

1. The Cabala
2. Monadic-Triadic Cosmos
3. Pico on the Cabala

# 07. Pico: Supernatural Magic and the Cabala

## Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494)

- Italian philosopher; younger contemporary of Ficino.

### Conclusions (1486)

- 900 claims on a variety of subjects: Aristotle, Plato, Hermes Trismegistis (10), magic (26), Cabala (72), Christian theology.

- *A new syncretic philosophy or a Christian apologia?*

- *Yates: A combination of Ficino's natural magic with the Cabala that resulted in a system of supernatural magic within a Christian framework.*

- 1486: Travels to Rome to debate *Conclusions*.
- Papal commission finds 13 conclusions heretical and Pope condemns all 900.



"There is no science that assures us more of the divinity of Christ than magic and Cabala." (M9)

- 1487: Pico offers an *Apology*, but eventually submits a retraction.



# 1. Cabala (Kabbalah)

- Jewish mystical tradition: Claimed to be handed down from Moses (Hebrew law-giver).
- Focus on creation by word of God: Spoken word is source of creation.
- Hebrew = language of spoken word.

## Zohar

- 13th cent. Spanish text on Cabala.
- Describes two branches:

### (1) "Path of Names"

- *Assignment of numbers to Hebrew alphabet (Gematria).*
- *Goal: Decipher texts to uncover hidden meanings.*
- *Especially popular: analyses of Genesis.*

Exs:

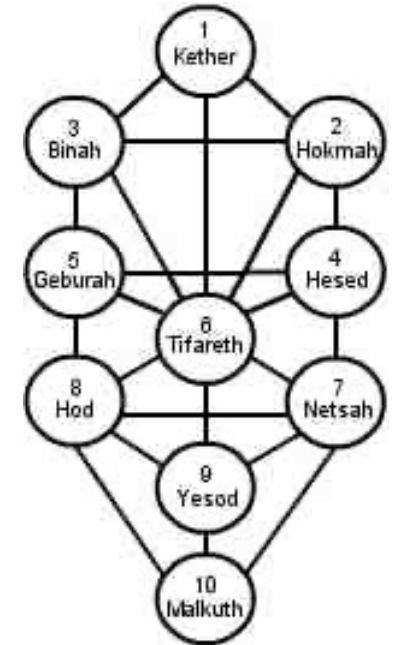
- Number of heavenly hosts = 301,655,172
- 72 "important" angels through which God may be approached.



*Nature encoded in symbolic numerical representations.*

## (2) "Path of Sephiroth": 10 names of God.

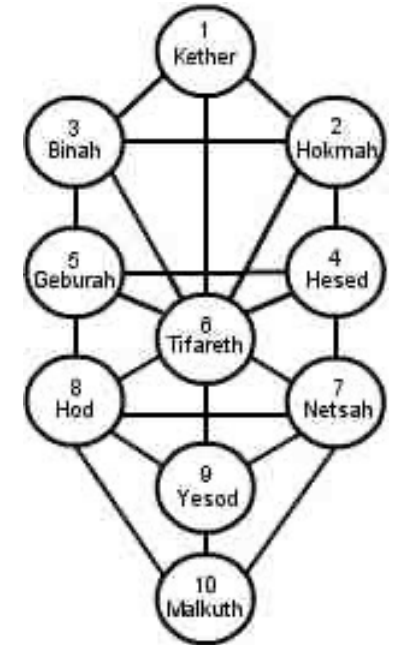
<u>Sephiroth</u>	<u>aspects of God</u>	<u>heavenly spheres</u>
(1) Kether	supreme crown	Primum mobile
(2) Hokhmah	wisdom	8th sphere
(3) Binah	intelligence	Saturn
(4) Hesod	love or mercy	Jupiter
(5) Gevurah (Din)	power and wrath	Mars
(6) Rahamin (Tifereth)	compassion	Sol
(7) Netsch	lasting endurance	Venus
(8) Hod	majesty	Mercury
(9) Yesod	foundation	Luna
(10) Malkuth	kingdom or glory	Elements



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

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"I adapt our soul to the ten sefirot thus: so through its unity it is with the first, through intellect with the second, through reason with the third, through superior sensual passion with the fourth, through superior irascible passion with the fifth, through free choice with the sixth, through all these as it converts to superior things with the seventh, through all these as it converts to inferior things with the eight, through a mixture of both of these - more through indifferent or alternate adhesion than simultaneous inclusion - with the ninth, and through the power by which it inhabits the first habitation with the tenth." (C66)

