

Cassirer's *Mirandola*  
44.

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For Part I, see LTP 1945:2, p. 131  
II.

Cassirer's Presentation of Pico

Now that we have seen at least a general sketch of Cassirer's idea of history, it should be evident that the doctrines found in Cassirer's article are those of Cassirer himself rather than those of Pico. Bearing this in mind, we can proceed to a consideration of the article itself. For the benefit of the reader who may not have read Cassirer's article it will be advantageous first of all to give a summary of the article, using, in so far as possible, Cassirer's own words.

The article, bearing the title Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and the subtitle A Study in the History of Renaissance Ideas, is composed of an introduction (pp. 123-131) and three chapters: Chapter I, The One and the Many -- God and the World (pp. 131-134); Chapter II, The Idea of the Microcosm and the "Dignity of Man" (pp. 319-338); and Chapter III, the Natural Philosophy of Pico and His Polemic Against Astrology (pp. 338-346). Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, we are told in the introduction, was one of the most remarkable figures of the Renaissance, but what is really significant in his thought is not bounded by the Renaissance, for he seems to announce and represent a decidedly new way of thinking. He himself held to the idea of a philosophia perennis and to the idea of an eternal and immutable Truth; hence what is characteristic in him is not the way in which he in-

creased philosophical truth, but the way in which he made it manifest. His nine hundred theses, treating of every kind of question and including the most incompatible elements, seem at first sight to form only a confused mass bounded by no intellectual form. A closer examination, however, reveals that it is precisely in this extravagance and excess that a new and distinctive way of thinking comes to light. He seems to have attempted to include all the intellectual forces which had cooperated in establishing religious, philosophical, and scientific knowledge. He knows no dogmatic restriction or limitation, for he was convinced that in the polyphony composed of all the great minds of the past could truth be seen.

Having studied all the great masters, he came to terms with all the important intellectual trends of his time but adhered to none in such a way as to exclude the others. Because of this comprehensiveness he has been designated an eclectic whose philosophy is devoid of any distinctive unifying principle or inner form. But this is an evaluation which might be formed only when, instead of judging Pico's thought by purely historical standards, we approach it with genuinely systematic claims. The purpose of the present article (Cassirer's) is to show that there is in Pico's philosophy a distinctive principle which unites all these apparently very divergent strains. This principle, it is true, is deeply concealed and can be brought out only by an analysis of the particular ideas and strains in Pico's thought.

The first of these is treated in the first chapter on the One and the Many - God and the World. The ideas of the One and the Many, Cassirer continues, form the two poles about which all philosophic and religious thinking revolves. Metaphysics and theology endeavor, in different ways and by different means, to grasp and clarify the relation between the Ultimate First Cause, which can be conceived only as absolutely One, and the multiplicity of things, their extension in space and their duration in time. Any attempt at a solution of this problem runs the danger of ending in a contradiction or of being left with only one of the two poles, as were the Eleatics.

Christian speculation rests on the assumptions and the ideas which the Greek thought worked out; but its aim is from the outset different from that of Greek dialectic and metaphysics for it does not inquire, in the same sense as the dialectic thinking, in to the "Why" of the world and plurality. This "Why" cannot be grasped by pure thought. In the beginning was the "Deed", was the free act of the Divine Will by which the world came into being and reason cannot venture to deduce this free act from its own principles as something necessary. It is an absolutely unique event, "irrational", and is known only by revelation. But philosophic thought could not rest with this simple line of division between faith and reason, and all medieval philosophy is filled with attempts to solve the problem of the One and the Many, for although the content of revelation is not

derived from reason, it must not be absolutely inaccessible and impenetrable to reason. The genuinely Christian orthodox solution is determined by the category of creation. If this category is accepted, any real "dualism" between the One and the Many is avoided, for by creation God is in no way dissipated or lost in anything different from Himself.

Quite different from this conception is the relation of unity and plurality in all those systems which begin with the idea of emanation. In these the relation more closely approaches the rationally comprehensible, for emanation stands not in the sign of freedom, but in that of necessity. In these there is no free decree, but Being is simply following its own "nature", according to the necessity of its own essence, in passing beyond itself and allowing something else to arise out of itself. This is accomplished in a firmly ordered series in which no step can be passed over as it leads from the One to the Many.

The whole intellectual outlook of Pico is saturated with these Dionysian ideas but intermingled with them is Averroism. In Averroism the whole problem of unity and plurality ceases to exist. For Averroism there could be no question of a "cause" of nature in the transcendent sense, for nature as such has no beginning in time; and the only thing with which Averroism concerned itself was an insight into the strict determinism of all occurrences, which follows from the general determinations of matter and motion, which are eternal.

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These three positions are incompatible one with another, but we find the three of them in Pico's philosophy. Pico, however, was able to employ at the same time the idea of creation, the idea of emanation, and the ideas of Arabian rationalism and naturalism because he did not take them simply in their previously accepted meaning, but related them to a definite ideal center, and by thus relating them transformed and enriched them. For Pico no one of these was the complete or exclusive solution of the problem of God and the World; rather they are all significant as particular moments in the new solution he is seeking. And the distinctive category under which he subsumed his doctrine of God, of the world and of man, his theology and his psychology is the category of *s y m b o l i c t h o u g h t*. Once we ascertain this central point of his thinking, all the different parts of his doctrine immediately coalesce into one whole.

The problem of unity and plurality now takes on a new significance. It is no longer a question of trying to show how unity contains plurality in a substantial sense, but rather to show the Many as expressions, as images, as symbols of the One. What Pico is trying to show is that only in this mediate and symbolic way can the absolutely One and absolutely unconditioned Being manifest itself to human knowledge. This idea of symbolism leads to distinctive and radical consequences. In the medium of this symbolic form of knowledge the fixed dogmatic content of the Church's teaching in a

sense becomes fluid. Whatever is substantial and sacramental is dissolved and becomes an intimation, an image of what is purely spiritual. These ideas had a marked effect on the transformation of doctrine, especially in Zwingli.

Although the central role which symbolic thinking plays in Pico's thought shows his close relationship to Cusanus, it is the difference between the two which is important here. While Cusanus always remained a strict apriorist, still the use of the principle of symbolic thinking and the principle of the *coincidentia oppositorum* transported him into the field of mathematical thinking which led him to the understanding of a new form of empirical knowledge. The use of these same principles took Pico in a different direction. It took him to the study of the human soul. According to Pico the soul has two fundamental forms of comprehending. The one "natural" way turns to the things of the external world and tries to represent them in images, by means of perceptions and phantasms; these phantasms are then compared by the discursive intellect and reduced to classes. But our knowledge of God and of our soul differs in principle from this natural way. Here rules a supersensible knowledge which is alone able to disclose the supersensible nature of the soul. Pico was convinced that the knowledge of God must be seized in the obscure depths of the human soul; and it was precisely here that he accomplished his peculiar achievement which carried him far beyond his mystical and Neo-Platonic sources and made of him

the herald of a new ideal of human freedom.

In the second chapter, "The Idea of the Microcosm and the Dignity of Man", Cassirer tells us that Pico's new ideal of freedom is set forth in his De hominis dignitate. The image of man as a microcosm, there set forth, is not new; but Pico's genius lies in the fact that he gave this idea a new interpretation. Taken literally, the older interpretation would really destroy the distinctive nature of man by making him a *mixtum compositum* with nothing proper to his own nature. The important thing for Pico is not to prove man's similarity to the rest of nature, but rather his difference from it. The special privilege of man, distinguishing him from both the natural and spiritual world, consists in this that he owes his moral character to himself. He is what he makes of himself and he derives from himself the pattern he shall follow. This doctrine is to be found especially in his De Dignitate Hominis.

The expression "likeness to God" now receives a new meaning, for it isn't something given by God to man at his creation : it is an achievement to be brought about by man himself. Just the ability, rooted in his nature, to bring about this achievement, is the highest gift man owes to Divine grace. In the theory of creation, as in that of emanation, man appears either as the result of a free act of a Being outside and above him or as the link in a necessary process of development. Here, on the contrary, both kinds

of dependence are excluded; man owes his deepest being to his own acts. Pico now sees human freedom as something higher than every kind of natural necessity. This is the theme he treats again and again, especially in his work against astrology. The whole of his work is determined by that one underlying theme; his metaphysics, psychology, theology, and ethics are but the continuous and consistent unfolding of it. To see this clearly we need a thorough analysis which will follow this theme in all its variations.

