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## The Polemics on Astrology 1489-1524

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**Abstract.** This article first examines astrologers' protestations at growing religious hostility in the 1490s and the involvement of Ficino, Pico and Savonarola in Florence. It then charts the reactions to Pico's *Disputationes* both in the anti-astrological camp's enthusiastic endorsement, and especially in the riposte of professional astrologers across Europe, whose piece-meal replies, intensified by the approaching conjunction of 1524, include a call for internal reform through a rejection of Arabic methods. Pico's technical and empirical secondary arguments emerge as more effective than the physical and moral primary ones and reveal his singular understanding of practitioners' mentality.

My intention in this article is to offer a selective rehearsal, with a few suggested adjustments and changes in emphasis, of the polemics on astrology between the publication of Marsilio Ficino's *De vita* and the flurry of activity prompted by the conjunction of 1524, a period in which they are at their most intense and critical. Rather than concentrate almost exclusively, as is usual, on the major protagonists of the late Quattrocento, Ficino, Pico della Mirandola and Savonarola,<sup>1</sup> or even on the furtherance of the anti-astrological cause by arguably less weighty figures such as Gian Francesco Pico, I shall attempt to convey something of the thrust and parry of the encounter by also giving consideration to the dating and sequence of events, to the counteraction of the astrological camp to Pico and his followers, and to some of the tactics, ruses, and posturing indulged in by well nigh all the participants.

Ficino's *De vita*, backed up by the publication in the following year of his attack on plebeian astrologers in his commentary on Plotinus, is above all an attempt to establish the Church's approval and the public's acceptance of his astral magic in the *De vita coelitus comparanda*, an attempt to hold the line in the face of increasing hostility from overzealous and uncomprehending theologians, which threatened to sweep away a delicate but precious syncretic construction perceived as a valid complement and bastion to his deep Christian faith. I do not intend to deal with magic. Ficino's case is exceptional since he had from the 1470s claimed a role in the movement against astrological abuse, above all with his unpublished *Disputatio*, parts of which were taken from his *De*

*Christiana religione* (1474) and *Theologia Platonica* (1474) or used again in the Plotinus commentary. Ficino knew he was open to misunderstanding, and constructed the *De vita* with considerable astuteness. He intentionally misrepresents the order of composition of its three books in order to help pass the *De vita coelitus comparanda* off as a logical extension of the natural medicine in the other two books; his treatment of talismans is protected by the subtle pretense of glossing Plotinus; and he treads a delicate path between submission to Albertus Magnus or St Thomas and annoyance at carping theologians. He was clearly prepared for the ensuing complaint made to Innocent VIII, for his vigorous riposte in nine months of well publicized correspondence was stage-managed in an upbeat manner which continued, once he had been duly snatched from the wolves' jaws, in his assertive mood during the period 1490-92.<sup>2</sup>

The climate of Catholic hostility which prompted Ficino's pre-emptive move was a European rather than Italian phenomenon. Marsilio was no doubt acutely conscious of the earlier condemnation of thirteen theses in Pico's *conclusiones*, but he would also have followed with mixed feelings the theological backlash against the excesses of swelling astrological practice, which was inflicted with singular severity by the theological faculty of the University of Paris. Simon de Phares, a noted astrologer and physician who served Charles VIII, was brought to book by the archbishop of Lyons and condemned. He appealed to the Parlement in Paris, which referred his case to the Sorbonne whose doctors of theology deliberated on it for ten months (1493-94).<sup>3</sup> The thrust of the trial is clear from the proceedings. The theologians complain bitterly that astrology is spreading like the plague and that, since Popes have been too lax and the Church's censures have been held in contempt, urgent royal intervention is called for to protect the Christian religion and stamp out impiety. The order for Phares's arrest was issued in April 1494.<sup>4</sup> This test case proved to be a major turning point in the polemics and its effects were felt for many years to come. In 1519 the Dutchman Albert Pigghe inveighed against the neglect of astrology in Paris and the sophistry of its caviling theologians.<sup>5</sup> Similarly Pedro Sanchez Cirvelo, who had studied theology and taught mathematics in the French capital from 1492 to 1502, complained in 1521, after his return to Salamanca, that he had had to abandon astrological prediction because of Phares's condemnation.<sup>6</sup>

