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UNDRESSING THE "TRUE MAN": A PHILOLOGICAL LOOK AT CORNELIUS AGRIPPA'S ANTHROPOLOGY

Abstract: The author revisits an old scholarly dilemma concerning the thought of Cornelius Agrippa, the famous German humanist and occultist, i.e. the conflict between Christian and heterodox elements in his thought. The author approaches this problem by examining Agrippa's views on human nature and demonstrates through a philological analysis that the German humanist attempted to integrate the anthropological dualism of Hermetic and Neoplatonic provenance into his understanding of Christianity.

Keywords: body, soul, spirit, Cornelius Agrippa, Marsilio Ficino, *De occulta philosophia*, *Corpus Hermeticum*

Against the confusing background of the late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Renaissance, the life and thought of Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (Cologne, 1486 – Grenoble, 1535) appear as exemplary of various intellectual currents and trends of the time. This famous German humanist and fervent initiate in the occult arts was one of the numerous Renaissance thinkers who aspired to build grand syntheses of various spiritual traditions with the idea of renewing Western Christianity, which faced a major crisis. However, due to the vast diversity of influences that shaped his literary output and the striking incongruity of his philosophical attitudes, Agrippa's case is in many ways exceptional.

The "Agrippan question": the magus versus the Christian?

What constitutes the core of the problem is an apparent inability of the scholars dealing with Agrippa to unequivocally classify his thoughts within this or that "school" or tradition. He eludes all such attempts by virtue of being simultaneously positioned in different, often mutually conflicting, intellectual paradigms.[1]

Agrippa von Nettesheim was one of the most important representatives of that broad fifteenth-to-sixteenth century intellectual and philosophical current often termed Renaissance Hermeticism. This diffuse,

1 The main scholarly monographs on Agrippa are Nauert 1965, Kuhlow 1967, Van der Poel 1997, and Lehrich 2003. For a detailed examination of Agrippa's esoteric notions vis-à-vis his religious convictions in the context of spiritual ascension see Putnik 2010.

Библид 0350–6428, Год. 52 бр. 172 (2020), стр. 69-85. / оригинални научни рад
141.319.8 Агрипа Х. К.
133.5 Агрипа Х. К.
https://doi.org/10.18485/kis.2020.52.172.5

syncretistic movement was grounded in several crucial philological, historical, and cultural factors: the emergence of medieval Arab scholarship in the Latin West, which paved the way for the gradual and limited legitimation of "magic" (mostly in the form of *magia naturalis*); the rediscovery of Plato, the Neoplatonists and the late antique Hermetic writings, as well as the appearance of their Latin translations; the consequent reevaluation and appropriation of various non-Christian esoteric teachings and practices; and finally, a new religious and intellectual climate marked by the emergence of various reform ideas and movements amid the stunning crisis of the Roman Church. Aligning himself with his immediate forerunners, Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola from the so-called Florentine Academy, and with his elder contemporaries, Johann Reuchlin, abbot Johann Trithemius, and Lodovico Lazzarelli, to mention but a few, Agrippa shaped his philosophy as a curious mixture of various spiritual traditions designed for one single purpose: to "purify" and reform the "corrupt" medieval magic and thereby offer a new, powerful philosophical synthesis to the crisis-stricken Christianity.[2] The main result of this program was his remarkable magical summa *De occulta philosophia libri tres* (Three Books of Occult Philosophy, 1533), an encyclopedia of practically all the available theoretical knowledge on occultism of the time, interpreted within a philosophical framework usually defined in the relevant scholarship as Neoplatonic.

On the other hand, out of his numerous lesser works and sermons, as well as religious controversies he was involved in, yet another, more neglected image of Agrippa emerges, that of a devoted *miles Christi* under the influence of Erasmus of Rotterdam, John Colet, and to some extent Martin Luther and other Reformation thinkers. This strand of literary and spiritual influence goes beyond contemporary Biblical humanism, encompassing medieval thinkers such as Albert the Great and Nicolaus of Cusa, and extends as far back as the early Church Fathers and the Old and New Testaments. Regarding the Church Fathers, Agrippa was particularly influenced by the available contemporary interpretations of Augustine, Jerome, and Dionysius the Areopagite, and as for the Biblical authorities, by those of St. Paul and St. John the Apostle (Nauert 1965: 40–64).[3] This aspect of Agrippa's thought was marked by an emphasis on the *via negativa* of the Areopagite, the concept of *docta ignorantia* as taught by Nicolaus of Cusa, and the *sola fides* principle of his above-mentioned contemporaries. Agrippa's conviction that God can be reached only through pure faith and devotion to Christ consequently led him to a strong anti-scholastic position and to a denial of there being any epistemological value to any of the human sci-

2 This intention was explicitly expressed in the dedicatory letter of the twenty-three-year old Agrippa to Abbot Trithemius, in which his linking of magic with Christianity is evident (Agrippa 1992: 68–71). See also Vittoria Perrone Compagni's Introduction to the same work, 15–16.

3 Agrippa himself authored an incomplete commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul, which unfortunately did not survive. This commentary was a result of Agrippa's Biblical studies under the direction of John Colet in London.

ences and disciplines, including all types of occultism. The ultimate result of such a train of thought was Agrippa's skeptical-devotional declamation *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum et artium atque excellentia verbi Dei declamatio* (Declamation on the Uncertainty and Vanity of Sciences and Arts, and the Excellence of the Word of God, 1526), a radical antipode to his magical summa, which led some scholars to connect Agrippa with the tradition of Pyrrhonist skepticism and with Sextus Empiricus.