We might first ask what is the relation of the principles of "*docta ignorantia*" and of "*coincidentia oppositorum*" (which govern the entire structure of Pico's philosophy) to his ethics and his idea of human freedom. Both these principles had long dominated theological thought; but what had been negative principles of theology, Nicholas of Cusa turned into positive principles of natural philosophy, cosmology, and epistemology. With them he made merely relative Aristotle's essential and radical distinction between motion in a straight line and motion in a curved line, and so forth. Pushed to infinity, straight and curved are only relatively distinct, since a circle with an infinite radius coincides with a straight line, and an infinitely small arc is indistinguishable from its cord. The principles Cusanus applied to nature, Pico applies to the specifically human world, to the world of history. Cusanus' underlying idea in a sense is transferred from the field of space to that of time so that the moments of time are equivalent to each other. Man's nature and



his specific dignity can be judged only when we dissolve the fixed temporal distinctions, the now, the before, and the after, and see all in a single vision. In this "seeing together" is first revealed the full meaning of human freedom. And this same idea holds for historical epochs. From each epoch to the next an intellectual heritage is handed down in an uninterrupted chain. But just as God did not give to man his greatest gift already made but expected him to achieve it independently for himself, so history does not give man goods already made. The intellectual heritage must be faithfully guarded and handed down, but each epoch has the right and the duty to appropriate it in independence - to understand it in its own way and to increase it in its own way. Pico expressly states that no other way of knowing truth is given to man. Indeed, he almost anticipates the saying of Lessing that not the possession of truth but the search after it is the vocation and the lot of man. Man will not so much possess as endeavor to earn; he will not so much know as inquire. Here we can see the influence of the Platonic doctrine of Eros. This form of love which consists in seeking, not in possessing, gives man that worth in which he need yield to no other being, for nothing can be higher than that spiritual power of the will; by it man can be what he chooses.

From this fundamental starting point a number of important consequences follow. There is no longer any fixed body of basic dogma which is to be defended under all circumstances. What Pico is seeking is the free movement of dialectic thought. He claims

the right of free inquiry for himself as for every other thinker. The teachings of the Fathers are to be accepted with due respect, but they are not of such authority and immobility that they cannot be doubted or contradicted. Thus even in religious dogma there is no real infallibility or "immobility". Faith too, like knowledge, has its history, and only in its totality can its inner truth emerge. Pico manifests this same independence towards Humanism. He insists that no one epoch can claim to represent the whole of mankind. The whole is to be found only in the totality of its intellectual history.

In the quarrel between the Platonists and the Aristotelians Pico embraced neither side to the exclusion of the other. This attitude is deeper than mere toleration and follows immediately from his idea of human freedom which makes possible and demands a new form of individualism. Just as it holds for mankind as a whole, so the principle holds for the individual that he cannot be assigned to a fixed and determined place in a realm of spirit : each must seek his position independently. There are no intellectual heretics. The intellect can be moved to accept a proposition only when from determinate grounds it produces in itself the conviction of that proposition; and it is not in man's power to accept or reject even a proposition of faith on external grounds. Individual inquiry is therefore indispensable for the subsistence of every truth, whether philosophical or religious; and every individual who has sincerely sought for truth is worthy of respect because he is an intellectual

microcosm mirroring the entire world of ideas.

If we reexamine Pico's "Oratio" we see that what is really important in it lies less in what is immediately contains than in what is passed over in silence. That man was created a free being and that his likeness to God consists in this freedom is the universally accepted doctrine of theologians - but they immediately add that man lost this privilege by the Fall. Man is forever driven from the paradise of innocence and freedom, and by his own powers cannot get back. Only a supernatural work of Grace can raise him up again. For Pico man's sinfulness is not an indelible stain on his nature; it is only the counterpart to something higher : he must be capable of sin that he may be capable of good. He is never secure in good, nor is he over a hopeless prey to evil; the way to both lies open to him, and the decision is in his own power. There can never be a termination of this process. Man's freedom consists in the uninterrupted creativity he exercises on himself and at no point can it come to a complete cessation.

The novelty of this idea of almost unlimited power of transformation is not so much its content as the value Pico places upon it. He completely reverses the conventional metaphysical and theological scale of values. In this scale the highest and indeed only true value belonged to what was eternal and immutable. Multiplicity, mutability and inconstancy in human activity were but signs of its vanity. For Pico, however, this inner unrest in man, impelling him from one goal to another, from one form to another, is no stigma or

weakness; it is really the mark of human greatness. This reversal of value is based on Pico's distinction between the realm of "Nature" and the realm of "Freedom", which must be measured by different standards. For natural things, for merely physical things, perpetual flux does mean a limitation and a privation of being, because they do not preserve their self-identity, and their change is brought about by an external power. But this manner of compulsion is transcended in human activity and production. Man is not merely a subject of passive becoming; he is the determiner of his own goal; he chooses the form he will bring forth, and then realizes it in free activity. This mutability, taken as the power of self-transformation, constitutes not man's weakness, but his greatness.

We can understand how such a view must have affected the aesthetics and the theory of art of the Renaissance. It contains nothing less than a kind of theodicy of art. Art is no longer derived from the pleasure in the imitation of the varied multiplicity of things; it is the expression and the revelation of the primary "creative" nature of man, for in his capacity to produce for himself a new world of forms is expressed his innate freedom.

It is obvious that at the same time the temporal character and "historical nature" of man receives a new meaning and value. Renaissance philosophy had developed the idea that, instead of the soul being in time, time was in the soul, because the soul produced from itself not only the ideas of number and magnitude

but also that of time. For Pico history is not mere fate, nor is time the mere external framework in which this fate is worked out. History is the sum total of the intellectual forms man produces for himself. In history, therefore, man is not merely subject to the temporality and transitoriness of things; he is free, because, although his nature is mutable, it is he himself who changes it.

The transcendence of God also takes on a new meaning. The absolute transcendence of God Pico never contested. No predicate of the finite can be applied to God. But there is one form of understanding which escapes this criticism; there is one basic intellectual phenomenon by which we are not only related to God but are actually one with Him. Human freedom is of such a kind that any increase in its meaning or value is impossible. Thus, when Pico ascribes to man an independent and innate creative power, he has made him in this one fundamental respect equal to Divinity. There is now applicable to God a positive predicate which will change negative theology. Now the entire world of Neo-Platonic ideas falls into flux. Even "immanence" and "transcendence" are opposites which must be overcome and transcended according to the "coincidentia oppositorum". Man as a creative being has risen above this opposition. In the extent of his creation he is infinitely removed from God, but in the fact, in the quality of it, he feels himself most intimately related to God.

What Cusanus had done with the principle of

the "coincidentia oppositorum" in Cosmology and Physics, Pico does in the historical and intellectual world. This now appears as a unified whole - like an infinite circle whose center is everywhere and whose periphery is nowhere because it is being constantly extended. And even if the end is never reached, we are still at every point within truth. The real outcome of this movement is first presented in Leibniz.

In the third chapter, The Natural philosophy of Pico and his Polemic against Astrology, Cassirer says that Pico's conception of the world of intellectual history forms the real center of his thought and upon it rests what distinctive and novel ideas he bestowed on modern philosophy. His natural philosophy has only a subordinate role. Even in his celebrated Adversus Astrologos it was his doctrine of freedom, not any empirical observation, which accomplished the overthrow of false astrology. In this work Pico makes a distinction between the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom, each of which has its own laws. Everything physical is subject to strict necessity; everything spiritual rests on freedom. The world of man, the world of science, of art, of religion - everything created by man - must rely on symbolic interpretation and be expressed in pictures and symbols. The nature of the corporeal, however, is no sum of "meanings"; it is a connected chain of causes and effects, and to know them we must follow this chain link for link without introducing anything of a different order. As a natural being man is indeed a vanishing nothing, but as a thinking being he stands far above the

stars and heavens and cannot be influenced by them. His work is the result of his own free will, not the result of the stars or the gift of higher powers. Everything intellectual comes from God and must be attributed to Him immediately - even nature, even the heavens must be rejected as an intermediary. It is interesting to note that Pico's speculative doctrine of human freedom was more effective against magic and astrology than was Kepler's mathematical conception of nature.

In summing up his position on Pico, Cassirer maintains that Pico was no "modern" thinker, that he stands within scholasticism and that he not only clung to and defended the form of scholastic philosophy but also preserved its matter. But this did not hinder him from accomplishing in the whole of his thinking something that proved significant and pointed to the future. The great influence which Pico exerted on subsequent thought could be exercised only by a philosophy which, quite apart from its temporal limitations and its debt to the past, contained a new way of thinking and tried to make this way prevail.

## III

The One and the Many

## 1.

The General Problem

In the first chapter of this article Cassirer discovers the peculiar principle which binds all the seemingly contradictory elements in Pico's philosophy. This binding principle is, according to Cassirer, the principle of symbolic thought. This deeply concealed principle becomes evident to Cassirer from a consideration of the problem of the One and the Many as found in Pico. Regarding this one problem Pico's philosophy embraces elements from the doctrines of creation, emanation and Averroism. Since these three doctrines, taken in their formerly accepted meaning, are absolutely incompatible, and since Pico was too keen a thinker not to recognize this incompatibility, it follows, since he did actually combine them in one explanation, that he did not accept these doctrines in their accepted meaning but only in their spiritualized form under which they issue forth from this homogenizing process of symbolic thought. The incompatibility of these three different explanations of the One and the Many, then, is Cassirer's chief reason for attributing to Pico a new way of knowledge.

In the following pages we shall examine



Cassirer's statement of this problem, for, by what we think is a misstatement of it, he has already predetermined the solution of it to his own position. This consideration of his presentation of the problem will be practically a running commentary on his text; and to avoid an excessive number of footnotes, the reference to the pages of the texts commented on will be given in the body of the text.

