intended also as an encouragement by young Lorenzo’s teachers, and Ficino’s associates, Naldo Naldi and Giorgio Antonio Vespucci, but he abandons this interpretation based on rejection of the

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206 Ibid., pp 77-78.

207 Ibid., p. 81.
past assumptions about the commission of the painting for the Medici villa at Castello.\textsuperscript{208}

Lightbown cites the Anonimo Magliabecchiano’s mention of works by Botticelli in the possession of Giovanni de’ Medici, which he suggests are for Giovanni’s brother, Botticelli’s patron, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco as the \textit{Pallas and the Centaur (Camilla/Minerva/Pallas and the Centaur)} and notes that in the inventory of 1499, the female figure is given a “new” name as “Camilla” and then, in a later inventory of 1516, the female figure is cited as “Minerva”.\textsuperscript{209} Noting that “…There is no myth that links Minerva or Camilla or any nymph of Diana with a Centaur, and for this reason the picture must be an allegorical invention…”, Lightbown alludes to a possibility of an addition to the \textit{primum in aliquo genere}; the generative originality of Botticelli in creating a new kind of art image, to carry on the \textit{quattrocento} theme of chastity overcoming lust.\textsuperscript{210}

Lightbown cites the fact that no mention is made of the exquisite \textit{Birth of Venus} in the inventory of the Medici Villa at Castello of 1499, and although it does appear at Castello by 1530-1540, Lightbown assumes that this image may have been commissioned for some other patron and not for Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco.\textsuperscript{211} Connecting the female attendant to Venus with the Horae, attendants to the goddess mentioned by Ovid in the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{208} Ibid., p. 80.
\item \textsuperscript{209} Ibid., p. 82, note 1, p. 186 and Appendix A, pp. 157-158, cites: “A castello in casa il Sr. Giovannj demedicj piu quadrij Djinse che sono delle piu belle opera che facesj.”
\item \textsuperscript{210} Ibid., p. 85. Lightbown explains the connection to Camilla or Minerva, symbols of virtue as a possible allusion to the jousting standard of Giuliano de’ Medici on which his Platonic “beloved” Simonetta Vespucci was represented as Pallas, thus extending the theme of virtue to the marriage of Semiramis Appiano and Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici.
\item \textsuperscript{211} Ibid., p. 85.
\end{itemize}
same work (the *Fasti*) assumed to be one of the sources for Botticelli’s *Primavera*, noting that the Horae were goddesses of the seasons, and noting the roses, myrtle and anemones in the painting, Lightbown concludes that this figure is the Hora of Spring.212 Lightbown notes the inconsistencies in this image with a particular text and cites Botticelli’s works on the illustrations of Dante’s text and the representations of San Zenobio in panels, to show that while Botticelli was fully capable of translating a literary text with considerable accuracy, he appears not to have that intention in this work and in the allegorical images that are associated with it.213 Lightbown’s observations on the synthesis of multiple sources within the iconographic and iconological frameworks of Botticelli’s images, implicitly raises the on-going question of the extent to which Botticelli himself is innovating his interpretations of classical texts, myths, and philosophical allegories, contrasted with possibly being directed by either a patron or a librettist in composing his evocative imagery noting that the subject of the *Birth of Venus* was allegorized by both Boccaccio and by “Marsiglio (sic) Ficino.”214

Of particular interest for this study is Quinlan-McGrath’s chapter entitled “The Physical Nature of Vision, the Material Image, and the Soul”. This discussion assesses the processes of vision and the extent of its power upon the soul considering the role of perception and intellection and the interactions of the material world with the intelligible and non-material mind. The implications of seeing and of the *spiritus*, the function of the

212 Ibid. p. 88.

213 Ibid. p. 88.

214 Ibid., p. 89. Lightbown cautions against the assumption that all secular painting created during the period of the Renaissance were necessarily “charged with moral significance”, suggesting that the painting could be merely intended to be delightful to the eye.
“ray” and its powers offer helpful insights regarding the mechanics and metaphysics of Ficino’s commitments stemming from the processes of vision.

Quinlan McGrath also clarifies the interdependence of Ficino’s discussion of the roles of the intellect, imagination, and spiritus in a dynamic interactive exchange, which permits the possibility of material images affecting the immaterial soul due to effects stemming from the entry of physical rays, connected to the reality of images, into the eyes, conveying these images to the imagination, via sense impression upon the eyes.215 The material image is understood by Ficino to project from its originating object (for the sake of argument, here, I will suggest a painting as the originating object) and the image is conveyed through space, and is taken into the awareness of the viewer.216 The danger Ficino warns his reader of, regarding the possible effects of images which pass to the imagination and could, thus interact with the immaterial mind, is that weak imaginations (ones with an inadequately prepared Spiritus in which the imagination, over time, has been properly exercised by comparing intrusive, material images with divine Images acquired through both habit and study), may permit the Material image to control the mind, instead of the proper function of serving a mind, armed with a well-prepared critical faculty, and McGrath offers the caveat: “When Ficino scolds philosophers for ignoring the instrument of thought, their Spiritus, it is, ultimately, because the purity of one’s Spiritus affects not just one’s perception but also one’s ability to think and to learn,

215 Mary Quinlan-McGrath, p. 75.

216 Ibid., p. 75-80. McGrath indicates that in Ficino’s Timaeus Commentary, he notes that the Matter, Qualities, and shape of the Material image exude from the object and enter the individuals visual Spiritus. McGrath notes the synthesis of ideas from Plato’s Timaeus, Plato’s Sophist, and Synesius’ De insomniis in structuring a highly nuanced account for the intake of Material images.
which affects one’s soul.” In Ficino’s system, while artworks are not explicitly cited as tools of philosophy, it is clear that in a structure presupposed upon a foundation of a vital connection between vision and cognition, that whether the connections are made explicit or not, it is clear as McGrath specifies: “….as vision is understood to be a transaction of reciprocal radiation operating through Spiritus, Ficino suggests that Material images do exist in nature and that they work through vision to in-Form the mind.” This process was accepted by Ficino as “natural” and consequently, it would have been understood as generating from God.

Bruno Santi’s work Boccelli, (Becocci Editore, Firenze), 1981, is helpful in terms of providing certain detailed insights pertaining to the character and the associates of Boccelli, i.e., his observation that Boccelli’s father referred to the young painter at age 13 as "studious and sickly" in the portate al Catasto, a document recording the income declarations of individuals in Florence for tax purposes. Unfortunately, Santi

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217 Ibid., p. 79. This observation by McGrath on Ficino’s theory of a vision-based, aesthetically centered learning process is crucial for the ideas posited in this study that the intentional inclusion of material images with important intellectually, and spiritually inspired themes would be a secret, but purposive inclusion in a program for the dissemination of philosophical reasoning in and among the members of Ficino’s circle of acquaintances. However, for precisely the reasons noted both by McGrath and also discussed in Ficino’s commentary on the Sophist, chapter 46, the idea of the daemonic power of light and of images as products of light and reflection as influential entities hung on a precipice that was precariously close to the magical and supernatural. See also Ficino’s Sophist commentary, Michael J. B. Allen, Icastes: Marsilio Ficino’s Interpretation of Plato’s Sophist, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1989, pp. 270-276.

218 Ibid., p. 80.

219 Ibid., p. 80, McGrath’s quote simply states that “Both Synesius and Ficino find this process (the in-Forming of mind by material images) natural and, thus, accept it as divinely created. Synesius points out that a person has the ability to direct this Spiritus in either a cleansing or a sullying way. Ficino’s remark on a weak will suggests the same.” Therefore, the individual, subjective preparation of the spectatory is of crucial importance in the edifying or not so very edifying effects of contemplating material images.
does not cite the document numbers or actual resources (Archivio di Stato in Florence? Laurentian Library?) for accessing the primary sources that support many of his observations in sufficient detail in this publication. Thus, while his commentary is of interest, it must be accepted with some caveats.

David Summers’ discussion of sense and judgment provides clarification for the role of memory within a system of aesthetic interrelations through which the importance of works of visual art may be understood to function within Ficino’s tiered ontology. The activities of memory serve as a means for refinement of the soul both through the fact of re-minding, or positing within the mind for consideration anew of concepts assessed via the soul pertaining to elevated ideas. According to the Neo-Platonists, an impression of the thing that was being compared to the Forms or the Ideas by the mens in contact with the rational soul generated a form of philosophical activity simply from participating in the action of contemplating an image of the proper kind of subject.\footnote{See David Summers, \textit{The Judgment of Sense: Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics}, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1987, reprt. 2007, pp. 110-117; and see also Anna Corrias, “Imagination: Plotinus and Marsilio Ficino on the Soul’s Tutelary Spirit,” British Journal for the History of Philosophy, Routledge Publications, Vol. 21, No. 3, 2013, Taylor and Francis online: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09608788.2013.771608#preview.}

Centrality of the imagination as a means through which external entities could affect and influence sentient beings due to the imagination’s mirror-like, reflective function is an important ontological component for the explanation of why works of art may serve to transform the human being. Impressions in the imagination could be images projected by benevolent daemons, which would be refined by the soul and presented for
judgment to the intellect (mens). The theory of a pneumatic or spiritual imagination and its mediation between body and soul is asserted by Ficino as described by Synesius, for whom the soul is based within the hegemonikon, or “seat” of the soul, which has four distinct powers: phantasia, reason, impulse, and assent. These powers are distributed like a vital entity, which is one in their shared soul-base, yet multiple in their determining functions. The fantasy or to phantastikon pneuma, specifically, is a sense material which was considered to be able to receive impressions from the material world, or the realm below, yet it is sufficiently immaterial such that it was assumed also to receive impressions from above. It is via the fantasy, that humans were understood to have


222 See David Summers, The Judgment of Sense, p. 113, who notes that when Ficino translated Synesius De Somniis, he translated the fantasy as the first body of the soul and common sense in note 5.


224 See David Summers, The Judgment of Sense, p. 112-113. Summers discusses the Augustinian inheritance of Plotinus and Porphyry of classical pneumatology transferred to the latter Medieval era, but further elaborates on the relationship of this classical, spirit-based ontology for associations with medical writings stemming from the ideas of Aristotle and the subtle pneumatic “fire” considered the principle of life in humankind. This principle came to be identified with immanent presence of God and the vital force or “world soul” associated with breath. This association is of considerable significance for the images of inseminating “breath” in two of the most important images pertaining to the representation of “power” in this study; that of the Primavera with the wind god, Zephyrus, discussed in Chapter IV, and the image of the Birth of Venus, in Chapter VII, in which the life-giving wind blows Love/Venus/ Aphrodite Ourania ashore as a divine gift to humanity. Both images are discussed in greater detail in Chapters IV and VII. The reference to the fantasy as to phantastikon pneuma is taken from Synesius, De Somniis, who Summers notes, describes the fantasy as “the first body of the soul about which nature has constructed all the functions of the brain, and to which all of the senses are subservient.” This function of the soul was understood to have power over all of the remaining senses, essentially being the source of all perception (see Summers p. 113).
communion with the divine; that is, with the gods or with God. The *spiritus* and fantasy were intricately connected to the powers of vision, both sensual vision and the higher, more abstracted inner or spiritual vision driven by images drawn upon from the reflections of the *phastikon pneuma*. *Spiritus*, a power of the soul (*vis animae*), lower in the hierarchy of being than mind (*mens*), retained a post-sensual capacity to sustain similitudes of corporeal things, after the material external object of perception was no longer physically present. The ability to “see” what was absent was a powerful determining consideration for assignment of the superiority of the spiritual vision over the sensual form of vision, embracing the role of human memory and a productive function of the fantasy connected to the possibility for heavenly, purely spiritual visions, wholly detached from corporeal reality. Thus the image-making *spiritus* was thought to be capable of communicating with the “true” Formal or ideal visions of heaven. As a consequence of his conception of sight as a truly “spiritual” activity, Augustine interpreted the Platonic theory of extromission as both an activity of the physical, fine, fiery ray sent out from the material *spiritus* of the individual from the eye and as an activity of divine inner light of the non-material “light” of rationality, a kind of power of judgment unique to each individual. The character of this unique pneumatic body of

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225 Summers, *The Judgment of Sense*, p. 113, notes that the notion of *spiritus* is elaborated in Augustine’s *De Genesi ad Litteram*, and transferring a “fully developed pneumatic psychology on to the Christian Middle Ages and the Renaissance.”

226 Ibid., pp. 113-117 gives a helpful explanation of the mechanics of spiritual fantasy and its access to prophetic dreams and heavenly visions as superior to sensual, material vision based in the ideas of Synesius, Plotinus, and Porphyry, synthesized by Augustine, and absorbed by Ficino.

227 Ibid., pp.115-116. Extromission, is one of the most important theories pertaining to how the eye was assumed to function, a topic which has been the source of conflicting interpretations in the past. Among ancient physicians and philosophers the idea of the “active eye” was a persistent scientific theory, and was particularly encouraged as a likely explanation for the mechanics of
the primary world soul was assumed to have acquired its individual character while in the process of descending from the spheres/planets to earth where of course it has intercourse with the body, where in this world, it will mediate between the higher spiritual, and lower material realms.\textsuperscript{228}

Artists, simply by virtue of the need to draw upon memory, imagination, absent vision, and thus rational spirituality as a by-product of the activity of creating visual images, must be understood not only to have communion with this activity of fantasy in accordance with St. Augustine’s theory of spiritus as set out in the \textit{de Genesi ad Litteram}, but, moreover, Augustine clarifies how Ficino would have understood the inner actions of vision to operate. The sensual activity of vision as spectators of paintings as material

\textsuperscript{228} Summers, pp 112-113, discusses Augustine’s reliance upon Plotinus’ theory of pneumatic imagination, further elaborated by Synesius, which would have been seen and incorporated by Marsilio Ficino in his translation of Synesius’ \textit{De Somniis}, c. 1484. A copy of Ficino’s translation is available on wiki.commons under the description: Latin Translation of Synesius, \textit{De insomniis} (“On Dreams”), translated by Marsilio Ficino. The online manuscript once belonged to King Matthias Corvinus. Manuscript Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August-Bibliothek, Cod. 2 Aug. 4°, fol. 5r.
objects would have been assumed to have caused the observers to experience engagement with the ideas embedded within the images through the unique individual preparations of each soul for the reception of the abstractions generated from images of or about the represented Forms and ideas shown in works of art, which would consequently affect each individual spectator in accordance with his or her capacity for the receptivity to those ideas (sustained through or within the image or painting) by each of the respective individual pneumatic presences.\textsuperscript{229} Augustine had identified three distinct forms of vision: material or sensual vision; that is, the power to observe present, corporeal, material reality; spiritual vision (the human ability to envision, from memory, absent corporeal things; third intellectual vision, or, the ability to perceive (within our reason) intelligible things, or things with no material presence.\textsuperscript{230} Spiritual vision or pneumatic vision combines all post-sensory vision and may be comparable to Averroes’ passive intellect and the \textit{vis cognitiva} to which Thomas Acquinas referred.\textsuperscript{231}

\textit{Spiritus} as a power of the soul engages in the constructive or imaginative activity of \textit{cogitatio} through which we may form images of things seen or images of fictions derived from imagination, whereby we are capable of imagining things or sites where we

\textsuperscript{229} St. Augustine \textit{de Genesi ad Litteram:} XII, 6.14, translated as “the Literal Meaning of Genesis”.

\textsuperscript{230} See St. Augustine, \textit{de Genesi ad Litteram:} XII, 6.14.

\textsuperscript{231} For a discussion of the influence of Ficino’s perception of the ideas of Averroes based in the arguments of St. Thomas Aquinas, see Brian Copenhaver, “Ten Arguments in Search of a Philosopher: Averroes and Aquinas in Ficino’s \textit{Platonic Theology},” in \textit{Vivarium,} Brill, Leiden, No. 47, 2009, pp. 444-479. Copenhaver discusses the roles of the passive and active intellect in Averroes’ theory of mind and the basis of these ideas in Aristotle and their impact upon both Thomas Aquinas and Ficino.
may have never been. As creatures with the gift of memory, we retain the ability to see corporeal things that are subsequently out of sight, and this activity is tied to our individual spirituality by virtue of use of the simulacra impressed upon the passive intellect. Through the activity of envisioning what is absent and its necessary employment of the imagination, one’s spiritus is naturally carried upward, away from material reality due in part to the understood mechanics of the activity of “envisioning” (either after-the-fact or without any actual materially-based experience). Since abstractions and elevated concepts rely on a “spiritual” inner, non-material sight, the inner light of reason, which necessarily illuminated such an inwardly motivated vision, may be understood even to surpass the “natural” light of the heavens. Augustine in reasoning about the mechanics of inner vision comes to the conclusion, in accord with Plotinus, that imagination (or inner vision) is superior to sensual sight or material vision.\(^{232}\) Thus, all uses of inner vision and memory, which require employment of a principle of temporal continuity, engage and possibly elevate the soul, since we could not understand speech or make sense of the beauty of music without this coherence of intention grounded in an act of spiritual vision.

Paintings become, according to the logistics of the process described above, a means through which a catalyst to induce acts of spiritual vision may be enabled because they cause the spectator to elevate the spiritus due to the need to act upon what is remembered as well as what is observed. Eyes allow the intiation of the process by which

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\(^{232}\) See Summers, p. 115 and note 10 referencing M.W. Bundy the theory of classical imagination in thought, p. 119. The *alta fantasia* of Dante and the *sensus communis* of Aristotle, from which we form intentions for future acts (such as preparing a painting for example), are explained with this basis in spiritual vision.
souls gain access to the divine intelligence or *mens* / mind which has the task of comparing the image in the painting to the divine intelligible image of “Truth”, and thus to judge the painting by engaging in a spiritual activity. In such a system, even to look at and contemplate works of art, although here our particular concern is with paintings, automatically elevates the *spiritus*. Vision provides the basic metaphor for spiritual judgment. Looking at art is either in fact a philosophical and spiritual activity, or is, at minimum, an activity that enhances and refines the spirit. The soul may be understood to extend itself beyond the body by means of sight, particularly in an extromissionist ontology of seeing. Acceptance of an extromissionist explanation for the activity of vision would indicate that inner visions of absent “souls” are seen through the soul of the perceiver by calling upon simulacra in memory and fantasy, which inhere communion with God, per Augustine’s theory of superiority of inner sensation, synthesizing the Aristotelian notion of the judgment of sense while providing for the survival of the Platonic theory of extromission. Calvacanti notes the importance of subjectivity in accordance with Ficino’s theory, based upon the Plotinian idea of the descent of the soul

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234 See David Lindberg editor, *John Pecham and the Science of Optics, Perspectiva communis*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1970, Proposition 46 [49] p. 129, who suggests that the eye itself has some proportioning and moderating power. (see also Summers, The Judgement of Sense, who speaks of the light of the sun and the light of the eye as the light of reason, the contrasting forms of revelation of truth in judgement implied between the observation of an object in the natural light to which the evaluation of rational judgment is applied as embedded in the phrase “in the light of the piazza” as a means of judging value, that is subjection to both the clarifying brightness of the light of the sun, and the evaluative, rational light of the applied reason of the populace in their judgment as a spiritual act to assess something of value such as Michelangelo’s *David*. Summers also notes that Leonardo da Vinci was conversant in the science of optics and that he had considered the value of an extro-missionist theory of vision, which is adhered to by Ficino following the guidelines of Platonism. Ficino’s theory of vision provides substantiation for a concept of the role of pictures as spiritually and philosophically catalytic objects.
through the heavenly spheres.\textsuperscript{235} Astrology supported this conception of a completely unique individuality.\textsuperscript{236}

As a painter, Botticelli would have been familiar with the importance of the use of geometry; that is to say, mathematical relationships made visible, and the use of proportion in structuring the compositional arrangements within his works. Moreover, Ficino as a familiar of Leon Battista Alberti and as an adherent to Neo-Platonic ideas and philosophical and metaphysical commitments discussed the importance of number as a conceptual foundation for ontological formulations of Platonic, Pythagorean, and Neo-Platonic thought in his commentaries and translations particularly of Plato’s \textit{Timeus}, \textit{Republic}, \textit{Meno}, and \textit{Philebus} as well as in the works of Plotinus.\textsuperscript{237} This familiarity with the importance of number may suggest a likelihood for aesthetically-based visual associations, grounded in symbolic geometric complexity, through which some of Botticelli’s compositions included in this study may be understood to have more than a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item That is to say that the idea of being born under a particular configuration of stars helped account for the favorable qualities that may appear in persons of not particularly distinguished heritage, but who were born under an fortunate configuration of heavenly confluences.) this is given in Summers, in note 21 referencing BT =Paola Barrochi \textit{Tratto di Arte del ’500} 3 vols. See Summers for the reference to Giovanni Calvalcanti’s dialogue with Alberti speaking with Ficino who was interrupted in completing his discourse in the Calvalcanti text.
\item Ficino’s relationship with Leon Battista Alberti is well documented in his letters and his translations as has been noted by John Shannon Hendrix in his article entitled “Alberti and Ficino,” from \textit{Rogers Williams University, School of Architecture, Art, and Historic Preservation Faculty Papers}, paper 25, (2012), \texttt{http://docs.rwu/saahp_fp/25}. See also Ficino’s works particularly the translation of the mathematically preoccupied \textit{Book VI} of Plato’s \textit{Republic} in addition to the ideas given in the translation and commentaries of the \textit{Timaeus}.
\end{enumerate}
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merely accidental significance for the logical philosophical extensions of Neo-Platonist thought.

In Book VI of the Republic, 509e – 511e, Plato provides what appears to be an allegorical discourse on the visible and the intelligible worlds symbolized by a divided line.238 Ficino’s support of the reality of incorporeal forms is substantiated by the concept of numbers which are conceptual entities with real world effects. This Platonic formulation on the existence of eternal, Universals as more fundamentally “real” than transient Particulars is subsumed in the philosophical question of how the “many” may be derived from the “One”. The answer to this question is provided with a mathematical geometric formulation. The allegorical discourse in the Republic is provided in the form of a conversation between Glaucon and Socrates. Kristeller notes Ficino’s citation in his Praise of Philosophy of Plato’s idea that the soul “dies” (in a sense) upon entry into the material, mortal body and returns to life upon its release from mortality. The soul then ascends through the medium of philosophy from the lowest place (the vessel of the body) via “physical instruments”, through the elements and by mathematical steps, attains the highest spheres of the heavens.239 Ficino uses metaphor in his philosophical imagery closely affiliated with the traditions of Plato, and Kristeller cites the importance of the Allegory of the Cave as a means for illustrating the aspiration of the soul toward the

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239 See Paul Oskar Kristeller, p. 222 who refers to Ficino’s discourse in the Opera Omnia, p. 265.
immutable God.\textsuperscript{240} The progressive stages of ascent in the Allegory of the Divided Line and of the Allegory of the Cave use images of reflection and hierarchical subdivision as a means to guide a seeker toward truth. Plato’s condemnation of illusion and mimesis in the Republic as distractions in the search for the immutable is also mitigated by his mention of the use of the drawing of diagrams in works such as the Meno, and the use of demonstration, also associated with the Allegory of the Divided Line. Therefore, the employment of representations is clearly accepted as a viable philosophical tool. Art, to the extent that it serves as a form of “reflection” of eternal verity, could reasonably be used to help direct a soul toward “truth” and to engage with an edifying concept of Beauty.

In the first chapter of his translation and commentary on Plato’s Timaeus, Marsilio Ficino notes that the Parmenides is a discourse upon divinity, while the Timeaus is a treatise upon the natural world, and that both dialogues are heavily indebted to Pythagorean ideas and ideals.\textsuperscript{241} In Chapter 43 of the Timaeus text, a demonstration of the character of natural phenomena is undertaken using the model of mathematics, and in

\textsuperscript{240} Ibid., p. 93, Kristeller discusses the importance of metaphor in Ficino’s works and his use of the Platonic and Plotinian models to present images of philosophical significance, repeating Platonic ideas or on occasion, offering original insights such as his suggestion that a soul obedient to bodily desires is comparable to the indulgent mother of a petulant child, or how the soul’s movement toward God is comparable to the ancient painter, Apelles’ process of creation in painting a picture.

\textsuperscript{241} See Marsilio Ficino, \textit{All Things Natural: Ficino on Plato’s Timaeus}, translation by Arthur Farndell, notes and additional material by Peter Blumsom, Shepheard-Walwyn Publishers, Ltd. 2010, p. 3. The text notes that Plato uses the Eleatic Pythagorean adherents, Parmenides and Zeno as the sources of the discourse in the Parmenides, and the Pythagorean Timeaus of Locri author of a treatise on the nature of the universe in the book which takes his name who provides the foundations for the ideas asserted in the text.
this chapter, Leon Battisa Alberti is mentioned by name as having published his work on architecture in the company of others whose mathematical observations are grounded in Platonist, and thus Pythagorean conceptualizations. Pythagoras’ mathematical foundation stems from his teaching of the Quadrivium, a program of study he is noted by Critchlow as having taught under the title of the Tetraktys beginning in approximately 500 BCE. Knowledge in the Pythagorean, Socratic, Platonic, Plotinian, and Ficinian models, is represented as a component of the action and structure of the soul (particularly in Ficino’s post-Plotinian metaphysics), the rational soul searches for truth via the act of contemplation and facilitates communication between Divine Mind and the world-soul, providing us (the thinkers or contemplators) with a means to gain access to [divine] truth. Truth thus gained via the activities of the soul, is an intrinsic component within the seeker and the Trivium and Quadrivium were structured to support the learner seeking truth by means of facilitating the contemplation of rational principles. These were in turn,

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244 See Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, English translation by Michael J. B. Allen, Latin text by James Hankins with William Bowen, The I Tatti Renaissance Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Volume IV, Book XII, chapter II, pp. 26-29, 2004, where Ficino notes “As John [the Evangelist] says, they receive from the fullness of the divine reason, because anyone who truly contemplates the species of an object has already received in himself some one of the ideas of the divine reason itself….And all Platonists support the view that, in the contemplation of rational principles, the divine reason is “touched” by a substantial not just by an imaginary touching of the mind; and that the unity proper to the mind is joined to God, the unity of all things , in a manner beyond our conception” ( Quod omnes faciunt contemplantes, quuos iniquit Ioannes de plentitudine divinae rationis accipere, quia scilicet quisquis vere contemplator speciem aliquam rerum, accepit iam in se aliquam ex numero idearum quorum plenitude est ipsa divina ratio….et Platonici omnes probant in rationibus contemplandis divinam rationem tactus quoque mentis substantiali potius quam imaginarium tangi, unitatemque mentis propriam deo rerum omnium unitati modo quodam estimabili copulari.”)
supported in the *Trivium* by Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric, respectively providing structure, coherence, and eloquence/beauty, where the *Quadrivium* provided the structure based in number for gaining access to the One; that is to say, the unity of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty via Arithmetic (the construct of Number), Geometry (number as manifested by measure or the articulation of space), Harmony (number in time), and last Astronomy (number or measure in space and time – via the awareness of and study of the Cosmos).245

Christopher Celenza discusses Ficino’s extensive paraphrasing Iamblichus’ works on Pythagoras, with commentary on certain parallels that may be construed concerning how the early Neo-Platonist associates Pythagoras with important hierophantic and soteriological significations, that Ficino may have extrapolated for implicit contextual reference to himself as a prophetic figure within the context of the anticipated celestial conjunction of 1484, the eschatological assumptions that are often anticipated with the turn of the century, and a “salvationist mentalite (**sic**)” intellectuals may be demonstrated to accrue to themselves.246 In every grouping of the *prisca theologia*, or “ancient wisdom” Ficino includes Pythagoras prominently, and the importance Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans placed upon the concept of unity and the idea of the transmission of what Celenza refers to as a “unitary wisdom”, is of paramount

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importance in Ficino’s own commentary. Celenza notes that for Ficino, Plato would have been understood to continue the preservation of ancient wisdom (“reservist antiqua”) by means of the “modo mathematico” or “in a mathematical way” and such a method of knowledge transmission is directly associated with Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans. Celenza cites Ficino’s letter to Janus Pannonius as a confirmation of Ficino’s interest in following the methods of the ancients in obfuscat ing divine mysteries through the use of mathematical figures.

247 Ibid., pp. 667ff (46 pages with notes). p. 6 of 46. in the article accessed online at: http://web7.infotrac.galegroup.com/…43!xm_1_0_A57815615?sw_aep=usclib.


In Ficino’s well-known letter to Janus Pannonius of the mid 1480s (which became the basis of his preface to his translation of Plotinus), Ficino offers a succession outlining the prsca theologia: It happened one that a certain “pious philosophy” was born, among the Persians in the person of Zoroaster and among the Egyptians in the person of Mercury [i.e. Hermes Trismegistus]; both of these agreed with each other. Then, this philosophy was nourished among the Thracians under Orpheus and Aglaophemus. And soon thereafter it matured among the Greeks and Italians under Pythagoras. But it was at last brought to real perfection at Athens by divine Plato. Now it was the ancient custom of the Theologians to cover up divine mysteries, now with mathematical numbers and figures, now with poetic figments.

My italics are to highlight Celenza’s observations on the organic character of Ficino’s metaphor of growth and maturity for a living and sustained philosophical project extending from Zoroaster to Plato cited on p. 7 of 46, (and perhaps, implicitly continued through Christ). Note 42 provides the transcription of Ficino’s original text from the Opera Omnia I: p. 871:


119
The relevance to Botticelli’s works lies in the implied geometry of his compositional structures, which inhere the contemplation of rational principles of proportion, number, and harmony by means of the application of consciousness (aisthetikos) toward the images predicated upon numerical relations based in both implicit and explicit use of geometric forms which, by virtue of their qualities, elicit action in the rational soul that support its search for Truth, Beauty, and thus God through evidence of number and often via repeated representations of phi–based (Φ) visual relationships.  

Lawlor notes the intentionality of much early esoteric teaching in Celenza notes that this quote stems from the eighth book of Ficino’s letters from the summer of 1484, remarking upon George of Trebizond’s comment that a great deal of Platonic instruction was obscured “per integumenta quaedam et enigmata,” (that is to say by disguises and riddles) and cites the preface to Trebizond’s translation of Plato’s Laws and Epinomis, edited in J. Monfasani, George of Trebizond: A Biography and a Study of His Rhetoric and Logic, Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition, I, Leiden, 1976, pp. 360-364.

250 The phi–based relationship (Φ), or three-term proportion is explained in Robert Lawlor, Sacred Geometry: Philosophy & Practice, Thames & Hudson, London, 1982, Chapter V “Proportion and the Golden Section,” pp. 44-64. The use of the 21st letter of the Greek alphabet to indicate the geometric relationship of \( a : b :: b : (a + b) \) such that the largest comparative term is the sum of the other two terms, which encapsulates the idea of Oneness or wholeness based in the reality that the two distinct terms become One. Ken L. Wheeler discusses the significance of the Golden Ratio in Pythagoras, Plato, and the Golden Ratio, Darkstar Publications, Lexington Kentucky 2005, pp. 1-40, noting the employment of the Golden Ratio in both the Allegory of the Divided Line taken from Plato’s Republic (op.cit.), 509d-511e and in the Allegory of the Cave from Republic 514a-520a. The purpose of these allegories according to Wheeler is to demonstrate “…the Emanationist philosophy/ religion of the Platonists” which serves as a component within a system which “…employed the Golden Ratio into both a ‘Divided Line’ analogy and the ‘Cave’ symbolism to show the variant degrees of proportion and ratio between the visible (aisthetos) and intelligible (noetos) kosmos in a divine Logos (proportion).” Wheeler indicates that the “Logos (proportion) which comprises the visible and intelligible…formed the foundational doctrine of the Pythagoreans and Platonists who despised all who were ‘ignorant of geometry’ to partake of their instruction.” The property which was understood to unify the earthly and divine realms was the “Logos of the Monad (the unity of one), geometrically and arithmetically represented by a power of phi (Φ), which is the logos (proportion) of the emanation of the Monad.Wheeler notes that also of special significance is the ‘Pythagorean triangle’; the model for the tetraktys, the pentagram, the Divided Line, and the Cave analogies. This particular form of isosceles triangle in the unique (Φ) relation is one angle of 108º: balanced by two angles of 36º: 36º which must
employing proportional relationships manifested via geometrical diagrams in leading the student toward an appreciation of the conception of Oneness. Distinguishing between proportion and ratio, Lawlor suggests that proportion is formed from ratios, which are comparisons of size or quantity, quality, or concept in an expression of the form \( a : b \). Ratio, thus provides a fundamental, perceptible measure of difference, while proportion is a more complicated conceptual series of relations of the form, \( a : b : : c : d \), which, as a multivalent measure of difference(s) inheres greater complexity, subtlety, awareness and discernment. The ancient Greeks had posited that a minimum of three terms is needed to express proportional relations (which could be reduced to two terms if the relation is a line of length “c” which is equal to components \( a + b \), or \( c = a + b \); this could be reduced to the equation: \( a/b = b/a + b \).  

Combine for a total of 180°. The 180° quantity is, of course, the same as the measure of a single straight line and half the quantity of the symbol of eternity and continuity, that is, of the 360° circumference of the divine perfect form, the circle. Wheeler discusses the role of the pentagon, Golden Rectangle, Platonic divided line, and spiral and their connection with the search for God and truth, as well as the concepts of generation by augmentation and return to the One.

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252 Ibid., p. 44.

253 The differences between ratio and proportion and the formula for the division of a line associated with the Golden Section is discussed by Matila Ghyka, The Geometry of Art and Life, Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 1977, pp. 1-19, with reference to Plato’s Timaeus on p. 3, particularly the passage from 31c-32a. See also Plato’s Timaeus in The Collected Dialogues of Plato, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Bolligen Series LXXI, (Princeton University Press, 1961/19th printing, 2005) pp. 1163 – 1165ff. The linkage of one thing to another via continuous proportion is explained: “…But two things cannot be rightly put together without a third; there must be some bond of union between them. And the fairest bond is that which makes the most complete fusion of itself and the things which it combines, and proportion is best adapted to effect such a union. For whenever in any three numbers, whether cube or square, there is a mean, which is to the last term as the last term is to the mean – then the mean becoming first and last, and the first and last both becoming means, they will all of them of necessity come to be the same, and having become the same with one another will be all one.” (p. 1163).
In addition, Ficino provides an extensive discussion in Book III, Chapter XVIII of the *De Vita* (Three Books on Life) pertaining to the use and power of images, although he refers particularly to engraved images in gems and metals and the power such images draw upon from their celestial sources.\(^{254}\)

Hendricks notes the differences between the concept of beauty based in proportion and number indicated by Alberti contrasting with Ficino’s transcendent idea of beauty based in the spiritual idealism of Platonic forms.\(^{255}\) Ficino’s inclusion of the beauty of ideas or philosophical concepts among beautiful things must indicate that beauty cannot be based in material or physical objects, however this does not in fact contradict Albertian proportion-based beauty, the consequence of *concinnitas*, or harmony among components, because in fact such a concept is ultimately based in relationships perceived as harmonious, and such relationships, whether in the instance of music or physical appearances, is fundamentally mathematical and comparative. If one were to follow the logic of a relational concept of beauty, which must be to some extent a search for harmonies, which are themselves consonances among components, such a relational idea is likely to be subject to mathematical reductions, which would mean that they are based in number and are thus abstractions observed via material reality (proportional


\(^{255}\) See John Hendricks, “Alberti and Ficino” 2012, p. 4ff citing Ficino’s commentary on the *De Amore*, V.I noting that beauty is an internal perfection which is concurrent with goodness, contrasted with Alberti’s concept of *concinnitas* in which parts [of a body] correspond by means of some precise rule, with each other.
relations and interrelations among shapes and forms in art, or variations of pitch and sound harmonies in music).

