

Walking between God and the Devil

How natural is Ficino's natural magic?



Mephistopheles appears before Faust (1826-1827) by Eugene Delacroix

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Abstract

In 1489 Italian renaissance philosopher Marsilio Ficino published his most controversial work, the third book on Life, De vita coelitus comparanda (Dvcc). In this book he discusses magical practices to attain good health. Defending himself against Christian criticism, Ficino claims his magic is natural and therefore in accordance with church doctrines. Here Ficino's claim is investigated by confronting this work with Christian arguments against magical practice, drawing heavily on Augustine's City of God. It is concluded that from a Neoplatonist perspective the magic in Dvcc can be considered totally natural.

"O Faustus, leave these frivolous demands, Which strike a terror to my fainting soul!"

(Mephistopheles to Faustus, in: 'The tragical History of Dr. Faustus' (Marlowe:1616)

1. Introduction

The story of Dr Faustus, who sold his soul to the devil in exchange for knowledge could have been a piece of medieval Christian 'propaganda' against the use of (daemonic) magic. Faustus is taking the road not to be taken by a mortal sinner (i.e. practising daemonic magic), the inevitable result being eternal damnation.

The first Faustus story, on which Marlowe's play was based, was published in 1587 (Scherer 1884). About hundred years earlier, between 1480 and 1489, the Italian philosopher and priest Marsilio Ficino published his three books on life (*De vita libri tres*). In the third book, *De vita coelitus comparanda* (On obtaining life from the heavens) he discusses the use of magic for a healthy life, using the powers of the heaven (Kaske & Clark 1989). This book proved very controversial, as he was brought before the Papal court in Rome because of it (Celenza 2012: 2.4).

Ficino was on the one hand heavily influenced by hermetic and Neoplatonist traditions, he translated many classical works into Latin (Celenza, 2012). In these traditions the use of magic was a more or less integral part of natural philosophy.¹ On the other hand he was a prominent member of the catholic church (earlier in life he was ordained a priest). The church was very critical of these practices, basically stating that magic was the work of the devil (as portrayed in the story of Faustus). Ficino tried to reconcile these perspectives by proposing his magic was 'natural', i.e. part of the laws that govern natural phenomena, thus avoiding the aspects of magic mostly criticized by Christian theology: the 'invoking of spirits' or even worse 'the creation of Gods' by men (Hanegraaff, undated: 2).

¹ Natural philosophy is the philosophical study of natural phenomena. Nowadays considered a precursor of natural science.

In this essay Ficino's claim is examined. Was his magic indeed natural or did it also contain elements of daemonic magic? Before we come to that question we will examine the different conceptions of magic in paragraph 2. Subsequently the Christian criticism against daemonic magic is discussed in paragraph 3, for this forms the background against which Ficino was defending his approach to magic. In paragraph 4 Ficino's magic in *Dvcc* is discussed. A conclusion is presented in paragraph 5.

2. Conceptions of magic

Magic is not a straightforward concept. In an introductory article to the new Journal 'Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft', Michael Baily discusses the various definitions of the concept, concluding that 'magic is a profoundly unstable category' (Bailey 2006:2). One problem, according to Bailey, is that magic is often defined by authorities of various sorts and these definitions tend to differ across time and between cultures. Many of the proposed definitions have been heavily discussed because they did not fit diverse circumstances and contexts (Bailey 2006: 4).

Recurring elements in definitions of magic are the use of (conscious) will power to influence events, effect change in material conditions or present the illusion of change by the use of (more powerful) preternatural or supernatural forces. This is done by means of rituals, symbols, actions, gestures, and/or language (Oxford Dictionary, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Flint 1991, Hanegraaff 2006, Bailey 2006).

In his classical study 'The Golden Bough', Scottish anthropologist James George Frazer related magic to science and religion. Science and magic share the assumption that all natural phenomena are subject to laws, and these laws can be discovered and manipulated (to cause predictable effects). Religion and magic share the assumption of the existence of unseen realities or supernatural powers. (Frazer 1922, ch. 4).