At the beginning of the first chapter

(page 131) Cassirer says :

"The ideas of the One and the Many form the two poles about which all philosophical and religious thinking revolves. Metaphysics and theology endeavor, in different ways and by different means, to grasp and clarify the relation between the ultimate First Cause of things, which can be conceived only as absolutely One, and the multiplicity of things, their extension in space and their duration in time. But whenever thought attacks this problem, it is in danger of being caught in an antimony, in a final and insoluble contradiction. Instead of the intended reconciliation of opposites, on closer analysis one term of the opposition seems to disappear, and thus the whole problem appears to evaporate. If the "First Cause" is really to be conceived as such, i.e., if it is to mean not only the temporal origin of Being, but also its persisting and enduring "Principle", if it is to be that on which all continuance of reality depends and that which it requires at every moment for its existence and character; this means that we cannot effect any real detachment of the Many from the One. The Many must be not only externally dependent on the One. They must remain ever included within it; all the reality we attribute to them they must owe to the One. Hence the Many have scarcely come into being before they must in a sense be taken back once more into the bosom of the One Cause of the World. The latter can suffer nothing besides or outside itself. For any being different from itself, anything that is not itself, would mean a limitation; and this can and must not take place in the absolute and unconditioned Being, which is assumed to be the totality of all perfection, the ens realissimum et perfectissimum."

In the first sentence of the above passage

Cassirer makes a very profound statement; but in all fairness to historical and theoretical truth we must immediately add that the

problem of the One and the Many is incomparably more profound and complex, from both the historical and theoretical point of view, than can possibly be gleaned from Cassirer's strange and disturbing over-simplification of it. Even if we confined ourselves to the problem of the One and the Many in Greek philosophy from Pythagoras to Aristotle, we should see that it could not possibly fit into Cassirer's formulation of it. The very statement of the problem is extremely varied, and the solutions arrived at are far from being answers to the same question. The complexity of the problem stands out clearly in Aristotle where he places strong emphasis on the distinction between the "one" which is convertible with being, the subject of first philosophy which is in turn divided into act and potency, substance and accidents, et cetera and the "one" which is the principle of number. This distinction is based in his discussions with the Platonists, and has remained crucial throughout the Middle Ages and even up to our own day in all discussions concerning the analogy or univocity of being. Furthermore, Aristotle's distinction is no less definite between the being that is the subject of first philosophy and the Being which is the extrinsic principle of that subject, namely, Pure Act, the self-thinking thought, the final cause of all things which attracts by its goodness. (1) Hence the "One" which is pure act and the "one" which is convertible with being raise and answer very different questions; and the former will obviously depend upon the latter.

Cassirer in his treatment of the One and

the Many has limited himself to the question of God and the World. Since his statements concerning the problem seem to be, in a general way at least, exhaustive of the subject, it is disconcerting to notice that he not only neglects Aristotle's distinction between potency and act as his answer to this natural problem of the one and the many, but that he does not even mention what we shall call the noetic problem which concerns the one and many in the means of knowing. However, since for Cassirer the so-called metaphysical oppositions are really only logical correlations, it is quite possible that he considers the problem of the One (God) and the Many (the world) as the naive explanation of what is actually the one and many in the noetic order. If he does this, he is identifying the "modus rei" with the "modus rei in intellectu", as the Platonists had done before him.

When he says "Metaphysics and theology endeavor, in different ways and by different means, to grasp and clarify the relation between the ultimate First Cause of things" etc., he does not make clear what he means by metaphysics -whether he means metaphysics in the primitive stage, or as we find it in Aristotle, or as the scholastics understood it. Neither does he make explicit what he understands by theology - whether it is the one which is a branch of metaphysics or the one whose principles are revealed truths.

(2) We might also ask why he has confined the multiplicity of things to those which have extension in time and place. The Ideas of Plato were not conceived as being in a place, and historically at least, they were related to the problem of the one and the many.

"Whenever thought attempts to solve this problem", he continues, "it is in danger of being caught in an antinomy, in a final and insoluble contradiction." It is true that there is a danger of being caught in an insoluble contradiction, but Cassirer fails to show that there is a contradiction involved even when these terms are taken in their substantial sense. He is content merely to suggest that there is one and treat it from afar -- like the hero's ignorance of the circumstances of Laius' death in Oedipus.

When speaking of the proposed reconciliation between the one and the many, Cassirer does not specify what reconciliation was intended, nor why an opposition of contrariety should even call for any reconciliation. Even in his treatment of the One and the Many as limited to God and the World he does not demonstrate that on closer analysis one term of the opposition seems to disappear in so far as it loses its independence, its absolute givenness, the real being of itself. One of the reasons Cassirer gives for his statement that one of the terms seems to disappear is that if we really conceive the First Cause as such, there can be no real detachment of the many from the One. Certainly, if we conceive the First Cause as a First Cause, the Many of the World, while having their own being, cannot have it a se. But why should this imply that they are not distinct from the One? The burden seems to be in the meaning assigned to the word "distinction." If "distinct from" means "Wholly of and by oneself," then the Many and the One cannot be distinct from the One; nevertheless it would still be Cassirer's task to show that they would

be identical. Since he has posed the problem in terms of God and the World, he has avoided the general metaphysical problem, and it is difficult to see how he can discuss his own problem without having considered the more general problem. It is in terms of this more general problem that Aristotle and the scholastics solved the one in which Cassirer is interested.

As a further reason that we should be left with only one term of the contradiction, Cassirer continues :

"The Many must be not only externally dependent on the One. They must remain ever included within it; all the reality we attribute to them they must owe to the One. Hence the Many have scarcely come into being before they must in a sense be taken back once more into the bosom of the One Cause of the World."

Cassirer here seems to oversimplify in more imaginative terms an extremely complex reality. Creatures are indeed externally dependent on the One as regards their whole being, for their very "esse in se" is "ab alio." Their whole being is but a participation of the being of the One and has been produced out of nothing according to the divine exemplar. The One is in the many but not of the many. It is in the many by the fact that it is their universal cause; it is not there as a part of them but as the principle from which they have their total being. Furthermore, to say that the many must ever remain included in the One should not be taken to mean that they are a part of it. That would be a rather naive acceptance of the expression "to be included in". The word "scarcely" in the last sentence just quoted is also worthy of note. It seems to denote that there is an

interval between the coming into being and the being taken back into the bosom of the One. This "coming into being from" here designates absolutely universal efficient causality and the negation of any subject "from which". It requires no takingback-into. The many, coming into being, are never separated from the One, although they are wholly distinct from it. Since the One is their absolutely universal cause, it is more in them than they are in themselves. A return to the One in this sense is meaningless; the many do not have to be taken back into the bosom of the One in this sense because they were never outside it. We can speak of a return to the One in the sense that the One is the final cause of the many. It would also be true to say that the many were never taken out of the One because they were never in it. This "coming from" and "being taken back" are not different movements, as Cassirer's imaginative presentation insinuates.

In the last part of the paragraph quoted above Cassirer explains that the One can suffer nothing outside itself, for that would mean a limitation - a thing which must not take place concerning the being which is assumed to be the totality of perfection. It is true that the First Cause can suffer nothing outside itself in the sense that there is no being which is not "from it" and wholly dependent on it. Furthermore, there could not be a being which did not have some likeness to the First Cause, for being is one in a sense which Cassirer has neglected to consider. If there were a being outside the scope of analogy, the one cause of the world would not be the universal exemplary cause. While Cassirer says that anything that is

not the one cause of the world would mean a limitation, the truth of the matter is that the One would be seriously limited if it were made up of the Many. When the absolute and unconditioned being is assumed to be the totality of perfection, it is certainly not so in the simplistic sense which Cassirer must suppose in order to set it forth as a glaring contradiction.

On page 132 Cassirer continues his presentation of the problem :

"Hence for the 'One' to pass beyond itself, and for the many to proceed out of the One, cannot be conceived in strictly rational terms. Every such proceeding would be either a diminution of the One's own nature, or a multiplying of this nature. And how would a multiplication be possible in what is assumed to be self-contained and perfect? Greek philosophy from the days of Parmenides felt such a multiplication to be contradictory and rejected it. 'It is the same, and it rests in the self-same place.' Each of the great systems that have followed the Eleatics has brought every resource to bear on freeing Being again from this absolute uniformity and fixity, and on indicating in Being the 'possibility' of plurality and change. But this 'gigantomachy' of thought, as Plato described it in the Sophist, has led to no final solution. None of the attempts at mediation between the opposite poles of unity and plurality, of Being and Becoming, can resolve the contradiction."

Here again, as we have already pointed out, to speak of the One's passing beyond itself is an ambiguous statement and raises a false problem. The same is true of the expression "to proceed out of the One" if it is to be conceived as entailing a diminution of the One's own nature or as a multiplying of this nature.

Cassirer appears to be considering this

whole problem in purely spatial imagery and to suppose that the ancients had done the same. There can be little doubt but that he is infusing into these words and concepts his own "inner feeling" with its consequent "new sound and new meaning." Since he claims, in accordance with his idea of history, the right to assume that this is the historically objective meaning and truth, we can have no quarrel with him from there on.