It was in Paris too that Giovanni Pico spent nearly a year (1484-85) completing his scholastic training. Perhaps a more compelling reason for

beginning this survey in 1489 is that this is the year of publication of the *Heptaplus* where in II. 7 Pico first censured astrology, giving warning of the *Disputationes* which in their closing pages would recall Paris's traditional hostility to astrology.<sup>7</sup> Eugenio Garin's perception of the disputations against divinatory astrology as an extraordinary celebration of human initiative is now less widely accepted following William Craven's rebuttal of this interpretation, even if the work's historiographical merits remain untarnished.<sup>8</sup> What does emerge considerably strengthened, however, is its religious motivation on which such unlikely bedfellows as Garin, Craven and Zambelli appear, in varying degree, to concur.<sup>9</sup> After his arrival in Florence in 1488, Pico adopted an ascetic life style and showed an increasing interest in biblical studies. In 1493 he embarked, probably in some form of collaboration with Savonarola, on his confutation of judicial astrology. It was long believed that this monumental work descended like a bombshell on the astrological camp on its posthumous publication almost two years after the count's premature death in November 1494, but early knowledge of its preparation sparked off reactions ranging from unease to outbursts of indignation and precipitate attempts to fend off the ensuing blow by consternated astrologers.

There are at least two defences of astrology written more than two years before July 1496, when the *Disputationes* appeared in print, which show an awareness of the work's range and style. Giovan Battista Abioso begins his *Dialogus in astrologiae defensionem* by drawing attention to the detractors of the celestial science who have recently appeared, and making critical mention of an unspecified count (*comes*).<sup>10</sup> In a letter to Giovanni Mainardi written shortly after the publication of the *Disputationes* Gian Francesco Pico identifies what would seem to be Abioso's dialogue as an angry reply to his uncle,<sup>11</sup> while much later, in his *Vaticinium* for 1523, Abioso himself refers back to his dialogue as proof of the ignorance and vanity of Pico's work.<sup>12</sup> The dialogue's colophon claims that it was written in 1492, sent to King Alfonso of Naples on 4 June 1494 and printed in Venice on 20 October 1494. Internal textual evidence points to the time of writing as certainly after 1492 and probably at the end of 1493 or beginning of 1494.<sup>13</sup> Abioso was in many ways typical of the dyed-in-the-wool professional astrologer, and his active life coincides almost exactly with the period under examination. It is worth dwelling for a moment on his dialogue, for it contains many of the features and arguments which are to recur regularly in the period's professional defenses. He is indignant at those unlearned

vulgar astrologers who provoked the attack. He is suitably respectful of the established religious order, yet predicts schisms within the Church. He repeats the standard assertion that the heavens are proof of God's glory and is careful to put Christ above the stars, yet occasionally lashes out against those religious zealots who make no effort to become acquainted with the science of astrology but assail it in order to promote their own spiritual campaign. A complete understanding of natural effects in sciences such as medicine can be attained only through a knowledge of both superior and inferior causes, so that astrology, being the essential link between the world of the stars above and the corporeal world below, enjoys a privileged position. The distinctive feature of this science of the heavens is that it depends on experiment, calculation and accuracy, and cannot survive on logic and sophistry alone; hence the constant need for rigorous observation and technical reform.<sup>14</sup> Such an approach explains the continual quarrel with the schoolmen and logicians: astrologers tended to operate within a technical and empirical mind-set which was in sharp contrast with the predominantly apologetic and aprioristic one of their principal persecutors.