Underlying Frazer's discussion on magic, science and religion we can discover a crucial distinction between different forms of magic. This distinction refers to the powers that are invoked by using magic. As with the definitions there is no consensus on how to order magical practices according to their efficacy, but for the sake of simplicity we will distinguish between two basic mechanisms/powers:

1. Magic using natural law (natural magic)
2. Magic using higher powers (daemonic magic)

Ad 1) Magic using natural law

This can be considered the 'scientific' approach to magic. It uses knowledge of hidden but (pre)natural laws to produce effects. Markus (1994: 377) traces this form of magic back to hermetic and Neoplatonist thinking. In the theurgic practices of those days sympathy was mentioned as an important explaining device. Markus quotes Plotinus:

'But how does magic work? By sympathy and by the fact that there is a natural concord of things that are alike and opposition of things that are different...' (Markus 1994: 377).

Neoplatonists considered all levels of reality as emanations of the Prime Mover. From this transcendent essence all other manifestations of reality, such as consciousness (mind), soul and material manifestations follow in a hierarchical order. But since they are all part of the same cosmological body, they are naturally related to each other. The hermetic principle 'as above, so below' describes precisely this principle.

In this tradition theurgy is the spiritual practice of reconnecting to the transcendent essence or origin of all things. Since this essence has a generic presence in all things living or dead, theurgists can work on any level (material, soul and mind/spirit) to produce effects on any other level. As Hanegraaff noted the law of sympathy implies a two-way process: man is not only 'receiving' divine influence, but can also create it (Hanegraaff undated: 1-5).

Ficino, defending himself against Christian criticism, described natural magic as follows:

"Nor do I affirm here a single word about profane magic which depends upon the worship of daemons, but I mention natural magic, which, by natural things, seeks to obtain the services of the celestials for the prosperous health of our bodies.

...

Lastly, there are two kinds of magic. The first is practiced by those who unite themselves to daemons by a specific religious rite, and, relying on their help, often contrive portents. This, however, was thoroughly rejected when the Prince of this World was cast out. But the other kind of magic is practiced by those who seasonably subject natural materials to natural causes to be formed in a wondrous way." (Kaske & Clark 1989)

Henry Cornelius Agrippa, more or less a contemporary (he started working on these topics shortly after Ficino's death) defined natural magic as follows:

"Natural Magick therefore is that, which considering well the strength and force of Natural and Celestial beings, and with great curiosity labouring to discover their affections, produces into open Act the hidden and concealed powers of Nature...(Agrippa 1676, 111).

Agrippa shared Ficino's ambivalent attitude towards the use of magic. On the one hand he was very much involved in it², on the other hand he was critical of daemonic magic: he warned against the 'delusion and mockery of evil spirits' (Agrippa 1676: 119).

Natural magic, in the definition of both Ficino and Agrippa, resembles strongly theurgy of the hermetic and Neoplatonist tradition. Its working is based on natural law and celestial beings are considered part of this law.

Ad 2) Magic using higher powers

This may be considered the religious approach to magic, since it uses supernatural powers to cause effects. Basically this means that spirits come into the frame. In the fore mentioned hermetic and (Neo)platonist tradition this addition would not have made a big difference, since daemons were considered intermediate forces in a cosmological scheme that connected man to its divine origin (Markus 1994: 378). So for theurgists like Plotinus and Iamblichus the distinction between natural and daemonic magic was probably non-existent, because all entities (of physical nature or otherwise) were part of the same natural order of things.

In Christian theology the existence of daemons is not denied, but they are not considered divine. Indeed, they may even work against God's plan. Magi striving for the divine might end up working with 'lower' spirits, sometimes without knowing it, because they are tricked by these spirits, as Faustus was tricked by Mephistopheles. According to various authors Christianity has turned the classical benign daemon into an evil demon, a category to be avoided (Flint 1991, Markus 1994).

Augustine played an important role in adding this moral/religious dimension to the use of daemonic magic. According to Markus Augustine's spirit universe was not very different from the Neoplatonists. He basically shared their views on the powers that are 'out there'. However, he added two very important distinctions to the practice of daemonic magic: the goals for which it is used and (related to it) the attitude of the magician towards daemonic power (Markus 1994:378-379).

Augustine separated magicians acting according to 'public' and 'private' law. The intent of a magician working according to public law is to serve God and his universal laws. Magic, in this sense, is a service to God. Augustine mentions the miracles of saints as an example of this practice. Magicians working according to private law use magic to satisfy private goals. They have become disconnected from universal law and God's purpose (they are considered the sorcerers).

² In 1533 Agrippa published 'De occulta philosophia libri tres' (Three books on occult philosophy), in which he extensively treated all kinds of magic.

