

**Percorsi conoscitivi nell'*Epistolario* di Marsilio Ficino:
tra *miseria hominis* e *deificatio***

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Summary

The thesis arises from the critical proposal to consider Marsilio Ficino's *Epistolae* as the philosopher's favourite place for the discussion of the main themes of his speculation. Ficino's preference for the short-treatise form makes this work a huge resource for the scholars; however, what is proposed here is a hermeneutical hypothesis based on the theory of knowledge emerging from his *Letters*. Knowledge has a decisive role in Ficino's epistolary project of the diffusion of a renewed Platonism: it is, on one hand, the most suitable instrument for the analysis of human condition and, on the other, the only medium for the elevation of man to the divine.

The thesis consists of three chapters: the first, which serves as an introduction, deals with some philological problems about the complex nature of the *Epistolarium*, mostly with the genre of letter-treatise that, although it is present in all the twelve books, it is exclusive of the second. Therefore, the main thematic nuclei of the so-called *Opuscula theologica* are examined, which are useful hermeneutical tools for the continuation of the work. Finally, I have proposed an interpretation founded on the peculiar relationship between *contemplative* and *active life* in order to better understand the arguments of the next chapters.

The second chapter discusses two core themes of Ficino's theory of knowledge: anthropology and psychology. About the former, I present the letters that the philosopher addresses «to Mankind»: from these, what arises is a picture of man who is always suspended between the *miseria* of his temporal condition and the *deification* as his highest aspiration, after the discovery and knowledge of the self. Ficino, ideally addressing the human race, succeeds to express the exhortation to the highest virtue of *humanity*, at the same time the means and ends of the highest achievement of man. The latter, however, becomes possible only by the special nature of the human soul which is the subject of analysis of the next section: the epistles on the soul are studied by comparing with the *Platonic Theology on the Immortality of Souls*, showing similarities and

differences. The question of the relation between the multiplicity of the powers of the soul and its unity is followed by that about the intellect and the will in the fruition of the highest Good. This is a recurrent and apparently contradictory theme in the *Epistolarium*, which I discuss on the base of recent studies.

The third chapter concerns the faculties of knowledge involved in the cognitive path offered in the letters. The first section talks about the ambiguous function of the two powers of *phantasy* and *imagination*, about which I explain not only the terminological difference, but also the different nature: the deceptive imagination, that is responsible for the illusory manifestation of reality, opposing the phantasy, that “translates” intellectual contents in order to make them comprehensible by the reason. The second section deals with the question of the production of true knowledge and the role of the reason and the intellect. From the problematic nature of human *intellectus* and the results of the second chapter, through an analysis of Platonic sources, I propose a form of human knowledge based both on dianoetic rational process and on intuition of the highest part of *mens*. In this way, one is able to give meaning to all the highest forms of knowledge throughout the work: divine frenzy, *vacatio animae* and prophecy. Although these seem “altered” states of consciousness related to each other, they reflect the evolution of Ficino’s philosophy. Following the progress of the first theme from the *De divino furore* to the last letters and the *Commentaries* on Plato’s dialogues (*Symposium*, *Phaedrus* and *Ion*), it is possible to get both the philosopher’s attempt to be close to the source and the problematic assimilation to the Pauline *raptus* that he proposes. The argument on the *septem vacationis genera* in the thirteenth book of *Platonic Theology* becomes the looking-glass through which one can interpret dreams, previsions, miracles found in the *Letters*. In the end, through the study of the Neoplatonic sources and the Savonarolan thinking, I discuss the theme of prophetic knowledge that is on the boundaries between a divine gift and a natural power of the soul.

From Ficino’s *Epistolae*, what results is a very complex picture of man, an actual double-faced Janus, who is always turned to the knowledge of God but is often hindered by the anxiety and restlessness of this life. Furthermore, the reading of the letters in relation to philosopher’s other works, is a valid instrument for the reconstruction of his thinking.

The thesis presents an Appendix with the text and the Italian translation of the most important letters in order to better comprehend the hermeneutical proposal of this work. In conclusion, there is a wide bibliography of the sources and the examined critical studies.