In addition to the old and much debated interpretive dilemma concerning Agrippa's "skepticism" versus his "credulity", there seems to be another, growing divergence in the pertinent scholarship. It is based on the widespread perception of a sharp division between magic and Christian piety as the two undisputed pillars of Agrippa's thought. Some scholars choose to approach him mostly as a theoretician of magic, even though his works abound in theological thinking.[4] Conversely, others tend to view Agrippa in more religious (that is, Christian) terms and are apparently willing to downplay the esoteric component of his thought. This current of scholarship often puts significant emphasis on Agrippa's role as a humanist opposed to the social and doctrinal misdoings and moral degeneration of the Roman Church.[5] The former scholars are inclined to see Agrippa's magical doctrines as incompatible with Christianity, which is certainly not a novel view. The latter, however, appear to be moving toward a curious "Christianization" of the German humanist, which is a new development. There is a good reason for such a dichotomy: the problem has always been how to relate these two facets of Agrippa's thought, i.e. his openly heterodox magical beliefs and his seemingly orthodox creed. In a world of inherited cultural paradigms and doctrinal compartments there could be no such thing as a "pious Christian magician". It would seem that the image of Simon Magus, looming menacingly behind any such idea, set the ultimate criteria for distinguishing piety from impiety in the large part of the Western cultural and religious consciousness. The "pious Christian magician" remains a contested notion in many ways. What strikes one in this oxymoron are not necessarily the common opposites of "Christian" and "magical", but rather the plurality of meanings that could be ascribed to the seemingly self-explanatory adjective "pious".

Anthropology as the crux of the problem

In my view, the intricate relations and interactions between these two alleged opposites can best be examined by looking more deeply into

4 This is how Agrippa has been viewed by scholars such as Keefer 1991 and Szőnyi 2004. The latter sees Agrippa's work as implying "an affiliation between the sacred and the demonic", thus subverting itself (Szőnyi 2004: 130–31).

5 In my view, Vittoria Perrone Compagni and Marc van der Poel are the most important present-day adherents of this approach.

Agrippa's peculiar anthropology as a meeting point between magic and theology. By "anthropology" I imply a complex set of beliefs, notions, and doctrines concerning issues such as the self, personhood, the body-soul dichotomy etc. that governed Agrippa's understanding of the phenomena he dealt with in his writings.

This is by no means a novel perspective. Along the lines of the "man the operator" paradigm postulated by Frances A. Yates (Yates 2002: 144), it was already Charles Nauert who in his magisterial biography of Agrippa emphasized the centrality of his anthropological views for a better understanding of his involvement in magic. It is worth quoting the following insightful remark by Nauert on this particular intriguing aspect of Renaissance anthropocentrism:

> What really made Agrippa's world view magical, rather than merely another expression of the widely held Neoplatonic picture of a hierarchically ordered world, was the position he assigned to man. (...) Potentially, man was what he had been before the fall of Adam: under God, lord and master of Creation. This exaltation of man as the magus was a special form of the Renaissance tendency to glorify man. Hence the Agrippan picture of the universe assigned an important position to man as center of all being, link between the material and spiritual worlds, and master of all the forces of the created world (Nauert 1965: 279).[6]

Although the existing interpretations of what exactly man's exaltation implies may vary to a considerable degree, Nauert's basic idea appears to be unequivocally accepted among the present-day scholars dealing with Renaissance esotericism, and Agrippa in particular. Also, there seems to be a wide agreement concerning at least one fundamental aspect of this peculiar Renaissance exaltation, namely that it aimed at the restoration of man's original ontological status, or the return to prelapsarian perfection — a goal undoubtedly shared by many sincere adherents to mainstream Christianity too. Both ideas, that of a prelapsarian perfection and a return to it, revolve around and depend upon the various notions of man construed both by the Renaissance syncretists and orthodox Christians. In other words, it is precisely the Renaissance ideas of man's nature that determined the ways his exaltation was to be understood and, ultimately, sought for in one's *vita activa*. Various aspects of this problem have been dealt with by a number of Agrippan scholars, usually only in passing, however, and as an integral part of other problems. With this analysis I intend to offer a more systematic approach to Agrippa's anthropology as delineated in his *De occulta philosophia*.

What follows is a philological examination of those loci in the *De occulta philosophia* that reveal Agrippa's understanding of man. As a classical philologist, I am particularly interested in the lexical and seman-

6 The term "exaltation", mentioned by Nauert in passing, has been made into one of the synonyms for "deification" and fully developed as a concept by György E. Szőnyi in his monograph on John Dee (Szőnyi 2004: 34–37).

tic aspects of the topic, and in Agrippa's terminological choices and the meanings with which he loads the chosen terms, especially with regard to his sources of references, both synchronic and diachronic. My main argument is that Agrippa's anthropology, especially as delineated in the *De occulta philosophia*, contains his attempted "reconstruction" of the "original" Christianity, which he believed was lost or on the brink of destruction in his own time. This "reconstruction" was largely based on his Christian appropriation of the Neoplatonic and Hermetic views on the nature of man.