Nicolas of Cusa suggests that God used arithmetic to create the Universe and our world, and this idea, which may have informed Alberti, is likely to have been one of which Ficino was well aware. In consideration of Alberti’s influence upon 15th-century art in general, but painting and architecture in particular, he is a likely source for Botticelli’s clearly proportion-based, mathematical, geometrical compositions, which would be physical manifestations of a number-based, conceptual beauty, rendered in an easily accessible form.

Each of the images by Botticelli, in variable ways, presents differing aspects of the powers of the Soul and of Love, and almost certainly, Love, due to its generative aspect, would have been perceived as a source for all the arts. Indeed in Ficino’s translation and commentary on Plato’s *Symposium*, an important aspect of Love itself is understood as an aesthetic act in which the soul is drawn inexorably toward its object of

256 See John Hendricks, “Alberti and Ficino,” for mention of Nicolas of Cusa on page 3, for the quote from Nicolas of Cusa’s *De docta ignorantia*, of 1440, II.13.

257 Ibid., Hendricks’ for mention of Nicolas of Cusa is on page 3 and see also p. 6 and note 9, and Alberti’s section 29 of *de Pictura (On Painting)*.

258 See Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium On Love* translated by Sears Jayne, Spring Publications, Dallas Texas, 1985, particularly pp. 64-68ff, where Ficino indicates that Love is the author and preserver of all things; continuing on p. 66 Ficino notes that Love is the “master and the governor of the arts”, which are noted in Speech III, Chapter 3 and specifies that “artists in all of the arts seek and care for nothing else but love.” Thus, the generative creative act, i.e., fabricating a work of art, is itself a demonstration of love in action, in its generative aspect. Thus, the employment of art to disseminate Love as a philosophical tool would always be implicit in the very making of any work of art, and would indeed be explicit in the generation of art images which employed Love as their subject matter.
desire, Beauty. The means through which Love is engendered is via the organ best suited to provide access to Art and Beauty as understood within the Neo-Platonist formulations, and that is through the power of vision. Thus, Ficino’s perception theory offers the aesthetic foundations of the entire project upon which the purpose of the soul (to return to its source) must be grounded. Based in this foundational idea, the role of art within the Ficinian philosophical system and its ontological structures and metaphysical commitments suggest that art, and beauty are crucial components in the dissemination of philosophical edification, since the soul, as an immaterial thing, would be fed by the comparably immaterial ideas transmitted via works of art, particularly those works which encouraged the spectator to contemplate philosophical, religious, or soul-edifying subject matter. The organs of the body (here specifically the eyes) were understood as mere instruments through which the edification of the soul might be achieved by means of their role in providing access to beauty.

See Marsilio Ficino Commentary on Plato’s Symposium On Love translated by Sears Jayne, Spring Publications, Dallas Texas, 1985, Speech II, Chapter 9, p. 58 “What lovers seek”, which notes “In conclusion, what do they seek when they love reciprocally? They seek beauty. For love is the desire of enjoying beauty.” Jayne cited Ficino’s use of Plotinus Enneads 5.3- 12 (see note 32, p. 60).

Beauty might also be achieved by means of the ears, and each of the 6 senses or powers of the soul in the Ficinian system, was assigned an element as well as a role either in supporting the soul in its purpose toward elevation to God, or serving the material body. The senses understood as merely serving the body were taste (water); touch (earth); and smell (air); while the eyes-vision (ruled by light and thus ruled by fire) and the ears-hearing (ruled by access to voice and under the influence of air) fed the soul’s sixth capacity to reason and, thus, these senses were more “spiritual” in character than the lower materially oriented touch, taste, and smell. See Sears Jayne (op. cit.), pp. 84-92)
V. Ficino’s Neo-Platonist Concepts in Selected Paintings by Botticelli

This summary discussion of the seven paintings, selected as examples of Botticelli’s works of art, which serve as philosophical *demonstranda*, is organized by themes indicating variations in the representation of the powers of the human soul. In addition, a proposed chronology, structured by the generally accepted order in which the actual production of each image is thought to have taken place, with some corresponding discussion of how the content and composition of each works relates to development of Ficinian thought has been used as a guide. These imposed structures are intended to support our awareness of how Ficino’s ideas pertaining to aspects of the capacities of a soul support the rational and generative functions of human existence as its being and journey may embody Neo-Platonist ideas and ideals. Each painting is introduced with a brief discussion of a particular capacity of the soul’s qualities highlighted (perhaps among other qualities) within the specified image.

Sandro Botticelli’s lyrical, solemn, elegant and mystical images are a perfect actualization of conceptual or abstract evocative ideas into concrete images which engage the spectator’s imagination by affirming the importance of vision as a means of incorporating external phenomena for purposes of internal realization and a contemplative re-formation of the ideas reflected from a divine source. Indeed, the consistently other-worldly, idealized character of Botticelli’s images seem a perfect reference to contemplative abstraction, showing us images that are possible in a material world, but which are more refined and ethereal than its actualities.
The purpose of this study is to clarify the manner in which the paintings included may be considered as instruments of philosophical reasoning, through which Ficino’s Neo-Platonist ideas could be brought before, and employed to educate a more extensive social ambient by means of the richly devised themes of reference to literature, antiquity, and politics that have been represented by Botticelli. The understanding of the pictures as having a relationship to the contemporary discourse on love, virtue, beauty, goodness and divinity, provides contemporary interpreters with a meaningful, coherent framework of reference for the iconographic and iconological diversity within the various images. Moreover, considering Botticelli’s paintings within the context of Ficino’s theories of perception offers a method for understanding how the varied sources in both literature and socio-cultural reference, work collaboratively among the selected images both as individual objects and as works considered as a group, to present an internal continuity of, and inter-image relevance for, this selection of Botticelli’s works as self-directed instruments of public and private instruction as well as intellectual and spiritual edification.
CHAPTER I

THE COLUMBIA NATIVITY

Item voluptas et in considerando actionem reddit quasi perpetuam, et in nutritione conservat diu individuum, et in generatione speciem facit sempiternam et transformat amantem in amatum et omnia procreat in arte et natura.\(^{261}\)

*The Columbia Nativity* (c. 1473-1475)

Sandro Botticelli
Fresco transferred to canvas (probably originally from an open-air exterior tabernacle)
Gift, Samuel H. Kress Foundation
5’ 2” height (160cm) x 4’5” (140 cm) width
The Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, South Carolina
(Figure 1.1)

In the Columbia Museum’s *Nativity*, an early work by Botticelli in fresco, we discover a representation of spiritual power demonstrating the act of divine contemplation which, within the Neo-Platonist system, permits the rational soul to gain access to the higher intellectual powers of the divine mind, and thus, insights into the nature of Truth, Beauty, and an intuition of God. Moreover, the divine contemplative act is manifested through the upward gaze of the Infant Christ, a figure symbolic of perfect innocence and unquestioned spiritual motivations. *Contemplatio*, aligned with *nous*, or

\(^{261}\) See Marsilio Ficino, *The Philebus Commentary*, translated by Michael J. B. Allen, Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, University of California, Los Angeles, Chapter II/Cap.XI, 1975, pp. 138-139 Jayne’s translation of the passage given above reads:

“…Again the pleasure in thinking imparts an almost ceaseless action; and the pleasure in nourishment preserves the individual for a long time, and in generation makes the species everlasting and transforms the lover into the beloved and creates all things in art and nature.”
the power of mind, and thus all intellectual and psychic (soul) or sources of spiritual power will also be related to our later discussion of the power of influxus (influence precipitating the possibility of change and internal transformation and the generation of ideas; this capacity would be self-evidently related to acquisition of conceptual, intellectual, spiritual, and philosophical powers in a search for wisdom, truth, and beauty. These spiritual powers, later to be understood as part of the influence of the heavenly or divine Venus are an important component in this discourse on the powers of the pre-Christian conception of the soul harmonized with later Christian teaching.

The unique 15th-century fresco-transfer image of the Nativity in the collection of the Columbia Museum is confidently attributed to artist Sandro Botticelli as a work executed sometime between 1473 (the year Marsilio Ficino became a priest) and 1475. The image offers a complex foray into spiritual meaning, using light and metaphor in a manner consistent with neo-Platonic ideology. The important figure of the Christ Child symbolically radiates light, translated by lines of gold leaf emanating from the Infant and surrounding his entire being. The Virgin is an epitome of modest feminine beauty, and she and the other holy personages represented (St. Joseph and St. John the Baptist) have lesser lights but are noted for their blessedness via thin circles of light, or haloes.

Three angels hover above the group in a heavenly realm treading on or upheld by light as well as having the blessed designation of haloes, thus creating a kind of hierarchy

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262 See Paul Oskar Kristeller, The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino, Columbia University Press, New York, 1943, p. 17, who notes that Ficino became a priest in 1473 and a canon of Florence Cathedral in 1487. The transfer technique is a method used for removing frescoes from the walls of structures in order to preserve them by lifting the entire plaster wall using glue and cloth mesh, off of the surface as a unit.
of light imagery appearing to correspond to varying levels of blessedness. Jesus, despite his incarnation on earth (and he is shown lying on the ground – the position nearest the earth – a paradox since he is God’s Will incarnate on Earth), by virtue of the quantity of his emission of light, is spiritually above all others represented, and the angels are ranked beneath Him, but above Mary, Joseph and John, the latter three of whom dwell in the material realm of earth. The Angels also hold lilies, flowers of spring, renewal and symbols of purity, death, and resurrection, alluding to Christ’s earthly birth and spiritual rebirth after the “death” and separation of the soul from the corporeality of flesh.

From the centrally placed angel dressed in red (proposed here as a Seraphim) a cascade of flame-like species of light flow down toward the Christ Child, a visual link directly between the realm of earth and the realm of God’s (or the One’s) love (and a representation of mutuality). The angel’s red tunic may be intended to suggest the passion and suffering as well as Christ’s future sacrifice. Golden trails of light descend directly toward the Christ, who, in turn, looks upward from his position on the earth, focused upon the angelic group hovering above, demonstrating an act of divine contemplation. Indeed the angels are united by a supporting pattern of light and may allude to the Trinitarian configuration of the Holy Three-in-one (a concept which has a well-documented Neo-Platonist foundation); a symbol of mind-soul-body, as well as in Christianity as God-Holy Spirit – Christ, a correspondence of ideas uniting the two theories of being and their accounts of the soul’s divine trajectory, interrelationship with the One, and possibility of survival beyond the corporeal body.\(^{263}\)

\(^{263}\) James Hankins, “Marsilio Ficino,” cites Ficino’s *Theologica Platonica*, Vol. VI, as specifying an ontology of five substances including God, angel, soul, quality, and matter. A possible
The image shows Christ before a wattle manger, made of interlacing sticks evoking allusive cross-like configurations. The Christ Child is actually placed upon a stack of sheaves of wheat, an allusion to the meaning of the name of the city of Bethlehem (meaning “city of bread”) and, even in this image of Christ’s birth, foreshadowing his last communion when the earthly body will be compared to the sustaining substance of bread.\textsuperscript{264} The group shows Mary, Joseph, and St. John in adoration around the figure of Christ. An ox and an ass are behind the manger, with a ruined stone structure enclosing them. A roof of triangular trusses in the foreground with a flattened rectangular covering is shown as part of the background, while two shepherds are present in the foreground on the viewer’s left, near St. Joseph, and an announcement to other shepherds is shown on the viewer’s right in the countryside, deep in the hilly, and mountainous background behind the figure of the kneeling Virgin.

Fern Shapely notes Botticelli’s work on frescoes in the Vatican in 1481-1482, after the painting of the Columbia picture. In the notes on the Kress Portrait of Guiliano de’ Medici in the Kress Catalogue, and offers speculations upon the allusions in the portrait that are open to a variety of interpretations regarding either the political circumstances of Giuliano’s death or his relationship to Simonetta Cataneo Vespucci as a correspondence with the imagery of the Columbia Nativity would be to suggest that God is symbolized by the image of the infant Christ, the angels represent the angelic substance, St. John as the representative of soul, the Virgin Mary as the representative of quality, and St. Joseph as the representative of matter.

source of philosophical and allegorical conceits. Features in the portrait include the open door, symbolizing death or departure, the presence of a turtle dove, symbol of mourning either for him, murdered at age 25 during the Pazzi Conspiracy if the portrait was finished after 1478, or mourning Simonetta if the image was completed by 1476. There are similarities in the Kress portrait to the portrait of Giuliano in the Uffizi’s del Lama Adoration, particularly the downcast eyes, ending with the opinion of H. Friedman, that this is a picture of Giuliano as mourner, not as one being mourned based on the presence of the turtledove, a symbol of conjugal fidelity, although Simonetta was in fact married to Marco Vespucci.

The use of allegory is an important component in a number of works by Botticelli. Eco cites the antiquity of the metaphorical reference to the presence of the divine with images of light and particularly with varying allusions to the sun, which in Platonic reference indicates the Ideal, the Sun (Apollo), the Good. According to Eco, Proclus served as the principal means of this imagery’s passage into the neo-Platonist canon, and from this vantage point, via the interventions of both Augustine and Pseudo-


266 Ibid., pp. 121-124.

267 See Frederick Hartt, op. cit., and Michael Baxandall, Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style, Oxford University Press, 1983, pp. 68-72, for a more extensive consideration of Botticelli’s complex allegorical œuvres.

Dionysius, becomes integrated within the conventions of Christian symbolism, associating God’s divinity with the concept of *lumen*-light-and/or fire.²⁶⁹

The essentials of the neo-Platonist metaphysics in the *Columbia Nativity* stem from how we may interpret the application of the term *hypostasis*: that is the underlying substance or essence of the fundamental realities supporting all further extensions of what may be considered “real”. The presence in Botticelli’s *Columbia Nativity* of triads in groupings of both figures (human and angelic) and concepts is of interest, particularly in combination with the hierarchies of light implied by representations of figures in varying degrees of radiant emanation. The groupings of three, in diverse ways probably allude to the three major neo-Platonist principles that particularly harmonize with Christian mysticism; these are the concept of the *One* or the Absolute, a self sufficient entity; the *Nous* or the Divine (sometimes referenced by Ficino as the Angelic) Mind a form of universal intelligence also referenced in a somewhat different, but analogous, pagan form by Plato (and Aristotle); and finally, the *Psyche* or worldly soul, also equated with the *logos*: the word as an incarnation of Divine Will into the activity of intelligence.²⁷⁰ These ideas appear to be a point of reference through the manner in which Botticelli has chosen to represent the *dramatis personae* of his *Columbia Nativity*.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 47, Eco cites the legacy of the image of divine light moving from Egyptian Ra, Semitic pagan Baal, Persian Mazda all representing incarnations of the divine Sun and noting the later influence on medieval scholastics of Arab thinkers, Avenpace, Hay ben Jodkam, Ibn Tofail (see p. 47 note 15).

²⁷⁰ These ideas are discussed extensively by Ficino in various places; however in particular, reference to the comparison between, God, Angelic Mind, and the Soul is discussed in Ficino’s *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium*, Sixth Speech, chapter XVI, in Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns, *Philosophies of Art & Beauty: Selected Readings in Aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger*, The University of Chicago Press, 1976, p. 229.
As noted above, the Infant Christ is shown gazing upward from the ground (and this appears to be an allusion to His incarnation as a material expression of the highest level of the Absolute, shown in a kind of paradox as perfected flesh, or the ideal brought into the material ambient) in contemplation of the heavenly realm, looking toward the three angels who hover above Him, and who represent the realm of the Absolute without actually being the Absolute, but rather a representative (angelic) aspect of It. Christ is however, the Logos, an incarnation of the Divine Mind of the Absolute and generated from the One. Although Christ is represented as existing in the material world, he is also probably shown here as a visual indication of the Platonic idea of ascending hierarchies. Thus, Christ’s placement on the ground, gazing upward towards His heavenly source is a demonstrandum of Love’s mutuality. The entire group is enveloped above by Pythagorean triangular forms, shown by the use of architectural trusses in the manger’s roof structure. Ficino, as the translator of Plotinus’ Enneads into Latin, would almost certainly have been the source for Botticelli of what appears to be an allusion to a kind of dialectical relation between the varying grades of the hypostases, with the flow from the heavenly Absolute, represented via the Angels with species of light emanating downward toward the Christ, generating from the Divine Mind into the material, Christian representation of the Psyche, who, in turn, returns the flow by his upward gaze toward

271 In Ficino’s commentary on Plato’s Symposium, he begins the discussion of Chapter I, of the Second Speech by noting that the “Pythagorean philosophers believed that a trinity was the measure of everything for the reason that…God governs things in threes…things themselves are defined according to triple classifications” and further citing Virgil’s observation that God rejoices in odd numbers. See Marsilio Ficino “Commentary on Plato’s Symposium,” edited by Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns, Philosophies of Art & Beauty: Selected Readings in Aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger, The University of Chicago Press, 1976, pp. 208-209. Ficino suggests that this formulation of three implies a cycle of birth, existence, and return to source, a beginning, middle, and end in an eternal, perfect cycle.
Heaven. Thus Jesus, the human form of the Divine Mind, offers a corresponding upward flow via his act (even as an infant) of contemplation, suggested by His gaze. He is the one with whom or through whom the earthly soul is united by contemplative action and the process of emanation, flowing out from God, the Absolute to His progeny, and then returning to Him in the form of contemplative adoration, creating a kind of “closed circuit” of divine interaction, supported by the manner in which Botticelli employs light in the representation of the figures.

For Ficino’s system, as for Plotinus’, the Absolute, corresponding for Ficino with the Christian idea of God, is best represented as pure light, completely free from the constraints and limitations of material being and from matter itself. Thus, Botticelli’s image implies a mystical hierarchy of light used to suggest progressive gradations of being and blessedness. Consequently, the infant Jesus is shown with a full bodily radiance, nestled in an aureole encompassing Him from head to toe. The angels, God’s messengers, tread on light but are not enveloped entirely in it and also are shown with haloes, this seems to imply that although they are in and of the heavenly realm, they are ranked below the Christ. The blessed of the earth, that is, the Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, and St. John the Baptist are all shown with haloes but with no addition of intrinsically emanating light sources stemming from their individual persons. These differing hierarchies of light appear to correspond to structures of the Absolute (paradoxically incarnated in Christ who is authorized to carry out God’s Divine Will), the heavenly Nous, represented by the angels, and finally the active physical imperfect, worldly

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engagement of the soul with the material Good represented by the presence of Mary, Joseph, and young John.

Botticelli’s homage to Ficino’s neo-Platonist incorporation of a hierarchy of being based in the hypostasis appears to be grounded in an emanationist representation of reality, understood to be compatible with Christian ideas of a transcendent, omniscient, omnipotent, infinite, absolute entity (God), a being who is ultimately ineffable, but whose material aspect (Christ) is expressed (at least partially) as a presence in the world and shown here among the things in it.

In accordance with Ficino’s explanation in the Platonic Theology of the differences between angelic levels of act and potency (implying also levels of act and potency within the human soul referenced above in the discussion of Apelles inspiration to paint a beautiful meadow), the angels represented as an allusion to the presence of God are not to be understood as God’s equivalent but are mere representatives here. Angels, according to Ficino are not the pure activity of spirit as is God, but angels are cited as being like light of some particular color – red or green light would not be considered pure light but are aspects of that all-inclusive pure light, and I am suggesting that in Botticelli’s image the triad of angels is to be understood as standing for the heavenly realm and being of it, but they are not the ultimate expression of the divine good; ironically, or, rather, paradoxically, the earth-bound infant, who is simultaneously
The Virgin is represented as the *madre pia*, or “devout mother”; the small star on the shoulder of her richly colored, blue cloak references the Hebrew form of her name—“Miriam” or “star of the sea”, in Latin, the “stella maris” and she is also referenced in Christian iconography as the new Eve, a new source of life and love and a symbol of goodness, here represented also in beauty. From Plato, Plotinus and Augustine, Ficino notes the structuring of a relation between goodness and beauty, that goodness is placed in the center of the circle with beauty on its circumference; goodness in a single center, and beauty in four respective circles (suggesting that beauty has aspects, while goodness is an absolute). 274 Ficino explains that the goodness, the absolute is God around whom (or around which) continually revolve the four circles of Mind, Soul, Nature and Matter and continues to elaborate on each of these four components anchored by the God-centered goodness. 275 This hierarchy could be interpreted as corresponding to Botticelli’s representation of the image of the radiant Christ surrounded by John the Baptist (Nature), the Virgin Mary (Soul), St. Joseph (Matter) and the triadic host of angels hovering above, which could correspond to or at least represent Divine Mind. 276 Angelic hierarchies are also organized in groups of three, and in this image the centrally placed angel clothed in a

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275 Ibid., p. 210

red tunic may indicate a Seraph, implying that the companion angelic figures may be a representative Cherub and Throne, the triumvirate of angelic figures traditionally represented as being placed nearest the dwelling place of God.\textsuperscript{277}

Ficino wrote to his friend Cavalcanti concerning his ideas on beauty not being a property of body \textit{per se}, but a property of abstractions including proportion, number, and measure, and the harmonious relationships of number and color among these abstractions.\textsuperscript{278} This idea is realized in Botticelli’s clear homage to mathematical precision in his employment of linear, geometrical perspective in rendering the space, and the homage to Pythagorean-ism in the triangular forms of the stable’s gabled roof supported by trusses, evoking the idea of the Trinity. The most prominent colors in Botticelli’s composition include red, blue, white, and gold, each of which has a richly symbolic association stemming from the late medieval period.\textsuperscript{279}

\textsuperscript{277} For a description of the angelic hierarchies see James Hall, \textit{Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art}, Harper & Rowe Publishers, New York, 1979, pp. 16-17. If Botticelli is representing a Seraph, Cherub, and Throne, then he has departed from the traditional manner of depicting the first two members of the triad (Cherubim and Seraphim are usually depicted as heads and wings only), although the red tunic is the color associated with Seraphs, blue with Cherubim, and gold with Thrones. The other angelic triads are Dominations, Virtues, and Powers, and Princedoms, Archangels, and Angels, each with a representative symbolic color.


\textsuperscript{279} See Baxandall p. 81 for St Antoninus and other medieval scholars listing the theological code of color in which, white implies purity, red-charity, yellow-gold-dignity, and black-humility. Leon Battista Alberti also gives an elemental code for color: red-fire, blue-air, green-water, and grey-earth.
Charles Mack notes the presence of the shower of golden flames motif connecting the figure of the infant Christ with the trio of angels hovering above, remarking that such flaming connective motives appear in other Botticelli paintings suggesting that the flames represent spirits or souls and in the Nativity may be understood as the descent of the Holy Spirit as Jesus represents God incarnate.280

The representation of the Christ Child, gazing upward in contemplation and adoration toward Heaven while being inversely emulated by the Virgin, St. John the Baptist, and St. Joseph, all of whom gaze downward toward Him, appears to allude to the importance of Love and ascending hierarchies of desire, as well as to the reflective character of worldly, material experience, as those on the lowest level of the hierarchy look toward God’s incarnate form, while Christ gazes upward to the true immateriality of the One. Panofsky discusses the essential role of Love in Ficino’s philosophical system.281 The vita contemplativa in Ficino’s system is understood as being a tool of the divine, and when contemplation is raised, through Love, to a blissful state of “furor divinus”, or “divine frenzy”, comparable to the divine madness spoken of in Plato (the stuff of Renaissance “genius”, but, per Panofsky, not a part of medieval conceptions of “genius”), providing a route to Love as a desire for the fruition of beauty or desidero di


The “desire for beauty” is, at least in part, rationally directed toward a goal, seeking the unity of goodness, truth, and beauty as a single expression, and in the Platonic, Plotinian, and Ficinian formulations, a desire to return to the One. Panofsky notes that this search or desire for beauty in its celestial form is the amor divinus, mankind’s highest faculty, stemming from the intellect, which moves humanity to contemplate intelligible perfection, the inspirational impetus of great art. Art may thus be inspired by or inspire this impulse or the correlate amor vulgaris which remains in the realm of the sensual, the perceptible, and the merely pleasurable.283

The Columbia Nativity represents the interaction of the systematic interrelations of visible, external beauty (the Virgin Mary), innocence or spiritual purity, a form of inner beauty (St. John the Baptist), and intellect or wisdom, another form of inner beauty (St. Joseph), all of whom contemplate the incarnation of divine mind in the radiant Christ Child who looks upward, contemplating his (and by extension, their) ultimate Source. Hartt discusses the likelihood that Botticelli was familiar with Ficino’s neo-Platonist-inspired interpolations of the concept of desio (desire, longing, or yearning) an activity of the soul through which it sought to return to its source in God (a parallel here with the neo-Platonic One).284

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282 See Panofsky ibid, pp. 140-141. Through Socrates, Plato discusses various aspects of Love in both the Symposium, cited above, and the four divine aspects of madness in the Phaedrus dialogue, see Hamilton & Cairns pp. 475-525.
283 See Panofsky, Ibid., p.143.
284 See Frederick Hartt, p. 329.
In summary, the Columbia *Nativity* appears to conform to the ideological and theoretical concepts consistent with the metaphysical views disseminated by Marsilio Ficino as part of his program to revive an interest in Platonic over Aristotelian ideas concerning the nature of being, which would, in turn, fuel the advances of the humanist concerns of Renaissance thought over the internalized Scholastic preoccupations characteristic of Medieval experience.

Botticelli’s representations of a tripartite hierarchy of light and repeated use within his *Nativity* image of neo-Platonic organizations of three; i.e., showing three differing aspects of soul, simultaneously referring to the Christian Trinity, and harmonizing these ideas with their correspondences of Platonic and Neo-Platonic *Nous*, soul, and body, when considered with the artist’s history of using classical and pagan source for symbolism in his works and in consideration of the symbolic connections among his representations of Christian ideas, appear to make his dependence on Ficino-inspired doctrine highly probable. The repeated use of references to Platonic, neo-Platonic, and Ficino-inspired symbolic relations provides powerful arguments for a likely involvement with and intention to represent ideas advanced by Ficino and his academic circle.

Correspondences in Botticelli’s *Nativity* with Ficino’s ideas regarding hierarchies of beauty as in the representations of infancy-innocence (via Christ or/and St. John), ideal youth- represented by the Virgin, and venerable age- in the person of St. Joseph-, showing the three ages of humanity theme, or the contrast provided by suggesting divine
beauty in the radiant Christ, juxtaposed with angelic beauty and material earthly beauty all seem to fit well into an overall symbolic program as it might be conceived in accordance with Ficino’s discourses on love and spirituality.

The material and symbolic representation of hierarchies of love and desire, culminating in the representation of spiritual love embodied in this image of the infant Christ in divine contemplation of God-the-Father, completes the iconographic programme of the Nativity, which offers repeated consistencies with a view easily ascribable to and consistent with Ficino’s overall philosophical project. The innocent, divine incarnation of God’s Will, a representation of the Good, shown in the depiction of the Christ, is symbolically shown as the center of the image, in turn adored by representatives of both the angelic and earthly realms; this model offers a work of art, which expresses with eloquence and conviction an externalization of concepts for the internal workings of the soul to which much of Ficino’s written work is devoted. The harmony, eloquence and beauty of Botticelli’s work is a fitting representation of the process of searching for internal perfection and a formal means of representing spiritual truth easily ascribable to Ficino’s overall philosophical project.

Contemplation is suggested as the incipient intellectual action which leads to the generation of all that we experience materially and spiritually, according to Neo-Platonist conceptualizations. Botticelli has represented the Christ as the earthly incarnation of the
Divine *logos*, shown in the Columbia *Nativity* as being in direct contemplative communion with the heavenly realm.²⁸⁵

The idea and representations of the processes of love emerge throughout the several selected images in the group included for this study. The earliest work selected, and perhaps the most conventional in its iconography is the Columbia Museum *Nativity* which shows the activity of contemplation (with an exchange of fiery species and the extension of the ray of vision moving between the infant Christ and Heavenly Angels, suggesting a representation of the role of the vacillating communicative movement of the rational soul elevating and descending between the divine and the realities of the material world (a possible model of the mediating role of the Christ himself.) Also the revelation of a soul capacity or “power”, having the ability to communicate between the earthly and material and the immaterial, intelligible and divine realms. The use of the image of the Christ would have been understood within Botticelli’s community as a universally accepted example of a material manifestation of man derived directly from God. The image of God-made-flesh is shown here, contemplating a return to his source through crucifixion and sacrifice; a return mediated through an act of love for all of humanity culminating in becoming a means of salvation for other souls. In looking at, and contemplating this image, as viewers, we initiate within ourselves a version of the very activity shown within the image and are thus set forth upon our own respective journeys toward a unique return to our source as individuals. This subjectively-directed,

²⁸⁵ (The Infant is shown looking heavenward in communion with three angels who represent differing aspects of God and of Mind. The idea of a “communion” is represented by divine flames or scintillations of light that flow in a circuit between the Infant Christ and the heavenly inhabitants.)
highly individual method of engagement with the image is an important aspect of the formula derived from Ficino’s theory of perception.

In the Columbia Museum’s Nativity, a particular significance may be attributable to the special attention Botticelli gives to the details of the ligatures that bind the crudely constructed shed beneath which the Infant Christ is shown reclining upon the stacked sheaves of wheat (an allusion to his pending future sacrifice). He is the binding tie to salvation as the earthly incarnation of God’s love for humanity, and the ligatures of the sheltering shed seems a clear reference to the religio religere, to bind or tie, the very term from which “religion” is derived. This would serve to remind the audience that part of the purpose of religion is to “anchor” and the “shelter” the spirit by means of salvation. It is unlikely that the triangular shapes of the angled structural trusses are mere fortuitous accidents. The evocation, by means of the triangle of the concept of the Trinity, united as One, like the very “oneness” of a Pythagorean interpretation of being and reality, all fall neatly and clearly within the compelling tenets of Neo-Platonist ideas and ideals.

Of further interest is the intentionally obscured inscription in ornamented gold decoration circumnavigating the fringe of the Virgin Mary’s blue mantle. Some of the words remain legible despite having been obscured by decoration intended to blend them into the patterns as mere curvilinear lines. Evident is the term “Regina” (a possible reference to the Regina caelum, or Queen of Heaven title later designated to the Virgin). A clear “Ave Maria” is discernible, and we may infer that the inscription provides a reference to the greeting offered to the Virgin by the Angel, Gabriel, when he arrives to
advise her of the transformation in her life that will occur due to her designation as the earthly vehicle through which God’s word would be morphed into human flesh. A curious, rounded, grey, hearth-like object props up the stack of wheat sheaves upon which the Christ Child reclines, adjacent to the wattle fence. The Virgin’s mantle has a rich, lapis lazuli blue exterior, with a verdant green under lining composing the symbolic color division of the mantle colors into an outer, objective, or exterior reality and an inner or subjective realization.

The three angels shown in the heavenly realm hovering above the shed, under which the Christ reclines, are subdivided by subtle color hierarchies, Placed between an angel with a nuanced, bluish under-painted garment (an allusion to Cherabim?) on the viewer’s left and an equally nuanced, angel clad in a pinkish robe shown on the right

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286 The passage for the Virgin’s insemination by the logos of God is given in Luke I:26-38. James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, Harper and Row, New York, 1974, pp. 18-20, notes that the incarnation of Christ is understood to have occurred precisely at the moment when Gabriel informs the Virgin of God’s will, and the date is traditionally celebrated as March 25th, nine months prior to the Nativity. This date may have implications for the transitional image of Botticelli’s *La Primavera* in reference to the cultural shift from pagan Rome, and the Greco-Roman tradition, to the initiation of the new Christian world order. Primavera, Spring is a season of renewal, regeneration, and rebirth, and the transition from the old to the new order is likely to be one of the image’s most powerful intended associations, showing the connection between Christian and pagan intellectual and spiritual conceptual realities as a single cycle of human generative thought.

287 To date I have been unable to identify this object upon which the sheaves of wheat are resting.

288 The Virgin is traditionally shown in a blue cloak symbolizing the colors of Heaven, and a red habit, see James Hall, p. 324, in the guise of the Madre pia, she may be shown kneeling on the ground with the Infant Christ also placed directly upon the ground, perhaps shown with roses, an allusion to her role as the “rose of Sharon.” See Hall, p. 329. The meaning of the green lining may be an allusion to a new age and the idea of the fertility of the Virgin and the dissemination of the Church. Philip Kosloski, “Why Is The Blessed Virgin Mary Always Wearing Blue,” *Aleteia*, online at: https://aleteia.org/2017/06/24/why-is-the-blessed-virgin-mary-always-wearing-blue/, (accessed 8-14-2018), suggests that the color blue symbolizes the people of Israel, and the color is specifically cited in *The Bible; The Book of Numbers: 15: 38-39; while red is a color associated with materiality, blood, and signifying mortality.
(Seraphim?), is an angel shown in the middle wearing a deep crimson garment (possibly a Throne or a Seraphim of greater rank than the figure in pinkish undertone?). 289

289 James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, Harper and Row, New York, 1974, pp. 16-17 notes that Cherubim are denoted by colors blue or golden yellow and Seraphim are denoted by red and may also be shown holding a candle. See also George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1961, p. 97 to determine hierarchy of angels as implied via color structure notes that Seraphim are painted red for passion, since they are absorbed in perpetual love around the throne of God, while Cherubim, representing Divine Wisdom may be golden yellow or blue in color. Thrones are noted as wearing the robes of judges and represent Divine Justice.
Figure 1.1 *The Columbia Nativity* c. 1473-1475, dimensions: 64 ½ x 54 inches (161.3 x 137.2 cm)
Figure 1.2 *The Columbia Nativity* c. 1473-1475. The detail: original dimensions: 64 ½ x 54 inches (161.3 x 137.2 cm). The central section of the overall composition, showing two figures in contemporary dress who may symbolize the presentation of the Christ to the Gentiles.
Figure 1.3  *Columbia Nativity* c. 1473-1475 detail: original dimensions: 64 ½ x 54 inches  (161.3 x 137.2 cm) Clouds being trodden upon by angels with golden radiances.
Figure 1.4 *The Columbia Nativity* c. 1473-1475 detail: original dimensions: $64 \frac{1}{2} \times 54$ inches ($161.3 \times 137.2$ cm) image of the base of the clouds with golden radiances and the descent of the golden radiance toward the Infant Christ; the head of St. Joseph, with partial images of the Ass, Ox, and The Virgin Mary.
Figure 1.5 *The Columbia Nativity* c. 1473-1475, detail: original dimensions: 64 ½ x 54 inches (161.3 x 137.2 cm) detail showing the descent of golden connective species.
Figure 1.6 *The Columbia Nativity* c. 1473-1475, detail: original dimensions: $64 \frac{1}{2} \times 54$ inches (161.3 x 137.2 cm) The Infant Christ in a radiance, with young St. John the Baptist.
Figure 1.7 The Columbia Nativity  c. 1473-1475, detail: original dimensions: 64 ½ x 54 inches  (161.3 x 137.2 cm) Problematic perspective orthogonals and concentric circular patterns overlapping a series of squares.
Figure 1.8 *The Columbia Nativity* c. 1473-1475, detail: original dimensions: 64 ½ x 54 inches (161.3 x 137.2 cm) (Pentagonal geometric form within the composition.)
Figure 1.9 *Portrait of Marsilio Ficino* by Domenico del Ghirlandaio; detail from a fresco, the Church of Santa Mar Novella, Capella Tornabuoni, 1486-1490.
Figure 1.10 *Portrait of Saint Augustine in His Study*, by Sandro Botticelli; detail from a fresco, the Church of the Ognissanti, Florence, c. 1480.
CHAPTER II:
THE UFFIZI ADORATION OF THE MAGI

Contingere tamen ex imaginibus legitima astrologiae ratione constructis naturalia quaedam bona non negat [Iamblicus].