The second defence that shows an early awareness of Pico's confutation is the one composed by Gabriele Pirovano of Milan.<sup>15</sup> It has long been viewed as yet another of the many rebuttals that followed in the wake of the published disputations. Thorndike puts its date of composition at after the death of Gian Galeazzo Sforza on 21 October 1494,<sup>16</sup> but it can be shown that he confuses Gian Galeazzo with his father Galeazzo Maria Sforza, indicating that it was written before this date.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, in the text Pirovano clearly states the time of writing as the beginning of 1494, a date supported by other internal references.<sup>18</sup> It is fairly clear that Pirovano's immediate aim was to stem the swelling flow of anti-astrological pressure and form some kind of protection against the imminent appearance of Pico's attack which hung like a sword of Damocles over astrologers' heads. In his impassioned introduction denouncing the new opponents of the stellar science Gabriele would appear to have Pico in mind, while further on in the dialogue he makes it clear that in confuting old arguments he is also answering those of Marsilio Ficino and of that supreme orator Pico della Mirandola.<sup>19</sup> Ficino's attack on plebeian astrologers in his commentary on Plotinus is answered in a long discussion on the opinions of the Neoplatonists, but, since Gabriele would almost certainly not have had access to Pico's completed text, he makes only a passing reference to the confirmation of Marsilio's arguments by the count 'longiori sermone vel

dulciori rhetoricae lira'.<sup>20</sup> The reference, however, is unlikely to be to the restricted censure in the *Heptaplus*, which would suggest that Pirovano was aware of the length and eloquence of Pico's forthcoming work.

Word of the *Disputationes* quickly spread throughout Italy and beyond. Such was the prodigious count's reputation that both camps felt obliged to react before the text was available. An incensed Giovanni Pontano dashed off, by way of reply, an entire book of the *De rebus coelestibus*, on which he was then working, soon after Pico's death. The mentors of Catholic rectitude for their part did not hesitate to draw on Giovanni's authority. The *Margarita philosophica*, an edifying encyclopedic guide written in dialogue form for adolescents by Gregorius Reisch, which was published in Freiburg in 1503 but has a dedication bearing the date 30 December 1495, is a case in point. In Book VII.17 dealing with astrology the master recommends to his pupil the twelve books which the count of Mirandola is said to have written, and looks forward to the day when such a scholarly work will come into the young man's hands.<sup>21</sup> In Florence itself we of course have an unambiguous and not surprising example of nervous awareness of the count's impending volume in Ficino's well known letter to Poliziano of 20 August 1494 in which he was anxious to clarify his own position as an anti-astrological polemist in his commentary on Plotinus and to reiterate the orthodoxy of his *De vita coelitus comparanda*.<sup>22</sup> Gone is the buoyancy of two years before. Lorenzo was now dead and Savonarola's recall to order had begun.

Savonarola's contribution to the polemics has been perceived as secondary and ancillary to Pico's mighty attack: he is seen above all as a humble popularizer of the *Disputationes* in his *Trattato contra li astrologi*. His independent role as an instigating force was, however, considerable: it was predicated on his unique prophetic vision and it developed as part of his personal mission of reform, while maintaining a close but far from subservient relationship to Pico's confutation. It is at its most virulent in his sustained campaign from the pulpit 1493-97, but is also painstakingly supported in published works such as the *Compendio di rivelazioni* (1495) and the *Triumphis Crucis* (1497). He also saw to it that his key sermons, many expressing his outrage against astrologers, went into print without delay. His hatred of astrology is fundamental: in his eyes it is the enemy of faith and good living, an impediment to Christian government, and above all a violation of divine prophecy. At the same time his campaign develops in close parallel to the composition and posthumous editing by Gian Francesco Pico and Mainardi of the

*Disputationes*. Gian Francesco's correspondence to Battista Spagnuoli, Ludovico Sforza, and others, and the dedication of his *De studio* (January 1496) attest his feeling of excitement and expectancy and his urge to communicate his uncle's achievement abroad. They also contain a number of references which, when taken together, suggest that there existed an early manuscript summary by Savonarola based on an acquaintance with the disputations in draft. Before the final version of the long awaited confutation was published in July 1496, this text could well have circulated within restricted circles. The *Trattato*, which appeared in 1497, came to be seen as the friar's modest contribution to the polemics after the main event thus obscuring his true role, whereas it was no more than a formality, a further step in an on-going collaborative campaign in which Savonarola's unique persuasive and proselytising powers at a popular level complemented Pico's philosophical and technical erudition.<sup>23</sup>