Setting the cosmological scene: *homo minor mundus*

As the largest, most important, and most complex among Agrippa's works, the *De occulta philosophia* is also the most elaborate exposition of his philosophical tenets. It is a summa of virtually all the esoteric doctrines and magical practices accessible to the author. As is well known and discussed in scholarship, this vast and diverse amount of material is organized within a tripartite structure that corresponds to the common Neoplatonic notion of a cosmic hierarchy. Thus, the first book deals with natural magic corresponding to the physical realm, the second with astral or mathematical magic corresponding to the celestial realm, and the third with ceremonial or ritual magic tied to the intellectual realm of the created world.[7] Each of these three parts embraces a number of doctrines and practices coming from different esoteric traditions — ranging from late Hellenistic Neoplatonism and Hermetism through medieval magic and Kabbalah to the doctrines of Florentine Neoplatonists and Christian Kabbalists — which Agrippa expounds and interconnects according to his hierarchical scheme.

The scheme is clearly Neoplatonic. The world was not created but emanated from the One, i.e. God, in three successive stages: as the intellectual world inhabited by angels and other incorporeal entities, the celestial world filled with stars, planets, and various living entities connected to them, and the physical world, known to us from our personal experience.[8] Moving across the cosmic vertical is possible, and one of the ways to achieve it, according to Agrippa, is magic or, more precisely, theurgy, as the highest and most sacred type of it. Stemming from the fact that the universe was emanated, and not created *ex nihilo*, follows that the opposite movement, that of voluntary spiritual ascent or deification, is also within man's capabilities.

7 The cosmological aspects of the *De occulta philosophia* have been extensively analyzed in scholarship: Walker 1958: 90–96; Yates 2002: 146–60; Nauert 1965: 220–59; Lehrich 2007: 36–42; Szőnyi 2004: 110–120, etc.

8 As indicated by Perrone Compagni (Agrippa 1992: 86), Agrippa's notion of *triplex mundus* comes directly from Pico della Mirandola's *Heptaplus* and Jochann Reuchlin's *De arte cabbalistica*. Certainly, all such divisions go back to Plotinus' emanational concept of νοῦς, ψυχή, and φύσις.

The *De occulta philosophia* paints the picture of a living, hierarchically structured cosmos governed by the rules of correspondences and harmony (*harmonia mundi*). In such a cosmos, magical operation is seen not only as possible but also natural — that is, perfectly in tune with the nature and structure of the cosmos itself. Since the author perceives magic as a highly efficient means for ascending back to the original realm of transcendence, the focal point in this picture is the operator himself, the human being.

Agrippa's notion of man depends almost entirely on, or is intrinsically connected to, his understanding of the cosmos. In the first book of *De occulta philosophia,* one reads that "man's nature is the most complete image of the whole universe, containing in itself the whole heavenly harmony" (Agrippa 1992: 148).[9] This idea of the *microcosmos in macrocosmo*, fairly common in the Renaissance, gained particular importance in Agrippa's thought as it provided a necessary conceptual backup for his doctrine of spiritual ascension. In other words, human nature as conceived by the German humanist cannot be fully comprehended independently of man's position and participation in the universe. Agrippa emphasizes that, just like anything else in this world, man was created in the gradual process of divine emanation. He inherits the Hermetic notion of the world as the first image of God and proclaims man as an "image of the image" (*imago imaginis*). In other words, in stark opposition to the Biblical narrative of creation, man was not directly created by God; rather, his creation was mediated by the world, that is, by the higher entities inhabiting it.[10]

The triad of *anima*, *corpus*, and *spiritus*

The *De occulta philosophia* provides abundant, albeit scattered material for elucidating Agrippa's understanding of the nature of man. Viewed in its main contours, Agrippa's anthropology is articulated in what might be called two triads. The first, more fundamental triad consists of the opposites of soul and body, with the spirit as their mediator. The second pertains to the domain of the soul itself and consists of the mind (*mens*), the rational soul (*ratio*), and the senitive soul (*idolum*). He adopts this terminology directly from Marsilio Ficino but, as usual, does not his acknowledge his source (Perrone Compagni 2000: 166–77). Throughout my analysis, I take into consideration the fact that Agrippa relies heavily on Ficino's tripartite notion of the human being, whereby body and soul, being the two poles of what is perceived as "man", are united by a third component — the spirit, serving as an intermediary between the two extremes.

9 "Humana natura … sit totius universi completissima imago, in seipsa omnem continens harmonium". The English translation of the *De occulta philosophia*, with my occasional emendations, is that of James Freake (Tyson 2000).

10 The idea of the inferior creators of man (the so-called younger gods) goes back, of course, to Plato, *Timaios*, e43.

The key terms of the first triad determine the coordinates of the field within which Agrippa envisages his "man the operator".[11] These coordinates, as I argue, correspond more closely to the Neoplatonic and Hermetic than to the Christian views on man's nature, although Agrippa interprets them as elements of the latter in a process that might be termed "orthodoxy building". Even in cases such as his short but important work *Dialogus de homine*, which might be taken to represent a monist anthropology peculiar to Christianity, the dualist perspective, in my opinion, remains more fundamental to Agrippa's understanding of man.