_Uffizi Adoration of the Magi (c. 1475-1476)_
Sandro Botticelli
Commissioned by Guasparre dal Lama c. 1475
Tempera (and oil?) on panel
3’ 8” height (112 cm) x 4’ 5” width (135cm)
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence
(Figure 2.1)

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290 Marsilio Ficino, _De Vita in Tres Libros Divisus_, a critical edition and translation with Introduction and Notes by Carole V. Kaske and John R. Clark, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies in conjunction with The Renaissance Society of America, Tempe, Arizona, 2002, pp. 342-343. The entire quote from Ficino reads as follows:

“Nam et Iamblichus ait eos qui religione summa sanctimoniaque posthabita, imaginibus duntaxat confisi, ab eis divina sperant munera, hac in re a malis daemonibus saepissime falli sub praetextu bonorum numinum occurrentibus. Contingere tamen ex imaginibus legitima astrologiae ratione constructis naturalia quaedam bona non negat.”

This is translated by Kaske and Clark as:

“For Iamblichus too says that those who place their trust in images alone, caring less about the highest religion and holiness, and who hope for divine gifts from them, are very often deceived in this matter by evil daemons encountering them under the pretense of being good divinities. Iamblichus does not deny, however, that certain neutral goods come to pass from images constructed according to a legitimate astrological plan.”

Ficino goes on to make claims that the power of the images may be in part due to the medicinal properties of the materials from which they are generated and that indeed the natural science may be far more powerful in bringing about the desired effects attributable to the images rather than deriving solely from the images _per se_.

156
The Uffizi Adoration of the Magi (c. 1475-1476) presents an image of the representation of devotion, which is demonstrated in the painting by means of the postures and positioning of figures within the composition’s configurations. Using the representation of gestures and attitudes, Botticelli provides the viewer with a compelling portrayal of the powers of patheia, sympatheia and empatheia in this image showing the evocative power of emotional response, passion, and the soul’s longing and suffering in anticipation of the return to its source. The souls motivational capacity for experiencing emotional power provides part of the message conveyed by this intriguing easel painting.

This image portrays the Infant Christ with 37 subordinate human figures, two horses on the far left of the composition (one white, one chestnut), and a peacock perched upon the wall on the far left. The figures in the composition are loosely organized into five different groups: A small group of three on the far left of the picture in the background gather on a balcony near a balustrade beneath the ruins of an arcade. Two other figures, one seated on the steps, another standing over him as if in conversation, are placed among the ruins of classical architecture. In the foreground of the painting, on the far left, is the head of a white horse, and beside it, the forehead of a chestnut steed is also represented. Members of the retinue of the eldest of the Magi congregate behind him in a group of twelve, all standing in various attitudes and poses. The eldest Magus constitutes one of the members of a central group of five figures, which includes the Infant Christ, and compositionally, this group demonstrates a formal arrangement of ascendancy toward the heavens and the gleaming golden Star of Bethlehem situated at the apex of the picture’s center, scintillating its beams of gold downward toward the Child. Dressed in
black, the elder Magus kneels before the Infant, employing a veil to grasp the foot of the youthful Christ, and he forms the left side of an equilateral triangular form within the composition, of which St. Joseph is the zenith. Joseph, however, blends into the rocky grotto that constitutes the setting for this combination manger-cave-and-ruin, faced on the side of the picture plane confronted by the viewer with a partially collapsed stone wall and its encroaching plants pressing through the crevices in the wall stones. The Virgin Mary holds the Holy Infant in her lap as he engages with the elder Magus, and just at her feet, a kneeling figure in a rich, red cloak, holding a veiled monstrance or pix, turns to his right as if to engage in conversation with the kneeling figure in pale green, who turns toward the figure in the red cloak, and who is also holding a pyx containing a gift for the Holy Infant. A diadem rests upon the ground between these two Magi. Behind the figure in green, who provides the compositional shift to the large group of 16 figures gathered on the right side of the composition, all of whom are standing and are shown in a variety of poses with great individuality. A wooden shed construction, supported in part by the ruins of the stone wall, covers the Holy Family, and the peacock, facing the left side of the composition, looking toward the Infant Christ, perches resolutely on the remains of the right outer wall.

Cosimo, Piero, and Giovanni de’Medici are represented within the systematic framework of interpretation of Platonic theology and perhaps indeed, daemonology, which may form the foundations of the innovative Renaissance aesthetic theories of Marsilio Ficino intended to guide a spiritual as well as the conscious, earthly journeys of the individuals represented in this composition. Like the image of *The Nativity* in the
Columbia Museum, also attributed to Botticelli, the Uffizi picture represents an iteration of the activity of “adoration,” but here rather than the adoration of the Virgin for her divine offspring, we see depicted the adoration of the Wise Men, likely a reference to Zoroastrian Magi who anticipated the birth of the Christ, shown in this “icastic” image in the form of members of the powerful Medici family.291 The arguments presented here are in support of a conviction that Ficino’s complex interpolation of the Platonic and Neo-Platonic views of God, beauty, and his apologia for a hierarchical explanation for the nature of being and for aesthetic signification, explain both formal and theoretical aspects of the Uffizi Adoration’s design and its configuration of figures.

This image of The Adoration of the Magi is a comparatively small, tempera picture when compared in size to several of the later works discussed below. Located in the Uffizi collection, the painting shows a portrait of its patron, Guasparre di Zanobi del Lama, the merchant broker of the money-changing guild, represented in a blue robe as part of the entourage of the Magi. The three Magi are represented symbolically by

291 The key term in the title of the Uffizi Adoration is the term “adoration,” taken from the Latin “ad” meaning “from”, combined with “orare”, signifying “to pray” or “to address with formal praise”; See the Online Etymological Dictionary at: http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=adore&allowed_in_frame=0, which notes the origin of the term adore in late 14th-century French., aouren, "to worship, pay divine honors to, bow down before," from Old French aorer "to adore, worship, praise" (10c.), from Latin adorare "speak to formally, beseech, ask in prayer," in Late Latin "to worship," from ad- "to" (see ad-) + orare "speak formally, pray" (see orator). The use of “Adoration”, caning "to honor very highly" is attested from 1590s; its weakened sense of "to be very fond of" emerged by 1880s. Related terms are: Adored; adoring. Adoration, a form of pathos, and, in this instance, is a demonstration of emotion in the form of prayer or devotion (related in character to the activity of meditation and, thus, connected to the actions of contemplation). Adoration is translated in the Uffizi image with emotive sincerity and passion, and is the state of being represented in this work, demonstrating the powerful emotive effects of pathos (patheia): the worshipful state and its “suffering” (passion) due to the soul’s separation from God and the desire for a reunion with the Divine in spirit. This rather Pythagorean idea of reunion with the single source of the Divine, is a seminal tenant of Neo-Platonist doctrinal ideals.
portraits of important members of the Medici family, with Cosimo, Il Vecchio, shown closest to the infant Christ, who is kneeling, grasping the Christ Child’s foot, his hands partially covered by a veil in a significant gesture of devotion. On his right (and to the viewer’s right) are images that have come to be traditionally accepted as portraits of his two sons, Piero the Gouty, and Giovanni, who are represented as the only other two kneeling figures, shown on a level below their father’s position. The Medici are the only devotedly genuflecting figures in the painting, the sons represented as in a physical hierarchy below their father, whose own position is clearly a level below, but in almost direct contact (but for the veil) with the Christ. The proximity of the kneeling Cosimo,

292 Frederick Hartt, The History of Italian Renaissance Art, p. 327 mentions Virginia Chieffo’s attribution of this gesture to a comparison with a priest’s holding of the monstrance in the elevation of the Host of the Eucharist while covering his hands with a veil. This detail will be further discussed below.

293 Some scholarly disagreement concerning the precise identities of the figures is a significant part of the discourse concerning this image. Roberto Salvini, Tutta la Pittura del Botticelli, Rizzoli-Editore, 1958, sub. Tavola 52, pp. 49-50, notes Giorgio Vasari’s claims in Le Vite dei più eccezenti pittore, scultori e architetti (1550), where the figure of Cosimo is confirmed in the representation of the first magus but Vasari calls the second Giuliano and in his 1568 edition of the revised text, he references the third magus as Giovanni de’ Medici. Salvini revises these identifications and suggests Cosimo as noted by Vasari as Melchior (Melchiorre), and Giovanni de’ Medici as Gaspar (Gaspare in Italian) as the third magus, but the second magus (noted by the author as following an identification made by Ernst Ul(m)ann) is thought to be Piero, called Il Gottoso (the “gouty”) as the magus, Baldassar (Baldassarre) and suggesting that the young man standing behind this magus is indeed a representation of Giuliano, Piero’s son. Salvini also identifies the young man on the extreme right, who looks out toward the spectator as a likely self-portrait by Botticelli. For further discussion of the identities of others represented see discussion on p. 50 of the source referred to above and see also, Giorgio Vasari, Le Vite dei più eccezenti pittore, scultori e architetti, (reprint of the1568 edition, dedicated to Cosimo I Duke of Tuscany), Introduzione di Maurizio Marini, Grandi Tascabili Economici, Newton, Roma, 1991 pp. 493-494, who notes: “Fu allogato a Sandro in questo tempo una tavoletta piccola....posta in S. Maria Novella fra le due porte....la adorazione de’ Magi; dove si vede tanto affetto nel primo vecchio, che baciando il piede al Nostro Signore e struggendosi di tenerezza, benissimo, dimostra avere conseguita la fine del lungissimo suo viaggio. E la figura di questo re è il proprio ritratto di Cosimo Vecchio de’ Medici, di quanti a’dì nostril se ne ritruevano, il più vivo e più natural. Il secundo, che è Giuliano de’ Medici, padre di papa Clemente VII....il terzo, inginocchiato egli ancora, pare che adorandolo gli rena grazie e lo confessi il vero Messia, è Giovanni figliuolo di Cosimo.”
Piero, and Giovanni to the Christ may be a signifier regarding the hierarchy of being in that each of the Medici principals was already deceased when this image was commissioned and thus in an “immaterial” state. An image of one of the spectators, who looks with a certain air of self-confidence toward the viewers of the work, is considered a self-portrait of Botticelli; and he appears to have included himself within the entourage of the Third Magus in this homage to the Medici, their power, influence, and patronage. In addition to the deceased Medici family members shown kneeling before the Christ, while living offspring of Cosimo’s line are represented looking on at the scene with the figure generally accepted as Lorenzo, Il Magnifico shown in the foreground on the viewer’s extreme left. His younger brother, Guiliano, is shown standing behind their kneeling uncle, Giovanni, and is dressed in a dark cloak with a scarlet stole and sleeve stripe in the crowd just at the perpendicular nexus of the stone wall on the viewer’s right.

The image is referring to multiple levels of allusion to Neoplatonic constructions of varying forms of “power” including the connection to divine purpose and power of the institutions of the Church whose foundations are implicated by the presence of the Infant Christ, the temporal worldly power of the Medici family, the power of the act of Adoration itself, which implies a generative contemplative act originating in the force of Love as deseo; the powers of the varying levels of being, material and ethereal (divine),

294 The painting is acknowledged by most art historians and the research personnel of the Galleria degli Uffizi as a work by Sandro Botticelli of c. 1475-1476; The members of the Medici family referred to above, predeceased the generation of the image in the following order, Giovanni (1421-1463), age 42; Cosimo Il Vecchio (1389 – 1464) age 74; Piero di Cosimo (1416-1469) age 53, for additional information on the Medici family see Colonel G. F. Young, The Medici, E. P. Dutton, New York, 1925; Additional discussion of how the positions of each figure may allude to Neo-Platonist references to the hierarchy of being is discussed in the text below.
perceptible and intelligible, and the power of the artist to “re-mind” us of these self-same varying powers; indeed the image of the young man in a yellow cloak looking confidently toward the spectator, permitting us to infer his role as a originator or author of the vision before us is a reference to the sophistical powers of artists as image makers and imitators of the Divine Icastes.\textsuperscript{295}

As noted in the introduction to this study, this image shows Cosimo, \textit{Il Vecchio} grasping the foot of the infant Christ using a veil.\textsuperscript{296} This action seems to allude to or represent a parallel with the action of the celebrant priest’s grasping of the monstrance,

\textsuperscript{295} The multiple levels of power suggested by the composition and content of this image are a means of engaging with the various aspects of the human presence, both material and spiritual. Implications suggested by Ficino’s theory of perception, which is likely to have been a part of Botticelli’s inspiration, authorizes the possibility of interpreting an intention to use images such as this one to influence the perceivers and transform their inner attitudes, which would in turn be likely to influence their worldly actions. The fact that Botticelli was included in both the inner circle of the Medici family, and has close ties with Ficino substantiates this possibility.

\textsuperscript{296} Cited by Frederick Hartt in his \textit{History of Italian Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture}, second edition, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1983 who credits Virginia Chieffo with the original comment on this interesting detail on the use of the humeral veil (see page 327 of Hartt’s text). The humeral veil is a rectangular cloth used at high mass and in processions of the Blessed Sacrament and at Benediction given with the ostensorium( a “monstrance” or also referred to as an “ostensory”, used to elevate the wafer of the host), only the hands are placed under the veil. The Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament is generally an afternoon or evening devotion including the singing of hymns before the Blessed Sacrament exposed on the altar in a monstrance and surrounded with candles. The idea is that this particular form of blessing is different from the normal order of priestly blessing. The celebrant holds the Blessed Sacrament, which is considered the body of the Lord, Jesus, the Christ, and thus, Christ, Himself directly blesses the people. In order to signify that he is not performing the blessing, the celebrant or priest covers his hands with the humeral veil, which drapes over his shoulders and covers his hands (the term “humurus” signifies “shoulder”, consequently a humeral veil is a “shoulder” veil. The \textit{Caeremoniale Romanum} indicates that the humeral veil is to be fashioned from silk. For more on the significance of the humeral veil, and the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, see Joseph Braun, \textit{The Original Catholic Encyclopedia} (published by Encyclopedia Press, 1913, pp. 542-543, scanned online version, accessed 2-8-14 at: \texttt{http://oce.catholic.com/index.php?title=Humeral}; also “Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament,” \texttt{http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02465b.htm}. And Taylor Marshall, Ph.D., blog, “Why Does the Priest Veil His Hands,” \texttt{http://taylormarshall.com/2012/03/why-does-priest-veil-his-hands-during.html}.  

162
holding the Host of the Eucharist (the body of the Christ), by its foot in the ceremony of
the Benediction of the Sacrament. Thus an evocation of the power of transubstantiation,
and mystical transformation is represented, showing subdivisions of levels of power
aspiring to the divine as suggested by the visual hierarchies that may be inferred from
arrangements within the composition that pertain to the content or message of this image.
Hartt cites important relevant passages from the Bible that connect the Adoration to the
Passion, and its implications pertaining to the revivifying power of the divine and the
Adoration theme as one relevant for the logistics of transition, renewal, and
transformation, due to the fact that the birth of the Christ means the “death” of the Old
Law and beginning of a new age initiated by Christ’s advent. This image with its
allusion to well known Florentine individuals is evidently a means of engaging the public
in careful contemplation of the event represented by the device of its contemporary
references while simultaneously rehearsing important religious dogma (the revelation of
the Christ to the Gentiles/Magi) and offering the presentation of an occasion to reflect
upon the deeper significations of Christian faith of the New Testament as a
transformation of the covenant of the old Jewish laws represented in the Old Testament.

This intriguing work seems to have been commissioned by a Medici dependent
who intended to honor, posthumously, his patron, Cosimo de Medici (Pater Patriae), and

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297 Hartt, p. 327, cites John 2:19-22, referencing Christ’s statement to the Jews regarding
destruction of the temple which he would raise up within three days (a double reference to
himself and his body as a temple and to the faith and a metaphorical referral to the actual
structure of the Temple of Jerusalem); and Matthew 21:42-44; Luke 20: 17-18; both of which
reference Christ’s quote from Psalm 117 regarding “The stone which the builders rejected, the
same is become the head of the corner...”. This passage is interpreted as an allusion to the
Resurrection, citing the rejected foundational stone which becomes an anchor within the
structure, metaphorically alluding to Christ himself and the new covenant within the faith.
to offer his gratitude for the on-going patronage of the Medici family, thus showing the youthful Lorenzo and his younger brother, Giuliano in an image intended to proclaim the devotion and public presence of the family.  

Ficino’s *Sophist commentary* of 1492, although published some years after this work had been completed, offers a discussion of the metaphysics of light as the mediating material interposed between the corporeal (world of materiality) and the intelligible realm (world of Forms). The image, which shows the positioning of a radiance of light at the apex of the work’s *disegno* intermediate nature of daemons as entities between divine and human natures. Botticelli’s placement of a radiant light source at the zenith of this composition may easily be interpreted as a symbol of the mediation between the divine and the human, due in part to the role of light as a metaphor for divine presence, and, additionally the Neo-Platonist concept of light as a means of the engagement with heavenly power. This radiance of light certainly represents the Star of Bethlehem, and via this symbolism the divine presence of the Christ as noted in New Testament narratives of the Nativity. It also intentionally represents the important metaphysical role of light as a refined level of material being, mediating between the heavenly realm and the coarser world of more substantive materiality and the corporeal realities of human kind.

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298 The painting is thought to have been completed by 1475, and Giuliano, who would be assassinated in 1478 in the course of the Pazzi Conspiracy, is represented as present and alive, in the painting along with the images of the two brothers’ deceased grandfather, father and uncle, all of whom would have been dead by the time of the painting of this image.

299 See Michael Allen’s assessment of the *Sophist commentary* p. 172 and Ficino’s narrative at 271.16-18).
Pagan/Christian syncretism is symbolized by the employment of the image of a peacock, a creature associated with loyalty and sacrifice associated with the goddess Juno, an iteration of the Great Mother associated with the Virgin Mary and transformed within Christian tradition into a symbol of purity and eternal life…its flesh being thought to be impervious to putrifaction.\textsuperscript{300} The peacock united the traditions of the goddess of motherhood and marriage with the Mother of the salvator mundi and inheres allusions to both the transformative significance of sacrifice and the possibility of immortality.\textsuperscript{301}

Botticelli further aligns pagan and Christian traditions by the representation of grandiose ruins contrasted with the humble shed of wood, which shelters the Holy Family in the Washington and Uffizi images of the \textit{Adoration of the Magi}. The procession of the

\textsuperscript{300} For an early account of the impervious flesh of the peacock, see The Essential Augustine, edited by Vernon Joseph Bourke, Hackett Publishing, from St. Augustine’s, The City of God, XXI, 4-5, sub “Wonders of Nature”, translated by Dods, 1974, p. 110, where Augustine notes: “For who but God, the Creator of all things has given to the flesh of the peacock its antiseptic properties? This property when I first heard of it seemed to me incredible; but it happened at Carthage that a bird of this kind was cooked and served up to me, and taking a suitable slice from its breast, I ordered it to be kept, and when it had been kept as many days as make any other flesh stinking, it was produced and set before me and made no offensive smell.”; See also, James Hall, Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art, Harper and Row, 1979, p. 238; see also Dr. Ralph E. Wilson, \textit{Early Christian Symbols}: “The Peacock as an Ancient Christian Symbol of Eternal Life,” accessed online at: http://www.jesuswalk.com/christian-symbols/peacock.htm: copyrighted,1985-2016 all rights reserved.

\textsuperscript{301} The image of the peacock is allied with the concept of sacrifice due to the peacock’s association with the giant, Argos (Argos Panoptes, Greek Ἀργός Πανόπτης, from the myth recounted by both Hesiod, in the \textit{Theogony}, and Ovid in the \textit{Metamorphosis}.), who was sacrificed in the service of the goddess Juno due to his fidelity to her and his transgression against the privacy of Jupiter, king of gods, due to his surveillance of Jupiter’s dalliance with Io. The giant was murdered by Hermes/Mercury on Jupiter’s instructions, and Argos’ hundred eyes were transferred to the tail of the peacock which until this transition had been quite plain; the transformed, now highly ornate creature then became a symbol for rebirth and, by extension, also a symbol of the resurrection of the Christ, as well as signifying the “all seeing” eyes and omniscience of the Christian God; see Ralph E. Wilson, \textit{Early Christian Symbols}: “The Peacock as an Ancient Christian Symbol of Eternal Life,” accessed online at: http://www.jesuswalk.com/christian-symbols/peacock.htm : copyrighted,1985-2016 all rights reserved.
corpus domini, thus combines ancient, Platonist theological ideas and, for Botticelli, also alludes to contemporaneous, early modern religious conceptual traditions as a single extension, one of the other. Here in physical and conceptual proximity, the ancient and post-Christian theological ideas meet and, while clearly the “modern” religious dogma dominates, it is shown resting upon the foundations of a ruined ancient past. This allusion is direct, and quite explicit; Botticelli is supporting Ficino’s thesis that modern-Renaissance Christian thought has a typological dependence upon and correspondence with the Italic and Grecian intellectual and spiritual past. This joining of pagan and Christian idea is preliminary to the emergence of pagan typological and allegorical representations (re-)introduced by Botticelli, that has not been seen in common usage since the days of early Christian syncretist imagery such as the mosaic of Christ/Apollo or Christ as Sol Invictus/Helios from Mausoleum M located in the necropolis below the Vatican among other examples.

302 See Paul Oskar Kristeller’s essay, “Renaissance Platonism,” in Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains, Harper & Row, New York, 1961, who writes on p. 59: The most central and most influential representative of Renaissance Platonism is Marsilius Ficinus, in whom the medieval philosophical and religious heritage and the teachings of Greek Platonism are brought together in a novel synthesis. As a translator, he gave to the West the first complete version of Plato and of Plotinus in Latin, adding other Neoplatonic writings; and in adopting Pletho’s conception of a pagan theological tradition before Plato, he translated also the works attributed to Pythagoras, and Hermes Trismegistus that were bound to share the popularity and influence of Renaissance Platonism….His emphasis on the inner ascent of the soul towards God through contemplation links him with the mystics, whereas his doctrine of the unity of the world brought about by the soul influenced the natural philosophers of the sixteenth century.

303 Note for the diverse examples of paleo-Christian imagery that conflate the images of pagan deities with Christ. The Sol Invictus mosaic is only one example, see Kurt Weitzmann, Age of Spirituality. Metropolitan Museum of Art (1979). p. 522. ISBN 978-0-87099179-0. http://www.saintpetersbasilica.org/Necropolis/Scavi.htm or the Uffizi sarcophagus with Apollo and the Muses noted as offering an image that may have served as the model for the representations of Christ, see http://www.friendsoftheuffizigallery.org/on-the-sarcophagus-with-apollo-and-muses/. In addition, the Sarco phagus of Junius Bassus, of c. AD 359 (discussed in Helen Gardners, Art Through the Ages, pp. 214, see online image at
Ficino’s early Lucretian and Epicurean interests re-emerge, disguised in Christian dogma. The Venus who will appear later, first in the *Primavera* and finally in the *Birth of Venus*, itself a demonstration of the donation of spiritual Love to humanity, seems in part intended to re-invest within human experience those aspects of love that the rather sterile, Christian representations cannot, the Platonic love being more holistic and comprehensive in its potential for carnal (*Venus genetrix*) as well as spiritual (*Venus Ouranos*) generative acts. This idea of a synthesis of a more holistic human capacity for love offers a logical transition from the series of images of the “innocent” Adoration of the Infant Christ to the “adoration” of the visual embodiment of celestial love in the represented form of a beautiful woman (a generative fantasy). Christ, as a perfect embodiment of pure spirit in the flesh yet not of the flesh, has no human sexual aspect; that is to say that as an incarnation of God, but is “made flesh” but is not of the flesh, instead, he is merely in the flesh. The necessity for a shift from Christ to Venus seems to become clear, and in this process, Botticelli initiates a richly Ficinian *primum in aliquo genere*.

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Hartt cites the Medici as proactive participants in the rituals of the Feast of *Corpus Christi* in Florence, and in the Uffizi *Adoration*, Botticelli effectively represents Cosimo for all eternity (or for certainly as long as the image endures) shown as identifying with the *Deposition* of the *Corpus Christi*, which image was originally placed in the Church of Sta. Maria Novella, in Florence, commissioned by Guasparre del Lama.³⁰⁵ Hatfield suggests that Botticelli’s image of Cosimo may be intended as a personification of or perhaps more accurately as an exemplification of *virtue* possibly presenting this representation of Ficino’s patron, as well as the patron of del Lama as the idealized image of the benevolent leader, elevated via his faith and good works, to the status of a Magus.³⁰⁶ Hatfield also notes the differences between uses of the terms *effigia* and *imago* and the indication of moral properties applicable to how these terms may be applied in representing the figures intended to be identifiable.³⁰⁷ In reference to the positioning of the figures and the configurations of the physical positions of members of the entourage as well as the Medici identified Magi, Hatfield also introduces the idea of Botticelli’s likely intention to represent the “movements of the soul”, as both a hierarchical structuring of the soul’s journey toward Christ in the afterlife, and the idea of the body as an expression of the soul itself.³⁰⁸


³⁰⁷ See Rab Hatfield, *Uffizi Adoration*, p. 96-97.

³⁰⁸ See Rab Hatfield, *Uffizi Adoration*, p. 98.
Botticelli’s works from a crucial, if only elliptically acknowledged, component of the Ficinian philosophical system in that the paintings are in fact demonstrations of Ficino’s philosophical method. The Hera-Juno-Aphrodite-Venus-Athena-Pallas-Mary analogy is quite powerful in Botticelli’s images, which would acknowledge the role of the Virgin as the “new” Eve, and a cognate of these varying iterations of the divine feminine, the generative mother goddess. The multivalent shifting use of identity is itself a Neo-Platonist reference on the sophistical model. Representations of an Incarnation of divine love in a body (God-in-the Christ) are in fact representations intended to articulate God’s act of divine love toward humankind by permitting a mortal (at least temporarily mortal) incarnation of Himself, which could serve as a means of human redemption, a vehicle, provided via Mary, which could carry away all human iniquity and culpability. This selfless love is paralleled in the Christian Father’s sacrifice of the Son by the pagan Son’s (Chronos’) sacrifice of the Father (Ouranos), giving birth to divine love and the goddess who was not merely spiritual and intellectual love, but who would also come to be identified in her twin aspect as the goddess of sexual generation as well as spiritual union. The demonstration as a philosophical tool is of equal importance with the awareness of knowledge by intuition. Botticelli, seems to be fully aware of the importance of his work as an extension of the Ficinian philosophical method.

309 See Michael Allen, *Icastes: Marsilio Ficino’s Interpretation of Plato’s Sophist*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1989, pp. 232-270 and Chapters 20, 21, 24, 26, 44, 45, 46 concerning identity, being and non-being, feigning and simulacra, reflection and imitations of being, and the sophistical predisposition for impersonation with Allen noting in his Epilogue on p. 204 that the sophist is “crafty and adroit” and that sophistry entails some measure of “authentic imitation of the intelligible sublime.” Sophistry is to some extent the “‘art’ of dividing and defining”, thus sophistry helps us in making distinctions. The identity conflations and overlaps of aspects of comparable spiritual beings is in fact a demonstration of intelligence in determining nuance within truth.
The image provides an important stage of adoration. Adoration is a particular act of Love in which an internal movement within the soul, a moment of *dynamis*, when a generative force opens a yearning within the soul, stimulated by contemplation, resulting in a profound longing for God. This image by subject and context shows a double allusion to the activity of contemplative adoration and the acknowledgment of love, both earthly and divine, for the image was commissioned by Guasparre del Lama as a demonstration of his earthly love and adoration in honor of his Medici patrons, who are themselves shown within the image in the actions stemming from divine adoration of the Christ. The representation of the then deceased Cosimo, *Il Vecchio*, shown in the image in greatest proximity to the Infant Christ, seems intended as a metaphor created to demonstrate that he was thus closest to the resolution of the true journey of return to the source in God through having gained (in the afterlife as shown in this image) access to his savior, the Christ. His late sons, Piero, and Giovanni are the other “earthly” figures shown in closest proximity to the figure of Christ as a representation of the soul’s projected journey and resolution of its purpose and yearning for God (here, via Christ’s act of salvation, in accordance with established church dogma). The actualization of the soul’s return to God can only be accomplished through death, and representation of the use of the humeral veil, with Cosimo shown grasping the foot of the Infant Christ, and, in an act of humility, kissing of the foot of Christ, is an allusion to the Medici’s public demonstrations of devotion through their involvement in the procession for the annual Feast of *Corpus Christi*.  

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The del Lama *Adoration* image portrays the Medici as models of devotion in that they are represented engaged in or observing acts of piety. However, the image is not only, itself an homage to the traditional activities of divine devotion, but further del Lama’s patronage of an image of his patrons is itself a lower level devotional action, and in the painting an image of him looks out toward us as the spectators, contemplating us as we contemplate the image. Botticelli also represents himself in this guise of contemplating the contemplator, reminding us that such a representation is intended to initiate a revivifying cycle of generation and regeneration, birth and rebirth. It is through the engagement with *spiritus* that the activity of contemplation ascends upward toward the levels of divinity moving through the rational soul toward Divine Mind. Through this image both Botticelli and his patron, del Lama, are made to live anew, as do their Medici patrons included in the picture and the Christ and all that he symbolizes. The onlooker, in contemplating the scene, breathes new life into the represented figures by means of his or her awareness of them, and is infused with the ideas invested in the work (the level of access to those ideas obviously depends upon the spectator’s awareness of Platonic and Neo-Platonic truths). Thus, sophistical illusionism here imitates the revivification of ideas that would generally be the province of philosophical reasoning. The image thus demonstrates and disseminates the ideas of eternal recurrence and resurrection.
Figure 2.1 The Guaspari del Lama *Adoration of the Magi*, Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1475-1476, dimensions: 44 x 53 inches (111 x 134 cm).
Figure 2.2 The Guaspari del Lama *Adoration of the Magi*, Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1475-1476, detail: dimensions : 44 x 53 inches (111 x 134 cm) central composition including Cosimo de’Medici grasping the foot of the Infant Christ, utilizing the humeral veil.
Figure 2.3 Detail of the Guaspari del Lama *Adoration of the Magi*, Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1475-1476, detail: dimensions: 44 x 53 inches (111 x 134 cm) 
2.3 detail: probable portrait of Sandro Botticelli from the viewer’s right of the original artwork; dimensions: 44 x 53 inches (111 x 134 cm).
Figure 2.4 The Guaspari del Lama *Adoration of the Magi*, Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1475-1476, detail: Golden Section composition - dimensions: 44 x 53 inches (111 x 134 cm)
Figure 2.5 he Guaspari del Lama *Adoration of the Magi*, Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1475-1476, detail: dimensions: 44 x 53 inches (111 x 134 cm) elliptical formation of compositional group.
Figure 2.6 The Guaspari del Lama *Adoration of the Magi*, Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1475-1476 detail: dimensions: 44 x 53 inches (111 x 134 cm) compositional pyramid within concentric squares.
Figure 2.7 The Guaspari del Lama *Adoration of the Magi*, Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1475-1476, detail: dimensions: 44 x 53 inches (111 x 134 cm) intersecting sight lines and triangular forms, within the compositional focus area.
Figure 2.8 he Guaspari del Lama Adoration of the Magi, Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1475-1476, detail: dimensions: 44 x 53 inches (111 x 134 cm) : equilateral triangular compositional element within the square.
CHAPTER III

THE WASHINGTON ADORATION OF THE MAGI

...ita cum primum ab omnibus corporis perturbationibus per moralem disciplinam purgata mens est atque in divinam veritatem, idest Deum ipsum religioso quodam flagrantissimo que amore directa, subito ut divinus inquit Plato divina menti veritas influit rationesque rerum veras que in ipsa continentur quibusve omnia constant feliciter explicat, quanto mentem circumfundit lumine, tanto simul et voluntatem gaudio beate perfundit. 311

The Washington Nativity & Adoration (c. 1478-1482)
Sandro Botticelli
Nativity and Adoration of the Magi
Tempera (and oil) on panel
2’ 29” height (70 centimeters) X 4’ 41” width (104.2 centimeters)
The National Gallery of Art, Washington.
(Figure 3.1)

This Nativity and Adoration of the Magi is assumed to have been commissioned by a member of the Medici family concurrently with the artist’s visit to Rome of c.1481,

311 This quote is taken from the letters of Marsilio Ficino, “VII Exhortation Ad Amicos Moralis” (quaie in codice ponitur post op. 948, 2) in Supplementvm Ficinianvm, Paul Oskar Kristeller (Pavlvs Oscarivs Kristeller), Florentiae, in aedibvs Leonis S. Olschki, MCMXXXVII, ristampa MCMLXX, Vol I, pp. 64-65; taken from the “Exhortation ad morale et contemplative religiosamque vitam”; Marsilius Ficinus amicis suis s.d.; in this encouragement or exhortation to live a moral and religious life, Ficino intentionally conflates the teachings of Plato as a guide for the life of spiritual Christian contemplation in which the philosopher enjoins his cohorts to participate. Prof. Kris teller offers a translation of the passage in his earlier work on Ficino’s philosophy wherein he discusses Ficino’s ideas pertaining to morals, art, and religion (considered to some extent as a unity), see Paul Oskar Kristeller, The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino, translated by Virginia Conant, Columbia University Press, New York City, New York, 1943, p. 291. The translation reads:

“When through moral discipline the mind is purified from all disturbances of the body and is directed by a religious and ardent love toward divine truth, namely, God Himself, suddenly, as the divine Plato says, divine truth flows into the mind…and as it overflows the mind with light, so does it happily overflow the will with joy.”
and then to have been later passed into the family of the Guicciardini of Florence.\textsuperscript{312} In the dynamic movement and circular composition of this image, with the evocative inclination of the devoted toward the centrally placed figure of the Infant Christ, we may recognize a representation of \textit{energeia}, that power which serves to elicit action through inspiration of an internal movement of the devoted soul, inspired, here, by love.\textsuperscript{313} The philosophical concept of energeia alludes to a more spiritual and complete action (an internal action) rather than the merely physical term of \textit{kinesis}. \textit{Energeia} is not the form of transformation that stems from \textit{dynamis}, but is an action within substance, an action within the soul \textit{per se} as it were. \textit{Energeia} is that capacity or power of the soul to be capable of initiating internal action and sustaining inner force; the source of the power of “influence” or \textit{influxus} which is demonstrated here by the physically manifested response to the Christ as shown in the painting by postures and attitudes of the Magi and their retinue.