Related to his goal is the magicians' attitude towards the powers he works with. Augustine claimed that piety, a prime quality of saints, subjected the private (interest) to the public (God's law), therefore creating an obeying, serving attitude towards the divine and the higher powers that serve it. The sorcerer on the other hand, uses the higher powers to its own ends: he tries to get control over them.

According to Augustine this difference in goals and attitude creates a vital difference in the powers that are invoked, hence the great difference between the practice of saints performing miracles and the practice of sorcerers. He who subjects to God's will and the higher powers that serve it, will mobilize spirits working in line with God's universal purposes. He who wants to control these higher powers for personal ends will mobilize low spirits working against God's plan (Markus 1994:379-380).

3. Christian criticism against magic

In the most recent edition of the Catechism of the Roman Catholic church, we can read the unequivocal rejection of magic in all its appearances.³ It contains three articles on Idolatry and three on divination and magic (Vatican 1993: 2112-2117). They state for example that:

- One is not to believe in other divinities than the one true God and therefore has to reject all (forms of) idols and idolatry ('divinizing what is not God').
- One should not be curious about the future and have confidence in the 'hands of providence'.
- One should reject all forms of divination since these 'conceal a desire for power over time, history [...] and other human beings, [...] as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers'.

At the same time it is evident that magic is an integral part of Christian life and theology. There are hundreds of entries in the Catechism on the ritual of prayer and how it brings the believer closer to God, on the works of the Holy Spirit, on the use of sacraments, bread, wine, holy water and other symbols, and on miracles and how they are meant to strengthen faith (Vatican 1993; various entries).⁴ The current Catechism, a product of the late twentieth century, is literally crammed with magical thinking and practices.⁵

³ The Catechism contains the fundamental dogma's of the Catholic church, worded in a way that enhances popular understanding.

⁴ By using the 'word search' option one can search the entire text of the Catechism and find numerous examples. <http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/INDEX.HTM>

⁵ In his book 'The City of God' Augustine treats extensively the qualitative differences between religious practice (read: magic) and other magic (Schaff 1886; mainly ch. 7-10).

The Christian condemnation of magic is not a recent phenomenon, its sources go back to biblical references, especially in the Old Testament. Here we find a number of examples in which the use of magic and divination is rejected (United Bible Societies 2009).⁶ In many cases this condemnation is put in pretty strong terms, as in Leviticus 20:27, where it says: 'A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death: they shall stone them with stones: their blood shall be upon them' (King James version 1611).

Theologically Augustine is one of the founding fathers of the Christian criticism. In the previous paragraph it already became clear that his conceptual ideas on (daemonic) magic are loaded with moral judgment. In his book 'City of God' it becomes clear where this comes from (Schaff 1886). We can extract the following arguments against the use of magic:

1) *There is only God, and only he should be worshipped*

Augustine reacts in many places to the practice of worshipping intermediate Gods by the Neoplatonists, stating that these Gods, for example the ones embodying the planets in astrology, 'can be nothing without Him' (BR: the one God) and more importantly: cannot be considered to be what He is. The sacred rites ought not to be performed for the many Gods, but for the one God (City of God VII:30, VIII:12).

2) *Demons are not better than men*

Augustine criticizes the idea that demons, in Neoplatonist thought placed between mankind on earth and God in heaven, are of a higher nature than mankind. That they don't have a body and dwell in an element above the earth (the air), doesn't make them superior to us, says Augustine. He refers to the work of Neoplatonist Apuleius who stated that demons share various qualities with men, like passions. According to Augustine it is 'nothing but folly' to worship the same qualities we humans want to get rid of (in an attempt to come closer to God). We should worship divine virtues and these are not confined to the higher worlds (above the earth), according to Augustine. On the contrary, the quality of the virtues in the demon world may well be of a lesser quality than our own (City of God, VIII: 14-17).