At the beginning of the first book of his masterpiece, the *Platonic Theology*, Marsilio Ficino pens the following inspired lines:

> Only after the death of the body can man become any happier. It seems therefore to follow of necessity that once our souls leave this prison, some other light awaits them. (…) But I pray that as heavenly souls longing with desire for our heavenly home we may cast off the bonds of our terrestrial chains; cast them off as swiftly as possible, so that, uplifted on Platonic wings and with God as our guide, we may fly unhindered to our ethereal abode.[12] (Ficino 2001: 14–15)

Even though Ficino, an ordained priest, cautiously appends a strong disclaimer to the beginning of his work — "Whatever subject I discuss, here or elsewhere, I wish to state only what is approved by the Church" (Ficino 2001: 1) — the quoted lines reveal several provoking ideas that necessitate a closer examination. The most striking is, of course, that "man" can become happier only after the death of the "body". What one finds almost explicated here is the idea that man is *not* his body. Ficino clearly juxtaposes two distinct subjects, *homo* and *corpus*, and brings them into a relation of dissent or disharmony. The bearer of desires is the "heavenly soul" (*caelestis animus*), which is trapped in the Platonic prison (*carcer*) and tied by its "terrestrial chains" (*vincula compedum terrenarum*). One might thus conclude that, for Marsilio Ficino, "man" is actually his soul.[13]

The opening sentences set the tone for the entire Book I of the *Platonic Theology*, in which Ficino argues not only for the immortality of the soul, but for its centrality. Thus, in the first three chapters of Book I he establishes the basic coordinates of his conceptual framework. In this framework, the role of body is downgraded to being merely an instru-

11 The well-known "man the operator" paradigm comes from Frances A.Yates (Yates 2002: 146–60). It denotes an esotericist actively seeking spiritual revelation.

12 "Solum autem post mortem corporis [sc. homo] beatior effici potest, necessarium esse videtur animis nostris ab hoc carcere discedentibus lucem aliquam superesse. (…) Solvamus, obsecro, caelestes animi caelestis patriae cupidi, solvamus quamprimum vincula compedum terrenarum, ut alis sublati platonicis ac deo duce in sedem aethercam liberius pervolemus."

13 Being a humanist and a translator of Plato and Neoplatonists, Ficino was naturally exposed through his education and readings to ancient Greek anthropological dualism. For a useful overview of this dualism in the context of Christian and Pauline anthropology see Gundry 2005: 83–156.

ment of soul, which is the midpoint of the cosmic spinal cord: it is "the link that holds all nature together — it controls qualities and bodies while it joins itself with angel and with God" (Ficino 2001: 16–17). In opposition to the inert mass of our bodies (*pigram hanc molem corporum*), there exists a higher sort of form which is in a certain sense changeable but indivisible. That is the rational soul, which is the moving force behind the body. Significantly, Ficino links the active nature of the soul and the passive nature of the body to the physical qualities of solidity and density: the more solid an entity is, the less capable it is of penetrating other objects and, consequently, acting upon them. Thus, all power of acting, concludes Ficino, must be attributed to an incorporeal nature alone.

Although it is sometimes noted that Ficino owes a lot to Thomas Aquinas and deploys scholastic concepts in his *Platonic Theology*,[14] even a cursory glance at the way Aquinas treats the issue of body and soul reveals significant differences. For Aquinas, "it is clear that man is not only a soul only, but something composed of soul and body" (Aquinas 1947: I, 75).[15] The soul is part of the human species and is not a hypostasis or a person in itself. Finally, the body is *necessary* for the action of the intellect: rather than saying that the soul understands, it is more correct to say that man understands *through* the soul. Thus, even if Ficino, as Allen and Hankins observe, tried to sketch out a unitary theological tradition in which he would reconcile ancient philosophy with Christianity, anthropology is certainly not one of the fields in which he succeeded.

Cornelius Agrippa must have studied Ficino's *Theologia Platonica* with great care: Vittoria Perrone Compagni tracks down at least a hundred instances of Ficino's mostly unacknowledged influence in the *De occulta philosophia*, many of them coming from the *Platonic Theology* (Agrippa 1992: 636).[16] It thus comes as no surprise that Agrippa's first anthropological triad is distinctly Ficinian in nature.

A definition of the soul

Agrippa's treatment of the subject of body and soul is almost hopelessly scattered throughout his occult encyclopedia and at times considerably inconsistent; yet, the most condensed and coherent discussion on the topic is to be found in chapters 36 and 37 of the third book. At the beginning of chapter III, 37 one comes across a straightforward definition of the soul:

14 See Michael Allen's and James Hankins' Introduction in Ficino 2001: viii–ix.

15 "Manifestum est quod homo non est anima tantum, sed est aliquid compositum ex anima et corpore."

16 In addition to the *Theologia Platonica* I, of particular importance for Agrippa's anthropological views must have been the following parts of the work: III.1–2, IV.1, V.1–15, VI.1–16, XII.1–7, XIII.1–10, XIV.1–8 ("Why are rational souls imprisoned in earthly bodies?"), XVII.1–4 ("What is the soul's status before it approaches the body, and what after it leaves?"), and XVIII.1–4.

> The soul of man is a certain divine light, created after the image of the Word, [which is] the cause of causes and first example, and the substance of God, figured by a seal whose character is the eternal Word. Also, the soul of man is a certain divine substance, indivisible and present in every part of the body, so produced by an incorporeal author that it depends on the power of the agent only, not on the bosom of the matter.