# 2. Monadic-Triadic Cosmos

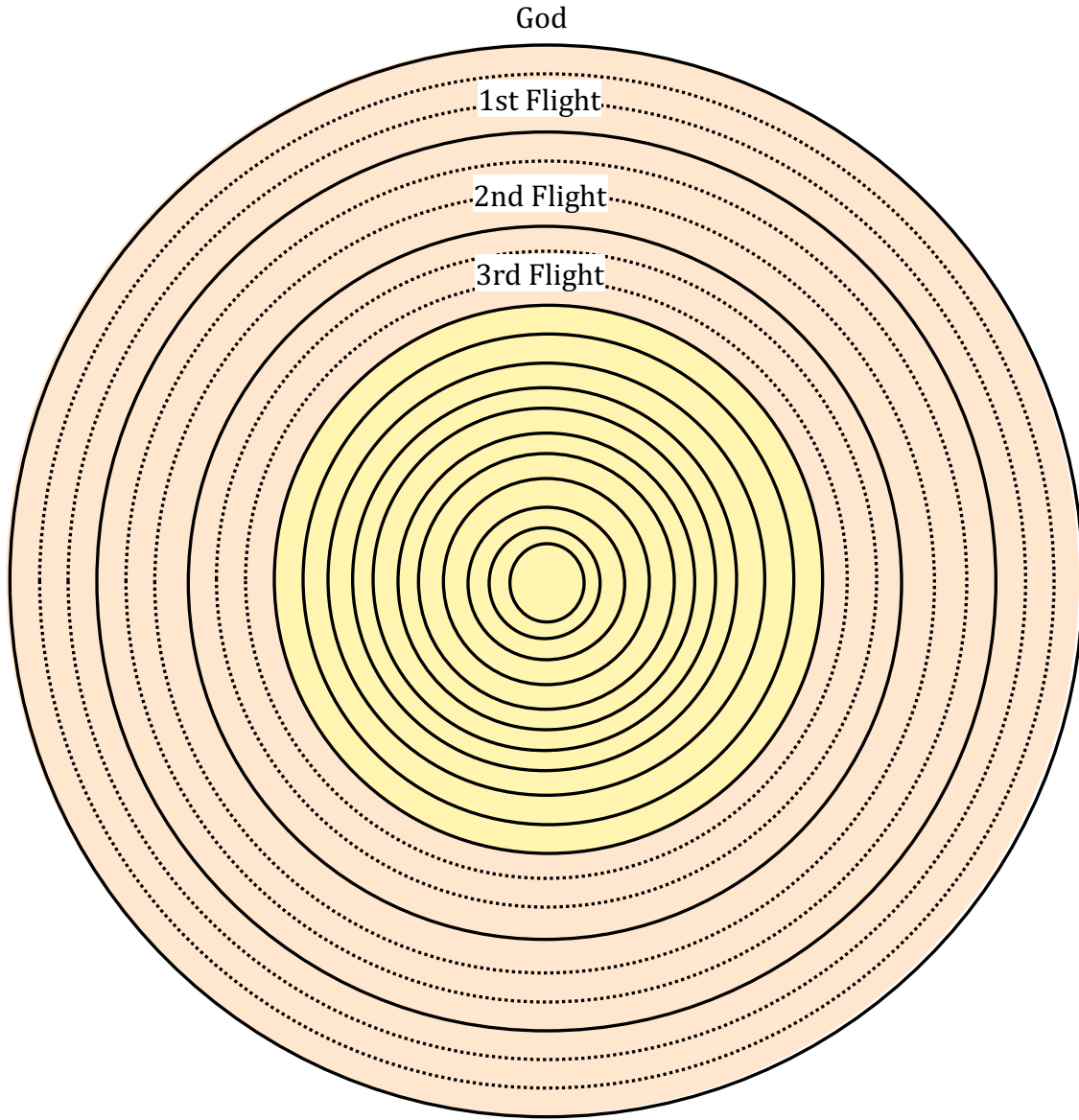
- Pseudo-Dionysius (*The Celestial Hierarchies* ~6 A.D.)

Natural Realm (Celestial & Terrestrial)

- Primum Mobile
- fixed stars
- Saturn
- Jupiter
- Mars
- Sun
- Venus
- Mercury
- Moon
- 4 Elements

Supernatural Realm (Empyrean)

- God
  - seraphim
  - cherubim
  - thrones
  - dominions
  - virtues
  - powers
  - principalities
  - archangels
  - angels
- } 1st flight (hierarchy of the Father)  
 } 2nd flight (hierarchy of the Son)  
 } 3rd flight (hierarchy of the Spirit)



"In the first world, God, the primal unity, presides over the nine orders of angels as if over many spheres and, without moving, moves all toward himself. In the middle world, that is, the celestial, the empyrean heaven likewise presides like the commander of an army over nine heavenly spheres, each of which revolves with an unceasing motion; yet in imitation of God, it is itself unmoving. There are also in the elemental world, after the prime matter which is its foundation, nine spheres of corruptible forms.