Although in his confutation Giovanni is incensed at the subjugation of Christianity to the stars, firmly supports the privileged position of divine prophesy, and makes what seems to be a reference to Savonarola's prediction of God's punishment, the work is free of declamatory religious utterances. Without entering into a detailed analysis of the multi-layered argumentation of the *Disputationes*, one could identify two broad levels: a higher level of primary moral and physical arguments which totally negate the influence and function claimed for the stars by astrology, and a lower level of secondary empirical arguments, not directed at destroying the theory but at confuting astrological procedure, which are dictated by the work's pragmatic aims and polemical role. The latter have not been the principal concern of scholars such as Garin bent on extolling the former, and have been viewed as superfluous by those, such as Soldati, Thorndike and Craven, who have judged the *Disputationes* negatively.<sup>24</sup> Yet it was almost exclusively through his secondary arguments that Pico was able to engage the astrologers in battle and force a series of tactical retreats, whereas the primary arguments failed, as one would expect, to inflict the immediate rout he desired. It is because Pico was not above having recourse to traditional demonstrations of the practical uselessness of stellar divination or the insurmountable difficulties in the application of astrological theory, which, as Soldati points out, the astrologers were well versed in rebutting, that he was able to illicit a serious and sustained reaction from them. Far from being damning superfluities, Pico's secondary arguments are an attempt to take astrologers on their own ground, and reveal a dialectic and tactical sensitivity which should be

judged in the light of the singular understanding of the origins and attractions of astrological practice shown in his twelfth book where the count admits that he too was impressed by astrology in his youth and that errors contain partial truths.<sup>25</sup>

The urgent need of a worthy riposte to Pico's published disputations felt by astrologers was filled by Lucio Bellanti of Siena's *Responsiones* (1498). Lucio was astute enough to treat his noble adversary with respect but vented his wrath on Savonarola whom he blamed for Pico's attack.<sup>26</sup> If we compare Pico's citation of leading contemporaries in his favour in the first book with Bellanti's reply, it is not difficult to see that the astrologer is happy to make unfounded claims and is unscrupulously intent on impressing the public. It is also clear, however, that the Count of Mirandola is operating at a similar level and not above giving a biased presentation of authorities.<sup>27</sup> Bellanti's point-by-point reply to Pico's attack is made as summarily as possible. But it was enough to satisfy Pontano and later received repeated praise in pro-astrological writings which continually refer back to Bellanti as having adequately answered Pico.<sup>28</sup>

In the opposite camp there was even less need to repeat Giovanni's comprehensive confutation which at once took its place in the orthodox canon. Occasionally an abridged form of its main arguments is found in works like Paolo Cortese's elegant *De cardinalatu* (1510) where Pico is highly praised (I.3), recognition is given to Savonarola's declamatory and persuasive powers (II.11), and a chapter of eight folio sides (I.4) is devoted to a rebuttal of divinatory astrology.<sup>29</sup> Further afield, the staunchly orthodox Symphorien Champier, who from Lyons helped to spread Neoplatonic ideas in France, diffused Pico's arguments in works like *De triplici disciplina* (1508) and *Prognosticon libri tres* (1518). Others were to offer vernacular popularizations in the Savonarolan mould for local consumption, such as the Portuguese monk António de Beja's *Contra os juizos dos astrólogos* (1523).<sup>30</sup> Only the evangelical Gian Francesco felt obliged to press the attack further in the *De rerum praenotione* aimed at completing his uncle's planned destruction of all superstitions. The fifth book against astrology (written 1503) is a competent summary of the *Disputationes*, which also answers some of Bellanti's points. It is interesting to note in Book VII his intransigent condemnation of the *De vita coelitus comparanda* and veiled rebuke of his uncle for turning a blind eye and citing Ficino's authority in his favour.<sup>31</sup> Giovanni's confutation was every bit as uncompromising as his nephew's in its fundamental arguments, but was implemented with an



astute and pragmatic awareness of public opinion. In 1510 Gian Francesco also attempted to round off the work of Giovanni Pico and Savonarola by composing a confutation ‘in the Parisian style’ stripped of the eloquence which he knew was repugnant to his uncle’s opponents. This *Quaestio* exists in a Ferrarese manuscript which does not appear to have been published, though the reader is referred to it on more than one occasion in his printed works.<sup>32</sup> Such was the preponderance of Pico’s role in the polemics that it is difficult to identify later assailants who were directly and clearly inspired by Savonarola alone, except perhaps among sermonisers such as the humble Piero Bernardino whose *Predica ai fanciulli*, delivered in 1499, contains a fierce attack on astrologers as arch enemies of divine prophecy and pious living.<sup>33</sup> However, it should not be forgotten that several front line polemicists such as Gian Francesco Pico himself and Mainardi, who stressed the need to rid medicine of astrological abuse, were also ardent Savonarolans.