> Anima humana est lux quaedam divina ad imaginem verbi, causae causarum, primi exemplaris creata, substantia Dei sigilloque figurata cuius character est verbum aeternum. Item anima humana est substantia quaedam divina, individua et tota cuique corporis parti praesens, ab incorporeo autore ita producta ut ex agentis virtute solum, non ex materiae gremio dependeat. (Agrippa 1992: 514)

Several points should be made with regard to this important definition. First, the soul is said to be *of the same substance as God* and no ontological difference between them is even hinted at. On the contrary, Agrippa is keen to underline this view by varying the same idea thrice in only a few lines: soul is *lux divina*, *substantia Dei* and, again, *substantia divina*. Clearly, this is in stark contrast with the Church doctrine; the German humanist here contradicts Thomas Aquinas almost verbatim. This is how the *Doctor Angelicus* draws a sharp ontological boundary between God and soul:

> I answer that, to say that the soul is of the Divine substance involves a manifest improbability. For, as is clear from what has been said, the human soul is sometimes in a state of potentiality to the act of intelligence—acquires its knowledge somehow from things—and thus has various powers; all of which are incompatible with the Divine Nature, Which is a pure act—receives nothing from any other—and admits of no variety in itself, as we have proved." (Aquinas 1947: I, 90)[17]

Next, Agrippa states that soul is "produced" by God (*producta*), not created (*facta*), a terminological nuance that should not be taken lightly. The general meaning of the verb *producere* in Classical and Medieval Latin is "to lead/bring forward" something that *already exists* (Ls 1975: 1455–56; Bls 1975: 738; Dcg 2012: 524; Nrm 2002: 858). It is very rarely synonymous, and only as a trope, with the verb *facere* (e. g. Plaut. *Rud*. 4, 4, 129: *ego is sum qui te produxi pater*).[18]

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17 "Respondeo dicendum quod dicere animam esse de substantia Dei, manifestam improbabilitatem continet. Ut enim ex dictis patet, anima humana est quandoque intelligens in potentia, et scientiam quodammodo a rebus acquirit, et habet diversas potentias, quae omnia aliena sunt a Dei natura, qui est actus purus, et nihil ab alio accipiens, et nullam in se diversitatem habens, ut supra probatum est."

18 For Augustine (*Contra Adv. Leg. et Proph.* 1), not even *creare* is synonymous with *facere*: *facere est quod omnino non erat, creare vero est ex eo quod iam erat educendo aliquid constituere* ("To make concerns what did not exist at all; but to create is to make something by bringing forth something from what was already"). For Aquinas, however, the two terms appear to be synonymous; see Aquinas 1947: I, 45, a. 1. Agrippa too uses *creare* and *facere* synonymously.

Finally, there is an even more significant implication concealed in the quoted words. I already mentioned that the idea of man being an (indirect) image of God was central to Agrippa. However, upon carefully reading this and other passages,[19] one conclusion seems inevitable: in some instances, it appears that, when Agrippa says "man", he actually has in mind his *anima*. In this view, "man" appears to be primarily his soul; the body is only of secondary importance. Agrippa thus replicates Ficino's basic conceptual framework discussed above. Such a "spiritualist" perspective is perhaps confirmed by Agrippa's occasional reinterpretation, or rewording, of the well-known Biblical *templum Dei* image: contrary to the Apostle Paul, who refers to the whole man and, more specifically, to man's body as a temple of God or of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16; 1 Cor 6:19), Agrippa restricts this image to the pure soul in several instances.[20]

Agrippa's tendency to identify man with soul goes beyond Marsilio Ficino and has its roots in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, a late antique collection of mystical and theological discourses that had a profound influence on the Renaissance syncretists. Among these, the so-called *Pimander*, the first of the Hermetic discourses, proves to be a text of fundamental importance for the German humanist and his own theological thought.[21] It provides the Hermetic account of man's creation, according to which man is consubstantial (ὁμοούσιος) with God, immortal, and entirely spiritual in nature: God "gave birth to a man *like himself*" (ἀπεκύησεν ἄνθρωπον ἑαυτῷ ἴσον; *hominem sibi similem*) (Nock, Festugière 1945: 10).[22] Man lost his immortality only *after* the fall into the material world, which the *Pimander* describes as a loving embrace of man and nature, born out of man's curiosity. However, this loss was only partial: due to his fall into the nature, and unlike any other living being, man is twofold — "in the body mortal, but immortal in the essential man" (τὸν οὐσιώδη ἄνθρωπον; *hominem substantialem*) (Nock, Festugière 1945: 11; Campanelli 2011: 12; Copenhaver 1991: 3). The crucial expression here is "the essential man," which implies that the "true" man is the one that existed *prior to* the fall, and that he is mortal only "in the body" (δὶα τὸ σῶμα; *propter corpus*) — a wording that leaves no room for the assumption that the material body is intrinsic to man. With this conceptual background in mind, I now return to Agrippa's discussion of soul.

19 E.g. Agripa 1992: 507 (*cuius imaginis anima humana imago est*).

20 *Ibid*.: "Abstinentia…quasi templum Dei reddit animum" (Abstinence … makes the soul a temple of God).

21 Agrippa lectured on this text in Pavia in 1515 and referred to it at length in several works, such as the *De originali peccato* and *Dialogus de homine*.

22 The Latin translation is that of Marsilio Ficino, as given in the critical edition of Campanelli 2011: 10. The English translation given is according to Copenhaver 1991: 3.