Botticelli’s \textit{Washington Nativity} (c. 1478-1482), perhaps more accurately described as an \textit{Adoration of the Magi}, like the Uffizi \textit{Adoration}, an image which had been commissioned for the church of Santa Maria Novella, is an easel picture comparable to the previously discussed image, and influenced by its compositional innovations. The Washington picture was very likely intended as both a devotional work and a


conversation piece, and its iconography appears to be carefully planned to stimulate contemplation of the complex association of theological and philosophical ideas it may be interpreted as representing to its past and potential spectators. Hartt indicates that its style may reflect Botticelli’s stay in Rome during 1481 to 1482.\(^{314}\) Its composition is more spacious and formal in arrangement than the Uffizi *Adoration* which features the prominent portraits of the Medici family members, and the Washington picture may have been influenced by Leonardo da Vinci’s unfinished *Adoration*, begun in 1481 for the monks of San Donato a Scopeto.\(^{315}\)

The rich geometric clarity of the Washington picture shows an increasing sophistication in compositional arrangement corresponding with symbolic implications, and is a departure from the slightly more spontaneous compositional style of the earlier Uffizi work. The subordinate figures gathered around the Virgin and the Infant Christ, are grouped in a 45 degree circular pattern inclined into the picture drawn in an ordered, perspective depth around the centrally positioned pyramidal forms of the Madonna with


\(^{315}\) I was able to see this image on 9-20-2013, on display in the National Gallery of Art, in order to examine it in detail. See Frederick Hartt, *History of Italian Renaissance Art*, 1983, pp. 445-447, regarding the probability that Botticelli was influenced by Leonardo’s work; Hartt indicates that the monastery of San Donato a Scopeto, which was originally located near the Porta Romana of the Oltrarno is long since vanished. Arguments for Botticelli’s having seen the Leonardo picture conflict. Indeed, Hatfield suggests that Botticelli influenced Leonardo first, and that Leonardo’s compositional response in the *Adoration*, of 1481 for the monks of San Donato a Scopeto in turn, influences Botticelli for the composition of the *Washington Adoration*; see Rab Hatfield, *Botticelli’s Uffizi “Adoration”, A Study in Pictorial Content*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1976, pp. 112-113. Hartt, p. 329, op. cit., suggests that the Washington *Adoration* shows signs of influence acquired in Rome during that year in which Botticelli was installed, working on projects for Pope Sixtus IV, noting this work’s indication of familiarity with classical ruins.
Child flanked by two of the Magi, one on her right, advanced in age, and one on her left, suggesting the vitality of youth, both have removed their crowns, signs of earthly administrative power, in the presence of the divine Infant Christ. The third Magi, representing middle age, offers frankincense (oolibanum), and is shown in a pose suggesting a psychological state of contemplation, positioned behind the elder Magi on the Virgin’s right (that is to say, the viewer’s left). The circular formation of the assembly is completed by the position of the spectator, a device, which draws the viewer into the “sacred circle” of the adoring collective, a circle in which the Infant Christ is centrally placed. The innocence of the youthful Magi on the Virgin’s left (our right), whose crown appears to be missing, and the complete submission of the elder Magi, whose crown is placed on the ground, at the edge of his thalo-red robe, and who is positioned closest to the Christ (and perhaps suggesting that he is closest to death and eternity?) offer a compelling contrast of youth and advanced age. This proximity of the eldest Magi to the Christ is offset by the contemplative, prudent pose of the middle-aged Magi, who has not yet removed his crown. Each of the three Magi is shown dressed richly in a distinctive color, the eldest in red, the middle-aged figure in blue, and the youthful Magus in green.

316 See Frederick Hartt, p. 329 for mention of the circle completed by the spectator. Perhaps this compositional device is a manifestation of Botticelli’s intention for the audience to be drawn within the image and to participate in the function of the image in returning the soul to its source via contemplation, if so, we, as spectators would thus complete the circuitus divinus.

317 The History of Painters website offers an analysis of common concepts associated with particular colors during the period of the early Renaissance, suggesting that red is a color associated with power and passion (and if attributed to the eldest Magus, this seems logical, that he should be the repository of wisdom and experience); blue is associated with ideas of spirituality and purity (and is the color particularly associated with the Virgin Mary and the people of Israel); while green symbolizes rebirth or regeneration, growth, resurrection and peace, all of which would be appropriate anticipations of the future role of the Christ, with each Magus
In the architecture above the Virgin and Child, a centrally placed tripartite triangular truss work shows three large triangles each inset with four smaller triangles (an iconographic device alluding to the implied presence of both the Holy Trinity and the 12 Disciples is incorporated into the composition via this pictorial stratagem). The geometric order of the composition alludes to the harmony and perfection of number and all lines in the composition’s linear perspective presentation culminate in the figure of the Virgin and the Christ Child, making them not only the apparent center of this represented world, but the actual center and source of all that is represented in it. This placement is reinforced by the use of a psychological defersence toward the Christ and the Virgin, exemplified in the postures of each of the approximately 40 figures in the composition, excluding the three figures of the Christ, the Virgin Mary, and Joseph, totaling thus 43 figures. While it may be coincidental that the numerals of 43, if added, equals the number seven, which happens to be the number signifying the quantity of the four cardinal and three theological virtues: prudentia (Prudence), temperantia (Temperance), virtus or fortitudo (Fortitude), with iustitia (Justice) and fides (Faith), spes (Hope), caritas (Love). The symbolic importance of the use of number and geometry in the art of this time period, allows for the possibility that such an apparent coincidence could be a fully intentional component of religious dogma and cultural signification.

The centrally located ruin in stone alludes to an ancient classical, pagan (and perhaps specifically Greek) past, a “failed” “pagan” culture that lacked, according to assuming an aspect of the Messiah’s character. See http://www.historyofpainters.com/colors.htm, 2017, accessed on 08-15-2018.
Renaissance Christian, enlightened views, complete access to “truth”. Near the wall, the arches of a Roman ruin suggest a continuity of tradition. Upon the foundations of the first structure rest the triangular trusses that imply a new faith, with salvation via Christ’s future sacrifice, but also alluding to a concept of Christian teaching balanced upon the foundations of classical ideas. The succession of triangles could also allude to the succession of ideas of the eternal soul, passing from Pythagoras, to the Socratic-Platonic tradition, and the Neo-Platonism of Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus, which so powerfully influenced St. Augustine. The allusion to a “ruined” pagan foundation upon which Christian enlightenment can be founded in this picture, which is likely to have been executed shortly before Botticelli devises a new idiom in which pagan allusion subsumes Christian ideals in his Primavera is certainly an intriguing occurrence, whether a coincidence, or part of a planned, logical, evolutionary program of expanding awareness pertaining to interpretations of doctrinal and philosophical complexity regarding canonical Christian ideas within a framing context of the Classical past.

Hartt discusses the probability of Botticelli’s awareness of Neoplatonic doctrine as a source of influence for this image, particularly the idea of representing the concept of *deseio*, the yearning of the soul toward its source, its true resting place in God.\(^{318}\) There appears to be some residual evidence that a star or source of light was at one time positioned above the figure of the Christ, its golden rays still stretching downward from

above his head, particularly visible just below the lower beam of the base of the third of
the three trusses that form the roof resting on the marble walls.\textsuperscript{319}
Ficino’s ties to Neo-Platonic thought and the influence of his ideas on Botticelli’s work
and specifically the representation of an implied visual hierarchy may demonstrate this
work’s position in the forming of a series of interrelations between the classical pagan
theology and the innovations of Christian thought using the foundations of the divinely
inspired Platonic philosophical tradition. In the image, the representation, which is most
abstracted and detached from material reality and specificity is the image of the Holy
Family itself.\textsuperscript{320} By including the spectator within the circumference of the ellipse, or
circular formation of the assembled group, we have been placed in a position of an
unobstructed view of the Holy Virgin upon whose knee the Infant Christ is shown in the
act of blessing the most elderly of the Magi, kneeling before him. Seated within the ruin
under the consolidated cover of the trussed roof, we notice a series of levels implied by
the composition of the ambient in which the Child and the Virgin have been situated.
Visually, we are drawn by the perspective device (our point of view) “inward” to the

\textsuperscript{319} The gold gilt lines extend from above the base beam, form a small “radiance” and then extend
directly down toward the head of the Christ Child, who is himself enclosed in a radiance, which
appears somewhat abraded as if the surface of the picture may have been rubbed. The proper
source of the downward extending light rays is missing, which may mean that this image was cut
down. There are vestiges of a representation of a luminous form directly above the figure of
Christ that descend from the apex of the foremost truss. If this painting has been altered and if
the source of light has been cut out intentionally to direct our gaze out of the image toward the
actual heavens above, such a choice would actively support our thesis of ascent via the image to a
transitive and actual contemplative internal ascent of the soul).

\textsuperscript{320} See Ronald Lightbown, Botticelli, 2009 p. 113 who notes “ As before, the Holy Family itself
is the least effective part of the composition: Saint Joseph is weak and inexpressive. Perhaps
Botticelli shrank from humanizing their conventional types.” I agree with Prof. Lightbown’s
conclusion that Botticelli has intentionally de-emphasized the specificity of the members of
the Holy Family in contrast with the portrait-like characteristics of the Magi and their retinue. This
seems a possible, indeed a probable visual metaphor for the translation of the differences of the
universal type contrasted with the specific individual.
scene of nature framing the Virgin and Child, through a valley, up the hills, up the mountains, up toward the representation of the sky (the representation of Heaven), and there the intersecting crosses of the three, large, quadripartite wooden trusses draw our gaze ever upwards. Through this means our eye is drawn toward the upper register of the composition and then extended out of the picture heavenward, from the fictive space into the actual space of the image’s location, to look upward and outward. We appear to be being manipulated in our activity of contemplation by the artist, via the suggestive use of line, channeling the direction of our gaze to ascend insistently heavenward. As we are engaged by the manipulative devices of these stratagems, we cannot avoid noticing that the stone (marble) foundations upon which the wooden, inter-crossing trusses rest are symbols of the pagan past, still sufficiently solid to support a new order of thought that directs us heavenward. These manipulations are unlikely to be mere coincidence, and indeed, it appears not only that are such manipulations of the spectator are consciously achieved, but they may be fully intentional, constituting a philosophical and a theological demonstration of methodology for the edification of the soul, enhancing its contemplation of the divine on its journey of return to its source.

Roberta Olson confirms the likelihood of accurately dating the Washington Adoration to the period of Botticelli’s Roman sojourn, basing her argument upon the strength of the manner in which this image corresponds to certain stylistic tendencies that

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321 In a discussion with Dr. William Eiland, Director of the Georgia Museum of Art on July 17th, 2018, I was made aware that the perspective representation by Botticelli does not necessarily merely draw our attention upward, but simultaneously draws us into the space of the painting by extending its illusion outward, into our reality. This valuable insight indicates a convincing argument for the circle of inclusion already suggested by the formal configuration of the composition. A more extensive investigation of Botticelli’s symbolic employment of perspective and geometry seems merited for further discussion and better understanding of this phenomenon.
evolve within Botticelli’s oeuvre as a result of his time working on the Sistine Chapel frescoes, from 1481 to 1482.\textsuperscript{322}

Ficino’s syncretic combination of ancient knowledge, medieval spiritual concepts, and Renaissance rationalism, incorporating a systematic interpretation of Platonic theology, forms the foundations for my claim here of the importance of the symbolic introduction of the Christ to the world, represented through images of the Epiphany, and its connection to Ficino’s aesthetic theories. The theme of the \textit{Adoration of the Magi}, was represented repeatedly by Botticelli and the Magi cult was specifically celebrated in processions and ceremonies every five years by the Florentines. The \textit{Magi}, the Latin plural of \textit{Magus}, were generally accepted as an acknowledgment of the wisdom of the ancient Near Eastern civilizations, later coming to represent the three known areas of the world as indicators of the universal appeal of Christianity.\textsuperscript{323} A specific association with


\textsuperscript{323} See James Hall, \textit{Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art}, Harper and Row, New York, 1974, p. 6. Hall notes that in late medieval art, the three kings came to signify the three areas of the known world, and the submission of the secular, worldly authority and power to the higher authority of the church and its representation of the power of God. In Italy, the diversity of identities was telegraphed by variations within the retinue of the individual kings. However, a northern tradition, possibly initiated under the authority of Frederick Barbarossa, began showing one of the kings, Balthasar, as an ethnic African. Thus the three came to represent the Semitic east (oddly personified by the youngest, Melchior), and Europe (possibly due to the association with Rome as a Christian center, with Caspar as the Eldest). (See Domenico del Ghirlandio’s \textit{Adoration of the Magi} (c.1487), Galleria degli Uffizi, which shows Africans in the retinue of the Magi, but no representation of a black, African Magus-King. Botticelli appears to have been more preoccupied with showing the three distinctive ages of the Magi as a means of suggesting universal appeal, rather than attributing location differentiation via indicators derived from the features and physiognomy of the participants in the scene (later images of the \textit{Adoration of the Magi} often use the diversity of phenotypes among the Magi to indicate the three known [at the time] parts of the world, Europe, the Middle East and Africa). Botticelli does show some diversity in the nationalities and races of humanity in his Roman fresco for the Sistine Chapel, indicating
Mithraic Zoroastrianism and its tenets may have been part of the appeal of this theme and the cult of the Magi was especially a cause for veneration in the “new Athens” as Florence, a self-appointed legatee of the renowned Greek intellectual center for philosophy and universal learning, was being positioned to motivate a renaissance of ancient, mystical, intuitive knowledge tempered by reason, structure, and order.\textsuperscript{324} The National Gallery website notes: “Sandro Botticelli, a Florentine, painted several versions of the theme as one of the city's leading religious confraternities was dedicated to them. The members of the confraternity took part in pageants organized every five years, when the journey to Bethlehem of the Magi and their retinue, often numbering in the hundreds, was re-enacted through the streets of Florence.”

Noting that the Washington \textit{Adoration} was probably painted in Rome, the online entry mentions that Pope Sixtus IV commissioned Botticelli to create works in fresco on the walls of the Sistine Chapel, as part of a general invitation to a number of noted Florentine masters of the time (this was in part an olive branch extended to Lorenzo Il Magnifico and in recognition of his survival of the Pazzi conspiracy). Botticelli's composition is described as “linear and decorative” and special mention is made of the placement of the \textit{Adoration} within the ruin of a classically-inspired temple-like structure the presence of Africans (or possibly dark-complexioned Saracens or Arabs) in The Temptation of Moses, \textit{Bearer of the Written Law} of c.1481-1482, nicely illustrated catalogue plate 44, p. 94, in Frank Zöllner, \textit{Sandro Botticelli}, Prestel Verlag, Munich, 2009.

\textsuperscript{324} See James Hall, \textit{Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art}, Harper and Row Publishers, New York, 1974, pp. 5-6, who notes the importance of the cult of Mithras in Rome during the early phases of the dissemination of Christianity. Hall suggest that the Magi are generally assumed to be Persian astrologers, and the transference of this source of “heavenly” wisdom as an infusion of both “scientific” and mystical, intuitive knowledge into the representations associated with Christianity in Botticelli’s Ficino-inspired neo-Platonist conception is unlikely to be construed as merely coincidental.
within which a shelter has been constructed, serving as the allusion to the humble stable mentioned in the biblical text. The writers of the entry note that “This setting emphasizes the belief that Christianity arose from the ruins of paganism, and suggests a continuity between ancient and Christian philosophy.”

The Washington Adoration is compared to earlier Renaissance paintings based upon the same theme, including the National Gallery's tondo by Fra Angelico and Botticelli’s teacher, Fra Filippo Lippi, with a powerful emphasis on “the pomp and pageantry of the scene.” Botticelli’s rendition emphatically foregrounds devotional commitment, and every figure is noted as presenting “an expression of piety, the postures of their hands and bodies revealing devotion, reverence and contemplation on the divine mystery before them.”

The term, mágos (is of Greek origin) and its variants appear in the Old and New Testaments. This term often refers to an illusionist, fortune-teller, or a “magician”. However, in the Gospel of Matthew, the term has been translated as signifying a "wise man".

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325 See the website of the National Gallery of Art: : The Collection : : “The Adoration of the Magi” article: Botticelli, Sandro, Florentine, 1446 – 1510; The Adoration of the Magi (1478/1482), tempera and oil on panel; painted surface: 68 x 102 cm (26 3/4 x 40 3/16 in.) overall size: 70 x 104.2 cm (27 9/16 x 41 in.); framed: 98.4 x 132.1 x 8.3 cm (38 3/4 x 52 x 3 1/4 in.); Andrew W. Mellon Collection; 1937.1.22: at http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/art-object-page.24.html. The picture has an interesting provenance and was acquired by Czar Alexander I of Russia in 1808, later passing into the collection of A. W. Mellon in 1931 and eventually becoming a part of the collection of the National Gallery of Art in Washington. See “Provenance” at the web address provided above.

326 Ibid., sub “The Adoration of the Magi”.
The Gospel of Matthew states that magi visited the infant Jesus shortly after his birth (2:1–2:12). The gospel describes how magi from the east were notified of the birth of a king in Judaea by the appearance of his star. Upon their arrival in Jerusalem, they visited King Herod to determine the location of where the king of the Jews had been born. Herod, disturbed, told them that he had not heard of the child, but informed them of a prophecy that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. He then asked the magi to inform him when they find the infant so that Herod may also worship him. Guided by the Star of Bethlehem, the wise men found the baby Jesus in a house. (The Gospels do not say if the Magi found him in Bethlehem, but only that they saw the star and found the child in a house.) They worshipped him, and presented him with "gifts of gold and of frankincense and of myrrh." (2.11) In a dream they are warned not to return to Herod, and therefore return to their homes by taking another route. Since its composition in the late 1st century, numerous apocryphal stories have embellished the gospel's account. Matthew 2:16 implies that Herod learned from the wise men that up to two years had passed since the birth, which is why all male children two years or younger were slaughtered during Herod’s Massacre of the Innocents, as he sought to prevent the prophecy of the advent of the Christ, and his (Herod’s) displacement from coming to fruition.327

The inclusion in the composition of a visual reference to the Statues of the Dioscuri from the Fontana Quirinale in Rome supports association and dating of this

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image with Botticelli’s Roman sojourn while simultaneously underscoring the synthetic and syncretic character of Botticelli’s inventiveness, manifesting a sympathy with Ficino’s philosophical system, which was so determined to harmonize the ancient, classical past with the doctrines and dogma of a contemporary Christian intellectual infrastructure. The allusion to reason controlling instinct, symbolized through the device of the horse-tamer image, in conjunction with the Christ shown as a powerful spiritual, harmonizing influence upon the public, gathered about him in a circle of humanity in which the spectator is the link completing the circle can hardly be mistaken.\(^{328}\) Moreover, Olson references a tradition within the corresponding typologies of Biblical narrative and pagan myth which associates the dual mortal-immortal nature of the Dioscuri with the dualistic synthetic character of the Christ, who was both mortal and immortal; human and yet the incarnation of divine will which had been made into mortal flesh.\(^{329}\)

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\(^{328}\) I have noted previously the discussion of the image of the groom as detailed by Ronald Lightbown in *Botticelli: Life and Work*, Abbeville Press, New York, 1989, p.113 who cites the article by R.J. M. Olson, “Botticelli’s Horsetamer: A Quotation from Antiquity which Reaffirms a Roman Date for the Washington Adoration,” in *Studies in the History of Art*, vol. 8, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1978, pp. 7-21 discussed in greater detail below. The original context of the statues that were later included in the Fontana dei Dioscuri as commissioned by Pope Sixtus V, after Botticelli’s time no longer exists, but the included statues of *Castor and Pollux* were taken from the *Baths of Constantine I*, Rome’s most important Christian convert, the Emperor who legalized the practice of Christianity and opened the gateway for the acceptance of this factional Eastern religion to become the official nationalized faith of the Roman state. The symbolic associations of such a liaison are unlikely to be purely coincidental in a painting, which makes such a visual point of showing the classical pagan structural foundations for a post-Medieval Christian spirituality. For the article by Prof. Roberta J. M. Olson, see Justor: [http://www.jstor.org/discover/ess=false](http://www.jstor.org/discover/ess=false).

\(^{329}\) See Olson, pp. 7-21, and particularly pages 10-12 discussing the pagan prototype of the dual nature of Christ associated with twin cults including that of Hercules and Iphikles as well as Castor and Pollux. Castor, the horse tamer and son of Tyndareous, was a mortal, while his brother Pollux, a pugilist and the son of Zeus, was immortal. Pollux sacrificed part of his immortality in order to extend the life of his brother, making both demi-gods sharing a nature that was both divine and human, anticipating the ontological status of the Christ as both human and divine. The
The importance of an association between geometry and divinity is also evident in the *Washington Nativity* which continues the Platonic analogy between number, geometry and the visual expression of a concept of divinity and contemplative philosophy.\footnote{330} The Neo-Platonist idea of contemplation as the means through which a soul may seek to engage divine truth, suggests that participating in the contemplation of representations of the Christ would be understood as a type of activity that would lead the spectator toward an inner consideration of the significance of the Christ, and in doing so, propel the soul (within the confines of its specific preparations in a particular perceiver in accordance with the preparation, learning, awareness, and understanding of the recipient) toward God, Truth, and the soul’s source.

This image demonstrates visually the interpretation of the concept of *influxus*, a consequence of an effluence from some influencing agent, in this instance the image of the Christ Child, toward whom almost each figure represented in the image, is shown to incline as they form a circle enveloping him. The Child is represented as actively radiating outward his rich, evolved, and elevated state of being in the form of an emanation which imitates and derives from the emanation of God-the-Father. Christ’s emanation as an emulation of the emanation of God the Father, whose effluence influences and actualizes all of reality extending from His perfections and eventually

devolving into the material reality of the human body and the realm of the senses at its utmost extremes extending away from God’s perfections toward material realization, corporeality, and imperfection, may be inferred from this representation, which is simultaneously icastic and demonstrative. The Washington Adoration is an example of how Botticelli specifically, and other artists within Ficino’s circle in a more general sense, may be understood to use images to embody and translate, or perhaps, rather transform philosophical messages into palpable demonstrations of religious and intellectual actualizations. Such demonstrations show the role of art as a source, offering an image-as-cause analogy extending from Ficino’s commitments regarding art (particularly painting and music) as a means to a reshaping of the Formal reality of the human soul, and thereby propagating the possibility of transformation.  

The activity of the power of dynamis generates an internal movement which stimulates the emotion of love via an influxus, a flowing into the spiritus of the soul of the power of patheia or emotion, and in the Washington Adoration, we discover a double employment of the concept of the influxus of emotion; both a flowing in and simultaneously, an outpouring of emotion stemming from the pathos or suffering of the soul due to its yearning and desire to return to its source. The Washington picture appears to show the effects and affect of and on the physical presence and phenomenal

331 See Michael Allen, Icastes, pp. 165 -167).

332 F.E. Peters, Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon, New York University Press, 1967, pp. 42-43, refers to Platonic awareness of both a passive and an active component of dynamis discussed as a medical term in Phaedrus 370c-d and as one of the pathé of the elements noted in Timaeus 33a; however the idea of the capacity for potential to be awakened by influxus bears a greater debt to Aristotelian reasoning, and its synthesis seems appropriately Neo-Platonist in character.
appearance of the individuals represented as each responds to the presence of the Christ. There is some possibility that the idea for a demonstration of the effects of an affective *influxus* may be modeled upon the actual influence upon Botticelli of either knowledge of or having seen *in situ* in Florence, Leonardo da Vinci’s unfinished *Adoration* of 1481, made in the same year that Botticelli initially traveled to Rome.\(^{333}\) This example offers a real world demonstration of the ability of a work of art to serve as a powerful catalyst, affecting an individual and his or her conceptualization of reality and disseminating this influence into other extended examples. The function in facilitating the dissemination of ideas is one of the powers of images within the Ficinian interpretation of the Neo-Platonist hierarchy of being, perception, and interaction, which explains, and via the very presence of the works of art, demonstrates the role of aesthetics in the dispersal of philosophical conceptual truth.

In Botticelli’s painting, the figures, shown in the presence of the source of their desire, represented by Christ, symbolizing the idea of God, are responding to the source of all that is both alluded to as felt *within* the perceiver, and also the event which is shown within the image, as well as all that is external to, yet referred to by and within the image. These multiple, simultaneous allusions direct us both inward, focusing on what is shown, and project us outward to contemplate references to the material world, which may be perceivable outside of the image. However, the dual representation of a material as well as a conceptual *influxus* makes this work a crux upon which the next stage of

\(^{333}\) See Hartt (op. cit.), pp. 329-330 and pp. 446-447 for discussion of the two paintings of the *Adoration* by the two pupils of Verrochio (Botticelli and Leonardo); and Lightbown (op.cit.) p. 22, noting the possibility of shared influences of Verrochio (and in the case of Botticelli, Filippo Lippi) upon Botticelli and Leonardo.; See also Chastel, (op. cit.), p. 133.
powers of aesthetic transfer will depend. This representation of the role of the Platonic-
Plotinian demi-urgos shows how the sophistical movement (from the discourse of the
metaphysics of nonbeing in the Sophist, emanates and particularizes and then draws the
emanations back to itself.334

This image demonstrates visually a consequence of an effluence from some
influencing agent (that is to say, of the act of influxus), here, shown by the image of the
Christ Child, toward whom almost each figure represented inclines. The Child actively
radiats his rich, evolved, and elevated state of being outward, a model for the concept of
emanation, which shows the artist’s skill in imitating the idea of the act of emanation, as
well as showing specifically the model of emulation by the Christ, whose emanationist
power derives from and within the all-encompassing emanation of God-the-Father.
Christ’s emanation is thus presented as an emulation of the emanation of the Source (God
the Father), whose effluence influences and actualizes all of reality and being, extending
from His perfected, central abstraction, and eventually devolving into the material reality
of all perceivable phenomena, including the human body and the things of the realm of
the senses, located at the utmost extremes extending away from God’s central perfections
toward all material realization, corporeality, and imperfection. Thus, we may infer from
this representation, that it is intended to be simultaneously both icastic and demonstrative.
This is, this painting provides an example of how Botticelli specifically, and other artists
within Ficino’s circle in a more general sense, may be understood to use images to
embody and translate, or perhaps, rather transform philosophical messages into palpable

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334 See Michael Allen, Icastes Sophist commentary, and Sears Jayne Symposium commentary?...
demonstrations of religious and intellectual actualizations. Such demonstrations show the role of art as a source, offering an image-as-catalyst analogy extending from Ficino’s commitments regarding art (particularly painting and music) as a means to a reshaping of the Formal reality of the human soul, and thereby propagating the possibility of transformation.\footnote{See Michael Allen, \textit{Icastes}, pp. 165 -167.}
Figure 3.1 *The Adoration of the Magi*, Washington, D.C., c. 1478-1482, dimensions: 26 ¾ x 40 3/16 inches (68 x 102 cm).
Figure 3.2 The Adoration of the Magi. Washington, D.C., c. 1478-1482, dimensions: 26 ¾ x 40 3/16 inches (68 x 102 cm) repeat of the elliptical composition.
Figure 3.3 *The Adoration of the Magi*, Washington, D.C., c. 1478-1482, original dimensions: 26 ¾ x 40 3/16 inches (68 x 102 cm) repeat of the elliptical composition – detail
Figure 3.4 *The Adoration of the Magi*, Washington, D.C. c. 1478-1482, original dimensions: 26 ¾ x 40 3/16 inches (68 x 102 cm) replicated pentagram within a pentagonal composition -detail
Figure 3.5 *The Adoration of the Magi*, Washington, D.C. c. 1478-1482, original dimensions: 26 ¾ x 40 3/16 inches (68 x 102 cm) central Golden Section compositional detail
Figure 3.6 The Adoration of the Magi, Washington, D.C. c. 1478-1482, original dimensions: 26 ¾ x 40 3/16 inches (68 x 102 cm) lateral replications of the Golden Section within the composition – detail.
Figure 3.7 *The Adoration of the Magi*, Washington, D.C. c. 1478-1482, original dimensions: 26 ¾ x 40 3/16 inches (68 x 102 cm) compositional detail of rearing and docile horses; An interesting visual allusion to the character of the Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux.
Figure 3.8 Leonardo da Vinci, *Adoration of the Magi*, Galleria degli Uffizi, (c. 1481).
CHAPTER IV:

THE PRIMAVERA

The second Venus, which is located in the World Soul was born of Jupiter and Dione...they attribute a mother to that second Venus, for this reason, that since she is infused into the Matter of the World, she is thought to have commerce with matter.336

La Primavera (c. 1482) (Genesis)
Sandro Botticelli
Egg tempera on poplar panels
c. 1482  6’ 8” (203 cm) x 10’ 4” (315 cm)
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence
(Figure 4.1)

This image demonstrates the generative powers of Love, and specifically the aspect of Venus associated with fecundity, dissemination, and procreative power, the Venus *Genetrix*. The concept of the *genetrix* may refer to the fertility of ideas as well as material generation, and both aspects would allude to the genesis or “coming into being” or “becoming”, and to the idea of process intrinsic to philosophical discourse and internal transformation.337 Such a representation alludes also to the power of shaping and


337 See Francis E. Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon*, New York University Press, New York, 1967 pp. 67-72 discussion of the sensible realm as the arena of “becoming” noted by Plato in the *Timeus* 27d-28a. Genesis and the sensible world is the realm of opinion (*doxa*) in the Platonic formulation. The metamorphic theme in this work seems to support this idea of showing or demonstrating the idea of change, transformation, growth, and the illusion of materiality contrasted with the reality of perfect, existing conceptual truth.
reforming material reality and thus to the fabrication of art, capacities guided by the soul which would inhere both creative and generative power.

The demonstration of the power of Art as a route for access to the abstractions of ideas via the soul or psyche intrinsically envelops the emploment of humanitas, a social and philosophical concept which this image was intended to help disseminate. Its symbolism provide a unity of political and spiritual power, both resources that were to be guided by Lorenzo Il Magnifico as the head of the city; yet, this power was to be enhanced by the cooperation of Lorenzo di Pierfranceso, a youth, who was intended to submit to the greater wisdom, through duty and love, of his older cousin. Venus here is a representation of the fecund power of perception and intellect magnified (a form of giving birth, or Socratic midwifery) by means of art, a form of disseminated conceptual power. The Venus Genesis, the power of creativity, fabrication, material perception, and of the capacity for developing an understanding of spiritual and material reality, all seem a part of the intentionality informing this painting.

This unique work has served as the catalyst for an extraordinary outpouring of intellectual speculation regarding its meanings and its symbolism, its sources, and its multi-valent interpretive possibilities. It is perhaps first and foremost a work that evokes the concept of the Renaissance paragone, in this instance, a quite direct comparison between the beauty of visual representation contrasted with the eloquence of poetic, oral expression, signified in the painting by the cascade of flowers streaming from the lips of the Greek nymph, “Chloris” immediately prior to her metamorphosis from a “maid” into her “matronly” Roman namesake, “Flora.” Indeed, the complexity of literary sources and
likely associations with political events and contemporaneous social implications suggests that the initial subject of this fascinating image is the philosophical tool of hermeneutics, the very activity of contemplating levels of meaning within the configurations of symbolic tropes, metonymic allusions, visual similes and prosopopoeiatic rhetorical devices.

The division of *La Primavera* into five loci of action is itself an interesting point of departure for consideration of the significations for and of this image, and we are shown nine figures in this elegantly controlled composition. Both of these numerical quantities are unlikely to be merely coincidental compositional arrangements in that both five and nine are symbolically significant numbers within NeoPlatonist philosophy. Five is the innovated number of subdivisions within Marsilio Ficino’s Plotinian-based construction of a metaphysics of being with the components of God, Angelic Mind, Rational Soul, Quality, and Matter, the defining constitutive elements of the soul-body relation; while the number nine is the last of the first numbers preceding ten, which as 1 and zero is a return to the One, or, metaphorically speaking, the source of being itself.338

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338 See Kevin Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus: A Practical Introduction to Neoplatonism*, p. 98, note 2 of regarding the number 9 as the symbol of totality in Plotinian Neoplatonist thought who refers to D.J.O’Meara (1989; 1993, 9), for further discussion of ancient number theory and symbolism in Plotinus. See also Celenza, Christopher S., "Marsilio Ficino", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.).: URL= : https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/ficino/, paragraph 3.2, sub Ontology, where Celenza summarizes Ficino’s schema of the gradations of being emanating from the One or God. Wim van den Dungen notes the significance of the Ennead in Hermes Trismegistus as the symbol of nous or “divine mind” and “logos” or divine word. As an aspect of communication, this would be within the realm of Hermes/Mercury, who is shown in the image, and would support the allusion to poetry indicated by the floral spray emanating from the lips of the nymph, Chloris. For additional information on Egyptian-religion-based, Hermetic mystery traditions, see van den Dungen’s article: “The Ten Keys of Hermes Trismegistos,” accessed on 12-15-16 at: http://maat.sofiatopia.org/ten_keys.htm : Wim vad den Dungen, Antwerp, 2005-2016.
The goddess Venus is centrally placed in the composition, surrounded by myrtle branches which take on the form of a compositionally isolating aureole, lending a pyramidal stability to Venus’ figure, and thereby serving as an anchor for the entire configurative structure.339 The open sky, interlaced with feather-like myrtle leaves in a decorative pattern evocative of angelic wings, extends on either side of Venus, perhaps offering an additional visual clue alluding to her status as a divinity.340 On the goddess’ proper right (the viewer’s left), a scene of metamorphic transmutation is in process as we witness the abduction and transformation of the nymph Chloris by Zephyrus, an action which causes her to become the goddess, Flora, shown adjacent on Venus’ proper left; Flora is both carrying flowers, gathered in the folds of her gown, and is dressed in flowers in the form of decorations woven into or painted onto a diaphanous garment covered by floral imagery, a clever visual pun by the artist showing a representation of nature via the images of flowers that are the [painted] “real” blooms being cast about the scene by the

339 See Umberto Baldini, Primavera, The Restoration of Botticelli’s Masterpiece, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1986, pp. 94-95, who notes the contributions to an enhanced understanding of the likely complexities of symbolic suggestions associated with this image offered by Guido Moggi of the University of Florence, and particularly suggestions made by Mirella Levi D’Ancona, whose careful analysis of the plants shown in the Primavera, (discussed further below) and their likely symbolic associations indicate that myrtle is the plant associated with the idea of marriage. The presence of the goddess Flora also alludes to and reinforces the importance of the institution of marriage, and thus alludes also to carnal contact, one of the three forms of Love (amor ferinus carnal love; amor humanus: human love; amor divinus: divine love). [Ibid. p. 95].