After the required general defense had been provided by Bellanti, the first two decades of the sixteenth century saw the emergence of a piece-meal approach. Astrologers began to focus on individual objections in their annual predictions.<sup>34</sup> In his *De diebus criticis* (completed 1504) Agostino Nifo replied to Pico’s rejection of the use of Galen’s theory of critical days in medicine, and in his commentary on Ptolemy’s *Quadripartitum* rebutted other criticisms made by the count.<sup>35</sup> Johann Essler of Mainz, whose *Speculum astrologicum* (1508) deals with abuses caused by vulgar astrologers’ insufficient technical knowledge, goes so far as to cite Pico and the entrenched astrologer Luca Gaurico together as equally reliable experts.<sup>36</sup> This dispersal on a secondary level of Pico’s attack sustained the hypothesis of astrology’s validity and temporarily diverted attention from those primary arguments which destroyed it root and branch, but it also maintained a low level of continuous engagement ready to flare up once more into full blown confrontation.

The necessary provocation was provided by the fears and speculation caused by the coming conjunction of the planets in Pisces during February 1524, which brought to the surface contrasting feelings and beliefs on astrology expressed in countless books and pamphlets. Zealots thundered against the resurgence of stellar prognostication and astrologers retorted.<sup>37</sup> It also became apparent that certain theologians nursed a deep conviction in the possibility of such prognostication. The Dominican Michele da Petrasanta produced a full scholastic rebuttal of the arguments against astrology, including Pico’s. Another Dominican theologian, Sebastiano Constantino zealously defended the prediction of a

flood because it instills a healthy fear of God in the people, reflecting a not uncommon interpretation of stellar inclination towards evil as divine punishment on the sins of mankind.<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps the most significant view-point highlighted by the controversy, however, is that of a few discerning astrological practitioners who badly felt the need for a reasoned internal reform of astrological methods which would expose the excesses of ignorant astrologers, reveal astrology's validity, and placate and satisfy its assailants. For some time enlightened astrologers had felt they must rid themselves of the errors that had infiltrated their science through Albumasar and Arabic practices. Heeding the humanist call for a return to classical basics, they turned in the first instance to Ptolemy and a preference for solar and lunar eclipses to planetary conjunctions. The astrological camp was split in two as a result, as Gian Francesco Pico was eager to point out in the *De rerum praenotione* (V.12).<sup>39</sup> But then Gian Francesco and even his uncle on occasions appear to cite Ptolemy as an example of scientific probity, and Giovanni is particularly incensed at the Arabic reliance on major conjunctions,<sup>40</sup> with the result that the would-be reformers, while deploring his uncompromising excesses, felt in tune with much of the learned aristocrat's assault on the misguided rabble. Just such an internal reformer is Albert Pigghe whose defense (Paris, 1519) is one of the earliest in the 1524 controversy. It opposes annual predictions for specific days, bemoans the recent spate of sensational prognostications, criticizes the Alphonsine tables, and offers a model example of Ptolemaic prediction for the year 1519 for others to imitate abandoning their Arabic follies. He does draw the line at Pico's denial of influence in heavenly bodies other than the luminaries, but foresees that misguided astrologers will rise up against his own proposed reforms.<sup>41</sup> Albert's standpoint is to some extent shared by Pedro Cirvelo who had also experienced the intolerance of the Sorbonne. His *Apotelesmata astrologiae* (Alcalá, 1521) maintain that the only qualified arbiter in astrological matters is someone who, like himself, is both an astrologer and a theologian. Pedro's goal is a 'natural' and above all Christian astrology. He is at pains to establish his credentials as an edifying writer and seems prepared to adopt the rules applied by the University of Paris in vetting astrological books. He is also clearly in the Ptolemaic camp, though he accepts certain things in Albumasar and criticizes others in Ptolemy. His attitude to Pico, whom he regards as an excessively zealous theologian and over-rhetorical Italian poet unversed in the scholastic dialectics of Paris, is considerably more hostile than Pigghe's, and he is