Embodiment and body

That soul is "produced" by God means that it "proceeds" from Him in a gradual process of emanation (Agrippa 1992: 514): proceeding from God, soul is joined to "this grosser body" (*corpori huic iungitur crassiori*), but only after it is wrapped in "a celestial and aerial body" (*coelesti aëroque involvitur corpusculo*), which the Platonists call "the ethereal vehicle of the soul" (*aethereum animae vehiculum*). Through this medium, soul is then infused into the middle point of the heart, which is the center of man's body, and from there it is spread through all the parts and members of the body. From that point on, the interaction between body and soul is regulated by two complementary principles: extension and obedience. It is the property of the soul, being moveable in and of itself, to extend itself into matter, which obeys the soul's commands and is set into motion accordingly. Had Agrippa been familiar with it at his time, he could have suggested an analogy with the electric current that energizes the appliance.

This process, he explains, is necessary for all those souls that are destined to dwell in the created world: since man is the image of the world, he replicates the very process of its creation, which implies the infusion of the World Soul (*Anima mundi*) into the World Body (*Corpus mundi*) (Agrippa 1992: 508).[23] Significantly, Agrippa uses the image of dressing (*induere*), as well as the phrase "corporeal man" (*homo corporeus*), which both underline his notion of the "grosser body" and the duality of man: "Animum igitur hominis, sic verbo Dei sigillatum, necesse fuit etiam corporeum hominem … induere" ("Therefore it was necessary that the soul of man, thus sealed by the Word of God, should put on also the corporeal man.") (Agrippa 1992: 508).

Thus, it appears that, for Agrippa, there are actually two different meanings, or modes, of "man": the "inward" man, who seems to be non-different from his soul, and the "corporeal man", who is barely anything more than an external garment — a "spacesuit" of sorts for living in a hostile environment.[24] This *homo corporeus* is the seat of the external and internal senses, organs, and members, through which, as if through an interface, the soul interacts with the world.

Perrone Compagni traces back this idea to Pico della Mirandola (*Heptaplus* 5: 6), but there is, in my opinion, an even more important conceptual and terminological parallel, namely that with the *Corpus Hermeti-*

23 The classical formulation of the doctrine of embodiment that Agrippa deploys here is Plato, *Timaeus* 42d–43c. Plato describes how the task of creating bodies was relegated by God to "the younger gods" (τοῖς νέοις παρέδωκεν θεοῖς). The notion of the *Corpus mundi* as deployed in Ficino and Agrippa also goes back to *Timaeus* 36e–37a.

24 Aquinas 1947: I, 75, commenting on 2 Cor. 4:16 where St. Paul speaks of an "inward" and "outward" man, explicitly rejects the identification of soul with man as a whole. However, this duality is there in Paul and it has been subject to various exegetical attempts.

cum VII (Nock, Festugière 1945: 81–82; Campanelli 2011: 47, Copenhaver 1991: 24).[25] In this short discourse one finds exactly the same imagery of clothes related to body and soul. In addition to the stern observation that "the soul [is] shut up in the body, preventing it from anchoring in the havens of deliverance" (τὴν ἐν τῷ σώματι κατακεκλεισμένην ψυχήν; animamque…corporis vinclis inclusam), Hermes advises his son in the following way:

> But first you must *rip off the tunic that you wear*, the *garment* of ignorance, the foundation of vice, the bonds of corruption, the dark cage, the living death, the sentient corpse, the portable tomb (…). Such is *the odious tunic you have put on*. It strangles you and drags you down with it so that you will not hate its viciousness, not look up and see the fair vision of truth and the good that lies within, not understand the plot that it has plotted against you when it made insensible the organs of sense, made them inapparent and unrecognized for what they are, blocked up with a great load of matter. (Nock, Festugière 1945: 81–82; Campanelli 2011: 47, Copenhaver 1991: 24) [26]

"Ripping off the tunic one wears", "the garment of ignorance", "a great load of matter that blocks up the organs of sense" — these images closely match Agrippa's own metaphor of *induere*,[27] even though he is much more ambivalent (and *has* to be as a self-professed Christian) in passing a judgment on such a state of affairs. In the dualist perspective of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, body is evidently a burden to be dispensed with.

Agrippa's description of the reverse process — death — shows similar traits of the dualist perspective. He understands the process of embodiment as infusing the soul into the body and fixing one to the other via the medium of spirit or the "ethereal vehicle". So, what happens when this bond is broken?

> But when by a disease or some mischief these middle things [i.e. the bonds of spirit] are dissolved or fail, then the soul recollects itself by these middle things and flows back into the heart, which was the first receptacle of the soul.

25 Speaking of Pico, however, it should be mentioned that this idea appears in his famous *Oratio* too, where he speaks of man as "a divinity clothed with human flesh" ("numen humana carne circumvestitum") (Pico 1998: 6). Describing the man who has attained the state of pure intellect, Pico says that he is "ignorant of the body, banished to the innermost places of the mind" ("corporis nescium, in penetralia mentis relegatum").

26 The italics in the translation mine. I give only the clothes-imagery parts in Greek and Ficino's Latin: περιρρήξασθαι ὃν φορεῖς χιτῶνα, τὸ τῆς ἀγνωσίας ὕγασμα, ... Τοιοῦτός ἐστιν ὃν ἐνεδύσω χιτῶνα; *vestem quam circumfers exuere, indumentum inscitie … Huiuscemodi est, quo circumtegeris, umbraculum inimicum*. In other words, body is equaled to *chiton* (a sewn garment worn by both sexes in ancient Greece).