3) *Demons are not able to mediate between men and God*

The intermediate role of demons, the idea that demons 'convey the prayers of men to the Gods and bring back to men the answers granted to their requests', is heavily disputed by Augustine. Basically his argument is that God doesn't need demons to contact men, demons are not worthy of doing this because they share the 'misery' with the ones below them (mankind) and they desist

⁶ For example in Exodus 22:18, Leviticus 19:31, 20:6, 20:27, Deuteronomy 18:10-14, 2 Kings 21:6, 2 Chronicles 33:6, Jeremiah 27:9, Ezekiel 13:17-23, Malachi 3:5, Wisdom of Solomon 18:13, Revelation 21: 8 (and further).

from telling mankind NOT to worship them but only to worship the one true God.⁷ Lastly, the scripture tells us how it is done: by the mediating role of Jesus Christ alone (City of God VIII: 18-22, IX: 17-23)

4) *Direct contact to God is possible, but not through magical practice*

Augustine is mainly criticizing (Neo)platonist accounts of theurgy, claiming that the Gods they dealt with were actually wicked spirits in disguise, for their characteristics resemble more the 'unblessed' state of demons than the qualities one may expect from Gods. He sees this as a danger for every human being trying to connect to God, even the righteous one (City of God X:10). To be safeguarded from his risk, one should stay away from magical practices and stay close to religious ritual as prescribed in the scripture and by the church.

Augustine pointed to the risks of magical practice, just like many pagan scholars had done before him (Flint 1991, Markus 1994). But where most of these scholars tend to focus on the conditions for avoiding these risks⁸, Augustine rejects these practices altogether and seeks the solution in canonizing Christian (magical) rituals.

4) **Ficino's magic in *De vita coelitus comparanda* (Dvcc)**

Ficino's Dvcc grew out of his commentary on Plotinus Enneads, especially on the section which discusses drawing favor from the heavens (Copenhaver 1984). The book discusses various magical practices, like astrology (most prominently), working with gems, images, figures, colors, numbers, music and words. In discussing these matters Ficino switches between describing practical applications and digressing on cosmological issues.⁹

To judge Ficino's magic just from this book is risky, since there are issues he discusses more prominently elsewhere and also in a different manner.¹⁰ But since Dvcc is his most important work on the topic, we may assume it contains at least some important insights on the matter. However even this statement is risky, because Ficino is not always very clear on 'who is talking' in his work. He often cites other sources ('they say'). Sometimes he disagrees with them, but mostly not.

⁷ Augustine acknowledges the existence of good demons (though he focusses very heavily on the bad ones), but it is unclear (to the author at least) how their (intermediary) role is to be perceived (see City of God IX:2). In book IX (from ch.22 and onwards) he introduces the role of angels. They are immortal as demons, but 'blessed' as well. The latter part sets them apart from demons, who share their 'unblessed' state with mankind. For this reason the works of angels can be considered the work of God.

⁸ Agrippa, for example, speaks of the importance of 'cleanliness' of the magus, before he performs his rituals (1676:119-120).

⁹ References to Ficino's work in this paragraph are based on the translation by Kaske & Clark, 1989.

¹⁰ For a more comprehensive treatment of his work, see for example the complete works of M.J.B. Allen (2014), Allen & Rees (eds.) (2002) and Voss (2006). Hankins (2006) explicitly discusses Ficino's different attitude to magic in his other work.

In these cases it seems Ficino agrees with them, but we can't be sure; defending himself against his critics he stated he was just recounting what others had said without necessarily agreeing to all of it (Allen, 2014).

To describe the most relevant passages from *Dvcc* we will use the distinctions of magic presented before.

Ad a) Goals to be achieved

If we use Augustine's distinction on the use of private and public law it seems Ficino is mostly working on the private level. From the outset he makes it clear this book is about medicine, specifically about the way the heavens can be used to attain a healthy and long life.¹¹ This goal would almost certainly be considered private by Augustine, since it aims at personal welfare.

At the same time Ficino argues in many cases the importance of the magus being properly aligned to the divine, otherwise he risks being deceived by evil daemons:

'For Iamblichus too says that those who place their trust in images alone, caring less about the highest religion and holiness, and who hope for divine gifts from them, are very often deceived in this matter by evil daemons encountering them under the pretense of being good divinities.'
(*Dvcc*, ch. XVIII)

Voss also stresses the importance of this aspect of Ficino's magic. In her view astrology and music were so important for Ficino because they were powerful means of re-alignment. Astral magic is ultimately meant to free the soul 'into its angelic or god-like nature'. (Voss, forthcoming: 3, 27).