It should above all be observed, a fact on which our purpose almost wholly depends, that these three worlds are one world, not only because they are all related by one beginning and to the same end, or because regulated by appropriate numbers they are bound together both by a certain harmonious kinship of nature and by a regular series of ranks, but because whatever is in any of the worlds is at the same time contained in each and there is no one of them in which is not to be found whatever is in each of the others." (*Heptaplus.*)



Above the four elements which are moved according to substance and quality are the seven heavens of the planets. They are not moved by substance but in a certain manner by a kind of quality or, as it were, disposition. Since the movement of these planets is erratic, an eighth heaven, whose motion is more regular, is set over them. But this heaven has two motions, namely one from the East to West and another in the opposite direction. It has two qualities also, namely brilliance and splendor. For that reason, the crystalline sphere whose one motion is from the East [to the West] and has a single quality, brilliance, is ascendant over it. But since position is superior to motion and since what gives light is superior to light, therefore one ascends to the Empyrean which is entirely stable and shining throughout. The Empyrean is rightly related to the stability and light of the Trinity, and the nine other heavens to the nine orders of angels. Indeed, they are disposed in a manner consistent with Dionysius the Areopagite; three hierarchies of divine spirits, each of which contains three orders. (*De Christiana Religione.*)



### 3. Pico on the Cabala

- Two types:
  - "Ars combinandi" (combinatorics; i.e., the Path of Names).
  - "Supreme part of natural magic".

Claim (Yates): The second type is the completion of Ficino's natural magic to the supernatural realm.



"No magical operation can be of any efficacy unless it has annexed to it a work of Cabala, explicit or implicit." (M15)

"No names that mean something, insofar as those names are singular and taken per se, can have power in a magical work, unless they are Hebrew names, or closely derived from Hebrew." (M22)



- Thus: One must know Hebrew and the Cabala to do *effective* magic.
- Implication: Poor Ficino, who knows little Hebrew...





"The work of the preceding hymns is nothing without a work of Cabala, whose property it is to practice every formal quantity, continuous and discrete." (O21)

- Thus: Ficino's Orphic hymns require Cabala in order to be effective.

← *Ficino's natural magic is ineffective!*

- But: Cabala adds abstract symbolism.
  - *Operatives are abstract numbers, not images or material substances.*

← *What about the Augustinian and Thomistic Prohibitions?*

## Traditional View of Pico

- "Oration on the Dignity of Man": the opening speech for the *Conclusions*.

"And so, O Asclepius, man is a *magnum miraculum* ("great miracle"), a being worthy of reverence and respect."



- Humans are intelligent agents in charge of their own destinies.
- Not at mercy of religious doctrines, but capable of avoiding evil through their own devices.

*Very influential in development of Humanism and the Enlightenment.*

Pico's Relevance to Development of Science

- Further development of magical tradition
  - Humans as creative agents acting on Nature.
- Combination of Cabala with natural magic.
  - Introduces numerical representations of Nature into magical tradition.

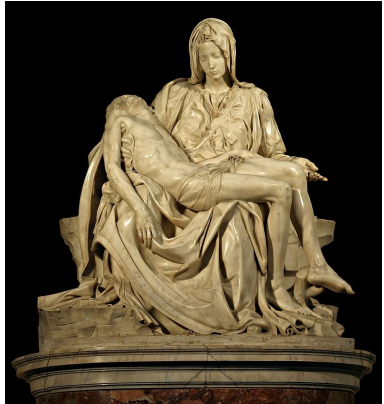
Yates' View of Renaissance Magic

- Basis of an artistic worldview.
  - Highly subjective.
  - Conditions imagination through rituals and ceremonies towards receiving inwardly the divine forms of God.
  - Heightening of artistic perceptions.
- Operative magi of renaissance were artists: Donatello, Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael, etc.
  - Knew how to infuse divine life into statues through their art (metaphoric interpretation of Hermetic writings).



"Primavera" ("Spring") as a talisman  
Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510)

Not turtles!



"Madonna della Pietà"  
Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni (1475-1564)



"David"  
Donatello di Niccolo di Betto Bardi (1386-1466)