27 In Ficino's translation of the above-quoted sentence one even finds a compound verb of the same root: *induere* / *exuere* = to dress / undress. The same verb is used in a similar context by the Apostle Paul in Eph 4:24: ἐνδύσασθαι τὸν καινὸν ἄνθρωπον τὸν κατὰ Θεὸν κτισθέντα; induite novum hominem qui secundum Deum creatus est ("And that ye *put on* the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness"). However, Paul's concept of *homo novus* differs considerably from the Hermetic one.

> But when the spirit of the heart fails and the bodily heat disappears, man dies and *the soul flies away with this celestial vehicle*, and its genii, keepers, and daemons follow it on the way out and carry it to the judge, where its sentence is pronounced and God quietly leads forth the good souls to glory, whereas the fierce demon drags the evil souls to punishment.

> Quando vero per morbum malumve solvuntur vel deficiunt haec media, tunc anima ipsa per singula media sese recolligit refluitque in cor, quod primum erat animae susceptaculum; cordis vero deficiente spiritu extinctoque calore, ipsum deserit et moritur homo et evolat anima cum aethereo hoc vehiculo illamque egressam genii custodes daemonesque sequuntur et ducunt ad iudicem, ubi lata sententia bonas animas Deus tranquille perducit ad gloriam, malas violentus daemon trahit ad poenam. (Agrippa 1992: 514–15).

In this passage, which gives a glimpse of Agrippa's views on eschatology (at least as delineated in the *De occulta philosophia*), one finds several interesting points. First of all, death is a process precisely reverse to that of embodiment: the soul takes the same steps, but backwards, and leaves the body carried away by the same ethereal medium that enabled the bond in the first place. The idea that the recollection of the soul, its return to the heart and the subsequent abandonment of the body all take place through the medium of spirit ("by these middle things" — *per singula media*) implies that there is *no direct contact* between body and soul. They are, so to speak, separate hypostases, with one of them becoming ontologically insignificant upon death: in the soul's *post mortem* perspective sketched here body does not figure at all. There is a final trial before God, but the result of the trial, whether good or bad, pertains only to the soul, which is taken either to glory or to punishment.[28] There is no mention of the bodily resurrection; moreover, there is strong indication that the final trial is *individual* and takes place *immediately* upon the person's death (this is clearly emphasized by the temporal conjunction *quando*).

What one finds here is an account of an active soul which is being escorted by its attendants, and it should be read in tune with another statement (Agrippa 1992: 524) in which the German humanist states that "separated souls retain the fresh memory of those things which they did in this life and their will".[29] With the pronounced role of *genii*, *custodes*, and *daemones*, the whole passage reads as Platonic, which Perrone Compagni (Agrippa 1992: 514) notes by identifying the original references in

28 This idea undoubtedly goes back to Plato, *Republic*, 614b–618b, where the philosopher narrates about the Armenian soldier Er, who was wounded in battle, left his body, and spent twelve days wandering around. He saw the heavenly judges and witnessed the trial. Agrippa could have found the same idea in Ficino's translations of *Gorg.* 523 E f., 524 E–525 B, 526 B–C, and *Phaedo* 107 D, 113 D.

29 "Animas separatas eorum quae in hac vita gesserunt nondum extinctam retinere memoriam atque voluntatem". For a diametrically opposed view see Aquinas 1947: III, 70: the sensitive and other human potiencies do not remain in a soul detached from the body; these potencies are retained only after the resurrection.

Plato's *Phaedrus* (246–48), *Phaedo* (107d), and *Timaeus* (41e). Donald Tyson (Tyson 2000: 586), however, finds another interesting parallel, that with the *Asclepius*, the only Hermetic treatise that was known throughout the Middle Ages in its Latin translation. In Chapter 28 of that work, one finds a similar account of the soul that leaves the body and "passes to the jurisdiction of the chief demon who weighs and judges its merit, and if he finds it faithful and upright, he lets it stay in places suitable to it. But if he sees the soul smeared with the stains of wrongdoing and dirtied with vice, he sends it tumbling down…to the depths below".[30]

A cursory look at another of Agrippa's works, the short, unfinished *Dialogus de homine* (A Dialogue on Man, 1516) reveals how he read his dualist anthropological notions into the sacred scriptures he referred to. This dialogue shows a strong influence of Pico della Mirandola and the *Corpus Hermeticum* on Agrippa, as demonstrated by Paola Zambelli (Agrippa 1958: 55ff) and Perrone Compagni (Agrippa 2005: 37–51). Even though the conceptual framework and the author's proclaimed intentions are Christian, he argues for the same ontological position of man in the universe as he does in the *De occulta philosophia*. His exegesis is clearly Hermetic in origin: God endowed man with mind, spirit, and speech, as well as with the ability to contemplate and obey Him, so that man could attract and "drag down the rays of divine light" ("ut…ad se divini luminis radios traheret"), which would permanently keep death away from him, even though he had received a mortal body (Agrippa 1958: 54v–56r), and was warned that he would be subject to dying if he did not act accordingly. In other words, the mortal side of man "did not count" as long as he obeyed God's commands and worshiped Him. His mortality was a mere potentiality, not an actuality. It turned to actuality, however, once man transgressed divine commands and "embraced the body" (*corpus amplectens*). Thus, man fell down to the dark sphere of concupiscence and became subject to dying.