340 I am grateful to Dr. William Eiland for pointing out the wing-like pattern of open sky on either side of the Venus figure in an email of July 27th 2018. Further research pertaining to the possible significations, perhaps as parallels to the image of the victorious Nike, or other angeloi or message figures may be of importance regarding this feature of the painting and may prove to be of considerable interest for additional study. The figure is illuminated from behind, shown within a “light envelope” of pale blue sky. (Ouranos is of course the god of the sky...her father/parent) in the divine Venus form narrative taken from Hesiod/ although this image is being proposed in my study as the generative Venus probably taken from Homer's account (profane Venus) the sexually generated daughter of Jupiter/Zeus and Dione...aspects of meaning would seem to depend upon (again ) which sources Botticelli may intend to evoke..and he could be alluding to both.
goddess, and the representation of representations of flowers on her costume (that is to say, the use of a the skill of painting to represent flowers that were themselves representations through skill on a fabricated costume, responding to works of nature which serve as inspiration for designs on a garment, as a witty allusion to the deferral of experience as one of the powers of art), thus, using art itself to allude to that action of art imitating nature. Above Venus, a blindfolded Cupid aims his arrow toward the four figures on Venus’ proper right (the viewer’s left). This group includes three female figures generally assumed by scholars to represent the three Graces. On the far left of the image (to Venus’ extreme right) is the god, Mercury/Hermes who gazes upward, facing away from the Three Graces as he appears to disturb a small gathering of mists or a mini-storm-cloud above him, using his caduceus (decorated with two dragons or winged serpents) as an agitator. The scene takes place in the bucolic setting of a small grove replete with a beautiful, tapestry-like carpet of diverse plants, many of which are in flower, and where orange trees and the angled branches of laurel form a background screen through which we as spectators are able to see the sky beyond this extraordinary gathering of divine beings.

Could it be an accident that the Primavera image seems to initiate its action in a substitutive metaphor of space standing for the concept of time, in which case its

341 The three female figures shown appear to be dancing, and may serve as multiple representations of symbolic significance, alluding not merely to the three Graces, proposed by Baldini as (from the viewer’s right to left) Pleasure, Chastity, and Beauty, but may also be allusions to the months of June, July, and August respectively. See Umberto Baldini, Primavera, The Restoration of Botticelli’s Masterpiece, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1986, pp. 88-94. The possibility of allusions to multiple identities for the individual figures is discussed further in the text and below.
movement is intended to be read not from left to right, like an ordinary text, but from right to left (like ancient texts from the East? An evocation of Zoroaster?). Moreover, this movement of spatial representation standing for the transition in time from early to late Spring, or from Spring to the end of Summer concludes with an image of Hermes (Roman Mercury), here shown in the position of the influencing governor of the astrological sign of Virgo, the month of September. Hermes also rules the month of June, influencing Castor and Pollux, the twins of Gemini, a month that may be represented in this image by the nymph of Beauty. Part of the rationale for this image appears to be related to concepts of communication, signification, intellectual engagement and interpretation, important components of the activity of philosophy.

This compelling image appears to be an ekphrastic visualization conceived as an entirely original compilation of several differing textual descriptions based in both ancient and contemporaneous literary sources, and indeed, it is a model for the intricacies of complicated, inter-textual image references.

Of the works discussed in this study for their likely dependence upon Neo-
Platonist ideas and ideals, perhaps Botticelli’s *Primavera* is the work presenting the most
facile and direct connection to the philosophical system in the form of a letter from
Marsilio Ficino, intended for the patron of the image, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de
Medici, a younger second-cousin and ward of Lorenzo Il Magnifico. In addition to this
letter, a second correspondence ties the work to the circle of scholars, poets, and
intellectuals within the Medici circle, and cements their ties to Botticelli. These
connections have been explored and addressed with comprehensive thoroughness by
Ernst Gombrich, who carefully discusses the various literary allusions incorporated
within the image’s complex symbolism, and presents associations with the ideas of the
philosopher Lucretius, the classical Roman writer Apuleius, the humanist Angelo
Ambrogini, called Il Poliziano, Ficino’s close friend and colleague, Giorgio Antonio
Vespucci (the uncle of explorer Amerigo Vespucci), Pico della Mirandola, and Naldo
Naldi among others.

While the painting incorporates elements from various literary sources (evoking
all, yet strictly adhering to none), ancient and contemporaneous, it illustrates no specific
text, however, it manages to serve as a unifying synthesis of conceptual actualizations.
Gombrich undertakes to draw meaningful links between Ficino’s letter to Lorenzo di
Pierfrancesco and the representations shown in the painting and while it is important to
discuss Gombrich’s fascinating thesis pertaining to the meaning of the painting, its
extensive symbolic significations may have no single, specific, literary source, and,

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343 See Ernst H. Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*: p. 40 regarding citation of the relation between
Lorenzo Il Magnifico and Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’Medici, and note 34, p. 206, citing Herbert
therefore, it seems intended as a visual cipher, a compelling conversational catalyst for the Neo-Platonic humanists, already familiar with the works that further expound upon the metaphysical commitments alluded to within this image.

Panofsky comments upon the evident intentions of Neo-Platonist philosophy to blur the barriers that had been established in Medieval thinking between Christian and pagan ideas and to effect a “decompartmentalization” of intellect and spirit, fusing Platonism and its revised late antique dependent, Neo-Platonism with Christian dogma, in Ficino’s neo-Neo-Platonist inventions.\footnote{See Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, Almqvist & Wiksell, Gebers Förlag AB, Stockholm, 1960, pp. 182-183.} He describes the *Primavera* as based upon the poetry of Poliziano, specifically *La Giostra*, dedicated to Giuliano de’ Medici, and thus consigns the image to the status of an essentially highly literate illustration rather than the unique, harbinger of philosophical ideas that seem more appropriate to its synthesis of disparate texts, written in differing periods, and representing sometimes competing narratives, which unite around certain Neo-Platonist conceptions.\footnote{See Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, Almqvist & Wiksell, Gebers Förlag AB, Stockholm, 1960, pp. 193-200. On page 194, note 3, Panofsky asserts that Poliziano’s *Giostra* supplemented by his *Sylva* and their classical sources provide a “basic text” for Botticelli’s *Primavera* and offers a contentious assessment of Gombrich’s suggestions pertaining to significant influences based in Apuleius’ *Golden Ass*; See E. H. Gombrich *Symbolic Images* (op. cit.), pp. 37-64.}

Botticelli’s work in the studio of the noted Renaissance sculptor and painter, Andrea del Verrochio, conducted simultaneously with the somewhat younger Leonardo da Vinci and, in addition to these distinguished fellow artists, his association with the artistically prolific Pollaiuolo Brothers.\(^{347}\)

Botticelli’s interaction with other Florentine masters allowed him to harmonize the advantages of the lessons learned from his artistic competitors with his own unique, richly poetic sensibility, a sensibility which results in the elegance and complexity of the Primavera. Hartt notes that the Primavera had been independently researched by both Shearman and Webster Smith and was discovered to have been initially installed (in a bedroom per Shearman and Webster Smith) in the townhouse of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici, the young cousin of Lorenzo Il Magnifico.\(^{348}\) Citing Ficino’s letter to the fourteen-year-old Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco, Hartt refers directly to the interpretation of Gombrich connecting Ficino to the young Medici patron, imploring him to inculcate the virtues of the goddess of Love.\(^{349}\) Ficino’s Christianized, moralized description of Venus is described by Hartt as “…an allegory of all those moral qualities that, it was thought, a cultivated Florentine patrician should possess.” Hartt also connects

\(^{347}\) Ibid., p. 327.


\(^{349}\) Frederick Hartt, (op. cit.), p. 332, Hartt quotes Ficino’s letter, reproduced in this study in Appendix A.
the image with Alberti’s suggestion that contemporary painters should explore classical literature as a foundation for *invenzione* and *istoriae* and recreate the philosopher Seneca’s description of the Three Graces, which were to be shown “nude or in transparent garments, dancing together with intertwined hands. One gives forth the benefits of Venus, the second receives, the third gives forth again.” Then, citing Dempsey’s research into possible sources for the *Primavera* image mediated by Botticelli’s contemporary, the philologist, Poliziano, appropriating elements from a range of ancient authors including Horace, Ovid, Lucretius, and Columella, Hartt provides Dempsey’s suggestion that the complexity of Botticelli use of iconography and literary sources has been structured by Poliziano.  

Hartt remarks upon Venus’s headdress in the *Primavera* as that of a married Florentine matron, supporting a theme of generative union associated with the rape and later marriage and transformation of the Greek nymph, Chloris into the bride of Zephyrus and her evolution into the goddess of flowers and gardens, Roman Flora, concluding that the complexity of possible readings for this image assures that it will continue to generate fertile, intellectual discourses in search of its significations; Hartt suggests, “The last word about this intriguing allegory has yet to be written.”

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350 Ibid., p. 332. For Charles Dempsey’s discussion, particularly of Columella’s citation of Venus’ role as the spirit of the month of April, see his *The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli’s Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1992 pp. 44-45 specifically quote the Roman agriculturalist (Columella) on the generative and fertility functions of the goddess of Love.

Paul Kristeller gives an extensive discussion of Ficino’s unique concept of the
*primum in aliquo genere*, an example of a particular thing which includes within itself, as
the first example of a new king of thing, the common qualities of the sphere of its genus
as a universal within itself. The Primavera may be understood to function as a
demonstration of how such a concept might be understood to function in view of this
image as a first thing of its kind in the transition from Medieval representations of an
imagined view assuming the position and interests of God, to a new, and quite
revolutionary, humanist view, centered in the perceptions and sensuality of man,
subordinated to a rich intention toward spiritual elevation via contemplative,
philosophical, meta-cognitive considerations of the variability of Love, per se. In Ficino’s
letter to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici, he give the impression of creating a schema
for which this image is a demonstration or kind of performance. The *Primavera* as a new
kind of painting, emerges with the nascent affiliation of the Renaissance for themes from
classical pagan literature, but which aligns compatibly with Christian social and
cultural values of love, virtue, and spirituality. However, within the image, the
importance of divine will and providence combine with the determinism of fate and the
machinations of astrology. This painting’s harmonious synthesis of disparate pagan and
Christian traditions was an entirely new kind of thing within the art ambient of the late
15th century, as was Ficino’s concept of seeking a middle ground between an Aristotelian
commitment to the nominalist position of universals which could only exist in thought
through the examples of particulars harmonizing with Platonic Ideas. Aristotle’s ideals

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352 Paul Oskar Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, translated into English by Virginia
353 Ibid., p. 148.
only via thought regarding particulars, as a doctrine which was incompatible with the
idea of Platonic Forms as distinct, existing real entities transcending thought, and having
an ontological reality independent of any particular thing as perfect intelligibles, in which
material examples participated at varying levels of adequacy.\footnote{Ibid., p. 148.} The \textit{primum} provided the
underlying qualities in which all future particular examples would participate (as in this
instance the synthetic images of \textit{Camilla and the Centaur}, \textit{Mars and Venus}, and \textit{The Birth of Venus}, all of which are allegories of Christian moral paragone, and are drawn
from pagan mythological sources).

Liana Cheney’s discussion of the \textit{Primavera}, indicates that the complexity of the
possible allegorical references combined with the diversity of scholarly hypotheses
renders this work especially problematic.\footnote{Liana Cheney, \textit{Quattrocento Neoplatonism and Medici Humanism in Botticelli’s Mythological Paintings}, (University Press of America, Lanham, MD,) 1985, p. 47.} Cheney’s research regarding this painting
confirms, however, that among the disparate ideas concerning the paintings contextual,
allegorical, political, poetic, or philosophical implications by different interpreters, there
is accord among scholars in the idea that the image was conceptualized and created under
the intellectual influence of Renaissance literature, either, Humanistic, or Neoplatonic (or
possibly a combination of both intentions within its highly diverse possible and probable
sources?).\footnote{Ibid., p. 47.}

Cheney summarizes the interpretations of other scholars and notes Mirella Levi
d’Ancona’s interpretation of the painting as part of the festive wedding arrangements of

\footnote{Ibid., p. 47.}
Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco and Semiramide Appiano in the context of the image’s botanical diversity.\textsuperscript{357} She also cites Warman Welliver’s discourse on the Primavera as dependent upon Poliziano’s Stanze per la Giostra, representing the Court of Venus in support of the creation, in Florence, of a new Athens.\textsuperscript{358} Cheney summarizes Pierre Francastel’s assessment of the Primavera as a combination of poetic and political concerns, with the principal sources of its inspiration cited as Lorenzo Il Magnifico’s Commento in tandem with the works of Angelo Poliziano, uniting an allegory of buon governo (good government) with psycho-sociological interpretations of the significance to Lorenzo Il Magnifico of the death of the beauty, Simonetta Vespucci, aligned with the death of Lorenzo’s brother, Guiliano.\textsuperscript{359} Or, as Cheney notes, there is the possibility, according to G. F. Young that the Primavera represents allusions to the motto of Lorenzo Il Magnifico, le temps revient, as well as simultaneously alluding to Guiliano as victor of the tournament which inspired Poliziano’s poem and the tribute at the same event to Simonetta.\textsuperscript{360} Cheney’s list of sources cited by various authors as sources for the imagery presented in the Primavera includes classical works such as The Golden Ass of Apuleius,

\textsuperscript{357} Ibid., p. 47.


\textsuperscript{360} Ibid., p. 49. See note 12, p. 77 where Cheney cites the use of the “Time returns” motto by both Young as well as in E.W. Rannels’ article, “Extrinsic and Intrinsic Values in Painting,” Gazette des Beaux Arts, Vol. 28, December 1945, pp. 357-376. See also, G. F. Young, The Medici, Modern Library, New York, p. 162.
the *Theogony* of Hesiod, the Homeric *Hymns*, the *Odes* of Horace, Lucretius’ *De rerum natura*, the *Fasti* of Ovid, as well as the *De Beneficis* of Seneca; and in addition to these classical works, contemporaneous sources from the *Quattrocento* upon which the work is thought to have been based, at least in part, include, Leon Battista Alberti’s *Della Pittura*, Lorenzo Il Magnifico’s *Altercazione, Canzoniere*, and *Selve d’Amore*, and Angelo Poliziano’s *Rusticus* and *Stanze*.\(^{361}\) These texts (among others) are noted by Cheney as being “instrumental in Botticelli’s creation of the *Primavera*.”

Cheney remarks upon the *Quattrocento* practice of interpreting ancient myths and legends in allegorical contexts, encouraging a hermeneutic and exegetical examination of such texts, and we may assume transitively, transferring comparable, thoughtfully interpretive assessment to representations and images inspired by such literature.\(^{362}\) Cheney acknowledges the probability that the *Primavera*’s figures and composition had been inspired from multiple sources of more than merely poetic inspiration, but also of moral and philosophical content.\(^{363}\)

The synthetic integration of disparate interpretive possibilities pertaining to the *Primavera* as proposed by Cheney is what is of greatest interest for this study, in that, as she notes: “. . .The painting will generously tolerate a range of political, poetic, and philosophical interpretations.”\(^{364}\) Cheney’s thoughtful summary indicates that this image

\(^{361}\) Liana Cheney, (op. cit.), p. 49.

\(^{362}\) Ibid., p. 56.

\(^{363}\) Ibid., p. 56.

\(^{364}\) Ibid., p. 62. The range of plausible interpretations is so complex and comprehensive, that an obvious conclusion appears to be that is may be both none of the specificities projected onto the
is perhaps especially interesting for its philosophical and political significations, which do not conflict with appreciation of the painting as a demonstration of classical poetic texts, which may have served as inspirational sources for contemporary, early Renaissance writers such as Poliziano and others. It is also perfectly reasonable to accept that the image could be open to “romantic” interpretations that it offers representations of particular individuals such as allusions at least to Giuliano de’ Medici, and Simonetta Vespucci as celebrated romantic figures of the period, while yet retaining all of its philosophical and political implications. Cheney notes that: “Under Ficino’s Neoplatonic influence, the painting is filled with complex mythological, astrological and moral connotations previously acknowledged.” This suggestion that this work’s role as a demonstration of layered philosophical complexity could well be its true goal, meaning, or purpose and is proposed as such here.

Mirella Levi D’Ancona, alludes to Marsilio Ficino’s text that explains the theory of Love by the example of linen which attracts descending flames. The linen plant interpreted in conjunction with flames of Mercury’s mantel, an allusion to St. Lawrence image by a wide array of scholars, and some incorporation of many or almost all such interpretations, in that if the image is the “new kind of thing” discussed by Kristeller and cited by Ficino’s philosophy as the *primum in aliquo genere*...then it may be a cog within a larger philosophical structure intended to engender reflection through contemplative engagement, and the more possible meanings this work and other works in this vein may offer, the richer the complexity of philosophical thought and dialectical discourse it would serve to catalyze.

Liana Cheney, (op. cit.), p. 62.

(“San Lorenzo” in Italian) a saint who was grilled (burned to death) supported by a painting now in the Accademia Museum from Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco’s house in Trebbio. Flames of love are reflected in the cornflower shapes, which are shown in the garment of the goddess of Love, amplifying her power. Ancona’s text holds multiple references to Ficino’s letters to the younger Lorenzo that substantiate, via discussion of the Three Graces and discussion of plant symbolism, Ficino’s influence on Botticelli’s theme for the image of the Primavera.\textsuperscript{367} Ficino, as a physician would also have been an herbalist, and in a letter from Ficino to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici, he suggests or alludes to a “Judgment of Paris” which may have been presented (per Ancona) as a first idea for the theme of the Primavera and the inclusion of Mercury with the Three Graces as a multivalent reference for double literary implications, enriching the conversational value of such images, which were intended to engender intellectual contemplation and philosophical discourse.\textsuperscript{368}

In this work, the representation of Flora (transformed from Chloris) shows the metamorphosed goddess/nymph with an open-mouthed smile (an unusual addition which

\textsuperscript{367} Levi D’Ancona (op.cit), pp. 14-16 and appendices reproducing Ficino’s letters to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medic, pp. 181-183.

\textsuperscript{368} The role of art images as stimuli for conversation and contemplation was an important source of Renaissance entertainment. The representations of the paragone or comparative modes of perceiving beauty in painting, music and poetry were constant themes in all of these artistic media. Such themes were treated by many of the great painters including Titian, such as his work of Venus and the Lute Player, a version of which is in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where the purpose of the image is to precipitate consideration of the varying levels of abstraction between sound and sight. Botticelli’s works would have been valued for initiating such practices.
may have significant symbolic value). Ancona contests the proposed significance of this work as described by Lightbown, who designates the *Primavera* as showing Spring associated with the wedding of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco which was proposed for May of 1482, but which was delayed and actually occurred on July 19th of 1482 (closer to Summer). The painting is also associated with funerary significance for Giuliano de’ Medici and Simonetta Vespucci who, it has been suggested, are entering into the “Elysian Fields.” connected to the wistful expression of the Venus/Aphrodite/Love central figure.

As a precedent to the botanical symbolism of *La Primavera*, Ancona notes Botticelli’s *Bardi Altarpiece* an image which provided representations of so many specific plants that Ancona claims to have found no other painting such a large collection of named plants. Cornflowers are shown on the peplos of Flora, which may

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369 See the article on Ficino and laughter by Marjorie O’Rourke Boyle, “Gracious Laughter: Marsilio Ficino’s Anthropology,” *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No. 3, Autumn, 1999, pp. 712ff, on the value of “laughing” which might accrue to Venus or Flora, the transformed Chloris, having completed her metamorphosis after insemination by Zephyr. A detailed image of the open-mouthed smiling or laughing Flora is given in D’Ancona, plate figure 1, before page 17.


371 *The Bardi Altarpiece* (1484-1485) was outfitted with a frame was that designed and made by Giuliano da Sangallo, brother of Antonio da Sangallo, architect of the Medici Villa at Poggio a Caiano; the painting was commissioned by Giovanni di Bardi of Florence, who served as the director of the Medici Bank in London until his return to Florence in 1483. Guiliano and Antonio da Sangallo were both charged with bringing up Giulio de’ Medici, the illegitimate son of Lorenzo, *Il Magnifico*’s younger brother, the murdered Giuliano. Giuliano’s son, Giulio was later to become Pope Clement VII, per page 12 of Ancona’s text; see also Emil Kren and Daniel Marx, “The Virgin and Child, Enthroned: The Bardi Altarpiece,” *Web Gallery of Art*, http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/b/botticel/22/50bardi.html accessed May 24, 2014. The painting is in the collection of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin -- Preußischer Kulturbesitz.
have important allusive cultural significance. Botticelli actually imaginatively merges plants, greenery and flowers, often attaching blossoms to leaves of entirely different species according to Ancona. Plants signal to the viewer to “Look carefully, sharpen your mind, and see the light”; these associations are attributed to Euphorbia, the Lily, and the Bachelor’s Button in La Primavera and each plant’s symbolism is important to the understanding of the text, context, and subtexts for this image. In Ancona’s work on the Primavera, she cites Ficino’s letter to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco, which explains the significance of the Three Graces. In her commentary, she notes that genius derives from the Three Graces, three girls embracing each other; three beloved planets; Mercury, Jovius (Mercury favored by Jupiter), Phoebus and Venus in association with Viridity (greenness), light, and joy.

The influxus finds a resource in ancient sources that earlier formulate the means by which this thirst of the soul for it origin depends. The creation of a reference to pre-Christian source of Love, here in a first pagan reference to a source as equal even foundational in importance to Christian teaching is indeed an example of the primum in

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372 The significations of the painted represenations of artificial cornflowers on Flora’s garment combined with the representations of “natural flowers emerging from her mouth is discussed in the section on this complicated and philosophically rich work. An important article by Philippa Berry, “The Voice of the Daemon” in Sillages offers intriguing insights into the significations for this seminal, transitional painting. See also D’Ancona for the figure on p. 12; Cornflower [in Italian? Or as a symbolic signifier?] means “beautiful bride” as noted in a poem by Lorenzo de’ Medici. There is also a 1946 publication by P.M. Bardi on p. 8 of La Primavera da Sandro Botticelli, Milano, Bompiani, which offers extensive plant names by Oreste Mattirolo.

373 See Ancona, p. 10.

374 See D’Ancona, information is given on pp. 181-183 and in Appendix C of the text.

375 Ibid., pp. 181-183.
*aliquo genere* the *Primavera* being a new “kind of thing” specific to the Renaissance conceptual rebirth of the importance of *studia humanitatis*. Indeed, the image shows activities pertaining to rebirth and regeneration, providing an *ekphrasis* of classical themes. The use of cross-pollinating references between art forms as a means of engaging the soul is implied by this image which was the first work commissioned for Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici by his older cousin, Lorenzo *Il Magnifico*, son of Piero de’ Medici (“Piero the Gouty”) and grandson of Cosimo *Il Vecchio*, Florence’s *pater patriae*, and Marsilio’s original patron. Based upon its significance and contextual indications, this work may indeed be intended to serve as a type of communicative link offering an integrating passage between the worlds of the pagan and Christian theological and metaphysical ideas. This image is perhaps most likely to be a candidate for the role of the connecting framework intended to function as a kind of formulaic natural magic influence possibly directed toward affecting one particular soul in such a way as to mollify its choleric character (that of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco) and cause him to become more receptive to a forgiving and accepting love and respect for a specific subject (in this instance Lorenzo *Il Magnifico*). Letters from Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco to Marco Vespucci and from Ficino to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco give us some insight into the likely sources for certain particularities of this commission and its intended effects as an employment of the influential power of the image upon a particular soul via the methodology of the Ficinian system of metaphysics, his theory of perception, his theory of learning and a clearly implied theory of aesthetics.\textsuperscript{376} The movement from the choleric

to a more receptive contemplative and melancholic state intended specifically toward Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco will be argued as part of the rationale for the creation of this work; thus, it is a tool to not merely modify behavior, but to disseminate a transformed, more philosophical disposition away from anger and (re-)action to contemplation. By encouraging the young man to embrace a yearning toward Love, Ficino’s own letter enjoins his pupil to be receptive to this inner transition. This work also shows the double revival, the resurrection imagery of springtime associated with the resurrection and spiritual rebirth of Love in Christ at Easter, and the revitalization of culture based in classical sources from ancient Greece and Rome, which constitutes the very foundation of the Renaissance, as well as the “resurrection” and regeneration of material (in additional to spiritual) life in the celebration of the goddess of sexuality, love, and procreative generation. This image thus can be presented as a self-conscious visual representation of the aims of the Ficinian circle in reviving or resurrecting Italian culture by representations, in various artistic and literary forms, of its foundations in classical ideas that anticipate and explain the values of subsequent Christian determinations concerning the immortality of the soul and its ultimate purpose.

One of the powers of the Will in accordance with Ficinian conceptualizations, inheres elements of his youthful flirtation with Lucretian and Epicurean ideas (which he later rejects, possibly as much for anticipated political and theological objections as much as for any likely philosophical disinclinations) which the Platonistic, sophistical character of Love combines within its nature those powers of the Will through which its forms

Pierfrancesco to Pagagnotti, Appendix C, p. 261; and the letter to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco from Marsilio Ficion, given in Appendix A, pp. 258-259.
permit its multiple iterations of its intelligible sources. Thus Venus/Aphrodite addresses aspects of the complexity of Love that its representation solely through Christ cannot address. The Botticelli paintings begin with the variations in the spiritual adoration of the spirit-made-flesh, but as the philosophical extensions of how Love, as Christ, as God, as dual aspects of Aphrodite, or as Athena-Minerva as an extension of Aphrodite manifest to the reasoning of the philosopher Ficino, some of this expanding complexity is demonstrated in the evolving themes of Botticelli’s works up to that juncture in time wherein he (that is to say, the painter, Botticelli) becomes mesmerized spiritually and emotionally (if not necessarily intellectually) by the sermons of Girolamo da Savonarola. The variable representations of Love imply that Christ as a most elevated revised version of and evolution of Platonic Love is a wonderful representation of

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378 Girolamo da Savonarola became associated with Botticelli when the artist returned from Rome where he had been summoned by Pope Sixtus IV (Francesco delle Rovere) in 1481 to complete a cycle of frescoes for the Sistine Chapel. In 1485 following his return to Florence, Botticelli began attending the sermons of Savonarola, a fiery Dominican preacher whose fulminating rhetoric briefly gained him an unprecedented influence in Florentine religious life. Noted above for his role in the notorious Bonfires of the Vanities, Savonarola’s eschatological visions caused the pleasure loving Florentines to consume by immolation considerable quantities of their beautiful, worldly treasures of jewelry, art, and diverse luxuries. Savonarola’s tempestuous preaching, however, eventually alienated him even from the church and in 1498, he suffered a fate ironically comparable to the very “vanities” he had caused to be destroyed by his followers. Considered by some a great prophet and by others a heretic, he was in turn, finally excommunicated by the pope, arrested, tortured, hanged, and then publically burned at the stake for heresy, having offended the Florentines and Pope Alexander VI (Rodrigo Lanzol y de Borgia) with his defiance and condemnations. Deeply affected by the loss of his spiritual leader following hard upon the comparatively recent loss of one of his principal patrons among the Medici (Lorenzo, Il Magnifico who had died only six years earlier, in 1492), Botticelli ceased to paint after 1500 and lived in poverty until his death in 1510. See Brenda Harness, “The Dark Side of Art: Savonarola, Lorenzo, and Botticelli”, online, November 2006, accessed June 14, 2014. http://www.finearttouch.com/The_Dark_Side_of_Art_Botticelli,_Lorenzo_and_Savonarola.html. See also note 50 above.
spiritual union, but the *Aphrodite-Venus genetrix* is an equally valid and necessary (for perpetuation of potential adorers of spiritual truth) if not equally spiritually elevated manifestation of the God and gods who demonstrate the extensive complexity of the phenomenon of Love. Further, the representation of Love as a beautiful woman forming the culminating manifestation of this evolution of images demonstrating differing aspects of this particular topic of philosophical inquiry provides a perfectly consistent intellectual resolution to the conceptual interrelations among the images discussed. The advent of Love as *Aphrodite Ourania-Venus Ouranos*, the celestial product of sacrifice, is both an allusion to the divine son’s sacrifice of the father according to the ancient Greco-Roman, pagan, theological foundations for much thought that would be transformed into elements of Christian dogma, and the new Christian covenant conception of the divine Father’s sacrifice of the beloved Son, an inversion of the old order which yet acknowledges by the very fact of its oppositional character, a relation between the pagan past and Ficino’s Christian present. The inversion of the Christian and pagan themes seems far too rich a metaphor to be simply accidental, particularly in the world of secret symbolic connotations to which Ficino and his brilliant intellectual circle belonged.

Of course, Ficino realizes that devotion to Christ implies no carnal, generative necessity, whereas, Love in the dual forms of Aphrodite-Venus, does inhere both the material, and the spiritual value of this powerful emotion, which is also perceivable as a kind of force, demonstrated through the Botticelli paintings for its outcomes and effects upon and through those who succumb to its variable influences. The suggestion through the philosophical system, as supported by the images, seems to be that in embracing
Humanitas, which includes human imperfections, we also embrace the possibility of the elevation of a spiritual reality from which, may emanate outwards, in imitation of the action of the One, the perfections of the God of love. This imitation of God and return to God is our spiritual goal, and the offering of Love as Humanity to humanity is the giving of us to ourselves via the realization of God, made possible by God.

In helping to actualize and externalize this realization, Botticelli’s trip to Rome in c. 1481 had a profound effect in transforming his work. The influence of the Roman visit is particularly evident in the Washington Adoration and the images which succeed it, including the representation of the Centaur in the Pallas and the Centaur, which may have been inspired in part by works seen during the Roman sojourn, and the composition of Venus and Mars, which appears to have been taken from a Roman sarcophagus. Thus the Ficino-Botticelli collaborative begins with Christian images that inhere Neo-Platonist metaphysical implications, and which lead to a visual retracing of tradition moving backward through time to the sources of the foundation of that humanitas which

\[379\] See Lightbown, Ronald, Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work, Volumes I, Abbeville Press Publishers, 1978, pp. 59-68 on Botticelli’s summons to Rome to complete fresco decorations for Pope Sixtus IV for the “capella magna” of the Vatican, which would come to be known as the Sistine Chapel.

\[380\] See Barbara Deimling, “Who Tames The Centaur,” in Sandro Botticelli and Herbert Horne: New Research, edited by Rab Hatfield, Syracuse University in Florence, Florence, Italy, 2009, p. 81, Figure 2.2, who notes, in a detail, that the family of centaurs is shown as a painted representation of a relief in Botticelli’s Calumny of Appelles which is interesting because, as Deimling notes on p. 64, Botticelli conflates the representation of the parent centaurs with their progeny, which are shown as satyrs, and the painted relief includes an image of Minerva, which, based on its subject matter may have been inspired by a relief or image seen by the artist while in Rome. More direct influence is evident as noted by E. H. Gombrich, “Botticelli’s Mythologies,” p. 67, citing E. Tietze-Conrat’s discussion of the compositional obligation Botticelli owes for his Mars and Venus to a classical Roman Second Century A.D. sarcophagus in the collection of the Vatican Museums, which shows the same subject and in an arrangement which may have inspired that used in the painting.
is to be ultimately expressed in Ficino’s conception of the tenets of Christian teaching, by showing us the pagan intellectual, and theological foundations upon which the Christian ideas and ideals, in many senses, may be quite rightly determined to rest. The theme of God manifested through human choices in the world implies an insight into human dignity, and the echoed glorification of God’s generative beauty through man-kind is manifested in and through the fabrication of a reinvented and renovated engagement with the plastic, literary, and architectural arts; that is to say, through the generation of the *primum in aliquo genere*. The incorporation of mathematical harmonies in works of art and architecture with a richly rational foundation, may be intuited as allusions to and acknowledgement of the importance of spiritual implications recognized in works by Pythagoras, Plato, Plotinus, and other thoughtful, pre-Christian theologians in antiquity. The images generated by Botticelli hold before us constant reminders of this connection between the pre-Christian and post-Christian worlds, and remind the viewer of the Ficinian syllogism\(^{381}\)

In Ficino’s system, ideas are the thoughts of God, a doctrine taken from the Neo-Platonists, and actually common to medieval philosophy. (see Kristeller p. 246ff). In the

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\(^{381}\) See Liana Cheney, *Quattrocento Neoplatonism and Medici Humanism in Botticelli’s Mythological Paintings*, University Press of America, Lanham, New York, 1985 pp. 22-24, and p. 28, note 2. Cheney also cites both Sears Jayne, *Marsilio Ficino’s Commentary on Plato’s Symposium*, p. 24, and Paul Oskar Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, pp. 231-254. Cheney notes the foundational importance of love in the Ficinian system, and cites Ficino’s syllogism as the rationale for how the universe, predicated upon the idea of love, was understood to function. The translation of the syllogism reads:

*Everything is in God  
God loves himself  
Therefore  
Everything loves God* (Taken from Cheney p. 22)
Primavera, a past of violent pagan persecution of Christian ideas in fact serves to generate a new, increasingly powerful Christian reality. Zephyr inseminates by breath; God inseminates by means of the logos (the word of God’s will uttered by the Angel Gabriel to Mary in the act of the Annunciation, again, a form of breath). Such an analogy could not have been lost upon the adherents of Neo-Platonism. The value and power of works of art within this system is that paintings may be used as devices through which philosophical reason may be engaged, not as mere supplements to philosophical contemplation, but as generative stimuli, conveying ideas to the soul via the eyes. Evocation of the Annunciation to the Virgin by Zephyr’s breathy insemination combined with the location of this moment in the Spring months calls forth the idea of how this image may be related to the assumed date of the Annunciation, generally accepted in Christian tradition as March 25\textsuperscript{th}, for of course this date was the conceptual renewal of the fate of mankind, and the source of a Renaissance after the fall of Adam via the salvation of humanity by the Christ.\textsuperscript{382}

This painting also has other multivalent didactic allusions and may be representing an aspect of the \textit{fuor divinus}, or “possession” by a “frenzy” of Love; a madness which leads Zephyr to abduct Chloris, an abduction that will result in her florescence, her metamorphosis into the fecund Flora. Phillipa Berry discusses the change of Chloris, a nymph representing undifferentiated Nature, into the fertile Flora, who

\footnote{382 See James Hall, \textit{Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art}, Harper and Row, New York, 1974, pp. 18-20, citing Luke I: 26-38 regrading the announcement to The Virgin Mary of her fate, and noting that the feast of the Annunciation is celebrated on March 25\textsuperscript{th}, nine months before the traditional celebration of the Nativity. Hall notes that Luke indicates the site of the Annunciation to be the village of Nazareth where the Archangel, Gabriel greets the Virgin in her chamber.}
combines Art and Nature in her “flowering”. Flora is shown with artificial flowers painted on her garment while she simultaneously strews “natural” flowers (also painted of course) from the gathered dress that she has transformed into a pouch. Her earlier self, Chloris, spews flowers from her lips, but her garment is unadorned; the metaphorical stream of flowers from her mouth may allude to poetry, one of the divine furors or frenzies. Is the painting showing the superiority of the painter over the poet in both paying homage to nature and to art and simultaneously both demonstrating painting as a sophistical analogy to philosophy and evoking poetry? The flowers emerging from the mouth of Chloris may allude to any aspect of spoken or aural action as connected with beauty. Philosophy, as discourse would fall within the orbit of this reference. The image of Flora simultaneously pays homage to the faculty of vision, the beauty of nature, and the ingenuity of human contrivance by showing us a consequence of both thought and skill based in what may be observed in the world around us. Chloris, grasped by Zephyr, a daemon of inspiration (quite literally a daemon of air and of divine breath) transforms unadorned natural beauty (note Chloris’ drab rather greyish peplos) into something more, into something ornamented by artifice and yet beautiful and natural, distributing “true” natural flowers, and ornamented with designs, based in nature, but crafted by art. So not only does the image appear to allude to a “rebirth” or “renaissance”, but it also shows what is entailed in and by this transformation.