It is very true that the procession of the effects from the One First Cause, even as we conceive this procession, is unknowable to us as to the exact "how." We cannot visualize it ; we know that we are compelled to conceive it by using the most inadequate comparisons; hence we do not expect to be able to "rationalize" this procession. This was already indicated by Dionysius and illuminatively commented on by St. Thomas. (3) If we want to conceive this procession in a manner more accessible to us, we cannot, as St. Thomas explains, conceive it but as a kind of movement. This representation becomes necessary because we wish to understand the procession as much as possible according to our own mode. The necessity of this movement is comparable to the case of someone who, being close to the objects, cannot see them all at the same time as the one who sees them from above, but must view their unity by means of a succession. The objects are all there, but he cannot be present to them all at the same time, i.e., he cannot see them all at the same time without motion. When we recur to such means of conceiving objects, we must not fail to note



those things which are due solely to the fact that they have been lowered to our rational mode. (4)

In the paragraph just quoted, Cassirer suddenly narrows down the problem of the One and Many to the problem as raised by Parmenides. He seems not to consider later solutions to this problem, and even Parmenides' position is not stated completely. In the fragments of Parmenides one observes that while he holds that alone to be being which "is" without qualification, he also recognizes another realm, the realm of becoming, the realm of doxa, in which there is no being in the first sense of the word, but in which there are multiplicity, difference, and contrariety.

Another item to be remarked in this same paragraph is that the step from the Being of Parmenides to the being of Aristotle, i.e., to being, the subject of metaphysics and to his being which is pure act and the self-thinking thought, is not so simple as Cassirer would have the reader understand. Being which is the subject of metaphysics, primarily substance, is by no means the Pure Act, the extrinsic principle of that subject. The Unmoved Mover has absolute fixity; while the possibility of plurality and change is on the part of predicamental being. As Aristotle pointed out against the Parmenideans in the second chapter of I Physics, "'one' itself, no less than 'being', is used in many senses, so we must consider in what sense the word is used when it is said that the All is one." The rest of that chapter and the following chapter are concerned with

this problem. All this is apparently ignored by Cassirer; and we wonder why, unless the reason is that it would not form a harmonious part in the historical process toward his own ideas.

Once Cassirer has posed the problem, attributing to being, taken in the same sense, all the attributes which belong to it in the various senses distinguished by Aristotle, it is true that, as he says, there is no solution to it. However, it matters little that there is no solution to this conception of the problem, for it is quite clear that this is Cassirer's own idealistic construction of the problem which is intended to predetermine the solution in the direction he desires.

Faith and Creation.

After having stated to his own satisfaction the general problem of the One and Many, he begins his exposition of the doctrine of creation which is the first of the three solutions he is considering. As an introduction to this doctrine he says on page 132 :

"Christian speculation rests on the assumptions and the ideas which Greek thought worked out; and at every point it must clothe its own distinctive problem in the language of Greek thought, in order to make it accessible and comprehensible to the mind. But its aim is from the outset different from that of Greek dialectic and metaphysics. For it does not inquire, in the same sense as dialectic thinking, into the 'Why' of the world and the 'Why' of plurality. This 'Why' cannot be grasped by pure thought. In the beginning was the deed - was the free act of the Divine Will, through which the world came into being. Human reason cannot venture to 'conceive' this free act, i.e., to deduce it as necessary from its own concepts and principles. It remains an absolutely unique event, unparalleled, 'irrational'; it can be explained or understood through no analogy, through no comparison we encounter in the sphere of our finite, empirical knowledge. But the certainly of God's creation and incarnation is not thereby shaken. For it is derived not from rational demonstration but from a fundamentally different source of truth. It is founded on revelation."

In passing it should be remarked that in the beginning of this paragraph Cassirer has already made critical idealists of the Greeks. It will be freely admitted that Christian speculation does not attempt to infer the existence of the world as flowing of necessity from the divine nature, but it does inquire into the 'why' of this non-necessity; and this is rational. What the world is has its necessity from God; that it is has its necessity from the divine will. It is likewise

true that human reason cannot infer what freely comes about as coming about necessarily; but neither does the divine intelligence do so. God has the goodness and the power to produce the world; He has all the knowledge requisite for its production; He knows what His freedom is whether He exercises it or not. But by "to conceive" Cassirer seems to mean "to conceive as necessary"; it means to deduce something as necessary from reason's own concepts and principles - from what Cassirer considers to be the principles of reason. Human reason can infer that God is necessarily free and that it is absolutely necessary that He does not of necessity produce the world. The very perfection of the goodness of God, which is the reason why He can produce the world, is the reason why this goodness does not necessarily communicate itself.

When Cassirer says that the free act of the divine will is an absolutely unique event, the term "event" is obviously understood in a grossly anthropomorphic sense, since any act of the divine will is measured by eternity. To call it unparalleled is somewhat ambiguous. Certainly it is unparalleled as a divine free act, but we can explain it in a way through an analogy with our own free acts, which we know.

Since Cassirer has limited the term "to conceive" to mean deduction of something as necessary from the principles and concepts of human reason, he calls "irrational" anything which cannot be so conceived. Thus with one sweep he throws out of the

"rational" world the whole practical order which is rooted in the good.

In the last part of the paragraph quoted and in the following paragraph of his article Cassirer sets the whole problem of knowledge and faith in a false perspective. The certainty of creation and the Incarnation, he says, is not diminished, for though they cannot be rationally demonstrated, they are founded on faith. Cassirer's use of the expression "rational demonstration" here is ambiguous, to say the least. If he means that in Christian speculation it cannot be deduced from the principles of reason that the world exists necessarily by the necessity of the divine nature, as it would no doubt have to be done in his system to be "rational", we may point out that this same revelation of which he speaks teaches us that the world does not exist necessarily, but from the free decision of God. However, the same revelation which tells us that the world was created by God also tells us in the first chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans that the fact of creation can be demonstrated by natural reason.

It is interesting to note that, while treating the Christian view, Cassirer places creation and the Incarnation in the same category as if the scholastics had considered them thus. Whether Cassirer thinks they should have considered them both as formally dependent on revelation is beside the point; the fact of

the matter is that the scholastics did not consider that the fact of creation was a truth formally dependent on revelation. In St. Thomas, for instance, the problem of the One and the Many, as Cassirer has stated it, is a problem that can be treated in a strictly metaphysical manner, as may be seen clearly from his De Aeternitate mundi contra murrantes. For St. Thomas, revelation enters only when it is asked whether the world did or did not exist from all eternity, whether God created from all eternity coincidentally with a created measure of duration. Specifically Christian and genuinely orthodox speculation never attempted to reach beyond that. Regarding the metaphysical problem, St. Thomas showed that the existence or non-existence of the world from all eternity is a matter of divine free will. From revelation we know that actually the world did not exist from all eternity; but this revelation, in so far as it concerns the mere fact of creation, has no supernatural content whatsoever. The revelation of the fact of creation is not a revelation concerning the supernatural order as such. Whether the world had or had not existed from all eternity, then, was to be pointed out by revelation; but not even the fact that it was to be thus pointed out was formally a problem of revelation, for metaphysics itself could show that it was incapable of determining this particular aspect of the question.

When Cassirer on page 133 says :

"Thus there are now repeated on another level all the great typical attempts to solve the problem of the 'One' and the 'Many' ..... The specifically and genuinely orthodox solution is determined by the category of creation, ..."

he is again identifying two different problems of the one and the many. We have just seen that St. Thomas, for example, did not treat creation on another level; he treated it as rationally demonstrable and not as a doctrine which is specifically Christian in the sense that it is formally dependent on revelation. There is a specifically Christian problem of the One and the Many, but Cassirer does not mention it. This problem is one of sacred theology and has nothing to do with the problem of reason and revelation as Cassirer has stated it. It fundamentally concerns the One and the Many of the Blessed Trinity and the possibility of a participation by the intellectual creature in the life proper to the absolutely One. It is at this point that Cassirer should have been reminded of the double problem of the One and Many which was mentioned at the beginning of this critical commentary, for the Christian problem concerns the possibility of knowing and loving God by the light and the love of the One. As a matter of fact, it is only in the Christian speculation on the elevation of the intellectual creature to the supernatural order that the problem of the One and Many is carried on another level. And this is certainly not merely a continuation in which are repeated all the great attempts to solve the problem Cassirer referred to in the previous paragraphs. The specifically and genuinely orthodox solution of the problem of the One and the Many which we have called typically Christian, i.e. the One and the Many of the supernatural order or the noetic One and Many, has nothing to do with creation as Cassirer has understood the problem. Rather

it has to do with the participation by an intellectual creature in the life of God Himself.

In the following lines of his article Cassirer admits that if the doctrine of creation is accepted, the problem of God and the World is taken care of :

"If this category (creation) is accepted, any real dualism between the One and the Many, between God and the World, is thereby avoided. For creation is wholly transferred to the interior of the Divine Being; it nowise means that this Being is in any respect dissipated, or lost in anything different from itself.