Ad b) Powers invoked

Throughout *Dvcc* we can read Ficino's rejection of invoking daemons and practices that refer to daemoniac magic. A few examples: in chapter XIII he writes 'But the incantations I gladly omit'. In chapter XV: 'I learned from the theologians and Iamblichus that makers of images are often possessed by evil daemons and deceived.' In chapter XVIII he states: '...we ought not rashly to allow even the shadow of idolatry.' In chapter XXI: '...we are not teaching philters but medicine'. In chapters ch. XIII and XVIII he explicitly warns against magical practices aimed at harming people. In chapter XXVI, where he summarizes his cosmology, Ficino is most outspoken on this topic. Without stating it very explicitly it is clear that he

¹¹ Where 'healthy' is not restricted to the body alone, but extends to the soul and spirit as well.

strongly feels that invoking daemons should be avoided and even more so the practice of worshipping them.¹²

Ficino uses the metaphor of farming to explain the naturalness of his magic. The farmer 'prepares the field and the seed for celestial gifts and by grafting prolongs the life of the shoot and refashions it into another and better species.' In the same way, he argues, '[the magus] does the very same things: he seasonably introduces the celestial into the earthly by particular lures just as the farmer interested in grafting brings the fresh graft into the old stock.' (Chapter XXVI).

The celestial gifts are a central concept in his magic. These gifts are considered occult but natural, just like the powers that make plants grow. Ficino's ideas are heavily influenced by Neoplatonist cosmology, in which a natural sympathy binds everything together. Ficino speaks of a harmony and of harmonic power and explains how the magician, for example the astrologer, uses this power:

'This harmony is thought to have such great power that it oftentimes bestows a wonderful power not only on the works of farmers and on artificial things composed by doctors from herbs and spices, but even on images which are made out of metals and stones by astrologers.' (Dvcc, ch. XII)

'...many people confirm that magic doctrine that by means of lower things which are in accord with higher ones, people can in due season somehow draw to themselves celestial things...' (Dvcc, ch. XV).

'The Arabs say that when we fashion images rightly, our spirit, if it has been intent upon the work and upon the stars through imagination and emotion, is joined together with the very spirit of the world and with the rays of the stars through which the world-spirit acts.' (Dvcc, ch. XX)

In Ficino's cosmology the different worlds are not only connected through harmony, but they are hierarchical as well. The material plane on which we live is considered the lowest of worlds. To attract powers of higher worlds, we have to align to the harmony of the celestials, because they are more similar to the Gods (ch. XXVI). Therefore the timing of events through astrological calculation (planets and stars properly aligned for the goals to be achieved) becomes a vital part of Ficino's magic.

The gifts from the stars are considered to come down naturally. They influence events on earth by sending out rays.¹³ Ficino stresses that they are not giving 'by their own election', it is a natural, law like process. He also emphasizes the stars are not worshipped by the magus but rather imitated (Dvcc, ch. XXI). Elsewhere he underscores the fact that the magus does not worship divinities, but uses the natural power in speech, song and words (Dvcc, ch. XXI).

¹² Elsewhere in Dvcc Ficino argues that we should not overestimate the power of daemons, especially when they enjoy being worshipped. It weakens their possibilities on the material plane (ch. XX).

¹³ Rays are considered to belong to the elemental world of the Gods, that is fire.

Ad c) Attitude of the magus

Timing is a crucial aspect in Ficino's magic, the right time is the time when the harmony in the celestial world is right for whatever goal the magus wants to achieve. Ficino quotes Ptolemy and Magnus on the importance of this practice and relates the idea of timing to the essential role of free will of man against the power of the celestials (Dvcc, ch. XII).

It is quite difficult to decide on the nature of this practice. There is a thin line between aligning -or subjecting- to higher powers and controlling them. On the one hand practices evidently meant to control higher powers, like incantations, were rejected by Ficino, on the other hand he speaks of luring and alluring higher powers to gain beneficial medical effects.¹⁴ Augustine would probably connect the answer to this question of attitude (subjecting to or controlling higher powers) to the goal of the magus, in this case the attainment of good health. Since this goal can be considered to service man and not God, Augustine would probably have rejected Ficino's magic on this ground.

5) Conclusion: Is it natural?

In discussing the nature of Ficino's magic two prominent issues leap forward: the nature of his magic in Dvcc compared to his other work and the diffuse criteria used to assess its naturalness.

