

Gentrain Unit 7. Marsilio Ficino, May 16, 2013, Dr. Cindy Ausec

Life (1433-1499)

- Born at Figline in the Val d'Arno October 19<sup>th</sup> 1433
- 1462 became the head of the Florentine Platonic Academy
- Ordained in 1473 and later a Canon of Florence

Renaissance Man

- Understood principles of every art - embodied the Renaissance ideal of the complete man
  - Philosopher and scholar
  - Skilled doctor who like Hippocrates never took a fee
  - Musician – main objective was to arouse devotion
  - Promoted the visual arts– their function was to remind the soul of its origin in the divine world by creating through art resemblances to that world. Directed the painting of Botticelli's *Primavera*
  - Priesthood – he considered it the highest function of all
- Translated into Latin the whole of Plato and many of the classical writings in the same tradition – remained the standard until the 19<sup>th</sup> century
- Philosophical Works
  - *De Amore* – explains how creation is brought into being
  - *The Platonic Theology or the immortality of Souls* – 18 books
  - *The Christian Religion* – emphasizes in addition to the divinity of Man's soul the personal relationship between Man and God
  - *The Three Books on Life* – a medical and astrological work

Platonic Academy of Florence

- Established by Cosimo de' Medici 1439 – selected Ficino to run it in 1462
- 1462 Villa at Careggi became the headquarters of the Academy
- Associated with his Academy and under his influence was the most conspicuously brilliant group of men ever to have been assembled in modern Europe. Lorenzo de' Medici, Alberti, Poliziano, Landino, Pico della Mirandola
- Inspired the great Renaissance artists, Botticelli, Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian, Durer
- Awoke Europe to the significance of the Platonic tradition

Marsilio Ficino as a Christian Thinker: Theological Aspects of his Platonism

- Pursued the idea of a Christian Platonism
- Had to deal with theological questions that the tradition of Christian thinking presented – *De Christiana religione* – a apology or defense of the Christian religion
- Plato and his followers provided the key to the knowledge of the divine and immortal principle within Man: Ficino made faith in this principle a living ideal for his age
- Immortality of the soul – Through Ficino it became central to Christian thought
  - Decree of the Lateran Council in 1512 added to Catholic Church's dogma

- Emphasis on the individual soul led to the devotional step of a “personal relationship” with God - characteristic of the reformers
- Immortality and divinity of the soul was the basis of “the dignity of Man”

#### Ficino as a Christian Thinker

- His theory of the soul is the foundation of his view of man
  - Order of Being - God, Angel, Soul then the material sphere Quality and Body
  - Emphasizes the middle position of the soul in the Universe
  - Special function of the soul - mediating between the divine and the material spheres of the cosmos
- Uses the Neo-Platonist conception of emanation and return
  - Characterized the human *mens* (mind) as a ray of the divine Spirit which descends into the soul and from there it ascends again back to God
  - Uses the metaphor of the soul as a mirror of God to describe the quality of the soul as a trace of God and then as an image and likeness of God
- Inclination of the soul towards the body and Sin
  - Through union with the body, the soul communicated and passes on the principles and laws of the divine and immaterial sphere to the sensible and material sphere
  - Sin – the fact that the soul can give up its proper task and succumb to material influence. When that inclination excludes the divine and intellectual affinity of the soul
- The Person of Christ
  - Ficino introduces the theory of Christ mediating the creation – highlights the cosmological aspects of Christ as Logos of the world
  - Incarnation –the descent of the pre-existent Logos into the sensible world
    - God in His goodness became man so that man could become God
    - The presentation of the divine sphere in the sensibly perceptible person of Christ abolishes the perverted orientation of the soul towards the sensible and material sphere
    - Makes the ascent of the soul towards God possible and establishes the basis for redemption
  - In Christ one person exists in three natures: God, Soul and Body – through the soul the extremes of God and body are connected
- Theory of Redemption - Redemption is the ascent of the soul to God
  - The soul ascends from the material sphere into the intelligible and from there to God himself
  - The soul’s ascent is dependent on divine influence
  - The ascent of the soul happens through the intellect by thinking and through the will by faith, hope and above all love
  - Divine ray is a special form of grace but it does not remove free will, even with the effect of grace the independence of the soul remains intact