The real and profound sense of 'creation ex nihilo' is this : in it the Divine Power is not bound to any substratum that could in any way condition or limit it. The world, plurality, has no substratum of that sort. For were such a substratum admitted, it would mean a kind of independence and self-sufficiency, by which the absolute dependence on God which is here to be displayed would be transformed into its opposite. If God is the content of all reality, there can be no matter 'given' to Him. This 'givenness', this material 'subject' for action, holds only for human art, which is thereby once and for all distinguished from genuine and absolute creation."

On the whole this explanation is true enough, but we must make two qualifications. In the first place we must repeat that in St. Thomas all this has nothing whatsoever to do with faith. He deduces creation ex nihilo from purely metaphysical reasons. If creation were not ex nihilo, God would not be Pure Act. Regardless of what Aristotle's position on the matter be held to be, it is quite evident that St. Thomas solves the problem in purely peripatetic terms. In the second place, the term 'content' is used ambiguously, to say the least; for if God is the content of creation in the sense that He is what is created, then it might be asked what the creation is the creation of.



Certainly, nothing can be given God, for He posits all that there is in creation, but this does not make Him the content of it - except in a very broad sense of the word, i.e. in the sense that He is the universal exemplary cause of all that is created, that all the being which creatures have, they have from Him; or that by His immensity He is in beings more than they are in themselves.

Necessity and Emanation.

After explaining creation in the manner we have just seen, Cassirer proceeds to a consideration of the theory of emanation which he displays as the second answer to the problem of the One and the Many as he has stated it. On page 134 he continues :

"Quite different from this conception is the relation of unity and plurality, of God and the world, in all those systems which start from the idea of emanation rather than of creation. Here the relation in a certain sense approaches more closely to the rationally comprehensible. For 'emanation' stands not in the sign of freedom, but in that of necessity..... Being is simply following its own 'nature' in passing beyond itself, in allowing something else to arise out of itself.... There is here a firmly ordered series, based on an intelligible principle : a scale of beings leading down from the One and the Many, in which no step can be passed over. To set up and establish this scale of being is the core of Neoplatonic speculation. This speculation, as it appears above all in the pseudo-Dionysian writings, in the work on the celestial hierarchy and on the hierarchy of the church, puts its stamp on all medieval thinking as well as on the thought of the Renaissance. The work of Pico della Mirandola and his whole intellectual development is completely saturated with the fundamental ideas and presuppositions of the Dionysian writings. The picture of the celestial choirs surrounding the highest Divine Being; the arrangement of the world in accordance with the different celestial spheres and the transmission of the effects from the above to the 'sublunar' earthly sphere : all this forms the basic framework of his metaphysics, his theology and cosmology."

A passage from Cassirer's Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance will throw light on this paragraph. Speaking of Dionysius the Areopagite's Divine Names and Celestial Hierarchy, he says :

"The importance of these works consists in the fact that here the two fundamental spiritual powers are motives on which the faith and science of the Middle Ages rest meet each other and coalesce, -- that here the peculiar concrescence of the Christian doctrine of salvation with Hellenic speculation is accomplished. What this

speculation, what, above all, Neo-platonism offered Christianity was the concept and the general picture of a graduated kosmos. The world was divided into a lower and a higher, a sensual and an intelligible world, which not only stood in opposition, but whose essence consisted in their mutual negation, in their polar opposition. But above this abyss of negation there existed between them a spiritual bond. From one pole to the other, from *super esse ad super unum*, from the realm of absolute form down to the material as the absolute formless, there led a continuous connecting road. By this road the infinite goes over to the finite; the finite returns to the infinite. The entire process of redemption is contained here in: it is the incarnation of God as it is the deification of man. But there always remains a "between" to overcome. There remains a separating medium which cannot be jumped across but which must be walked step by step in a strictly regulated sequence." (5)

There is a third highly significant

Dionysian book which has not come down to us but whose general idea is known and which Cassirer does not even mention. In the previous paragraphs Cassirer had completely obscured the problem of faith and reason; here, as in his other works, the true issues of Christianity are discarded into a poetic background as if they are too improbable and unbecoming to be brought to the fore. We shall not here take issue with his attempt to interpret historical positions in the light of his own philosophy, but we must reproach him for not having shown how his philosophy accounts for what Christian speculation really held. In fact, nowhere have we found proof that Cassirer really understands this speculation. For reasons we shall mention later, he now refers to the idea of emanation as a solution to the same problem of which creation is a solution. This particular presentation of the idea of emanation, i.e., as the ideal origin of the universe, historically has been confused with the actual, with the existential

origin of the universe.

The distinction between the ideal and the existential origin of the universe is a distinction which Dionysius certainly presupposes, though he does not explicitly develop it. Because he does not explicitly develop it, it is possible for those who prescind from the fact that Dionysius was an orthodox Christian to interpret his works as being incompatible with Christian orthodoxy. But why should the other interpretation be favored as more historical than the orthodox one? Just here Cassirer's conception of history comes into play, for this is the interpretation which can be ideally reconstructed to suit the progress of ideas leading up to his own comprehensive rationalism which will be historically significant. Cassirer needs this "possible" interpretation; he wants this possible interpretation to be the historical one. The dynamism of history calls for conflict. Hence, Cassirer will be interested in the doctrines of creation and emanation only in those aspects which, either because of some conflict in their primitive form in which there was much confusion, or because of some particular later interpretation which is far from having been either the logically or historically preponderant one, will bring the two in irreconcilable conflict. In the case of Dionysius the most striking example of "ideal reconstruction" may be seen in Cassirer's tacit introduction of Avicenna's conception of emanation as the explanation of the Dionysian conception.

There is no evidence in the works of Dionysius that his presentation of the orderly emanation of things from God is intended as a solution to the problem which Cassirer has so far presented. On the contrary, it is evident both from the extant works of Dionysius and from those works whose description has come down to us that he firmly adhered to the idea of creation in its strictly orthodox sense. What is more important is that he presents us with another view of the world -- one of which his great medieval commentators were certainly aware -- one which is in no way detrimental to the doctrine of creation.

Here we shall briefly expose this idea and come back to it in the next chapter. The order of the universe is not merely in what it has most perfect of formal order, i.e., an order of graduated perfections, an order which goes up gradually and gradually descends, an order in conformity with wisdom (*sapientis est ordinare*) as the Greeks held it. This very order does, however, furnish us with the foundation of a formally epistemological view. It offers us the subject for a mode of knowing which historically takes from Platonism and Neo-platonism certain elements usually considered to be absolutely opposed to Aristotelianism. As St. Thomas points out, the Platonic mode is a logical one. Plato, he says, interpreting Aristotle, confuses the *modus rei in intellectu*. The Platonists *logice procedunt in naturalibus*. In short, they confine themselves to a purely logical outlook on things. We shall not here concern ourselves with this historical problem, for we are interested

rather in what happens to the Platonic mode in question when we claim for it no more than a logical view of reality, an outlook which claims no more for itself than it can offer.

For the sake of clarifying our meaning, let us suppose that this logical view remains completely subordinated to a more directly real one and that reality is its term — not a term it claims to reach, but a term it tends to approach dialectically in an extrinsic mode. It will then be evident that just as the formal orderliness, the graduated inequality, the great multiplicity of things, is for the sake of imitating the unity and the intense and infinitely perfect simplicity of the First Cause, so too not only may this unity be used for the purpose of making known to us, by graduated ascent even in an extrinsic and very indirect manner, the perfection of which this graduated multiplicity is only a degradation as it were — this has been most emphatically brought out in the commentaries of St. Albert and St. Thomas — but this whole hierarchy, including both unity and multiplicity, can be viewed with a more deliberately epistemological intention, with an intention whose purpose is expressed by Dionysius himself. Just as the universe is but an imitation and vestage of God: so in like manner the greatest assimilation which can be achieved even by the intellectual knowers of the universe, i.e., those beings which tend toward the inner possession of the all, is not an entitative assimilation. No creature

tends toward substantial otherness, nor does it tend toward the possession, for example, of an intellect of a higher degree as its knowing faculty. But it does tend toward an ever higher cognitive assimilation by operation. (6) By conferring Grace God Himself has incited the intellectual creature toward this ever greater assimilation. Now a knower tends toward an assimilation with a higher not by a mere intensification of its own proper mode of knowing, but also by an imitation of the higher mode of knowing. This statement may indeed involve a paradox, a paradox which has been pointed out by both Dionysius and St. Thomas. What is highest in the lower is contiguous with the lowest in the higher. On the other hand, what is highest in the lower, is not that which is most proportioned to it, for as St. Thomas points out, the contemplative life is best but it is not the one most proportioned to man. Now the intellectual operation in man in which he most intensely imitates a higher mode of knowing will in that respect be the best. Now just what is that higher mode of knowing which man attempts to imitate once he is firmly enough established in his own most connatural mode of knowing? (7)

The higher intellect differs from the lower in that the higher in fewer means of knowing, i.e., in fewer concepts, knows more things and knows them more distinctly than does the lower intellect through many means. This type of knowing many things in one concept is characterized by St. Thomas in Chapters 98-100 of II Contra Gentiles as universalis virtutis in contradistinction to universality in praedicando tantum. When a universal is in praedicando tantum its universality is due to abstraction from differences so that he who knows man as animal has of man only confused, hence imperfect, knowledge. If, however, the concept of animal were universal virtutis, it would in its very unity distinctly represent to us both brute and man even as regards what each one has proper to itself. The latter type of universality belongs to a type of intellect higher than that of man. However, although we can never achieve that type of universality, we can imitate it. And it is in mathematics that we find the most perfect, not to say, the very exemplary type of imitation of this unity. We find this especially in the method of limits where we attempt to reach formal difference through a single means of knowing, as when from the very concept of polygon we attempt to reach the circle by means of a graduated increase in the number of sides of a regular inscribed polygon. In other words the formal difference between the two presents itself as an irrational gap which we attempt to fill and breach without having to accept the givenness of one of the two terms in question. In fact, the ideal of mathematics may be envisaged as an attempt to breach all



formal differences in this manner so that at the limit all the mathematics would be seen by means of a single concept. This consideration will allow us to define rationality as Cassirer understands it.