To begin with the first. It seems that authors commenting on Ficino's work are in disagreement on the nature of his magic. Some claiming it to be natural, others pointing to the important role of daemons in his work.¹⁵ A possible explanation for this is that Ficino's magic in Dvcc was rather goody-goody compared to what he wrote earlier on. Hankins shows that in his older work Ficino described magical theories 'far more ambitious and dangerous' than in Dvcc (Hankins 2003:21):¹⁶ drawing on Avicenna's theory of magic Ficino described the divine properties and qualities of man, once the soul is liberated from the body and its material orientation (this idea was totally contrary to Christian theology).

When we limit ourselves to Dvcc, it is quite safe to say that Ficino's magic can indeed be considered natural within the Neoplatonic framework, because he limits himself to the natural sympathies in the cosmos. Voss points out he was (probably) fully aware of its deeper implications (Voss forthcoming: 3-4). Indeed, reading Dvcc

¹⁴ For example by means of timing events, but also by other ways.

¹⁵ See for example the comments by Walker (2000, reprint), Yates (1964), Hanegraaff (undated), Voss (1992, 2006, forthcoming), Copenhaver (1984) and Hankins (2003).

¹⁶ According to Hankins we can find this work in his epitomes of the *Laws* and in the *Platonic Theology*.

one stumbles over daemons everywhere. But somehow Ficino manages to keep them out of the magic.

The literature shows that the naturalness of Ficino's magic can be approached from quite different angles. In this essay we used an Augustinian viewpoint. Augustine stresses the aspect of invoking daemons. It is difficult to answer the question where natural magic ends and daemonic magic begins. The same goes for the distinction between daemonic and divine magic. And also for the difference between natural and divine magic. Whatever the answer to these questions, it is evident that the issue of differentiating between these modes of magic, was and still is of much greater importance to Christian theologians than to Neoplatonist philosophers. For the Neoplatonist everything within the unity of being is considered natural and divine at the same time. For Christians the distinction between creator and created is much stricter.

Another angle is presented by Walker. He refers to the non-transitive nature of Ficino's magic as being the natural part of it. In other words it is meant to transform the operator, not somebody or something outside him (cited in Hankins 2003:1). This sets Ficino's work apart from such things as medical incantations and witchcraft.

Hankins refers to yet another aspect of naturalness. He quotes Ficino in *Dvcc* saying that the soul is exposed to the higher realms not only by natural means (celestial influence) but also by the election of free will or by affection.'(Hankins 2003:6).¹⁷ This statement seems to have an adverse effect on Ficino's defense for natural magic. Surely from this perspective his much discussed practice of electing the right time, can not be considered natural. Near the end of *Dvcc*, when Ficino is eager to illustrate the naturalness of his magic, he adds another argument by comparing his magic (of electing the right time) to the instinctive behaviour of animals naturally timing events (*Dvcc*, Ch. XXVI). But the distinctive feature of animal behaviour is precisely the absence of free will.

The term natural also refers to the natural hierarchy of the worlds. Christian theologians like Augustine and Neoplatonists seem to agree on the idea that worlds are created and thus ordered in a hierarchical way and that god, the one, is on top and the material world is 'way down'. They have different views on the way the 'bottom-up relations' should be taken care of. Neoplatonists and also Ficino acknowledge the fact that the world of humans is far from the perfect world of the gods, but they perceive an active role for them to reconnect to the gods. Augustine seems to advocate a much more careful and passive approach to this matter. He is afraid that the process of aligning to the divine too easily becomes a strategy for controlling the higher worlds, thereby attracting all the wrong forces. In the end,

¹⁷ This quote comes from *Dvcc*, chapter XXII.

these positions are not that different since they both stress the importance of intention: the purity of man to (re-)connect to god. Of course they differ in their idea what man can ultimately achieve with this. For the Neoplatonists man can become divine (that is reconnect to his divine status), thereby in some way nullifying the hierarchy. For Augustine this option is not 'on the table'.

To conclude: when we restrict ourselves to Ficino's magic in *Dvcc* and we approach it from a Neoplatonic viewpoint, which seems most appropriate, we can conclude that the magic in this book is totally occult and natural. Moreover, throughout this book Ficino rejects daemonic magic. Whether he did so because of fear of prosecution or because he changed his views in reaction to earlier discussions around his work (and that of others), we will not know. When we review the magic in *Dvcc* from another viewpoint, using for example Augustine's theology, we may well reach a different conclusion. But by doing so the concept of natural magic is taken out of its philosophical context and becomes blurred.

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