unable to refrain from calling the count intemperate, ignorant and puerile. The third part of Pedro's work, the *Responsiones*, is yet another general reply to the *Disputationes*. But Pedro does accept Pico's attack on 'superstitious' astrology and recognizes his brilliance. He also suggests that Giovanni wanted to exculpate himself after his wayward youth and states that it is his intention to pass the confutation under review removing what is insincere.<sup>42</sup> In the introduction to the *Centiloquium* which forms the second part of Cirvelo's work, he explicitly thanks Pico for bringing about the present elucidation of astrology.<sup>43</sup> Where Bellanti and others had angrily defended the professional viewpoint, Pigghe and Cirvelo, in a calmer mood, accepted many of Pico's secondary criticisms in their call for reform.

Their approach, however, was not universally adopted. If Pigghe hoped that Nifo, whom he admired so much and to whom he addressed his preface, would assume the initiative in a campaign of reform, he must have been disappointed, for the *De falsa diluvii prognosticatione*, published just eight months after his own work, was, as Thorndike points out, ambiguous and many-sided.<sup>44</sup> The Spanish anti-reform 'conjunctionist' Thomas Rocha, in his *Digna redargutio* (1523), views Nifo as a friend and ally of Pico who had led him to destroy astrology, and Pigghe as something of a traitor in astrological circles.<sup>45</sup> Marco Beneventano protested bitterly in two opuscles (1521) at Pigghe's criticism of the Alphonsine tables.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, Georg Tannstetter in his *Libellus consolatorius* (Vienna, 1523), praises Nifo and Pigghe, presents himself as a Ptolemist, and soundly condemns Albumasar's doctrine of conjunctions against which he cites Pico.<sup>47</sup> The content of his work, however, contradicts this picture and runs counter to the general direction of Pigghe's criticisms. Tannstetter's main intent seems to be to protect his respectable position at the University of Vienna by passing the irksome criticism of astrology on to the practice of sensational astrologasters and by declaring an informed but selective approval of Pico whom he describes, in a later work on astrological medicine, as a praiseworthy pruner of superstitions.<sup>48</sup> The adoption of the Count of Mirandola by astrologers as a technical authority and the widely held illusion that he was targeting only bad astrologers, especially those who subject human will to the stars and religious events to planetary conjunctions, serves to explain why the polemics developed into an internal controversy rather than the opposition of two intransigent camps. It also accounts for the strained, uncertain self-identification with Pico and the desire to explain him away by presenting his work as what it in

fact was not, or rather as what those convinced of astrology's legitimacy would have liked it to be.

Following the 1524 controversy the polemics lost something of their sense of urgency and, lacking in fresh impulses, continued on their long but unimpassioned downhill path. Astrology continued to be practised, but in Bologna, which had been one of its most thriving and assertive centres, astrologers showed signs of discouragement, and astrology lost dignity and the favour of the university till teaching ceased altogether in 1572.<sup>49</sup> Papal support was also lost and the Council of Trent and the Bull of Sixtus V issued limited condemnations of astrological practice.<sup>50</sup>

It is important to be aware that the polemics on astrology were not an impersonal battle of ideas dependent on logical demonstration and confutation. They were a function of their historical context and their development was largely dictated by exterior circumstance, by pressure from the Church and public opinion. This resulted in expedients such as false avowals of orthodoxy and feigned submissions to ecclesiastical judgement, or ruses such as diversionary attacks on supposedly inferior astrologers and the claim to be an indispensable arbiter on technical matters. Both sides became expert in persuasive tactics such as the loading of historical evidence and misrepresentation of testimony or the assumption of poses to impress their public: the righteousness of the champion of orthodoxy, the frustration of the serious practitioner harassed by barking theologians, the disdain of the established expert, adulation and respect for the deceased and noble Pico.