This breaching of the formal differences by way of infinite interpolation, this attempt to reach the differences in identity, shows us what Cassirer means by rationality. We accept this method for what it is worth. We see in it a very tenuous and incomparably remote imitation of the divine mode of knowing. There is in it no actual accomplishment of even the lowest type of superhuman knowledge.

In many respects the works of Dionysius are in this mode. In them there is not only an attempt to visualize the order of the universe; there is also a constant attempt to see this order as a series converging as it were, toward a limit. There is an attempt to fill the gaps logically, i.e., an attempt to see the "All" in so far as it is accessible to us both through faith and through reason in a higher mode. There is an attempt at what Cassirer would call rational conception, but this attempt is far from having in all its fundamental aspects the meaning that Cassirer would attribute to it; for as his writings show, Cassirer has not brought out the fundamental distinction between what we have called the natural problem of the One and the Many and the noetic problem. This is all the more to be wondered at, since this distinction was clearly indicated in the medieval literature which grew up around the works of Dionysius. We refer to all those questions and articles in the works of St. Thomas,

for example, which treat of the intelligible species of the separated substances. Cassirer has interpreted Dionysius as well as the Dionysian literature partly in the mode of Plotinus where the logical is given a realistic status and definitely in the mode of Avicenna. (8) Now, if the aim of the attempt to breach the gaps were not merely an attempt at a deeper and more rigorous insight into the formal manifold of things but rather an attempt to reduce the things themselves, the very intelligible natures, one to the other, at the limit we should have a universe of the type described by Meyerson, i.e., a purely sterile amorphous, infinitely vacuous tautology -- too non-existent to suggest even the possibility of a contradiction. Not even the mathematical universe, however, can be without gaps.

We can now see the meaning of the first part of the paragraph in question. Cassirer sees in the Dionysian graduated scale between God and what is most removed from Him in the order of the many an attempt at the assimilation of the being of the higher and the being of the lower order.

We shall see later why it is so important that Cassirer's Pico at least be completely saturated with the fundamental ideas and presuppositions of the Dionysian writings.

#### 4. The Freedom of Reason.

For the time being we shall take leave of this Dionysian idea and consider the third incompatible element Cassirer finds in Pico. In the paragraph following the last one quoted from his article Cassirer says:

"But with this Neoplatonic influence there is joined another which affected Pico from the very beginning of his intellectual development.....the Averroistic teaching. To it he remained faithful in his later years.....But if we place ourselves on the level of this teaching, at one stroke the problem of unity and plurality, of God and the world, assumes a completely different form.....The whole question resolves itself into nothing, into a purely dialectical pseudo-problem. ...The problem only arises and can only continue to exist, if reason makes no use of its basic right, the right of independent critical examination, but surrenders itself to dogma. Within the limits prescribed by the medieval picture of the world, Averroism is the attempt at a rational explanation of nature. It seeks to carry this explanation of nature without the admixture of any dogmatic theological position. What it is looking for is insight into the strict determinism of all occurrences, which follows from the general determinations of matter and motion. What we can know clearly and with certainty is the connection that itself obtains under these determinations, and the way in which they mutually condition each other. But there can be no question of a 'cause' of nature in the transcendent sense. For nature as such, the whole of matter and motion, has no beginning in time. To the theological category of creation and to the metaphysical category of emanation there is here opposed the doctrine of the eternity of the world, as it had been established by Aristotle...."

In the preceding paragraphs Cassirer had presented creation ex nihilo as a Christian and genuinely orthodox solution to the problem of the One and the Many as he had formulated it. He mentions it here again as theological in opposition to metaphysical. From what we have seen it is clear enough that the metaphysical doctrine of creation, far from being a solution to the problem in question, is actually a conclusion, or, to be more exact, a correlary, rigorously deduced from the general solution of a particular aspect of the problem of the One and Many found in Aristotle. If God is Pure Act, He must be, whether Aristotle himself says it or not, the absolutely universal cause of all things. It follows then that every being has all that it is from

God; hence, the Many which involves potency and act has all that it is from the One that is Pure Act.

Cassirer now proceeds to make Averroism center around this same problem of the One and Many as he has formulated it. From all this it is equally clear that the problem of the One first cause and the Many can be made to center around the problem of creation, just as the very problem of creation could be made the center on a problem of faith. As we have already shown, the fundamental problem of creation is not one merely of faith. That God is the absolutely transcendental cause of the universe can be demonstrated in metaphysics. It can be demonstrated too that God is free to create or not, that in His very freedom to create He can create a universe from all eternity and He can create one that has a beginning according to time. What God actually did was told us in revelation. Only the latter point is a matter of faith to us. Now it is very easy to make the metaphysical problem itself "apparently" depend on faith with the consequence that the whole problem of the transcendent One and Many will hinge on faith. For if we deny that the world actually had a beginning according to time, we can do so only for a cogent natural reason. And if the world had to exist from all eternity, we should deny the absolute transcendence of the First Cause, hence of the One which finally brought about the correlary of creation. But even this reasoning backwards is much more an attack on human reason than upon faith. As Cassirer himself had attempted to show, the transcendence of the First Cause raised the

problem. It was not faith which had raised it. It was the transcendence of the One which entailed the necessity of creation and of free creation. It was the necessity of creation's being free that entailed the possibility of creation ab aeterno and creation in tempore. In all this, reason had made use of its basic right. It is still making use of its basic right when it shows us that revelation must tell us what is actually the case. Hence, to deny faith in this matter is to deny the basic right of reason and, we might say, the capacity of reason.

One thing should stand out clearly in Cassirer's treatment of Averroism: Averroism is definitely an assertion of naturalistic dogmatism over and above all reason. There is in Latin Averroism not merely absolute dualism of supernatural faith and natural knowledge; there is a much more subtle dualism, subordinate in one sense, transcendent in another, within the very realm of the natural -- a dualism between a purely natural dogmatic faith in reason and reason as we know it in operation. Cassirer himself points this out when he says that we must distinguish between the empirical content of knowledge in Averroism and the conceptual form and the basic theoretical conviction it stood for. The full meaning of this dualism Cassirer has already brought to the fore in his treatment of Giordano Bruno in Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance. He there shows how ultimately the "heroic emotion" is at the root of otherwise speculative problems. But let us get back to the problem in question.

The problem of the eternality of the world is a particularly interesting one since it is one to which philosophy could give no definite answer as to what was actually the case. It is one of those problems in which, either for theoretical or for purely historical reasons, reason following its own path encounters faith which has to answer a particular problem raised by reason itself. Philosophy itself could not answer the question whether the world did or did not actually exist from all eternity -- except in a dialectical way as Aristotle himself had put it. The fact that faith gives a very definite answer to a question which reason cannot definitely settle for itself shows the limits of reason. And according to the sentiment we held about the capacity of reason, or, as Cassirer has put it, about the basic right of reason, we may indeed feel humiliated.

The Averroists themselves did not have reasons for maintaining the eternity of the world which could resist this basic right of reason, as St. Thomas has ably demonstrated. As Cassirer so aptly puts it, it was a question of basic theoretical conviction rather than of empirical content. Instead setting forth reasons in matters otherwise philosophical they appealed to the authority of Aristotle and to Averroes' particular brand of Aristotelianism. Obviously, human authority is preferable to the best of reasons which threaten to lead man to what is better than himself. Nevertheless, Averroism is one philosophical attitude for which there was no need of Cassirer's idealization.

History itself gave it in ideal form, just as sometimes human events or actions may meet the requirements of the poetic "ought to be". Cassirer may in all security view it as leading to his own thought. But the right of free inquiry in the proper domain of the intellect and the rights of the senses were not limited to Averroism, as Cassirer seems to imply.