Here, again, Agrippa reverts to the Hermetic cloth-image: "You should, as Hermes says, *undress that garment* that you wear around yourself" ("Oportet autem te, ut inquid hermes, vestem quam circumfers exuere") (Agrippa 1958: 57v–57r). Not only does one find the same verb that Ficino used in his translation of the cloth-image passage (*exuere*), but Agrippa goes on to quote the same lines from the *Corpus Hermeticum* VII that I quoted above, strongly arguing for the *corpus animae carcer* doctrine: body is a garment of evil, living death, a sensible corpse, and so on.

In an even more spectacular twist of exegesis, he directly links this ultimately anti-corporeal passage to Christ's words from Matt. 16. 24: "If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross,

30 Copenhaver 1991: 84. From Agrippa's point of view, the "chief demon" of the *Asclepius* could hardly be identified with the Christian Devil. Within the Hermetic/Neoplatonic scheme according to which Agrippa tries to tailor Christian eschatology, it should be understood as a higher entity in charge of the post mortem trial.

and follow me".[31] That cross, explains Agrippa, is nothing else but "this material body, which we wear as a sort of cross. We should *get rid of it* and *leave it*, so that we could return to the pristine immortality together with Christ" ("quo crux nil aliud est quam corpus hoc materiale, quod in similitudine crucis geritur. Hoc nos abnegare et relinquere oportet, ut cum christo ad pristinam immortalitatem revertamur") (Agrippa 1958: 57v).[32] As if to nail down the argument, he quotes the Apostle Paul's words from Phil. 1. 23: "cupio dissolvi et esse cum Christo" ("For I am in a strait betwixt two, *having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ*"). In other words, in order to be with Christ, one must await the dissolution, the separation of the soul from the body!

To sum up, the textual evidence presented in this analysis strongly suggests that Cornelius Agrippa more or less directly sticks to the Platonic/Hermetic duality of man, whereby the ontological importance of the soul outweighs that of the body and reduces it to a mere *carcer animi*, the dungeon of the soul. What is so peculiar about Agrippa is his equally strong and persistent Christian self-identification, both in his literary works and his documented public life. It raises the question, heatly debated in the scholarship, whether Agrippa was a conscious pretender or unaware of the profoundly unorthodox character of his ideas. Given his thorough classical and ecclesiastical education, the latter solution is highly improbable. However, I would argue that the answer is to be found in a highly syncretistic spiritual atmosphere of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century in the Latin West. The age of the rediscovery of Plato, Neoplatonists, and the *Corpus Hermeticum* had, once again in history, brought about an intense mixing of various non-Christian traditions and mainstream Christian teachings. Thus, Agrippa's construction of a new "new orthodoxy" rests on his reinterpretation of the notion of piety: by reading into his Christian sources notions adopted from the Hermetic and Neoplatonic authors he replaced the well-established Christian idea of piety with theirs. What he got in this way was a sort of "alternative Christianity", once again "enriched" with elements from other traditions.

The idea that the human being equals the inner or essential man stripped of his material body reads almost as an inversion of the Biblical account of the fall. In stark contrast to Christian anthropological monism, the Hermetic notion of piety is informed by radical dualism: "My child," says Hermes Trismegistus to his disciple, "it is impossible to be engaged in both realms, the mortal and the divine. Since there are two kinds of entities, corporeal and incorporeal, corresponding to mortal and divine, one is left to choose one or the other. *One cannot have both together*" (Copenhaver 1991: 16).

31 The English Bible quotes in this text are given according to King James Version; see https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Matthew-Chapter-16/ [last accessed: 12/11/2018].

32 Italics in the translation mine.

Hence the importance of magic in Agrippa's perception of piety. Competing with the more or less established Christian doctrine, many late antique modes of spirituality, including the Hermetic thought, saw this kind of personal involvement in attaining salvation as an integral part of piety. Many Renaissance syncretists, such as Cornelius Agrippa, inherited this idea and tried more or less openly to build it into the main body of Christian teachings. In other words, what they tried was to inaugurate the "pious Christian magician"operating in a world marked by anthropological dualism. What they obviously did not count on was the resilience and strength of the millennial traditions standing behind, defining, and reaffirming the conflicting characters of the Apostle Peter and Simon Magus.

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Ноел Путник

Разодевање „истинског човека“:
филолошки осврт на антропологију Корнелија Агрипе

Резиме

У раду се разматрају антрополошки аспекти хетеродоксне мисли немачког хуманисте Корнелија Агрипе (1486–1535), нарочито с обзиром на његов спис *Три књиге о окултној филозофији*. Агрипина интелектуална позиција на идеолошкој мапи ренесансног хуманизма већ дуго је предмет научних дебата, у којима се нуде различита тумачења противречности између хришћанских и херметичко-неоплатонских елемената у његовим филозофским назорима. На основу филолошке анализе изворâ – поготово семантичке анализе термина *corpus* и *anima* у контексту Агрипиног схватања процеса утеловљења – у раду се закључује да Агрипину диспаратну мисао можемо најадекватније протумачити као настојање да се платонско-херметички антрополошки дуализам уклопи у шири концептуални оквир хришћанског монизма. У том контексту, нарочито се наглашава посредничка улога Марсилија Фичина, Агрипиног непосредног претходника, као и утицај антрополошких доктрина позноантичког *Херметичког корпуса*.

Кључне речи: тело, душа, дух, Корнелије Агрипа, Марсилио Фичино, *De occulta philosophia, Corpus Hermeticum*

Примљен: 20. 12. 2018.

Прихваћен за објављивање: 20. 12. 2019.