Berry writes of the possibility of an allusion to an important astronomical event wherein the astrological sign of Scorpio (in the end of October through mid-November) would be influenced by a juxtaposition of Saturn (intellect or Wisdom) and Jupiter
This propitious juxtaposition of planetary and daemonic forces, as harbinger of change are also noted by Chastel, and the “Great Conjunction of 1484” was thought to portend a significant metaphysical, social, and cultural transformation, with supernatural overtones. As Berry notes, it was into this tense atmosphere that the eschatological predications of Girolamo da Savonarolo would emerge, interestingly enough, as a refutation of the classically-driven paganism of the humanists who were predicting radical transformation.

In her discussion of Botticelli’s Primavera, Berry notes that the representation of the Greek goddess, Chloris, spewing flowers from her lips is morphed into an image of fecundity, as the figure of Flora, the Romanized representation of the Greek Chloris, the act of aery insemination by Zephyrus gives birth to beauty, in the form of her dissemination of the flowers which originated from within Chloris (most likely a metaphorical allusion to acquisition of the gift of poetic speech), and the author notes the importance of the use of the image of the flower as a metaphor for “the poetic trope during the Renaissance.” It may also be possible that the representation of the Chloris-Flora/ Greek to Italic shift is a message, promoted by Ficino and the intellectual circle of the loosely organized Florentine Platonists, that the center for humanism, envisioned by Cosimo de’Medici created in Florence was a shift toward a new Athens in the city of


385 Ibid. , p. 3, paragraph 5.
flowers, and a movement to Florence as the new center of Platonic thought. The Chloris-Flora transfer and propitious astrological event could be understood as contextualizing documentation of the importance of the Primavera as a talismanic image demonstrating the rationale for an intellectual shift of power, from the ancient past, based upon the extended conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, symbolizing the meeting of Power and Wisdom, into a new role for the city of Florence, and indeed, the conditions were ripe to establish a Renaissance which was not merely implemented, but which continues to be celebrated even into our contemporary era.

Charles Dempsey (1992) offers compelling insights pertaining to the contextual complexities of Renaissance poetic references providing a highly nuanced, scholarly philological discussion of the probable association with Botticelli’s La Primavera viewed through an exploration of the poetry, documents, and socio-political ambient of Lorenzo de’ Medici and his circle. Dempsey’s intention appears to be to de-emphasize the significance of Ficino’s influence upon the complex imagery presented in the Primavera image, but with the ultimate outcome of his exhaustive research appearing to have quite the opposite effect. Dempsey’s convincing arguments for a greater influence of Poliziano and Lorenzo upon Botticelli in the formulation of the poetically inspired, even ekphrastic representations as foundational to the Primavera offers affirming clarifications for aspects of how the painter has been inspired by his contemporaries in devising such a powerful allegorical representation.  

386 See Charles Dempsey, The Portrayal of Love: Botticelli’s Primavera and Humanist Culture at the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificent, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey) 1992, particularly Dempsey’s “Introduction” and “Chapter One-Poetry as Painting”, pp. 3-49, for a thorough discussion and critique of earlier assessments of the likely connotations for the
However, as Dempsey’s argument proceeds, his suggestions coincide with a certain eloquence, with the philosophical arguments concerning Ficino’s discussion and commentary on Plato’s *The Sophists* in which all of the foundations for multiple cognate and metaphorical identities employed in the love poetry of Lorenzo and Angelo Poliziano is explained, anticipated, and exemplified. The use of sophistical disguise and transformation as a strategy permitted the reading of theory, image, and poem on public and private levels of connotative reference, which was of value to the philosopher, Ficino, the writer Poliziano, the administrator, Lorenzo de Medici and their co-conspirator, visual artist, Botticelli, as a means of making visible, based in Platonic and Plotinian theory, the unique, unified world envisioned by each as components of a whole comprised of interrelated elements in a complex exchange of energy and motivations. Where Lorenzo may have disguised his private love in public poetry, Ficino disguised philosophical controversy with pagan foundations for Christian ideas and Botticelli’s paintings envisioned commemoration of the interrelationships of theoretical, political, and personal motivations in images commensurate with the complexity of conceptualization appropriate to his patrons’ multilayered planes of experience and action.

Philippa Berry discusses Ficino’s suggestions pertaining to the importance of demonic presences as mediating forces between heaven and earth, and among these demonic powers, Love is perhaps the most significant, and in relation to love, the *Primavera* by diverse authors, and Dempsey’s counter arguments for a greater literary, poetic, and philological, rather than a philosophical and theoretical foundation for the confounding imagery of this extraordinary image.
generative life-giving daemon of the West Wind, or Zephyr is noted in the *De Vita Libri Triplici*. In addition, Berry indicates that the *ingegnosi* (geniuses) were thought to be able to access daemonic powers. In the *Ion*, Plato comments upon the interpreter’s, that is to say, the Rhapsode’s access to a kind of transcendant expression, mediated by divine possession. Ficino’s self regard as a member among the *ingeniousi* as one of those individuals who were able to communicate with supernatural forces, relied upon a conflations of the daemonic spirits with the angelic messengers of the Christian God.

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388 See Philippa Berry, “The Voice of the Daemon: Inspiration and the Poetic Arts in Botticelli’s Primavera,” p. 6, paragraph 15, Berry notes Michael Allen as the source for Ficino’s belief that “certain ingeniousi” could mediate communication with beneficent daemons, see also p. 9, note 9, and Michael J. B. Allen, *Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation*, Leo S. Olschki, Florence, 1998, p. 141 noting Allen’s description of Ficino’s idea as not being the shared, or common sense (*sensus communis*) of Aristotle, but something closer to a folkloric sixth sense, Berry cites Allen’s quote:

> We must imagine an exchange, as it were, of mirage-like images, of musical voices, of Ariel music, an exchange that can occur equally during wake or sleep. Ficino refers us to the theory he associates with Avicenna: that the prophets similarly communicate with the angels, “seeing” aethereal angelic forms and “hearing” aethereal voices with a common aethereal sense; intuitively sensing presences that elude ordinary sensation.”

Allen offers Heitzman’s *L’agostinismo avicennizante* as his source for Ficino’s awareness of Avicenna and notes the observations also of Proclus regarding the internal Socratic daemonic voice.


The *Primavera’s* rich presentation of vegetation is uncharacteristic of Botticelli’s works created prior to 1483, and Berry links the *Primavera’s* almost tapestry-like floral richness to the exhibition of Hugo Van der Goes altarpiece, shown in Florence by Tomasso Portinari in 1483. Moreover, in November of 1484, the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the powerful, and fertile sign of Scorpio precipitated discourse resulting in the kinds of predictions often associated with the transitions and transformations attendant upon the shift to a new century. Thus, the eschatological tensions and interpretations of a new age introduced via an apocalyptic celestial event created the atmosphere fostering an ambient of penitential absorption, which seized the Florentines (including Botticelli) resulting eventually in Savonarola’s rise, eventual isolation, and final rejection. The predisposition toward interest in pagan philosophy and literature of the Florentine intelligentsia was noted as based upon predictions taken from Joachim da Fiore, or Giachinno da Fiore, a mystic theologian with esoteric preoccupations.

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392 Berry refers us to the observations of Andre Chastel’s *L’Antichrist et la Renaissance*

393 Regarding Savonarola, see Berry p.7; See also Brenda Harness, “The Dark Side of Art: Savonarola, Lorenzo, and Botticelli”, online, November 2006, accessed June 14, 2014. [http://www.finearttouch.com/The_Dark_Side_of_Art_Botticelli,_Lorenzo_and_Savonarola.html](http://www.finearttouch.com/The_Dark_Side_of_Art_Botticelli,_Lorenzo_and_Savonarola.html). In note 345 above

For Ficino, the celestial event of 1484 in which a conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter signaled the interaction, on a metaphysical scale, of wisdom (Saturn) and power (Jupiter), and this conjunction in the sign of Scorpio suggested exceptional fertility. However the conjunction in the third and last decan of the sign meant that it would occur under the influence of the sign ruled by the goddess Venus. Berry notes that the Primavera is the revelation of a new golden age, supported by the anticipated celestial events cited and symbolized by the presence in the image of a variety of flowers. The flowers, emblems of marriage, sexuality, amatory symbolism, and fecundity, could simultaneously allude to the alliance between Zephyr and Cholris/Flora, as well as the contemporaneous event of the marriage of Semiramis Appiani and Lorenzo de’ Pierfrancesco de’ Medici. Moreover, this alliance of wisdom and power, corresponding with the power-filled generation of a new age and all other apocalyptic, resurrectionist ideas and ideals entailed by such an event, set the tone for anticipation of the advent of a new century.

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Rab Hatfield provides compelling philological arguments for reconsideration of the conventional identifications of the figures in Botticelli’s *Primavera* based on Angelo Poliziano’s interpretation of Ovid’s *Fasti*. Hatfield questions the tradition associating the image with Medici patronage and shifts the argument to a possible association with the Strozzi or Tournabuoni families.\(^{397}\) The identity of the three dancing female figures in the composition, frequently cited as “Graces” are thought to be representations of the “Horae” or “Hours” by Hatfield based upon his reading of the image because the Hours “produce all things that grow from the earth” and because these goddesses are “essential to spring.”\(^{398}\) Hatfield suggests that the dance in a circle is “…a symbol of the life-giving cycle over which these lovely sisters preside.”\(^{399}\)

Hatfield concurs with the general identification of the male figure as Mercury (Greek, Hermes) noting that if Venus is the goddess of April, Mercury is the god of May, which was named for his mother, Maia, according to Ovid, he is the gateway god for the transition from spring to summer.\(^{400}\) In Hatfield’s account of the likely meaning of

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\(^{397}\) See Rab Hatfield in his article, “Some Misidentifications in and of Works by Botticelli,” in *Sandro Botticelli and Herbert Horne: New Research*, edited by Rab Hatfield, Syracuse University in Florence, Florence, Italy, 2009, pp. 18ff, and particularly page 20 where the shift in patronage to the Strozzi and Tournabouni families is cited. Hatfield further identifies the three dancing female figures as the Hours (*Horae*) rather than Graces, citing philological arguments based in the Neo-Platonist poet, Angelo Poliziano’s interpretation of Ovid’s *Fasti* as the likely “source” for the Botticelli painting. This idea has been cited previously in this discussion in part III of the Introduction regarding Botticelli’s intellectual engagement and adherence to the suggestions concerning the self-education of artists offered by Leon Battista Alberti in his *De Pictura*, a discussion highlighted by Charles Dempsey.

\(^{398}\) Rab Hatfield, (op. cit.), 2009, p. 18

\(^{399}\) Ibid., p. 18

\(^{400}\) Ibid., p. 18 and note 99, p. 31, citing Ovid, *Fasti*, IV (April), pp. 125-127.
Botticelli’s composition, he disagrees with the identification for some of the figures suggested by Wind, and notes that the figure being seized by the Zephyr is Chloris-Flora, regarding whom, instead of metamorphosing into Flora, as suggested by Wind, the flowers escaping from her lips offer her identity as Chloris-Flora, and the goddess adjacent to her, rather than being a cognate identity, is a separate entity, perhaps Spring *per se*, a personification, or, perhaps the goddess Proserpina, who emerges from the Underworld when Spring arrives.\(^{401}\)

Hatfield observes that in both this image of the *Primavera* and in the image of the *Birth of Venus*, Botticelli has elected to show the presence of breath (Latin *spiritus*) in one instance passing from the god Zephyr to his captive, Chloris-Flora (the *Primavera*) and in the other instance used to propel the goddess Venus-Aphrodite to shore, toward human kind (the *Birth of Venus*).\(^{402}\) As Hatfield correctly observes, “spiritus” means both “breath” and “life” in Latin, and thus this image refers to the generative powers associated in both images with the goddess Venus, who serves as the principal subject in both.\(^{403}\)

Rebekah Compton has discussed the connections between Ficino’s talismanic discourse on the generative powers of the goddess and the connections between the

\(^{401}\) Rab Hatfield (op.cit.) 2009, pp. 8-17ff in particular. Hatfield cites Ovid, and the philosopher Lucretius and the *De Rerum Natura* as sources for the poem by Poliziano which Hatfield believes provides Botticelli’s textual inspiration for the imagery in this complex, and much debated composition.

\(^{402}\) Rab Hatfield, (op. cit.), 2009, p. 19.

\(^{403}\) Ibid., p. 19.
manner in which Venus is represented in *La Primavera* and the ideas espoused in Ficino’s influential guide *De Vita I Libri Tres*. Compton includes a much needed addition to the discourse regarding the powers of sensuality alluded to within the Botticelli images that are discussed by Ficino, although senses of taste and smell were considered less intellectual and less spiritual than powers of consciousness and vision, these allusions to the allurements of Venus in her generative, sensual role are significant. Compton notes “By placing the myrtle bush in the very center of his composition, and in direct relation to Venus, Botticelli reminds viewers of its life-giving properties and also of its connection to fertility as it leads directly up to Cupid, the goddess’s own progeny.”

Compton’s citation of the prominence of myrtle in the Botticelli image follows her discussion of Ficino’s comments from the *De Vitae* pertaining to the significance of myrtle: “According to Ficino, Venus favors the color green and the sweet fragrances of myrtle, roses, violets, and citrus.” Moreover, Compton’s commentary pertaining to the aromatic capacities of the cited plants, noting that the “invigorating odors move the spirit and transform the mind and body...” is an allusion to the capacities of the soul, which, by means of offering animation and consciousness to a body, allows for the incorporation of

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404 See Rebekah Compton, “Venusian Magic in Marsilio Ficino’s *De via libri tres* and Renaissance Art, (unpublished 2015), pp. 1-15. The Botticelli image of *La Primavera* is discussed specifically on pp. 3 and 4. See also Chapter 7 of this study for more discussion of Compton’s observations of the talismanic associations with materials and plants represented in the images of Botticelli and other Renaissance artists who appear to be influenced by Ficino’s Neo-Platonist ideas. Prof. Compton was kind enough to share the information from this article with me prior to its publication.

information via the senses. It is clear that this transformative attribute of the goddess, whose engagement with the senses is one of the capacities, which acts upon body, mind and spirit, and is part of the evocative intention of such an image as the *Primavera*. Botticelli’s work falls within the category of a visual dialectical demonstration of the extensions of the powers of Love and how it may manipulate the individual by means of the environment, causing the diverse powers of the soul to be aroused in order to “transform” the individual. Compton provides an extended quote from Ficino’s *De Vita libri Tres*, which contextualizes her commentary:

Post oraculum nobis congitandum mandate rerum viridium naturam, quatenus virent, non solum esse vivam, sed etiam iuvenilem, humoreque prorsus salubri et vivido quodam spiritu redundantem. Quapropter odore, visu, usu, habitatione frequenti iuvenilem inde spiritum nobis influere. Inter virentia vero deambulantes interim causam perquiremus, ob quam color viridis visum prae ceteris foveat salubriterque delectet.  

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406 Ibid., p. 3.

407 See Rebekah Compton, “Venusian Magic in Marsilio Ficino’s *De via libri tres* and Renaissance Art,” (unpublished 2015), p.3 and note 4, in which the author quotes Ficino’s *De vita I libri tres*, pp. 204-205. Neo-Platonist ideas Compton cites as detailing components of the power of the goddess of Love.


> After the oracle, she gives us this to meditate on: that the nature of green things, for so long as they stay green, is not only alive but even youthful and abounding with very salubrious humor and a lively spirit; and because of this a certain youthful spirit flows to us through the odor, sight, use and frequent habitation of and in them. While we are walking among the green things, let us figure out why the color green more than others foments the sight and healthfully delights it.”

The sight of course being one of the intellectual powers of the soul, supporting cognition, and thus the extensive inclusion of green in the Botticelli painting of the *Primavera* could be understood as a device to encourage our sustained contemplation of its themes.
She resumes her quotation from Book II, Chap XIV of Ficino’s text regarding the allurements of the color “green”, with:

Quamobrem color viridis maxime omnium nigrum cum candido temperans, præstat utrunque, delectans partier atque conservans; et mollis insuper et adhuc tenera qualitate, sicut et aqua, radiis oculorum absque offensione resistit, ne abuentes longius disperdantur.  

Such a desired effect as that described by Ficino to rejuvenate the spectator by virtue of the power and influence upon the soul derived from the images themselves and colors used to actualize them is precisely what the suite of mythological pictures could have been intended to do; however the beginnings of this motivational use of art imagery was already in evidence in the religious works previously discussed. Thus, the Primavera is presented as an extension and indeed a representation of how the amplification of the soul’s powers may function, as had been already demonstrated in the three religious images from Chapters, I, II, and III. 


On which account the color green tempering most of all black with white, furnishes the one effect and the other, equally delighting and conserving the sight. Besides, by its soft and withal tender quality, just like water, it opposes the visual rays without striking against them, lest departing too far they should be destroyed.

Ficino continues to explain that the rarified softness of green things serves to soothe the liquid rays of the eyes (see p. 205 of the cited text). These observations form part of an important extromissionist cognition and aesthetic theory fused into a discourse on optics.

410 See both the Introduction and the first three chapters of this study for further discussion of how the powers of the soul are both represented and demonstrated in accordance with Ficinian theories in the Columbia Nativity, Uffizi Adoration and Washington Adoration by Botticelli.
Figure 4.1 *La Primavera* Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1482, dimensions: 80 x 124 inches (202 x 314 cm). From right to left: Zephyr, Chloris, Flora…an example of the *primum in aliquo genere*.
Figure 4.2 *La Primavera* Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1482: dimensions: 80 x 124 inches (202 x 314 cm) From right to left: Zephyr, Chloris, Flora...an example of the *primum in aliquo genere*. 
Figure 4.3 *La Primavera* Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1482, dimensions: 80 x 124 inches (202 x 3.14 cm); detail of central, triangular composition.
Figure 4.4 *La Primavera* Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1482, dimensions: 80 x 124 inches (202 x 314 cm); use of the Golden Section.
Figure 4.5 *La Primavera* Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1482, dimensions: 80 x 124 inches (202 x 314 cm): inversion of use of the Golden Section.
Figure 4.6 *La Primavera* Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1482, dimensions: 80 x 124 inches (202 x 314 cm); lateral replications of the Golden Section.
Figure 4.7 *La Primavera* Galleria degli Uffizi c. 1482, dimensions: 80 x 124 inches (202 x 314 cm) Image of compositional geometry copied from Umberto Baldini, *Primavera: The Restoration of Botticelli’s Masterpiece*, pp. 98 & 99.
CHAPTER V

CAMILLA/PALLAS/MINERVA AND THE CENTAUR

Ego igitur sortem eorum laboriosissimam miseratus, qui difficile Minervae minuentis nervos iter agunt, primus tanquam medicus debilibus et valetudinariis adsum, sed utinam facultate tam integra quam propitia voluntate.  

Camilla-Minerva-Pallas-Athena and the Centaur c. 1482
Sandro Botticelli
Egg tempera on canvas
(c. 1482) 6’ 8” (204cm) x 4’ 9.6” (145.5cm)
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence
(Figure 5.1)

This representation of a figure often identified as Minerva or Pallas (herself a cognate identity for the Greek goddess Athena), is now thought, in recent scholarship, to actually represent the Volscian princess, Camilla. The image is, in either instance, very likely intended as a representation of Virtue or “Arete” which also signifies the concept

411 Marsilio Ficino, De Vita in Tres Libros Divisus, a critical edition and translation with Introduction and Notes by Carole V. Kaske and John R. Clark, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies in conjunction with The Renaissance Society of America, Tempe, Arizona, 2002, in Chapter I, “The Nine Guides of Scholars,” pp. 108-109, Ficino notes the difficulties of the search for the wisdom which falls within the province of the goddess Minerva, Greek Athena, and the passage quoted above is translated by Kaske and Clark as:

“Since I pity the burdensome lot of those who make the difficult journey of Minerva who shrinks the sinews, I am the first to attend as a physician sick and invalid scholars; but would that my ability were so sound as my will is dedicated!”

The passage initiates a pun on Minerva as the “minuens nervos” or “shrinker of sinews,” referring to the shifts in the body as part of the aging process, continued in 2.3 (pp. 168-171) in which Minerva’s role as the source of vital oil and “fiery vigor” and that she “may enlarge our head” [the source of our wisdom]… “the part of the body from which she herself was born…” We notice that the figure of Camilla/Minerva has grasped the forelock of the Centaur, controlling him by his head, suggesting control of the mind.
of excellence, overcoming brute force or sensuality. The power of the virtuous higher soul to triumph over the demands of the earthly body, and its proclivity toward vice (symbolized by the Centaur) is also an evocation of the force of *phronesis* or wisdom, an attribute of the goddess Athena. Thus the multiple iterations of identity for the female figure provide a pantheon of shifting conceptual possibilities for how this image may be understood. As a work intended to generate philosophical discourse, its connotative vagueness becomes an asset in promoting a dialectical engagement with the subject shown in the painting. By precipitating the spectator to initiate a search of his or her own awareness, seeking to understand the image we perceive, the painter has propelled his audience into the activity of contemplation and cogitation as we seek for the keys interrelationships among conceptual possibilities which may have motivated the creation of this work. The hybrid man-beast being subdued by a beautiful maiden could easily be understood as a manifestation of the power of excellence, and the attendant power of virtue overcoming what is unfamiliar and irrational (the unexpectedly hybrid character of the Centaur naturally evokes an allusion to irrationality because this is a creature outside of the ordinary experience of the natural world).

This intriguing image, commonly referred to as *Pallas and the Centaur* was recorded in an inventory of 1516 in the Medici archives as “*ja figura conuna Minerva e centauro in tela e asse dritto* (“an image of Minerva and centaur on canvas and straight board”), however an earlier inventory of 1498, closer in date to the actual creation of the image notes the work as *Camilla and a Satyr*. While this confusion regarding the

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412 The reference to this image as *Camilla and the Centaur* is discussed by Frank Zöllner, in the Foreword of his work *Sandro Botticelli*, Prestel Verlag, Berlin, London, New York, 2009, citing
identity of the female figure could simply be an error of transcription, it is a point of interest as to why the compiler of the inventory should make such an identification of this subject at all. A. L. Frothingham suggests that this is an image of Pallas or Camilla or an Amazon warrior citing an image of a Roman Calendar, year c. 354, of Treberis which refers to the city of Trier subduing a barbarian.

Two figures are shown in this vertically structured composition. A tall elegant female figure with dark blond tresses grasps a decorative, ceremonial halberd, mounted with an onyx, using her left hand; the halberd’s staff being intertwined by her forearm and elbow. With her right hand, she gracefully and forcefully grips the hairs of the forelock on the head of a Centaur, who is situated in a trench, on a level situated below her own position within the picture. The female figure’s upper body is framed to her waist in blue sky, and, a landscape which morphs into a harbor scene horizontally interrupts the frontal verticality of the composition, creating a horizontal counter-balance.

Barbara Deimling on Botticelli, who is also cited by Charles Burroughs in his article “Talking with Goddesses: Ovid’s Fasti and Botticelli’s Primavera,” in Word and Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Inquiry, Routledge, London, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp. 71-83. Burroughs notes that Deimling emphasizes the twinning sprigs of myrtle that are woven about the arms and torso of the female figure are not olive branches. Olive is associated with Athena/Minerva; however myrtle is associated with Venus, and since it appears to be myrtle that adorns the figure of Pallas/Camilla [Burroughs also notes the crescent moon worn by the Venus of the Primavera which is identified with the goddess Diana implying a sophistical hybridity in the understanding of the symbolic significations and transformative possibilities in “reading” what is very likely to be a talismanic image. See Barbara Deimling, “Who Tames the Centaur? The Identification of Botticelli’s Heroine,” in Sandro Botticelli and Herbert Horne: New Research, ed. By Rab Hatfield, Syracuse University Press, Syracruse, New York, 2009, pp. 63-79. See also Tess Ann Bookwalter: “Critical Analysis for Understanding Art: The Botticelli Code,” posted, Sunday, September 30, 2012@ tessannb; http://bookwalter.blogspot.com/2012/09/the-botticelli-code.html,who takes her reference and analysis in large part from A. L. Frothingham, “The Real Title of Botticelli’s Pallas,” in The American Journal of Archeology, The Archeological Institute of America, Vol. 12, No. 1, January-March, 1908, pp. 438- ISSN: 00029114 E-ISSN: 1939828X-
behind the female figure, breaking just at her midriff. Her diaphanous garment is white, decorated on the sleeves with quatrefoil formations of diamond rings but with triangular formations of triple-diamond rings on her garment from her torso below her breasts to her ankles (the diamond ring is an impresa used by the Medici family, and particularly associated with Lorenzo Il Magnifico). On her back she carries a shield against which her extended, blonde cascade of hair is represented as wafting in the breeze. Her deep green himation is wrapped about her right shoulder, curves under her arm and circumnavigates her waist, trailing behind her. The elegant sandals she wears are a golden yellow in color, and her arms and breasts are encircled with myrtle branches, while a myrtle coronet decorates her head. Although she appears to subdue the Centaur, she does not look directly at him, instead her head inclines to her right, and her gaze is directed out of the rectangle of the picture plane.

The Centaur carries a bow and an arrow quiver supported across his torso by a scarlet strap. Where the female figure’s head is circled by myrtle and sky, the Centaur’s entire body is enveloped in earth or stone. His human head and torso are surrounded by

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413 See the early use of the impresa of the diamond ring on the obverse of a birthtray by Giovanni di Ser Giovanni Guidi in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The birthtray was made in commemoration of the birth of Lorenzo de’Medici, later called Il Magnifico, and is decorated with the image of a diamond ring with three ostrich plumes alluding to the Christian Virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity, an impresa thought to have been initiated by Lorenzo’s father, Piero. See Italian Renaissance Learning Sources, online, The National Gallery of Art, accessed January 27th, 2017: http://italianrenaissanceresources.com/units/unit-5/essays/the-special-case-of-the-medici-experts-in-self-promotion/.

414 The leaves encircling the female figure’s form were once thought to be olive branches when support for the identification of the female figure was assumed to be Minerva/Athena. The absence of a helmet, or the visible representation of Medusa on the aegis of the shield calls identification of this figure into question as Minerva, and the early citation in the 1498 inventory of the figure as “Camila” makes this identification somewhat more plausible. See note 1 above.
(embedded within?) a constricting man-made structure, and his lower body is encased at the horizon level in either water or earth; indeed he is symbolically earth-bound, entrenched in materialism or inert matter. This manner of representation is very likely a metaphor for his being a daemonic beast below mankind in stature due to the powerful character of his animalistic, half-equine “nature”.\footnote{James Hall, Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art, Harper & Row Publisher, New York, 1979, p.61 indicates that in general, the character of the Centaur, according to Greek legend was “brutal, drunken, and lecherous”. Hall specifically mentions that to Renaissance humanists, the centaur symbolized or personified the partly animal nature of human kind in contrast with the higher-level wisdom (philosophical predisposition?) of Minerva/Athena.} He seems to be attempting to move away from the female figure who twists his upper body toward her by the force of her grasp, and he appears to be subdued, compelled to do her bidding. The placid harbor scene that constitutes the backdrop shows a single ship in the bay.

Botticelli’s compositional structure for this image employs the vertically oriented composition in a curiously allusive series of sub-divisions which appear to be based in a loosely configured stratification of space grounded in the subdivisions associated with the harmonies of a golden rectangle. As we have seen in other works discussed in this study, the symbolic relationships of the golden rectangle are repeated in varying ways with the compositions of almost each of the seven images included in this discourse on philosophical implications of visual works (see Figs. 5.3 and 5.4).

The figure of the female protagonist is slightly right of center, while the Centaur is pushed into the left of the composition, reinforcing an easily discernable “L”-shaped configuration. The horizontal sub-divisions of the vertically oriented composition fall easily within patterns of expected golden rectilinear harmonies.
Contrasts of dark and light (the Centaur’s dark body, shown as parallel to the horizon of the picture plane, is contrasted with the verticality of the tall, fair, female figure), seem to suggest not merely an evocation of beautiful proportions, but perhaps offers a moralizing intention. The dominating presence of the female figure seems to be implying her uprightness and virtue, and, by comparison, indicates a less heroic characterization for the Centaur, whose human, upper body and torso are vertical, but are bound to his dark, elongated, equine body.

In most interpretations of this image the centaur is understood as representing uncouth or uncultured behavior, and/or as a thinly veiled reference to the Pazzi family, whose conspiracy against the Medici had been defeated in c. 1478. The other possibility that has been suggested is that, here, we have an image created as an homage to the impending marriage of Semiramide Appiani to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici, an arrangement formalized to cement the power and prestige of the Medici family and to support the political aims of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco’s powerful older cousin, Lorenzo, *Il Magnifico*. In either instance of likely possible symbolic connotations, whether showing the triumph of Lorenzo Il Magnifico over his political adversaries, or showing the virtuous Semiramide subduing her suitor, the choleric Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco, the image is a repository of fascinating interpretive probabilities and philosophical implications pertaining to ethical or moral concerns.
This work of c. 1482, created in tempera on canvas, is mentioned in the inventory of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’Medici and is thought to have been commissioned as a gift by Lorenzo Il Magnifico for his young cousin, his ward, whose fortune he held in trust. Such a relationship between the two men is itself a demonstration of a complex power relationship and it could be a component of the work’s overall significance. If the image was intended as a marriage gift for Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco and Semiramide Appiani, planned for the same year in which the picture was commissioned. The image may simultaneously refer to the accomplishments of Lorenzo Il Magnifico’s branch of the family, and the figure of Pallas Athena/Minerva/ Camilla is shown wearing a peplos decorated with intertwined diamond rings, an established Medici device. Athena grasps the centaur by his forelock in order to subdue him, and this action appears to signify a demonstration of intellectual power over brute force and of the power of reason over the animal drives of passion. Camilla/Pallas/Minerva/Athena is elevated above her captive, shown standing on higher ground, perhaps signifying the exaltation of reason above passion. The Centaur holds a huntsman’s bow and wears a quiver of arrows. In the background, a ship is shown, sailing in an open bay. Camilla/Athena’s figure is decorated with overgrown, leafy vines, and she holds a halberd axe. She stands beside a ruined structure, and a low fence, which is in the background, is represented before a body of water, a bay, a possible reference either to the port of Pisa or the city of Genoa, with a shore landscape shown as comparatively barren.

416 In her article, “Who Tames the Centaur,” in Sandro Botticelli and Herbert Horn, edited by Rab Hatfield, author, Barbara Deimling, on p. 72, attributes the early suggestion that this image alludes to the wedding of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’Medici to Semiramide Appiani to the scholarship of Ronald Lightbown (1978) and Lillian Zirpolo (1991-992).
In her discussion of this image, Barbara Deimling cites the *Pallas and the Centaur* jointly with the *Venus and Mars* in referring to both works with an intention to seek “deeper meaning” grounded in a conception that “both illustrate the idea of love as developed by Marsilio Ficino, philosopher at the court of the Medici, who combined Platonic ideas with Christian belief to produce a new Neo-Platonic view of the world.” Deimling continues, “Ficino saw the nature of love as a duality of physical, earthly desire, on the one hand, and spiritual longing directed towards God, on the other. These he saw as diametrically opposing each other in the form of the conflict of sensuality and intellect, of matter and spirit. Ficino described man’s ideal journey through life as a striving to escape from sensual passion and acquire a cerebral desire for enlightenment and wisdom in God.”

Although the confusion surrounding identification of the female figure in *Camilla and the Centaur*, has caused the image to be generally referred to as Pallas Athena, or Roman Minerva, goddess of Wisdom and War, symbol of rational thought, and patron of the inventiveness of “techne” (Greek τέχνη), it seems likely that in many ways the picture is intended to celebrate the connotation associated with Athena/Minerva/Camilla’s “techne” aspect, which may be translated as art, cleverness, skill, or craft and which implies all of the creative technologies that provide advantages in life and War. The Centaur, as a symbol not of craft or artful creativity, but of brutish, unrefined force.