When confronted with the count's fundamental arguments, astrologers could not, of course, but reject them out of hand. However, the fact that the secondary arguments alone held their serious attention and effected changes in astrological practice not only justifies Pico's copious treatment of them, but shows that he had fully assessed the task before him and understood the mentality and presumed reaction of his opponents. Pico was too perceptive to imagine that his work would fell astrology with one blow, even if he was wholly convinced that his primary confutation was irrefutable. To help us understand the standpoint of the astrological practitioner, we could borrow the image used by Simon de Phares who asserted in his *Recueil* that simply because a snake drinks from a clear fountain it does not follow that the fountain should be destroyed.<sup>51</sup> Astrologers were incapable of giving serious consideration to Pico's radical arguments. It is not surprising that they should be reluctant to have to prove the existence of the clear fountain from which they were convinced they had been drinking for so long. Pico's grasp of this

mentality explains, justifies and reveals the merit of his secondary arguments. By the same token, their defect is that they obstructed the perception of the fundamental arguments. If it is true that numerous committed astrologers failed to see that the possibility of astrological practice was always excluded *a priori* in the *Disputationes*, it cannot be said that Pico helped to avoid this basic misunderstanding. The layered argumentation of his voluminous attack threw up apparent contradictions which would naturally lead an astrologer to imagine that Pico's concern with technicalities presupposed the validity of the theory. The Count of Mirandola's ability to reason like an astrologer may well, ironically, have obscured the totality of his confutation, but one cannot deny that it remains an admirable *tour de force* which resulted in certain astrologers rethinking their practices, or that his copious secondary arguments, when viewed on a contextual and tactical level, hold a more central and significant position than the modern perspective has until now been able to accord them.

*\*This article is based on a paper given at the colloquium on 'Magic and Astrology in the Renaissance' held at the Institute of Romance Studies, University of London on 10 December 1999.*

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11. See Gian Francesco Pico, *Opera omnia* (Basel, 1573), fol. 1279.

12. See *Vaticinium eventuum anni 1523* (Naples, 1523), b.ii<sup>r</sup>.

13. See *Dialogus*, e.v<sup>v</sup>, a.ii<sup>r-v</sup>, d.iii<sup>v</sup>, d.v<sup>r</sup>.

14. See *Dialogus*, b.ii<sup>r</sup>, c.ii<sup>r</sup>-c.iv<sup>r</sup>, c.vii<sup>v</sup>, d.ii<sup>r</sup>-d.iv<sup>v</sup>, e.v<sup>v</sup>.

15. Gabriele Pirovano, *De astronomiae veritate opus absolutissimum* (Basel, 1554). I have not seen the first edition of 1506 or 1507 mentioned by Argelati and Thorndike.