If Cassirer's Averroism had merely wanted an autonomous physics, if it had merely insisted on the right of reason in its own field, if when faced with evident truth it had merely claimed the right for any intellect to enter into disputation with God Himself as Job had done, Averroism would have found ample support in Albert and Thomas who vigorously defended the capacity and the achievement of human reason over those who were, in the words of St. Albert, "*tanquam bruta animalia blasphemantes in iis quae ignorant*". (9) In his commentary on the Book of Job, St. Thomas himself had explained: "*Videbatur autem disputatio hominis ad Deum esse indebita propter excellentiam qua Deus hominem excellit. Sed considerandum est quod veritas ex diversitate personarum non variatur. Unde cum aliquis veritatem loquitur, vinci non potest, cum quocumque disputet*". (10)

Averroism would not have suited Cassirer's history if it had been merely a reaction against that ever present tendency in scholasticism toward universal indoctrination to the point of contempt for matters which, instead of being handed down to us by way of doctrine, should be acquired by way of personal experience. That too might still have been completely orthodox, for as St. Thomas had

said: "Dignius est accipere scientiam per creaturas sensibiles quam per hominis doctrinam." (11)

As a matter of fact, this dignity of experience as opposed to indoctrination by man might be considered as an insult to the Averroists, since they themselves appealed so often to the authority of Averroes.

We should be the last to under estimate the consummate art with which Cassirer has composed the trilogy of Creation, emanation, and Averroism. The thread he has sought in history is somehow actually there. It follows a logic of its own, none the less intelligible when we reason backwards toward Averroism, starting from Cassirer's own contemporary thought and when we consider the historian an "einen rückwärts gekehrten propheten", a "retrospective prophet". (12)



Cassirer's Solution of the Antinomy.

As we pointed out at the beginning of this commentary, however, Cassirer's chief purpose in here offering the doctrines of creation, emanation and Averroism as attempted solutions of the problem of the One and the Many was to establish his thesis that Pico adhered to what is actually Cassirer's idea of symbolism in knowledge. After having emphasized the fact on page 136 that Pico embraces all three of these incompatible doctrines in his system, Cassirer draws his conclusion on the following pages:

"...He was able to employ at the same time the idea of creation, the idea of emanation, and the ideas of Arabian rationalism and naturalism, only because he did not take them simply in their previous meaning, but related them to a definite ideal center, and by thus relating them transformed and enriched their content. No one of these ideas appears with Pico as the complete and exclusive solution to the problem of God and the world. For him they are significant rather as particular moments in the new solution he is seeking.

The distinctive category under which he subsumed his doctrine of God, of the world and of man, his theology and his psychology, is the category of symbolic thought.... The basic metaphysical problem of unity and plurality now takes on a specifically different significance... Pico is no longer trying to exhibit the Many as the effect of the One, or to deduce them as such from their cause, with the aid of rational concepts. He sees the Many rather as expressions, as images, as symbols of the One. And what he is trying to show is that only in this mediate and symbolic way can the absolutely One and absolutely unconditioned Being manifest itself to human knowledge. Metaphysics as well as dialectic or physics can yield no higher truth. They are only different symbols and different interpretations of one and the same meaning, which is the foundation of them all, but which is not capable of being grasped by us as it is in itself, without any symbolic intermediary."

Regarding Cassirer's conclusion that Pico embraced these three doctrines under the category of symbolic thought we should like to remark in the first place that there is absolutely no need of the category of symbolic

thought to reconcile these doctrines as they are found in Pico for the simple reason that they are not opposed. It is true that they are incompatible as Cassirer has stated them. But we have already shown when treating of his statement of the Dionysian position that this particular view can be understood in a sense in which it is in no way opposed to the doctrine of creation. And Cassirer himself admits on page 335 that Pico did not in any way embrace the determinism of Averroism which would be contrary to the doctrine of creation. There he says:

"The Averroists have been characterized as the 'freethinkers of the Middle Ages.' They treat the doctrines of the positive religions as myths; what they are seeking is a doctrine of God that shall remain within the bounds of mere reason. In this underlying aim of rationalism, Pico could and must feel himself related to them; for he too constantly defended the 'libertas credendi', and for the sake of this defense he too fell under the ban of the Church. But the relationship extends no further: for if Pico granted the rationalistic assumptions of Averroism, he rejected all the more sharply the naturalistic conclusions it had drawn from them."

The only important element of Averroism, then, found in Pico is a certain sympathy for the rationalism of the Averroists, "for he too constantly defended the 'libertas credendi'." Cassirer is not too definite in his statement of this rationalism with which Pico sympathized. There is certainly no evidence in Pico's works to lead one to say that he considered the doctrines of the Church as myths. Neither is there any reason for saying that Pico felt himself related to the Averroists in their seeking a doctrine of God which would remain within the bounds of mere reason, if by the expression "within the bounds of mere reason" is meant the naturalism of the Averroists. Cassirer himself has excluded

that. If this "rationalism" refers to the desire to allow reason a free rein in its own domain, then St. Thomas too, no less than Pico, must feel himself related to this aim of the Averroists, for, as we have seen in the preceding pages, he too defended the basic rights of reason.

Pico's defense of the libertas credendi is alleged by Cassirer as the proof that Pico defended the Averroistic idea of the freedom of reason even against the Church. On page 137 Cassirer says of this libertas credendi:

"Even against the Church Pico boldly defends this basic thesis of the libertas credendi; he is certain that no one can or ought to be forced to believe."

And on page 328 he says:

"For it is not in man's power to accept or reject a proposition of faith on external command"

If Cassirer means by this that Pico considered human reason to be of such a nature that it could not give its assent to a doctrine for which it could not find evidence in its own domain - a blatant misunderstanding of the term, he is contradicting the express words of Pico; and if he does not mean this, the very mention of the libertas credendi in relation to Averroism is meaningless. In Quaestio octava de libertate credendi of the Apologia Pico does say: "Non est in libera potestate hominis credere articulum fidei esse verum quando sibi placet, et non esse verum quando sibi placet," as Cassirer quotes on page 328. In this particular question Pico is discussing the power of the will to force the assent of the intellect to a doubtful proposition when there are no rational grounds for assenting to either part of the contradiction and when there is no

other reason brought to bear. In such a case, he says, the will cannot force the assent of the intellect. If an assent is to be given, some other motive must influence the intellect:

".... donec ei nova supervenerit apparentia vel per sillogisticam rationem vel per intuitivam notitiam, vel per testimonium multorum, vel per auctoritatem dicentis, vel aliud simili." (13)

Far from rejecting all external reasons as sufficient motives for assent to propositions of faith, Pico considers certain of these external motives to be intellectual reasons. Among the valid motives usually accepted by theologians for the Gospel, for example, are "pronunciatio prophetica, scripturarum concordia, auctoritas scribentium, rationabilitas contentorum,.... Irrationabilitas singulorum errorum, ecclesiae stabilitas, miraculorum claritas." (14)

Furthermore, when Pico says that the teachings of the Fathers of the Church are to be accepted with due respect but not in such a way that they cannot be doubted, in the same sentence he excludes from this category the Sacred Scriptures and any doctrine definitely determined by the authority of the Church. (15) In the following sentence he speaks of an infallible authority which he attributes explicitly to the Sacred Scriptures and implicitly to the Church. It is difficult to find in the text of Pico any convincing evidence for the belief that he was very closely related to the Averroistic "free-thinkers of the Middle Ages."

By way of a slight digression we should like to display another of Cassirer's reasons for placing the category of

symbolic thought in Pico. The symbolic thought of which Cassirer speaks in this article demands that man be ever changing without any possibility of his coming to a state of rest either in knowledge or in the activity of his will. On pages 29 and 30 Cassirer says that Pico did not believe in an eternal hell, for that would be contrary to the conception of man and human freedom as they must be in the system of symbolic thought. "An eternity of punishment, he says, "would imply a form of finality which according to Pico's basic conception would contradict the real meaning of human existence." As proof that Pico did not believe in an eternal punishment he quotes from the Conclusiones in theologia<sup>the</sup> following: "Peccato mortali finiti temporis non debetur poena infinita secundum temporis, sed finita tantum." It is true enough that Pico defended this thesis, but in this same Apologia, which Cassirer quotes, he makes very explicit what he means by this particular thesis. First he distinguishes between what he calls temporal and eternal sins. The former is one which has been forgiven, while the latter is a sin which was never forgiven. The theological implications of his division do not interest us here; we are concerned only with the fact that Pico definitely held that there was an eternal punishment for the eternal sin. "Ruditas autem maxime," he says, "erat credere quod ex praedicta conclusionibus ego intendebam negare poenam aeternam." (6) And the ninth conclusion listed at the end of the Apologia is the following: "Peccatum mortale est demeritorie dignum poena aeterna." (17) It is also interesting to see that in the Proemium of the seventh book of the Heptaplus Pico, speaking of happiness, says that man's happiness consists in the knowledge and

possession of God where he rests, but for the attainment of which he needs God's help. (18) If an eternity of punishment, as Cassirer claims, would imply a form of finality which according to Pico's basic conception would contradict the real meaning of human existence, then the only logical conclusion from the works of Pico seems to be that he did not advocate this category of symbolic thought which Cassirer ascribes to him.