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418 For the reference to this work as *Camilla and the Centaur*, see Frank Zöllner, *Sandro Botticelli*, Prestel Verlag, Berlin, London, New York, 2009, who in his Foreward cites a paper by Barbara Deimling, which analyzes this work in terms of its Medicean symbolism for referents which are interpreted in terms of “Tuscan nuptial iconography. The challenges of identifying the subject of this work are discussed in greater detail in Chapter V.
and of lust, is often thought to also symbolize the irrationality of the attack against Lorenzo de’ Medici derived from the meaning in Italian of the word “pazzi”, which denotes “insanity”, a characterization of the participants in the Pazzi Conspiracy. The, interlocking diamond rings decorating the female figure’s garment, present a motif used as a Medici family symbol appropriated during the period when Cosimo, Il Vecchio was the de facto political leader of the city of Florence, which in the newly constituted culture of the Neo-Platonist inspired Renaissance, was to be perceived as the new Athens. The triumph of Athena/Camilla is symbolic also of three differing levels of triumph for Lorenzo; on one level the political triumph over the Pazzi mentioned above, on a second level Lorenzo’s personal victory over his own lower instincts, and thus his triumph over his own lower nature, a tribute to his self-command; and finally, the more abstract (and eternal) triumph of cultivated Reason (Athena) over Force and animalistic brutality (the Centaur). These multivalent levels of meaning are an important component of Neo-Platonist comparative moralizations.

Once the primum in aliquo genere had been created as an example, establishing a clear connection between classical, pagan sources and literature with the theological and philosophical goals of Christian teaching, we then discover a direct connection, the opening of a context within which a work like the Minerva/Athena Subduing/Triumphing Over a Centaur, shows not merely the triumph of pagan intellect and intellectual love and wisdom over sensual pleasure and physical attractions but a typological reference to the triumph of the spirit over the body, of permanent over temporal, of form over particular, and of the desire for God over earthly life. Cheney
discusses the tension between the traditional political interpretations of this image and the philosophical and conceptual interpretations of representation of the goddess of wisdom subduing a half-human monster. Early interpretations include allusion to Lorenzo de’ Medici’s political victory in the difficulties stemming from the Pazzi Conspiracy and a metaphorical reading of the triumph of wisdom over the arbitrary actions of the lower, bestial character of humankind. However, another, less elevated possibility for the generation of this image may be subsumed in elements surrounding its history. Lorenzo il Magnifico’s difficulties regarding gaining access to the fortune of his younger cousin and ward, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’Medici are well-documented. This image is noted as having been hung outside Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco’s bedroom. Could it have been intended as having a magical incantative purpose meant to subdue the younger Lorenzo’s rebellious spirit to the will of his older cousin as a part of its original purpose? Is this a desired state of affairs wherein the resources of the rebellious “beast” of youth are to be subdued and directed by the wisdom of his more experienced cousin? It is likely that the image is intended to operate on all of the suggested levels, as a work referencing Lorenzo’s political triumph, as a general allegory referencing wisdom’s triumph over foolishness, and finally as a personal reference to Lorenzo’s need for control over his...

419 Appendix C provides Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco’s letter to Piero Pagagnotti expressing his displeasure at not having his funds placed at the disposal of his friend Amerigo Vespucci. Lorenzo notes “io me senti collerico..” expressing his anger at his older cousin’s refusal to help his friend.

420 In Appendix A, a line from Ficino’s letter (taken from E. H. Gombrich) to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco is also of interest in that is suggests “…But I would rather not talk of the price; for Love, born from the Graces, gives and accepts everything without payment…: When the Medici fortune had been divided between Cosimo il Vecchio and Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco’s grandfather, Cosimo’s brother (also named Lorenzo [1395-1440]), a considerable fortune had been passed to young Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco. His older cousin, Lorenzo il Magnifico often needed access to funds for his political projects in Florence and Ficino’s language seems intended to mollify the somewhat irascible younger Medici family member.
rebellious youthful relative. The multivalent character of such a visual parable would have been an important part of its contextual, Neo-Platonist appeal.

Cheney suggests that Botticelli’s treatment of this theme is an allegory of Medicean moral victory. Cheney’s discourse points to the associations between the goddess Minerva/Athena and the idea of wisdom.

In the image of Camilla and the Centaur, the figure of Camilla/Minerva/Pallas appears to symbolize the triumph of wisdom over ignorance and simultaneously, demonstrates the shift of the intellectual inheritance of Athens to Florence, and thus, not to Rome (in this instance, Camilla, the Volscian maiden, is perhaps shown as a cognate presence for, and yet simultaneously not the Roman Minerva but a presence that could be more aligned with Florence, that is to say, with origins external to Rome).

Camilla’s heroism derives from the traditions of ancient Rome. She was dedicated to the goddess, Diana by her father Metabus, King of the Volscians when he offered a prayer to the goddess to guide his hand when he tied his daughter as an infant to a lance or arrow and launched her across the river Amesan in Latium. Camilla became a warrior princess devoted to Diana. Her story is recorded by Virgil and is assumed to be taken from ancient legends made popular in central Italy before written documentation.

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421 See Liana Cheney, Quattrocento NeoPlatonism and Medici Humanism, p. 33 where the work is suggested as an allegory for Lorenzo de’ Medici’s victory over the Pazzi conspiracy discussed further in the text.

had become common.\textsuperscript{423} This origin in central Italian thought may be among the most important elements justifying her representation by Botticelli in Florence as a noted warrior of the Roman period, but in fact a non-Roman, Italic heroine. Her role in fighting in opposition to Aneas as well as the Volscians’ sustained opposition to ancient Rome could be of metaphorical importance if the Botticelli image establishes a metaphorical opposition to the hegemony of Rome, with Camilla as cognate for Florence/ Fiorenza. It is perhaps ironic that Roman resistance fighter, Camilla was killed in battle by the Etruscan (Tuscan) hero, Arruns as is noted in Book 11 of the \textit{Aeneid}.

The conflation of identity, even if an uncommon practice in 15\textsuperscript{th}-century painting, would still, as an example of the \textit{primum in aliquo genere}, be a reasonable and effective rhetorical invention; that is to say, this, like the \textit{Primavera}, would be an entirely new kind of work, in the vein of the sophistical role of art as a rhetorical tool, here bringing together, by demonstration, cognate identities and alluding to differing examples of a feminine ideal. The synthesis of identities, fusing Camilla/Minerva/Pallas/Athena, as embodiments of virtue, seems reasonable as a strategy in Neo-Platonist discourse, and foregrounds the unadorned search for truth, with Camilla, specifically as an example of feminine virtue, reason, patriotism, chastity, and self-sacrifice. Certainly such an image may also have been intended as a model for the prospective bride, Semiramide, and the conflation of Camilla with Athena is likely to be fully intentional, for Athena, also a sophisitical identity for Flora/Fiorenza/ Florence is paired in Medici patronage with Venus as the embodiment of spiritual love as well as generative, carnal, love, both of

\textsuperscript{423} Ibid., p. 31.
which may serve to conquer antagonisms and triumph over war and discord. These differing qualities would certainly be valuable as didactic reminders of a complex conceptual virtue for a bride, and would, through the subject of Camilla, inhere a rich, political allusion reinforcing the private and public narratives of the mythology of the Medici family.\footnote{424 The Medici family mythology that would be enriched is the idea of the triumph of Lorenzo II Magnifico over the Pazzi as well as Lorenzo’s powerful adversaries in Rome, since Camilla, a Volscian heroine, would be more aligned with the Etruscan, and thus Tuscan, non-Roman Italic past, and could be interpreted as quite a subtle and highly nuanced message regarding the triumphant emergence from the conspiracy against Medici power in the region through a courageous application of reason. See Cheney’s discussion of Minerva/Camilla as the symbol of intelligence as a protectress of the Liberal Arts, and the Centaur as a symbol of political upheaval and crime in Liana Cheney (op. cit.), pp. 34-35. Barbara Deimling discusses Camilla as a model for the young bride, See Barbara Deimling, Who Tames the Centaur, (op. cit.), pp. 64-71.}
Figure 5.1 *Pallas/Athena/ Camilla and the Centaur*, c. 1482, Galleria degli Uffizi; dimensions: 80 x 58.1 inches (204 x 147.5 cm)
Figure 5.2 Pallas/Athena/ Camilla and the Centaur, c. 1482, Galleria degli Uffizi; dimensions: 80 x 58.1 inches (204 x 147.5 cm) detail of Pallas/Camilla grasping the forelock of the Centaur
Figure 5.3 *Pallas/Athena/ Camilla and the Centaur*, c. 1482, Galleria degli Uffizi; dimensions: 80 x 58.1 inches (204 x 147.5 cm) foundation for subdivisions within the Golden Section (a symbolic imposition of reason upon chaos)
Figure 5.4 *Pallas/Athena/ Camilla and the Centaur* c. 1482, Galleria degli Uffizi; dimensions: 80 x 58.1 inches (204 x 147.5 cm) compositional subdivisions within the Golden Section.
Figure 5.5 *Pallas/Athena/ Camilla and the Centaur* c. 1482, Galleria degli Uffizi; dimensions: 80 x 58.1 inches (204 x 147.5 cm) compositional subdivisions within the Golden Section.
CHAPTER VI

MARS AND VENUS

….Mars surpasses the other planets in courage, because he makes men braver. Venus dominates him. For when Mars is located in the corners of the heaven, in either the second or the eighth house of a nativity, he threatens evils to the person being born, but Venus often shackles, so to speak, the malignancy of Mars, by coming into conjunction or opposition with him…

Mars and Venus (c. 1483)
Sandro Botticelli
Tempera and oil on poplar wooden panel
2’ 3” (68.3 cm). x 5’ 8” (173 cm)
National Gallery, London
(Figure 6.1)

A representation of physical and material power subdued by the abstract power of Love and Beauty, this allegorical image demonstrates how an invisible, internal transformation may manifest changes in or alter the character of objects in the material world. Physical strength and virtue, represented by the war god, Mars, as an embodiment of dynamis (δύναμις), offers consideration of how the often coercive power of physical force may be contrasted with the motivational power of love/eros. Part of the implication suggested by this image is that an unseen force, such as love Love, easily vanquishes even the most destructive external physically manifested forms of force, thus the unseen influence may be more power than the visible threat. Love, as the motivating authority of the soul’s desire for its return to the source, is understood to be able to triumph over any material, visible threat, and such, shown with the examples of pagan mythological

425 See Marsilio Ficino, Commentary on Plato’s Symposium On Love: (De Amore), an English translation by Sears Jayne, Spring Publications, Inc., Dallas, Texas, Speech V, Chapter 8, p. 97.
characters, enhances and confirms the ideas of the power of faith, associated with the teachings of Christianity.

In the horizontally structured composition of an image of the goddess Venus as a personification of Love, she is shown having subdued the god of War, Mars, a personification of physical force, and demonstrates that the contemplative power of Venus/Love is shown to have a greater capacity to effect change than mere force or action. Venus is shown to have the ability to triumph over both discord and material physicality, or virtus, in the sense of physical power or strength. Thus, the physical force and action of Mars is subdued by vigilant Love, or more simply stated, it is Love that conquers War, Love being the more powerful of these two entities.

Vigilant Venus implies the watchfulness of Love sustaining Peace and Harmony supervising a sleeping discord in the form of the god of War, strife, and destruction. Earlier scholars’ often tended to search for a particular classical or contemporary literary source for Botticelli’s mythological works; however, it seems likely that Botticelli, like Ficino, used a synthetic combination of sources in order to generate an integrated, interpretative approach to fabricating his representations of mythological themes, rather than consistently relying upon single sources and certainly going beyond the idea of merely illustrating a text, although the intention that Botticelli’s works realize is the production of an ekphrasis, a visual equivalent of an interpolated literary conception.426

426 See Edgar Wind, Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance: An Exploration of Philosophical and Mystical Sources of Iconography in Renaissance Art, W.W. Norton and Company, New York, 1968, pp. 86-96, who notes the philosophical roots of the concept of the dynamic interaction between Love and War as creative in the philosopher Heraclitus. Wind discusses the daughter,
The painting shows two dense copses of beautifully painted laurel trees, a group of trees framing the Venus figure on the viewer’s left, is composed primarily of immature saplings, finely articulated. The group on the right, includes a fully mature trunk against which the head of Mars is resting; it also shows two truncated branches and from the opening in the uppermost one of these, wasps swarm above Mars’ flaccid, face, his head thrown back with the untrammeled bliss of an oblivious slumber, unaware of and untroubled by the menacing insects.

With the amorous couple are four young satyrs, each engaged in mischief involving Mars’ armor; the first, has grabbed Mars’ lance below the vamplate and is wearing the sleeping god’s gleaming metal helmet, which is far too large for its bearer, and thus it falls over his eyes and face, preventing him from seeing his way. The second grasps the central shaft of the lance while looking with laughter backward toward his helmet-blinded compatriot, apparently steadying the extension of the weapon along its

Harmonia, who results from the illicit affair of Mars and Venus. Harmonia was conceptualized as having aspects of the character of both parents; ferocity and contention as well as generosity and the ability to please. Perhaps the philosopher most associated with the idea of the interactive necessity of Love and Strife is Empedocles. Wind also makes note of the doctrine of contraries from the Sophist (242d-h) of Plato, and Ficino would certainly have been well aware of the paradoxical character of the union of love and war from his comments upon Plato’s work. However Wind cites Pico della Mirandola as a likely influence upon Botticelli for this particular image on p.88ff. and also cites Ficino’s likely influence on p. 90. The Venus victrix or martial Venus is cited as an inevitability because Venus, as a goddess of beauty, is characterized as needing contrariness to subsist. An extensive discussion of other earlier literature is provided by Liana Cheney (op.cit.), pp. 66-70. The idea that this image is an example of ekphrasis is suggested by E.H. Gombrich, Symbolic Images (op. cit.), pp. 67-68, and gives a relief form a 2nd century Roman sarcophagus in the Vatican collections as a source (Gombrich’s figure 48, and Figure 6.6 in this study). E. Panofsky in Renaissance and Renascences (op. cit.) alludes to the moralizing aspects of such images in his discussion of the Rinascimento dell’Antichità, pp. 182-188.
length. The third young satyr holds the end of the lance, which appears to have been inserted into a conch shell, which he is also blowing into the ear of the sleeping Mars. A fourth young satyr crawls through the armor breast plate, upon which the weight of Mars sleeping body rests, emerging from beneath the oversized armor of the somnambulant warrior bearing a mischievous grin.

Venus is clothed in a sheer, diaphanous, white gown trimmed luxuriantly in gold; her hair is in an elaborate series of braids, two of which meet in a brooch, pinned or suspended from them as a pendant at the juncture of her breasts. The beautifully painted translucency of her garment is most eloquently rendered on her left leg, which extends in counterpoint to the extended opposing leg of the sleeping Mars. Mars’ hand has let fall a tool used to help load on his armor. Between the two figures, an open plain spans the center of the painting’s background filling the space between the two forests of laurel, Venus’ realm on the viewer’s left, and Mars’ on the right. The three young satyrs playfully appear to guide the lance from left to right; from the realm of Venus toward the indolent and passive Mars, thereby inverting the normative positions of it metaphorical thrust and making the active female displace the male role in a visual reference to the coital act. However, the insertion of the lance into the sea shell, suggests that the product of the sea (Venus) had been the recipient of masterful lancing by the god of War, an act which has evidently depleted his energies and left her aware, awake and fully vigilant. Thus, Love has in absorbing the thrust of War, triumphed over, and subdued him. The sound produced by the conch shell, in this sexual inversion, may suggest the sweet sounds of poetry, specifically, the poetry of Love, which has both seduced and subdued
its object, the lover, Mars, and rendered him defenseless against the power of Venus, Love. The male/female – insertion/reception metaphor is again inverted as the sounds of love; that is to say, the music emitted from the conch shell, which is received, even in an unconscious state by the ear of Mars, is inserted into the passive male by the symbol of Venus. We may conclude that the words or at least the sounds of Love have an inner power sufficient to subdue the challenges of War and discord.

The horizontal composition may have been part of a decoration for a specific piece of furniture, and most likely could have been a decoration for a marriage chest, or cassone, or perhaps for the backboard of a day bed, or “spalliera” which explains the contrast of length and height and provides the uniquely harmonious subdivisions of the surface design. The use of multiple repetitions of the golden rectangle within the composition inhere a reference to the fecund, multivalent, generative character of love based in geometric multiplication of forms (see Figs. 6.2, 6.3, and 6.4). The integration of symbolism, visual relationships of ratio and number, and literary and philosophical references make this image a perfect point of departure for the consideration of Renaissance Paragone. Thus, the use of number and geometry to direct the viewer’s awareness beyond the merely physical and toward the conceptual realm is yet another tool in the painters’ arsenal to direct the audience (and here specifically the well-

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427 A cassone was a storage or gift chest while a spalliera was a work that was at shoulder height or at the level of the “spalle” or shoulders, a backboard for the ceremonial bed in the camera a central chamber often used for sleeping and a site for conception within the institution of marriage, or for providing lodging for notable house guests and individuals of importance within a palazzo. Some discussion of the uses of the spalliere is provided by Caroline Campbell, Curator of Italian Paintings before 1500, for the National Gallery of Art, London, in a video from the National Gallery of Art website accessed, September 27, 2017 at: https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/sandro-botticelli-venus-and-mars.
informed, highly literate, well-prepared audience) to receive the many layers of communicative engagement made accessible through this work.

An interesting argument can be offered for a likely significance for Venus, the bringer of Peace in this image, as an analogue to the Christ in triumph over discord or sin, and indeed as Festugiére notes regarding Ficino: “….dans son *Commentaire sur le Phèdre*, il affirme que l’amour dont parlent Platon et saint Paul n’est qu’un seul amour: l’amour de la Beauté, qui est Dieu.” 428 In his powerful affirmation of the unity of Beauty and Goodness, Festugiére continues his argument that the Ficinian theory of Love inheres the Platonic commitment to the Greek unity of Beauty with the Good, a moral and aesthetic unification which is reflected in Botticelli’s image of symbolically subdued violence, which resists even the trumpet blast of the perverse young satyr who blasts the sound of the conch shell directly into the ear of the sleeping War god. This image may offer another suggestion to us as the spectators regarding the primacy of perceiving beauty with the eyes, for the dominance of vision in our experience of this work would also coincide with Ficino’s claims of vision as the sense most attuned to the edification of the human soul in its recollection of its own divine nature as it seeks its return to its

428 See Jean Festugiére, *La Philosophie de L’Amour de Marsile Ficin et Son Influence Sur la Littérature Française au XVIᵉ Siecle*, Paris, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1941, p. 22 , in other words, the author claims that in Ficino’s *Commentary on the Phaedrus*, he confirms that the Love discussed by Plato and St. Paul is one and the same Love, and, that this form of Love is the divine love of Beauty, which is God. Festugiére quotes Ficino: “Deum tandem amamus ut pulchrum, quem jam pridem dilexeramus ut bonum.” God in the end is love and beauty, which has always been esteemed as the Good.” (my own loose translation), and noting that this idea in Ficino stems from the Old Testament with which Ficino appears to have been thoroughly familiar.
source in God, for, Beauty best perceived with the eye, is the companion of divinity, of Love, and thus of God.\textsuperscript{429}

Ficino discusses the astrological implications of the association of Mars with Venus and Venus’ constant domination of the most brave, bold, and ferocious of the planets.\textsuperscript{430} Thus, within the metaphysical structure of Neo-Platonic thought, Love dominates Strife, and the image in Botticelli’s work may be quite easily understood as a demonstration of the philosophical, metaphysical commitment structure, which

\textsuperscript{429} Ibid., pp. 32-33, for the discussion of the unity of beauty and goodness in God. Festugière summarized Ficino’s discussion from the commentary on the \textit{Symposium} on the identification of the Beautiful with the Good – the Greek term cited by Festugière which articulates this synthesis is “\kappa\alpha\lambda\omega\kappa\alpha\theta\omicron\omicRON” translated as “beau et bon”. He amplifies Ficino’s observations in Speech II, Chapter V: “Or Dieu n’est pas seulement beau, il est bon. En son unité, en sa simplicité suprêmes, beau et bien s’unissent et se confondent d’une manière ineffable. “Fontaine pérennelle” de la Beauté, Dieu l’est aussi du Bien.”

\textsuperscript{430} See Marsilio Ficino, \textit{Commentary on Plato’s Symposium On Love: (De Amore)}, an English translation by Sears Jayne, Spring Publications, Inc., Dallas, Texas, Oration V, Chapter 8: On the Virtue of Love, pp. 96-98: Jayne’s translation reads; “Love is affirmed as \textit{just} for this reason, that where love is pure and true, there is an interchange of good will which admits no insult or injury, So great is the power of this charity that it alone is able to preserve the human race in tranquil peace, which neither prudence nor fortitude, nor the power of arms, of laws, or of eloquence, without good will, can bring about…..Moreover, he calls it \textit{temperate} because it conquers the base desires. For, since love seeks beauty, which consists in a certain order and temperance, it scorns cheap and intemperate appetites; it always shrinks from sinful actions. This you heard enough about in the beginning from the hero. And where the desire for this rules, all other desires are disdained. …He added courageous, For what is more courageous than boldness? And who fights more boldly than the lover for his beloved? Than the other gods, that is, Mars surpasses the other planets in courage, because he makes men braver. Venus dominates him. For when Mars is located in the corners of the heaven, in either the second or the eighth house of a nativity, he threatens evils to the person being born, but Venus often shackles, so to speak, the malignancy of Mars, by coming into conjunction or opposition wit him…” Ficino follows with an extended discourse on the powers of Mars relative to the presence of Venus, with the planet ruled by the god of War always in submission to the influence of the more powerful force of the planet under the influence of the goddess of Love. The thorough explication of this theme is undertaken by Edgar Wind in \textit{Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance: An Exploration of Philosophical and Mystical Sources of Iconography in Renaissance Art}, W.W. Norton Company, New York, 1968, pp. 86-96, beginning with Pico della Mirandola’s study of Plutarch’s theory of Mars and Venus as the progenitors of Harmonia, born of the union of Love (Venus) and Strife (Mars).
demonstrates but does not necessarily *illustrate* this astrological insight. Vasari writes that there were a number of paintings by Botticelli in the home of the Vespucci, and, indeed, the presence of the wasps, or *vespe* may indicate derivation of this work from the collections of the Vespucci family.\(^{431}\)

E. H. Gombrich notes the correspondence of the image represented to a text from the Roman poet Lucian\(^{432}\) The presence of the *vespe*, or wasps may indicate an allusion to the Botticelli’s neighbors, the Vespucci, from which family, Marsilio Ficino’s good friend Antonio Vespucci hailed.

Cheney has suggested that this image could imply a demand for the god, Mars, the great protector, to awaken, particularly due to the detail of the small satyr with the Triton’s conch, who appears to be blowing directly into Mars’ ear.\(^{433}\)

\(^{431}\) See Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite* (op. cit.), pp. 492-496. Liana Cheney, *Quattrocento Neoplatonism and Medici Humanism in Botticelli’s Mythological Paintings*, University Press of America Inc., Lanham, Maryland, 1985 p. 42, notes the importance of Botticelli’s neighbors the Vespucci family, including Marco Vespucci, husband of Simonetta Vespucci, the legendary beauty from the important coastal city of Genoa, upon whom the idealized image of the goddess in Botticelli’s painting may have been modeled. Simonetta Vespucci was the idealized love of Giuliano de’Medici, the brother of Lorenzo II Magnifico. Their relation was commemorated in Angelo Poliziano’s poem, *La Giostra* of 1495. Marco’s brother, Amerigo Vespucci, was the explorer after whom the continental Americas have been named.

\(^{432}\) See E. H. Gombrich (op.cit.), p.68, The 2\(^{nd}\) century A. D. Greek poet, Lucian whose poem offers an ekphrastic description of a lost, but famous painting of the time attributed to Echion, of the wedding of Alexander the Great and Roxana, Botticelli may have had direct access to this narrative or may have discussed it with the Neo-Platonist scholar, Politian; See also Edgar Wind (op. cit.), pp.85-96 for discourse on the picture’s Neo-Platonist significations.

\(^{433}\) See Liana Cheney, p. 90.
The goddess Venus as personification of Love subdues Mars, a personification of physical force, and demonstrates that the contemplative power of Venus/Love is shown to have greater capacity to effect change than mere action. Venus is shown to have the ability to triumph over both discord and mere physicality, or *virtus*/strength. Thus, the physical force and action of Mars is subdued by vigilant Love, or more simply stated, it is Love that conquers War. Love being the more powerful (most powerful?) of these two entities. Vigilant Venus implies the watchfulness of Love sustaining Peace and Harmony supervising a sleeping discord in the form of the god of War, strife, and destruction.

Earlier scholars’ often tended to search for a particular classical or contemporary literary source for Botticelli’s mythological works, however, it seems likely that Botticelli, like Ficino, used a synthetic approach to generating an integrated, interpretative approach to fabricating his representations of mythological themes, rather than consistently relying upon single sources and certainly going beyond the idea of merely illustrating a text, although the intention that Botticelli’s works realize is the production of an *ekphrasis*, a visual equivalent of an interpolated literary conception434

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434 See these ideas may have been suggested first by Wind and are reiterated in Cheney’s text. The idea of *ekphrasis* is suggested by Panofsky in *Renaissance and Renascences*, Almqvist & Wiksells, Gerbers Förlag, Stockholm, 1960, p. 192; Panofsky notes that the *istoria*, or as he refers to it, the “scenario” of both Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus* and the *Primavera* could be ascribed to the “ecphrases” found in Politian’s (Angelo Poliziano’s) *Giostra*, and E. H. Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, Phaidon Press Limited, London, 1972, reprint 1993, p. 53 suggests derivation of the Birth of Venus in the classical author, Apuleius, citing the lines: “On come spring and Venus and Venus’ winged harbinger marching before with Zephyr and Mother Flora a pace behind him, strewing the whole path for them with brilliant colors and filling it with scent.”…these elements conform more strongly to the Primavera, but with the common element of the “winged harbinger[s]”; Regarding the use of multiple sources and ekphrastic intent, see also Liana Cheney, *Quattrocento Neoplatonism and Medici Humanism in Botticelli’s Mythological Paintings*, University Press of America, Lanham, New York, 1985, who cites Gombrich’s references on p. 57.
Figure 6.1 Mars & Venus c. 1483, National Gallery, London, dimensions: 2ft 3 inches x 5ft 8 inches (69 x 173cm).
Figure 6.2 *Mars & Venus* c. 1483, National Gallery, London; dimensions: 2ft 3 inches x 5ft 8 inches (69 x 173cm); detail of Mars asleep; playful satyrs and wasps above the head of sleeping Mars.
Figure 6.3 *Mars & Venus* c. 1483, National Gallery, London; dimensions: 2ft 3 inches x 5ft 8 inches (69 x 173cm) ; overlapping examples of the Golden Section.
Figure 6.4 *Mars & Venus* c. 1483, National Gallery, London; dimensions: 2ft 3 inches x 5ft 8 inches (69 x 173cm) ; compositional design with overlapping examples of the Golden Section without figures.
Figure 6.5 *Mars & Venus* c. 1483, National Gallery, London; dimensions: 2ft 3 inches x 5ft 8 inches (69 x 173cm); compositional design with mirrored vertical inclusions of the Golden Section with figures.
Figure 6.6 Image of a Roman sarcophagus, Second Century AD, showing the reclining Venus and Mars with Putti (taken from E. H. Gombrich, fig. 47).
CHAPTER VII

THE BIRTH OF VENUS

“The first Venus, which is in the Mind, is said to have been born of Uranus without a mother, because mother, to the physicists is matter. But the Mind is a stranger to any association with corporeal matter.”

The Birth of Venus (c. 1483-1486)
Sandro Botticelli
(c. 1483-1486)
Egg tempera on canvas
5’8” (173 cm) x 9’ 2” (279 cm)
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence
(Figure 7.1)

The final image considered in this study is a symbolic embodiment of both beauty and love, which envelopes references to the human capacity for sense perception. The attendant judgments that stem from sense perception, which are crucial for the engagement of the intellect in verifying such perceptions against the conceptual standards of truth and beauty, are already familiar to the eternal soul within the Neo-Platonist system, based upon the conviction concerning the origin of the soul in the One. The advent of, or Birth of Venus is thus, a demonstration (as indeed each of the images discussed would be) of the processes of Aesthesis (Αίσθησις); that is, all of the activities of perception that permit the making of judgments, and allowing for the recognition of Beauty and Truth. These are the processes via which the immaterial, intellectual soul

communicates with the sensible material body. This process is aligned with the spiritually transformative powers of art images, which are capable of conveying abstractions directly to the immaterial soul by means of contemplation (theoria), the first of the concepts explored by means of this extended discussion of seven Botticelli images. Thus, this picture provides a fitting conclusion for this discussion and a new beginning based upon presentation of the motivation for the creation of a circuit of power, the circuit conclusus, into which the contemplation of art imagery propels us as perceivers. The representation of Divine Venus and her donation to humanity provides us with a foundation for the processes of Aisthesis – those powers of perception, awareness, and understanding inhering the transformative power of Humanitas as per Ficino’s letter to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’Medici, cited earlier in the text. It is Humanitas that will permit the union of Lorenzo Il Magnifico’s political power (influence) with the material wealth (power of material resources) that could be provided by his wealthy young cousin and guided by Lorenzo Il Magnifico to manifest beauty and disseminate philosophical awareness in the world of the Florentine intelligentsia and beyond.

In this image, as in others, it appears that Botticelli has undertaken the task of commenting, in a highly original manner, upon multiple poetic and philosophical sources, and he was almost certainly inspired by social interactions and informal discourse with friends, such as Ficino and Angelo Poliziano, in conversations that were certain to propel the painter toward contemplation of ideas reflecting the metaphysical commitments of Neo-Platonist philosophical hierarchies.436

Consideration of the developments discussed in the course of this study support assertion of the thesis that art images were used intentionally as instruments for the dissemination of philosophical reasoning. This image of the revelation to humanity of unadorned Love with typological connections to the generation of love from sacrifice and rebirth would have generated an immediate recognition of the parallels between the relationship of such a theme, to the ideas of Christian sacrifice and transformation associated with Christ’s baptism and Crucifixion. Indeed the composition of Botticelli’s Birth of Venus presents compelling resonances with images of baptism from sources as diverse as the images of the *Baptism of Christ* by Lorenzo Ghiberti from decorations on the baptisteries of both Florence and Siena (see Figures 7.1 and 7.2) to the composition used by his teacher Andrea del Verrocchio in the famous work of the same theme (*The Baptism of Christ*) which introduced Leonardo da Vinci as a painter to the Florentine public. The Ghiberti compositions, replete with hovering, winged figures appear to be a definite source of inspiration. Divine Venus, who comes into being from the castration of Ouranos anticipates the coming into being of spiritual love through Christ, and the themes of sacrifice and tragedy serve to repair the schism between the old and the new orders of reality, as is the case with Christ’s own sacrifice and Crucifixion. This image

*ekphrasis* of Poliziano’s poem the Giostra combined with Botticelli’s awareness of the legendary *Aphrodite Anadyomene* by the famous ancient Greek artist, Appelles could suffice to explain all aspects of the image. In contrast, Liana Cheney in *Quattrocento Neo-Platonism and Medici Humanism in Botticelli’s Mythological Paintings*, University Press of America, Inc., Lanham, MD, 1985, suggests that this image of *The Birth of Venus*, as a representation of Ficino’s concept of the “Twin Venuses” here the “Venus Urania” or *Aphrodite Ourania* indicates that access to beauty is via spiritual love, and that beauty, *per se*, is to be sought, by transcending towards the Creator (pp. 91-92). This latter idea would imply that simply looking at the image moves its spectators, who seek to access its beauty, through a NeoPlatonic metaphysical structure based in contemplation by an intrinsic, imbedded process.
embodies important parallel developments in conceptual complexity between Ficino’s philosophical insights pertaining to the nature of the soul, and Botticelli’s complementary expressive development as a master painter within the circle of Florentine Medici patronage. The paragone inspired dualism involved in “reading” such images, replete with allusioins to both classical literature of the moral and ethical biblical parables, would have been recognized as part of a matrix of activities intended to edify human understanding in support of promoting the insights of Christian teaching grounded in the foundations of classical philosophical reasoning, revivified through the intellectual interests and life of the Renaissance.

The image is populated by four beings; a centrally placed nude, female figure, standing upon an enormous clam half-shell floating in the sea, but headed toward shore. The central female figure is covered only by her hair and her strategically placed hands, which obscure her breasts in part, and shield her pubic area and groin from view. This figure, whose long, blonde tresses, billow in the breeze, angles her head to the right, toward the sources of the light wind, that is propelling her toward landfall, provided by an intertwined, winged, flying pair of loosely draped figures, one male, the other female, both of whom are shown on the right of the centrally placed female figure (that is to say, on the viewer’s left side if facing the painting).437 In addition to providing the wind that

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437 The wind-blown qualities of the figures shown in Botticelli’s image evoke the suggestion of Aby Warburg of the “animated details” or “bewegtes Beiwerk” which, in turn, stems from recommendations to painters set forth by Leon Battista Alberti in his work On Painting, translated with introduction and notes by John R. Spencer, Yale University Press, New Have, 1966, particularly pp. 80-81, where Alberti notes “I am delighted to see some movement in hair, locks of hair, branches, fronds, and robes.” Alberti continues offering recommendations that appear to have had a powerful impact upon Botticelli in the creation of details of hair and garments that entail the “waves in air like flames, twines around itself like a serpent…” Thus,
serves as the source of the clam-shell’s propulsion, flowers, in the form of pale pink and white roses, emanate from the two figures winged figures who create the breeze. Just below them (the intertwined figures), shown at the base of the image, and located in the water between the figures and the clam half-shell, we discover two upright bulrushes, surrounded with five broken stems. On the central nude figure’s left (i.e., the viewer’s right) another female figure, fully clothed in a flower-covered garment, is present on the shore, holding a large, florally decorated bolt of pink fabric, with which she appears to run toward the central, nude, female figure as if with the intention of draping her. On the shore behind the fully clothed figure, we are able to discern the trunks of three laurel trees which create a canopy of leaves and branches that extend outward, toward the central, nude, blonde figure.

The elegant subdivision of counterbalancing triangular shapes which serve to anchor the centrally placed, pyramidal compositional structure indicated by the form and placement of the figure of Venus/ Aphrodite provides the stable, harmonious aesthetic character generated by this image, one of Botticelli’s most famous compositions (see Figs. 7.3 and 7.5). If the composition is bisected, the central figure of Venus arches just slightly to the right of the center axis, anchoring an elegantly pitched central isosceles triangular form which subdivides the composition into its central, stable base and the

while Ficino’s philosophical ideas may have informed the ontology of what is shown in Botticelli paintings, it is clear that Alberti was a powerful influence in how the painter decided to represent his subjects.