16. See Thorndike, IV, p. 542.

17. See *Opus*, p.231 where the duke in question is obviously Galeazzo Maria who was assassinated in 1476.

18. See *Opus*, pp.290-91, 266.

19. See *Opus*, p. 252.

20. See *Opus*, pp.238-9, 252.

21. See Gregorius Reisch, *Margarita philosophica* (Freiburg, 1503), q.iv<sup>r-v</sup>.

22. See Marsilio Ficino, *Opera omnia* (Basel, 1576), I, fol. 958.

23. For a comprehensive treatment of Savonarola and astrology, including a close consideration of the points made in this paragraph, see Remo Catani, 'Savonarola and Astrology', *The Italianist*, XVIII (1998), 71-90.
24. See Benedetto Soldati, *La poesia astrologica nel Quattrocento* (Florence, 1906), pp. 216-23; Thorndike, IV, pp. 529-43; Craven, pp. 131-54.
25. See *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*, II, pp. 502 (=XII.3), 492 (=XII.2), 486 (=XII.1).
26. See Lucio Bellanti, *Liber de astrologica veritate et in disputationes Ioannis Pici adversus astrologos responsiones* (Florence, 1498), pp. 96, 111.
27. See *Disputationes*, I, pp. 58-98 (=I.1); Bellanti, pp.169-74.
28. See Book III of Pontano's *De fortuna* (Naples, 1512), c. Fr.
29. See Paolo Cortese, *De cardinalatu* (Castrum Cortesium, 1510), fols 27<sup>v</sup>, 142<sup>v</sup>, 34<sup>f</sup>-37<sup>v</sup>.
30. See Joachim De Carvalho, 'O livro "Contra os juizos dos astrólogos" de Fr. António de Beja', *Boletim da Biblioteca da Universidade de Coimbra*, XVI (1944), 181-290 (includes a facsimile reproduction of the text).
31. See G. F. Pico, *Opera omnia* (Basel, 1573), fols 668-9.
32. See Walter Cavini, 'Un inedito di G. F. Pico della Mirandola: La "Quaestio de falsitate astrologiae"', *Rinascimento*, XIII (1973), 137-71.
33. See *Predica di Pietro Bernardo ... facta nel populo di Sanc Lorenzo in chasa sua* (Florence, 1499), b.i<sup>f</sup>, c.i<sup>v</sup>.
34. See the 59 tracts held by the British Library at c.27.h.19-22, especially those by Giacomo Petramellara and Lodovico Vitali.
35. See Thorndike, V (1941), pp. 79-80, 162-4.
36. See Johann Essler, *Speculum astrologicum* (Basel, 1573), pp. 216, 249-51, 253.
37. On the conjunction see Aby Warburg, 'L'astrologia e le profezie politiche nella età della Riforma' in *La rinascita del paganesimo antico* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1966), ed. by G. Bing, pp.331-49; Thorndike, V, pp. 178-233; Paola Zambelli, 'Fine del mondo o inizio della propaganda? Astrologia, filosofia

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della storia e propaganda politico-religiosa nel dibattito sulla congiunzione del 1524' in *Scienze, credenze occulte, livelli di cultura* (Florence:Olschki, 1983), pp. 291-368. 'Astrologi hallucinanti': *Stars and the End of the World in Luther's Time*, ed. by P. Zambelli (Berlin-New York: De Gruyter, 1986) is mainly concerned with the conjunction in a German context.

38. See Thorndike, V, pp. 197-99, 215.

39. See *Opera omnia*, fols 586-92.

40. See G.F. Pico, *Opera omnia*, fol. 579; G. Pico, *Disputationes*, I, pp. 144-56 (=II.7), 520-58 (= V.1-5).

41. See Pigghe, *Astrologiae defensio*, pp. 2<sup>r</sup>-4<sup>v</sup>, 6<sup>r-v</sup>, 16<sup>v</sup>, 19r-27<sup>v</sup>, 32v.

42. See Cirvelo, *Apotelesmata*, pp. a.ii<sup>v</sup>-a.iii<sup>r</sup>, c.vii<sup>r-v</sup>, c.viii<sup>r</sup>, d.i<sup>v</sup>, d.iv<sup>r</sup>, d.vi<sup>v</sup>.

43. See Cirvelo, *Apotelesmata*, (new sig.) A.i<sup>r</sup>.

44. See Thorndike, V, p. 197.

45. See Thomas Rocha, *Digna redargutio* (Burgos, 1523), a.ii<sup>r</sup>, b.i<sup>v</sup>-b.ii<sup>r</sup>.

46. See Thorndike, V, pp. 200-201.

47. See Georg Tannstetter, *Libellus consolatorius*, a.ii<sup>r-v</sup>, b.ii<sup>r-v</sup>.

48. See Georg Tannstetter, *Artificium de applicatione astrologiae ad medicinam* (Strasburg, 1531), p. 49<sup>r-v</sup>.

49. See Thorndike, V, pp. 234-51.

50. The exception to this trend is the continued and strong support for the use of astrology in medicine: e.g. the ripostes to Pico by Geronimo Torrella (1496), Antonio de Cartagena (1529) and Gerardo Columba (1596). The use of astrology by doctors was excluded from the condemnations of the Council and Sixtus V.

51. See *Recueil des plus célèbres astrologues ... fait par Symon de Phares*, edited by E. Wickersheim (Paris, 1929), p. 2.