"It should be noted that in his citations from Pico Cassirer has chosen passages which Pico himself considered to be in need of elucidation, and with poetic license he has given to their indetermination a "new form and meaning" which is opposed to the one given them by Pico himself in his later explanations. One might be almost tempted at times to think that Cassirer has violated those "strict rules" by which the historian as well as the scientist is bound in the collection and evaluation of his "matter". (19)

He could continue comparing Cassirer's interpretation of Pico with Pico's own words, but the comparisons we have already made are sufficient to bring to light in a concrete way Cassirer's Poetic construction of history, and that was our purpose in this present work.

In a latter section we hope to consider the symbolism itself advocated by Cassirer and the doctrine of freedom consequent upon it. Cassirer, when he traces these ideas to Nicolas of Cusa, has already indicated the direction a criticism must follow.

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----- De divinis nominibus, ibid.

----- De mystica theologia, ibid.

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## References to the Introduction:

1. Volume III, numbers 2 and 3, 1942; City College of New York, N.Y.
2. In passing we should like to point out two misstatements in Avery Dulles' work, *Principes Concordias: Pico della Mirandola*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1941.) On page 56 he wrongly attributes to Scotus the opinion that the Persons of the Trinity are only formally distinct from one another. Scotus, like all orthodox Catholics, held a real distinction between the Persons. Cf. *Ox. L.I., d.26, n.8* (Tome 10, p.298) Vives edition.  
  
On page 5 the author does not distinguish between the humanistic conception of the Incarnation and the Scotistic opinion which likewise does not make the Incarnation dependent of the fall of Adam <sup>but</sup> which in no way makes it due to the dignity of man as does the humanistic conception. Cf. La Regalita de Christo of Ephrem Longpré, published by Agostino Gemelli in the Acta of the Milan National Congress (Milan, 1926). English translation, The Kingship of Christ, by Daniel J. Barry, C.F.M., St. Anthony Guild Press, Paterson, N.J. 1944.
3. Dr. Cassirer died within the past year.
4. R.B. Perry: Philosophy of the recent Past, page 147; Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, Chicago, Boston, Atlanta, San Francisco, 1926.
5. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, p.124, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Volume III. In the future all references to this article will mention only the title and the page.

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1. Ecclesiastes, IV, 11.
2. *Op. cit.*, VIII, 14.

3. Poetics, c.9, 1451a36. Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Aristotle will refer to the translation found in Richard McKeon's The Basic Works of Aristotle, Random House, New York, 1941.
4. Cf. A.-M. Parent; La connaissance du bien et du mal, Laval Théologique et Philosophique, Volume I, no.1, pp. 47ff, 1945.
5. Poetics, c.23, 1459a16.
6. Cassirer: An Essay on Man, p. 150.
7. Poetics, c.9, 1451b11.
8. Op.cit., c.25, 1460b33.
9. Ia, q.57, a.2, c.
10. II Contra Gentes, c.100, Cf. also c.98.
11. Cassirer: An Essay on Man, p.169.
12. St.Thomas: VII Metaphysics, lect.6, n.1394.
13. Cassirer: An Essay on Man, p. 164.
14. Op. cit., p.167.
15. Op. cit., pp.155-6.
16. Op.cit., p. 157.
17. For instance, in the Metaphysics (Book I, c.1, 981 a10) Aristotle shows that with respect to the end of medicine, experience without theory is better than theory without experience. We shall quote the text at length. We must note, however, that in one respect the Philosopher is using the term art in a broad sense, and in another he takes it in a very restricted sense. In a broad sense, insofar as it comprises medicine and shoemaking as well as the fine arts: in a restricted sense, insofar as he opposes art and experience, whereas art as an intellectual virtue implies the proximate faculty of production. (VI Ethics, c.6) In the Metaphysics we read:  
 "With a view to action experience seems in no respect inferior to art, and men of experience succeed even better than those who have theory without experience. (The reason is that experience is knowledge of individuals, art of universals, and actions and productions are all concerned with the individual; for the physician does not cure man, except in an accidental way, but Callias or Socrates or some other called by some such individual name, who happens to be a man. If, then a man has the theory without the experience, and recognizes the universal but does not know the individual included in this, he will often fail to cure: for it is the individual that is to be cured.)

But yet we think that knowledge and understanding belong to art rather than to experience, and we suppose artists to be wiser than men of experience (which implies that wisdom depends in all cases rather in knowledge): and this because the former know the cause, but the latter do not. For men of experience know that the thing is so, but do not know why, while the others know the 'why' and the cause. Hence we think also that the master-workers in each craft are more honourable and know in a truer sense and are wiser than the manual workers, because they know the causes of the things that are done (we think manual workers are like certain lifeless things which act indeed, but act without knowing what they do, as fire burns -- but while the lifeless things perform each of their functions by a natural tendency, the labourers perform them through habit); thus we view them as being wiser not in virtue of being able to act, but of having the theory for themselves and knowing the causes. And in general it is a sign of the man who knows and of the man who does not know, that the former can teach, and therefore we can think art more truly knowledge than experience is; for artists can teach, and men of mere experience cannot." (Aristotle: *Metaphysics*, Book I, c.1, 981a10.

Again, although metaphysics is wisdom proper and the noblest and most divine of purely human sciences, nevertheless prudence, which is not wisdom proper, is the wisdom for man and more necessary. (Ia-IIae, q.57, a.5) Mathematics too, with respect to formal certitude, is better than metaphysics. "... Mathematica sunt abstracta a materia, et tamen non sunt excedentia intellectum nostrum; et ideo in eis est requirenda certissima ratio." (In II *Metaph.*, c.3, lect.5, n.336.) "Cum enim mathematica sit media inter naturalem (scientiam) et divinam, ipsa est utraque certior." (In *de Trin.* Poet., q.6, a.1, ad 2 q.)

According to the *de Partibus Animalium* (B.I, c.5, 644b22-645a10) (and in several places, e.g., In I *de Anima*, lect.1, n.5, St. Thomas refers to this passage with approval), sensory and uncertain knowledge of things divine is better than copious and certain knowledge of things within closer reach. And although the sense of touch is the lowest of our knowing powers, nevertheless it is the most necessary and the most certain, for which reason it is called the sense of the intellect. (In I *Metaph.*, lect.1, nn.6-9 and II *de Anima*, lect.19 nn.482-486)

18. *Poetics*, c.6, 1449b27.
19. *II Physics*, c.5, 197a.
20. *VI Metaphysics*, c.2, 1027a19.
21. *II Ethics*, c.6, 1106b28.
22. *Poetics*, c.25, 1461b9.
23. *De. cit.*, c.9, 1452a1.
24. Cassirer: *An Essay on Man*, pp.161-2.

25. Poetics, c.24, 1460a11.
26. Ibid., a26.
27. Op. cit., c.9, 1451b11.
28. Ibid., b15.
29. Cassirer: An Essay on Man, p.204.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Op. cit., p.205. Italics my own.
34. Op. cit., p.185.
35. Op. cit., p.174.
36. Op. cit., p.175.
37. Op. cit., p.205.
38. Ibid.
39. Op. cit., pp.204-5.
40. Op. cit., p.177.
41. Op. cit., p.185.
42. Op. cit., p.186-7.
43. Op. cit., p.187.
44. Op. cit., pp.187-189.
45. Poetics, c.4, 1448b10.
46. Cassirer: An Essay on Man, p.135.
47. Op. cit., p.205.
48. Op. cit., p.204.
49. Op. cit., p.174.
50. Op. cit., p.206.
51. Op. cit., p.205.

52. Op. cit., p.204.
53. Cassirer: Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance, pp.150ff. Leipzig, Teubner (1927)
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56. Cassirer: Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance, p.6.
57. Cassirer: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, p.324.
58. Op. cit., p.138.

## References to Chapter III:

1. Cf. St. Thomas, Ia,q.1,a.7.
2. Cf. St. Thomas, Ia,q.1,a.1 ad 2.
3. Commentaria in lib. de divinis nominibus.
4. Cf. DeKoninck, La dialectique des limites comme critique de la raison, Laval Théologique et Philosophique, Vol.I, p.177.
5. P.9. English citation from an unpublished translation by Fr. Victor Mills,O.F.M.
6. Cf. St. Thomas, Contra Gentes,III,C.21.
7. Cf. De coelesti hierarchia,c.10 and Proculus' Liber de causis, c.10 (Lesson X of St. Thomas' commentary).
8. Cf. De Wulf, L'Histoire de la Philosophie Medievale, Vol.II,p.301; also p.108 for explanation of Dionysius.
9. Prologue to his commentary on Aristotle's Poetica.
10. Comment. in Job, c.13, lect.2.
11. III,q.12,a.3,ad 2.
12. Friedreck Schlegel as quoted by Cassirer, An Essay on Man, p.178.
13. Pico della Mirandola, Omnia Opera, Strassburg,1564, fol.LVI.
14. Ibid.
15. Op.cit.,fol. XXX.
16. Op. cit., fol.XXXIII.
17. Op. cit., fol. LX.
18. Op. cit., fol. XIV ff.
19. Cassirer, An Essay on Man, p.204.