438 This image of aery spirits may also be intended to evoke the Platonic dialogues of the Phaedrus and its allusions to the presence of Boreas, the “breath of inspiration”. See Michael J. B. Allen, The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino: A Study of His Phaedrus Commentary, Its Sources and Genesis, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984, pp. 5ff.
composition’s two exterior scalene triangular forms, one, which envelopes the air-borne couple on the viewer’s left and the other, formed from the isocelene side of the central triangular shape, runs almost perfectly along the left leg of the clothed female figure on the right, who is lifting the floral cloak as if to cover the nakedness of Venus. The division along the central axis of the inner isosceles triangle also subdivides the composition into four scalene triangular units, which meld into two vertically oriented rectangles. The harmonious balance and counterbalance of space in each of the quadrants is achieved with a coolly intellectual restraint, the apparent simplicity of the structure concealing a compelling, internally complex proportional order (see Figs. 7.6, 7.7, and 7.8).

Botticelli’s composition provides an extraordinary blending of classically inspired verticality, well-structured spacing, and rigorous order combined with fluidity and graceful, interlacing, linear curves, which are counterbalanced by strong horizontal elements. The opposing sides of the composition perfectly contain their respective figures within the implied confines of two golden rectangles, a compositional device which serves to isolate the figure of Venus within a tall, narrow central, almost columnar focus, wherein her body is shown arching gracefully, implying a parabolic curve. If the outer golden rectangles are subdivided, the square that results from the first division of the line falls almost perfectly upon the horizontal lines of the sea that extend across and unify the composition. The proximity of the subdivisions to the groupings stemming from repeated applications of the golden rectangle make it difficult to assume that such mathematically precise proportional harmony is in the least accidental. The golden ratio is very likely
used expressively here, and was understood to be a rhetorical device employed to allude to the Neo-Platonist concept of the Soul’s purpose to return to its source in the One or in God. The use of the golden ratio, a relationship among parts based upon a 1: 1.01688 harmony, is frequently represented in Botticelli’s images.

In the Birth of Venus the multiple Phi proportional relationships underscore the idea of the return to the Source, the return to the One; the search for beauty as truth and thus a return to God as the purpose, function and desire of the Soul. The visual manifestation of this Phi-based geometric relation, grounded in exponential increase, represented by the form of the spiral, intimates a geometric foundation for materiality, which was assumed by Plato to be the connective structure of reality itself. This concept harmonizes with the themes and likely social functions of connectivity,

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439 Scott Olsen, *The Golden Section: Nature’s Greatest Secret*, Wooden Books, 2006, pp. 2-36, discusses the philosophical problem of how the “One” becomes “many” citing Plato and the Pythagorean tradition with a discourse on why the distinctions between ratio and proportion are relevant in assessing the employment of the “golden” or “divine” ratio as an allegorical device, derived from Plato, noting that Plato held the “continuous geometric proportion to be the most profound cosmic bond” (p. 4 taken from Plato’s comments in *The Republic VI*, 509e-511e in the explanation of the divided line, See *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Bolligen Series LXXI, (Princeton University Press, 1961/19th printing, 2005) pp. 745-747.)

440 Cite here other instances of works included in this study where the Phi relation is demonstrated or shown and refer to pages in the Introduction where the Phi relation is discussed for its relevance to Neo-Platonist aesthetic ideas and ideals.

441 See Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, English translation by Michael J. B. Allen, Latin text by James Hankins with William Bowen, The I Tatti Renaissance Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Volume I, Book I, 2001, pp. 16-17, which notes that the rational soul is in its “most blessed” condition when it “steals into the bosom of the divine” or thus returns to its source in God, which is its ultimate purpose:

discourse, and coherence attributable to art images within the structures suggested by Ficino’s letters regarding the importance of *Venus Humanitas*. 

Gombrich has suggested that this work inheres allegorical significance grounded in the tenets of Neo-Platonism intended to harmonize with Christian tradition, combining the material and spiritual, with likely allusions to images of the baptism of the Christ. Noting that Marsilio Ficino explains this narrative of Venus’ birth, taken from an account provided by Hesiod in the *Theogony*, and which, in Gombrich’s words, “stands for the birth of beauty within the Neo-Platonic system of emanations.”

Cheney, along with a number of earlier scholars, notes the affinity of the images presented in *The Birth of Venus* with passages from Angelo Poliziano’s *Stanze*, lines 99-103, which were evidently inspired by literary imagery from the texts of Ovid’s

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444 See Ernst Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, “Botticelli’s Mythologies,” p. 73 attributes the connection to an idea mentioned in a lecture given by art historian, Friedrich Saxl (location and date unspecified) and Gombrich shows Alesso Baldovinetti’s *Baptism of Christ* from the Museo di San Marco in Florence, as an example of a possible visual source, connecting this composition to the tradition of the image of the anointing of the Christ, supported by the compositional affinities with Andrea del Verrocchio’s famous *Baptism of Christ* in which his mastery as a painter is superseded by the young Leonardo da Vinci. As Gombrich notes on p. 218, note 156, an even closer affinity may be observed in the composition of the Baptism of Christ cast in bronze by Lorenzo Ghiberti for the Baptistery of Florence Cathedral, or the work by Ghiberti from the Baptismal Font, Siena,which includes hovering, winged angelic figures (see figures 7.2 & 7.3).

Metamorphosis, the Homeric Hymns, possibly Apuleius’ Golden Ass, and Hesiod’s Birth of Venus, from the Theogony, among its likely probable sources.\(^{446}\)

This image of generation implies by its literary origin from a Greek creation myth modified by the traditions of Latin culture and literature, the ideas of both birth, and rebirth, Venus/Aphrodite being in some sense a reincarnation or new incarnation of the reproductive power of Ouranos, God of the Sky as well as a commentary on the shift of intellectual and spiritual significance from ancient Athens, to the glory that was Rome, to a new center of classicism, Fiorenza, the city of Florence as the new nexus of the treasures of classical thought and the re-establishment of the supremacy of Humanitas, reasoning, humanist motivations in the generation of culture integrated with the enlightening matrix of Christian teachings. This power of generation and re-generation, of the capacity of creation and creativity as such, which inspire and in fact generate beauty from experience which is often full of tragedy and sacrifice, is a kind of reiteration of the Ficinian *primum in aliquo genere*, that is, the generation of a new kind of thing from something of quite dissimilar origin.

It seems more than probable that this image, and others with comparable themes, were merely decorative. Such images were intended to have an impact in both the intellectual and spiritual realms of Florentine life during their time, and to extend their

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\(^{446}\) See Liana Cheney, pp. 71-73 and p. 83, note 88. Cheney quotes the relevant passages from Poliziano’s *Stanze*, and cites Gombrich’s suggestion that the Birth of Venus is influenced by the poetry of Apuleius’s Golden Ass, Ficino’s *Philebus Commentary*, Pico della Mirandola’s commentary on *Canzone d’Amore* by Benivievi and that all depend from Hesiod’s *Theogony*, which Cheney quotes from R. Lattimore’s *Hesiod* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1959), pp. 134-135.
effects into the future, and, thus, into our time, such that they may legitimately be considered talismanic.

The diverse sources of literary inspiration which appear to inform the subject matter of the *Birth of Venus* enhance its consideration as a likely tool for the dissemination of philosophical thinking. Panofsky suggests that Botticelli’s secular paintings of mythological themes perhaps should not be considered as a cycle, and this view seems correct.\textsuperscript{447} I have noted previously that early scholarship often seemed preoccupied with finding definitive literary sources for Botticelli’s images; yet, Botticelli, like his friend Poliziano, synthesized information from multiple referents in order to create a completely original response to the unique philosophical, aesthetic, and conceptual allusions to more sources, both pagan and Christian, appropriate to the *Zeitgeist* of the time, enriching the symbolic denotations and connotations of the work.\textsuperscript{448}

The donation of Love to humanity as an unadorned form confirms a typological connection to a theme of the generation of eternal, spiritual Love from sacrifice and rebirth, a classic alliance between interdependent forces of good and evil. Divine Venus, who comes into being from the act if castration, the separation of Ouranos (space, the god of the sky) through the active disobedience of his son, Chronos (time, the segmentation

\textsuperscript{447} See Erwin Panofsky (op. cit.), pp. 198-199 and Liana Cheney (op.cit.), pp. 70-75, and note 94, p. 84.

\textsuperscript{448} I am also grateful to Prof. Martin Donougho for bringing to my attention the possibility that the representation of *The Birth of Venus* could have been understood at the time as a theme pertaining to marriage, as indicated in the interesting article by Jane Long, “Botticelli’s Birth of Venus as Wedding Painting.” *Aurora*, Vol. IX, 2008, pp. 1-27, which suggests that Venus’ erotic representation as she arrives on land could be intended to signify the “arrival of the bride at her nuptial bed.”
and differentiation of reality), prefigures the coming into being of Beauty, in the Christian tradition, the emergence of spiritual love through Christ, whose sacrifice and death were understood to serve to repair the schism between man and God constituted by the fall of Adam, which is offset by Christ’s own sacrifice and Crucifixion. The Birth of Venus is a culminating work of sacrifice of immortal space into segments of time, the actualization of particulars and the generation of the terminally beautiful. Ficino and Botticelli achieve an intellectual, philosophical and expressive fruition with which this image resonates. Its complex connotative readings expressions of the infusions and anticipations from Christian tradition united with classical literature, and a consequent revitalization of both traditions for the moral and ethical edification of human understanding. Ficino’s eudaimonic and teleological conviction that a spiritual reunification with the Source, and thus fusion with eternal joy and bliss, was possible by means of the contemplative, intellectual life of the Renaissance is articulated by the persistend power of this image of spiritual Love.
Figure 7.1. *The Birth of Venus*, c. 1484-1486, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence; dimensions: 67.9 x 109.6 inches (172.5 x 278.9 cm).
Figure 7.2 Lorenzo Ghiberti, *Baptism of Christ*, Florence Cathedral, Baptistery of San Giovanni, North Doors 1404-1424
Figure 7.3 Figure 7.2 Lorenzo Ghiberti, *Baptism of Christ*, Baptismal Font, Siena, 1427.
Figure 7.4 The Birth of Venus, c. 1484-1486, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence; dimensions: 67.9 x 109.6 inches (172.5 x 278.9 cm); equilateral triangular composition bracketed by two scalene triangular shapes and with the central triangle subdivided into two right triangles.
Figure 7.5 *The Birth of Venus*, c. 1484-1486, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence; dimensions: 67.9 x 109.6 inches (172.5 x 278.9 cm); composition showing mirrored images of the Golden Section flanking the figure of Venus/Aphrodite.
Figure 7.6 *The Birth of Venus*, c. 1484-1486
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence; dimensions: 67.9 x 109.6 inches (172.5 x 278.9 cm); multiple reflected iterations of the Golden Section, with overlapping examples anchoring the composition of the figure of Venus/Aphrodite.
Figure 7.7 *The Birth of Venus*, c. 1484-1486
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence; dimensions: 67.9 x 109.6 inches (172.5 x 278.9 cm); multiple reflected iterations of the Golden Section, with overlapping ascending spiral arches extending from the figure of the Hora, toward Venus/Aphrodite, and Zephyrus with Chloris.
Figure 7.8 *The Birth of Venus*, c. 1484-1486
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence; dimensions: 67.9 x 109.6 inches (172.5 x 278.9 cm); use of the Golden Section, with spiral arch extending from the figure of the Hora, toward Venus/Aphrodite, and Zephyrus with Chloris engulfing the entire composition, observed from viewers’ right to left.
Figure 7.9 *The Birth of Venus*, c. 1484-1486; Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence; dimensions: 67.9 x 109.6 inches (172.5 x 278.9 cm); use of the Golden Section, with an inversion of the spiral arch extending from the symbolic bullrush to the figures of Zephyrus with Chloris/Flora, toward Venus/Aphrodite and terminating in the Hora, engulfing the entire composition, observed from the viewers’ left to right.
SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

Ergo ne dubites, dicent, quin material quaedam imagines faciendae, alioquin valde congrua coelo, per figurum coelo simile arte datam celeste munus tum in se ipsa concipiat, tum reddat in proximum aliquem vel gestantem.449

Based upon the evidence provided in texts and images, it appears that Botticelli’s paintings, as they have been integrated within the Ficinian conceptual system, are objects that serve as far more than mere, “intuition maps” directing our ideas into specific pathways of interrelated referents and patterns of relation. These works are intended to indicate ideas for observers as both diagrams of states of affairs and references to relationships among concepts with esoteric, transformative intentions regarding the manifestations of those states of affairs intended to influence the perceivers of the images into accommodating the very relationships that may be represented. Consequently, the Botticelli images both demonstrate, and simultaneously conjure forth, by analogy and in ideational reality, the “truth” of the intentions that they represent. This “demonstration” is meant in the Platonic sense of the use of diagrams supporting the deductive –and inductive– cogitative processes, as is shown by the employment of drawings generated by

449 See Marsilio Ficino, De Vita in Tres Libros Divisus, a critical edition and translation with Introduction and Notes by Carole V. Kaske and John R. Clark, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies in conjunction with The Renaissance Society of America, Tempe, Arizona, 2002, pp. 332-333 the quote is translated as:

Therefore you should not doubt, they say, that the material for making an image, if it is in other respects entirely consonant with the heavens, once it has received by art a figure similar to the heavens, both conceives in itself the celestial gift and gives it again to someone who is in the vicinity or wearing it.
Socrates as a visual aid to support the reasoning activities of the young enslaved boy from the *Meno* in the elenchus employed to provide a model to be observed by Meno and simultaneously intended as a demonstration of a pre-existing truth recognized or recollected by an eternal soul.\(^{450}\) Belief in the power of such daemonic images is precisely what would have threatened a theologian like Girolamo da Savonarola to desire and even demand the destruction of such works as being likely to unduly affect and influence the reconfiguring of reality according to human, rather than divine, providence. This Savonarolan perception of threat to the public from mere proximity to such objects seems grounded in a medievalizing sensibility that considers the object as an inherently powerful thing-in-itself, which contrasts with the more modern conception of the object b advanced by Ficino, in which objects are conduits of self-projection through the infusion of the divine ray of the mind. Ficino’s human being subjectively participates in the construction of his or her “reality”. For Ficino, the perceiver is not merely a passive recipient, but is an active agent in the activity of shaping aesthetic consciousness. While for Savonarola, it seems the visual configurations could have been interpreted as representing daemonic forces that would have to have been eliminated or certainly controlled or curtailed; according to Ficino’s system, such objects were a means of reminding the observer of his or her own inner divinity and engaging in mnemonic philosophical acts. Of course, ultimately, Savonarola failed to be capable of accomplishing his desired outcome of eliminating these evocative objects of beauty, perhaps due as much to the curious human predisposition to question dogma as to the

failures of his own conceptualization of what is essential to human experience. Ficino’s theoretical formulations cleverly emphasized a mechanistic rather than a solely daemonic process, defaulting to the natural and potentially benevolent influences of images due to the processes of vision itself in accordance with natural functioning based in scientific, even medicinal processes, and it is especially this social, healing aspect of the power of images that is of interest here. This topic however, is related, yet is entirely different from the subject of daemonic esoterism in which Ficino manifested such considerable interest; in any case, for the present, the preoccupations of such study must be reserved for further investigative opportunities at some later date.

The subject matter of Botticelli’s images reinforces the metaphysical commitments of Ficinian Neo-Platonism in that, by representing gods of Love, and/or the incarnation of God’s Love (the Christ), Botticelli not only shows the source of all art, which according to Ficino’s Symposium commentary is Love, he also demonstrates the role the metaphorical analogy of the act of art making presents in comparison to the divine generative creativity of God. This action offers a demonstration of the role of art within the system of Neo-Platonist metaphysical connections of soul, essence, and spirit. The creation of art images engages the intellectual powers of the Soul, captivating the power of reasoning, by bringing access to beauty to the spirit through the eyes, not because the painting or work of art is an object, but because the image, an object of contemplation, provides access to ideas, which are themselves beautiful or good

451 See Marsilio Ficino, Commentary on Plato’s Symposium, translated by Sears Jayne, Spring Publications, Dallas, Texas, 1985, pp. 63- 66, Speech III, Chapter I, “Love is in all things and for all things,” and Chapter 3 “Love is the governor of the arts.”
or both, with painting permitting the reception of “colors and shapes of bodies in a spiritual way.”

Perhaps, the principal reason that the power of images was not discussed more extensively and explicitly in Ficino’s philosophy may be due to the ethical challenges to Christian dogma that attributing talismanic powers to such images would imply in terms of idolatry and the influential implications of demonology. By demonstration, Ficino may have chosen to show his support for the conceptual importance of images in transforming reality by indirect means, and a never overtly stated collaboration with Sandro Botticelli, whose works continue to serve an important if, tacit, and cryptic role in the dissemination of philosophical awareness and understanding to the circle of the initiated, has lost none of its power or depth. However, committing such ideas to paper to a greater extent as declarative insights in the painter’s and the philosopher’s historical moment, rather than functioning as Ficino actually did, within a multilayered framework of contextual suppositions of possibility, a mode of teaching and learning that had already proved to be problematic during his life time, causing him to rely on powerful

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452 Ibid., pp. 87-91, Speech V, Chapters 3-4, where Jayne’s translation cites: “Beauty is something incorporeal – Since these things are so, it is necessary for beauty to be something common to virtue, shape, and sounds.” Jayne indicates that these ideas have been taken from Plotinus Enneads 1.6, noting on p. 102 that Ficino offers further explication in his commentary on Plotinus’ Liber de Pulchritudine from Ficino’s Opera Omnia, pp. 1573-1578. If virtue is beautiful, beauty cannot be a characteristic solely of bodies, indeed on p. 87, Jayne translates Ficino as specifying: “Hence it happens that the Reason itself of beauty cannot be a body, since if beauty were corporeal, it would not be applicable to the virtues of the soul, which are incorporeal. And beauty is so far from being a body that not only the beauty, which is in the virtues of the soul cannot be corporeal, but also that which is in bodies and sounds. For although we call certain bodies beautiful, they are nevertheless not beautiful by virtue of their matter, in itself.”
protectors, would have been fool-hardy and incautious.\textsuperscript{453} The complexity, beauty, and power of Botticelli’s works, however constitute a cryptic demonstration of Neo-Platonist considerations of the powers of the human soul, and the benefits of the contemplative and philosophical life for the spiritual edification of human kind.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER OF MARSILIO FICINO TO
LORENZO DI PIERFRANCESCO DE'MEDICI


My immense love for you, excellent Lorenzo, has long prompted me to make you an immense present. For anyone who contemplates the heavens, nothing he sets eyes upon seems immense but the heavens themselves. If, therefore, I make you a present of the heavens themselves what would be its price? But I would rather not talk of the price; for Love, born from the Graces, gives and accepts everything without payment; nor indeed can anything under heaven fairly balance against heaven itself.

The astrologers have it that the happiest man is he for whom Fate has so disposed the heavenly signs that Luna is not contrary in aspect to Mars and Saturn, that furthermore she is in a favourable aspect of Sol and Jupiter, Mercury and Venus. And just as the astrologers call happy the man for whom Fate has thus arranged the heavenly bodies, so the theologians deem him happy who has disposed his own self in a similar way. You may well wonder whether this is not asking too much—it certainly is much, but nevertheless, my gifted Lorenzo, go forward to the task with good cheer, for he who made you is greater than the heavens, and you too will be greater than the heavens as soon as you resolve to face them. We must not look for these matters outside ourselves, for all the heavens are within us and the fiery vigour in us testifies to our heavenly origin.

First Luna—what else can she signify in us but that continuous motion of the soul and of the body? Mars stands for speed, Saturn for tardiness, Sol for God, Jupiter for the Law, Mercury for Reason, and Venus for Humanity.

Onward, then, great-minded youth, gird yourself, and, together with me, dispose you own heavens. Your Luna—the continuous motion of your soul and body—should avoid the excessive speed of Mars and the tardiness of Saturn, that is, it should leave everything to the right and opportune moment, and should not hasten unduly, nor tarry too long. Furthermore, this Luna within you should continuously behold the Sun, that is God himself, from whom she ever receives the life-giving rays, for you must honour him above all things to whom you are beholden, and make yourself worthy of the honour. Your Luna should also behold Jupiter, the laws human and divine, which should never be transgressed—for a deviation of the laws by which all things are governed is tantamount to perdition. She should also direct her gaze on Mercury, that is on good counsel, reason.
and knowledge, for nothing should be said or done for which no plausible reason can be adduced. A man not versed in science and letters is considered blind and deaf. Finally she should fix her eyes on Venus herself, that is to say on Humanity. This serves us as an exhortation and a reminder that we possess anything great on this earth without possessing the men themselves from whose favour all earthly things spring. Men, however, cannot be caught by any other bait but that of Humanity. Be careful, therefore, not to despise it, thinking perhaps that *humanitas* is of earthly origin.

For Humanity (*Humanitas*) herself is a nymph of excellent comeliness, born of heaven and more than others beloved by God all highest. Her soul and mind are Love and Charity, her eyes Dignity and Magnanimity, the hands of Liberality and Magnificence, the feet Comeliness and Modesty. The whole, then is Temperance and Honesty, Charm and Splendour. Oh, what exquisite beauty! How beautiful to behold! My dear Lorenzo, a nymph of such nobility has been given wholly into your hands. If you were to unite with her in wedlock and claim her as yours she would make all your years sweet.

In fine, then to speak briefly, if you thus dispose the heavenly signs and your gifts in this way, you will escape all the threats of fortune, and, under divine favour, will live happy and free from cares.

(from E. H. Gombrich, pp. 41-42, also reproduced in Liana Cheney, Appendix B, pp. 114-115.)
APPENDIX B

LETTER OF MARSILIO FICINO TO
GIORGIO ANTONIO VESPUCCI

Letter of Marsilio Ficino to Giorgio Antonio Vespucci and to Naldi: (tutors to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’Medici @ from Ernst Gombrich, Symbolic Images, Studies in the Art of the Renaissance, Phaidon Press, 1978 p. 43:

I am writing a letter to the younger Lorenzo about the prosperous fate often bestowed upon us by the stars which are outside us and also about the free happiness we acquire by our own free will from the stars within us. Explain it to him, if it should prove necessary, and exhort him to learn it by heart and treasure it up in his mind Great as are the things which I promise him, those which he will acquire by himself are as great, if only he reads the letter in the spirit in which I wrote it.
APPENDIX C

LETTER OF LORENZO PIERFRANCESCO DE’ MEDICI TO PIERO PAGAGNOTTI


Egli e stato qua sua Amerigho per quella lor facenda; ora io credo che la sia a mal partito perché Lorenzo mi pare non sia volto aiutarla. Si che confortate Messer Giorgiantonio a patientia. Entendete la volontà sua quale ella sia et offeritegli per nostra parte ogni et qualunque cosa et ditegli che in mentre che noi aremo roba non gli mancerà nulla, chè per la gratia di Dio noi abiamo tanto che a dispetto di chi non vuole è sarà sempremai uno huomo da bene.

Menate con esso voi Giovanni Cavalcanti che anche lui lo conforti.

Messer Giorgiantonio vorrebbe che ser Antonio andassi a partito; non credo che I console se ne contention; pur se v’andràd non credo vinca perché la cosa e ferma. Niente-dimanco fate quell che vuole per mia parte.

Non vengo costo perch’io non credo giovare, chè si e’ credessi giovare alla cosa verrei, se bene I credessi farne dispiacere a Lorenzo.

Non vi vengo in fine perché io mi sento collerico in modo che io direi cosec he dispiacerebbono a qualcuno; per[6] se vuol, verrò. Lo.

**Translation** of original Latin text from E. H. Gombrich, *Symbolic Images: Studies in the Renaissance*, pp. 80-81:
Letter of Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de’Medici to Piero Pagagnotti: @ 1476.

Amerigio has been up here with me in connection with their affairs; now I think that things are going badly because it seem to me that Lorenzo is not inclined to help. So comfort Messr. Giorgiantonio that he should be patient. Find out what he wants, whatever it is, and offer him on our behalf everything whatever it may be, and tell him that while we possess anything, he will want for nothing, and that through God’s grace we have so much that he will always be well off despite anyone who wishes otherwise.

Take Giovanni Calvalcanti with you that he may also comfort him.
Messer Giorgiantonio would like Ser Antonio to stand for election; I do not think that the consuls will accept this; moreover if he stands I do not think he will win because the matter is closed. Nevertheless, do what you like on my behalf.

I am not going there because I do not believe I can be of use, but I should like to help if you think I could, although in doing so I think I would displease Lorenzo.

In short I am not coming because I feel so choleric that I would say things which would displease somebody; however, if he so wishes, I shall come.

Lo.
APPENDIX D

THE LETTERS OF MARSILIO FICINO TO IACOPO BRACCIOLINI


Animae natura et officium, laus historiae
The nature and duty of the soul, the praise of history
Marsilio Ficino to Jacopo Bracciolini, son of orator Poggio, and heir to his father’s art; greetings.

Every year the early disciples of Plato used to hold a city festival in honour of Plato’s birthday. In our own times the Bracciolini, his modern disciples, have celebrated the occasion both in the city and the surrounding countryside. Our book on love records the country festivities at the home of the splendid Lorenzo de’ Medici at Careggi, whilst in the city of Florence the festival was celebrated at princely expense by the richly gifted and noble-minded Francesco Bandini.456

454 This transcription is taken from the source noted above (The Letters of Marsilio Ficino, translated from the Latin by members of the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, London, Vol. I, preface by Paul Oskar Kristeller, Columbia University in the City of New York, Shepheard-Walwyn Publishers, London, 1975, pp. 160 -161 ) and the notes are also given from the cited source and are reproduced verbatim, in full here, with the text. The first note explains “Ficino writes in the prologue to De Amore (ed. Marcel [Raymond Marcel], p. 136): ‘Plato died at the age of 81 at a banquet on the 7th November, his birthday. This banquet, which commemorated both his birthday and the anniversary of his death, was renewed every year by all the first followers of Plato down to the time of Plotinus and Porphyry. But for twelve hundred years after Porphyry, these solemn feasts ceased to be celebrated, until in our time Lorenzo de’ Medici, wishing to restore the Platonic Symposium, appointed Francesco Bandini as master of the feast (archytriclinum)’.”

455 The note to The Letters of Marsilio Ficino, 1975, p. 217 explains: “The feast at Careggi was held on 7th November, 1468. Ficino wrote his commentary on the Symposium between November, 1468 and July, 1469.”

456 The Letters of Marsilio Ficino, 1975, p. 222 cites Francesco Bandini (1440-1489) as an important priest and diplomat who served as “master of wine” (archytriclinus) for the Symposium given in the spirit of Plato.
I was among the company when you, Bindaccio Ricasoli, our Giovanni Cavalcanti and many other members of the Academy sat down to the feast. Of the many different things we discussed at that gathering, I often reflect especially on the conclusion we reached before the feast, about the nature of the soul. I will gladly remind you of it now, for nothing befits a man more than discourse on the soul. Thus the Delphic injunction ‘Know thyself’ is fulfilled and we examine everything else, whether above or beneath the soul, with deeper insight. For how can we understand anything else fully unless we understand the soul itself, through which everything must be understood? Does not a man abuse the soul by not devoting himself to its study, when it is by means of the soul and for its sake that he wants to understand everything else?

We all agreed there that the reasonable soul is set on a horizon, that is the line dividing the eternal and temporal, because it has a nature midway between the two. Being in the middle, this nature is not only capable of rational power and action, which lead up to the eternal, but also of energies and activities which descend to the temporal. Since these divergent tendencies spring from opposing natures, we see the soul turning at one moment to the eternal and at another to the temporal and so we understand rightly that it partakes of the nature of both. Our Plato placed the higher part of the soul under the authority of Saturn, that is in the realm of mind and divine providence, and the lower part under Jupiter, in the realm of life and fate. Because of this the soul seems to have a double aspect, one of gold, one of silver. The former looks toward the Saturnine the later toward the Jovial. But this looking carries both desire and judgment. It is better to love eternal things than to judge them, for they are very difficult to judge rightly but they can never be wrongly loved. They can never be loved too much; indeed they cannot be loved enough until they are loved passionately. But it is better to judge temporal things than to desire them. Usually they are judged well enough, but basely loved. A judge takes within himself the form of the object being judged, whereas the lover transports himself into the form of the beloved. It is better to raise to ourselves inferior things by judging them, than to cast ourselves down through loving them. It is better to raise ourselves to higher things through love than to reduce them to our level by judgment.

Farewell.

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457 The Letters of Marsilio Ficino, 1975, p. 224 (Cavalcanti) and p. 231 (Ricasoli) notes both of these individuals as members of Ficino’s Academy, with an important role of influence being played by Giovanni Cavalcanti (1444-1509), with whom Ficino had been in love since the young man had been a mere seven years of age. Son of a Florentine nobleman, Cavalcanti became a statesman and diplomat and was a source of inspiration for Ficino’s intense contemplations regarding the nature of both beauty and love. Bindaccio Ricasoli (1444-1524) catalogued Ficino’s works in 1493, and was an associate of Ficino’s early biographer, Giovanni Corsi.

458 Ibid., p. 217 cites: “See Plato, Timeus, 34B, 36E, seq., describing the creation of the soul.”

459 Ibid., p. 217, note 4 explains: “Like Janus having two faces’ in the Italian manuscript.”
But before I draw to a close I beg you, my Bracciolini, not to lose your enthusiasm for writing history, now that you have begun. For historians praise the style of your prose and the subject itself is very necessary for the life of mankind, not only to make it more agreeable but to found it upon tradition. What is in itself mortal, through history attains immortality; what is absent becomes present, what is ancient becomes new. A young man quickly matches the full development of the old; and if an old man of seventy is considered wise because of his experience of life, how much wiser is he who covers a span of a thousand years or three thousand years. For each man seems to have lived for as many thousands of years as the span of history he has studied.

Once more, farewell.
MARSILIO FICINO’S LETTER TO PEREGRINO AGLI


De divino furore On Divine Frenzy
Marsilio Ficino to Peregrino Agli: greetings.

On November 29th my father, Ficino the doctor, brought to me at Figline two letters from you, one in verse and the other in prose. Having read these, I heartily congratulate our age for producing a young man whose name and fame may render it illustrious.

Indeed, my dearest Peregrino, when I consider your age and those things which come from you every day, I not only rejoice but much marvel at such great gifts in a friend. I do not know which of the ancients whose memory we respect, not to mention men of our own time, achieved so much at your age. This I ascribe not just to study and technique, but much more to divine frenzy. Without this, say Democritus and Plato, no man has ever been great. The powerful emotion and burning desire which your writings express prove, as I have said, that you re inspired and inwardly possessed by that frenzy; and this power, which is manifested in external movements, the ancient philosophers maintained was the most potent proof that the divine force dwelt in our souls. But since I have mentioned this frenzy, I shall relate the opinion of our Plato about it in a few words, with that brevity which a letter demands; so that you may easily understand what it is, how many kinds of it there are, and which god is responsible for each. I am sure that this description will not only please you, but also be of the very greatest use to you. Plato considers, as Pythagoras, Empedocles, and Heraclitus maintained earlier, that our soul, before it descended into bodies, dwelt in the abodes of heaven where, as Socrates says in the Phaedrus, it was nourished and rejoiced in the contemplation of truth.


Those philosophers I have just mentioned had learnt from Mercurius Trismegistus, the wisest of all Egyptians, that God is the supreme source and light within whom shine the models of all things, which they call ideas. Thus, they believed, it followed that the soul, in steadfastly contemplating the eternal mind of God, also beholds with greater clarity the natures of all things. So, according to Plato, the soul saw justice itself, wisdom, harmony, and the marvellous beauty of the divine nature. And sometimes he calls all these natures “ideas”, sometimes ‘divine essences’, and sometimes ‘first natures which exist in the eternal mind of God’. The minds of men, while they are there, are well nourished with perfect knowledge. But souls are depressed into bodies through thinking about and desiring earthly things. Then those who were previously fed on ambrosia and nectar, that is the perfect knowledge and bliss of God, in their descent are said to drink continuously of the river Lethe, that is, forgetfulness of the divine. They do not fly back to heaven, whence they fell by weight of their earthly thoughts, until they begin to contemplate once more those divine natures which they have forgotten. The divine philosopher considers we achieve this through two virtues, one relating to moral conduct and the other to contemplation; one he names with a common term “justice”, and the other ‘wisdom’. For this reason, he says, souls fly back to heaven on two wings, meaning, as I understand it, these virtues; and likewise Socrates teaches in Phaedo that we acquire these by the two parts of philosophy; namely the active and the contemplative. Hence he says again in Phaedrus that only the mind of a philosopher regains wings. On recovery of these wings, the soul is separated from the body by their power. Filled with God, it strives with all its might to reach the heavens, and thither it is drawn. Plato calls this drawing away and striving ‘divine frenzy’, and he divides it into four parts. He thinks that men never remember the divine unless they are stirred by its shadows or images, as they may be described, which are perceived by the bodily senses.

Paul and Dionysius, the wisest of the Christian theologians, affirm that the invisible things of God are understood from what has been made and is to be seen here, but

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462 Ibid., p. 206, note 3, which reads: “Hermes Trismegistus, Pimander, 6-8.”

463 Ibid., p. 206, note 4, which reads: “In the Republic, V. 476, seq., Plato describes ideas as the unchanging forms of justice, goodness, beauty, etc., of which the manifestations we perceive are shadows. They alone are the objects of real knowledge. See also Plato, Timaeus, 28, seq. The substance of this letter is drawn from Plato’s Phaedrus, 244-56, and Phaedo, 81-3, 66-8.”

464 Ibid., p. 206, note 5, which reads: “Phaedrus, 247.”

465 Ibid., p. 206, note 6, which reads: “Phaedo 66-8, 82.”

466 Ibid., p. 206, note 7, which reads: “Phaedrus 249.”

467 Ibid., p. 206, note 8, which reads: “Phaedrus 244-5.”

468 Ibid., p. 206, note 9, which reads: “This Dionysius was, in the 15th century wrongly believed to be St. Paul’s Athenian convert (Acts 17:34). He was in fact a Christian Neoplatonist of the 5th century A.D., whose writings were much studied by Christian theologians.”
Plato says that the wisdom of men is the image of divine wisdom. He thinks that the harmony which we make with musical instruments and voices is the image of divine harmony, and that the symmetry and comeliness that arise from the perfect union of the parts and members of the body are an image of divine beauty. (The quote transcribed here only reiterates what is written through page 44 of the text. The letter, written on December 1, 1457 at Figline, continues to page 48.)

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