

**THE ALCHEMICAL ORDER: REASON, PASSIONS, ALCHEMY AND  
THE SOCIAL WORLD IN THE PHILOSOPHY AND COSMOLOGY OF  
JEAN D'ESPAGNET**

by

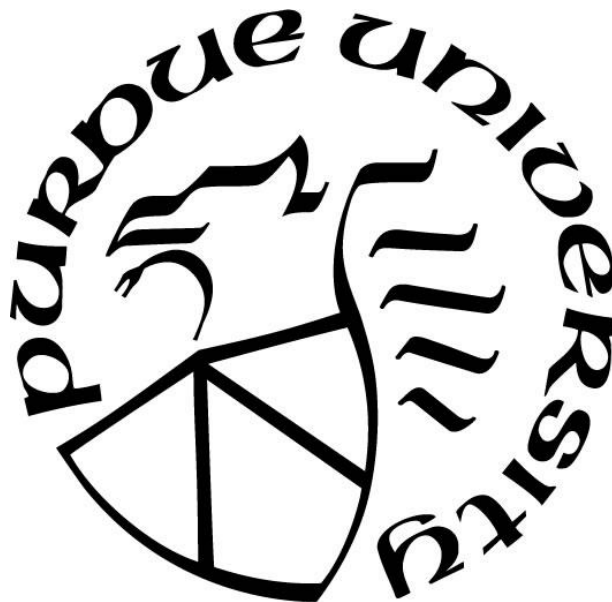
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**A Dissertation**

*Submitted to the Faculty of Purdue University*

*In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of*

**Doctor of Philosophy**



Department of History

West Lafayette, Indiana

May 2022

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*To my large and loving family*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Such a project as this and the educational journey it represents will inevitably incur a host of debts, both personal and intellectual. I offer my deepest and most heartfelt thanks to Jim Farr first and foremost, without whose expertise, patient aid, and thoughtfulness as a mentor and as a human I expect my academic path would have ended long ago. I am honored to call Jim a friend and I will look up to him for the rest of my life. Alongside Jim I must also thank Danielle Gaylord, his kind and caring wife; they both graciously welcomed me into their home when I was far from my own. To my parents Anne, Scott, Cara, and Milton, as well as my siblings M.J., Mackenzie, and Katherine, my profound love and gratitude for their patient and unwavering support across this long journey. To my father Scott in particular I owe my enduring love of history and literature, without which I expect I would be a very different person. Purdue University's Department of History is home to a host of fantastic historians, a number of whom I have had the pleasure and benefit of working with. I am grateful to Professors Melinda Zook and Fritz Davis especially for their generosity and help over the years and with this current work, as well as John Contreni, Will Gray, Charles Ingrao, Jennifer Foray, Silvia Mitchell, Margaret Tillman, David Atkinson, and Frank Lambert who throughout my tenure at Purdue have offered their time and knowledge in seminar, the undergraduate classroom, events, exam rooms, and casual conversation to help me become a better historian and educator. I am thankful as well for my graduate compatriots who made this experience bearable and often enjoyable, particularly my fellow Francophile Ed Gray, as well as Hayley McCurry, Olivia Hagedorn, Pádraig Lawlor, Ali and Keenan Shimko, Stephanie Ayala-Chittick, Brian Alberts, Marc Smith, Andrew McGregor, Matt Schownir, Zach Schulz, Amanda Rumba, John Loving, and Amber Nickell. I am happy to have known all of you. Outside of Purdue, I owe Professor Mack Holt a debt for his kindness and impressive expertise as a reader

on this project, and I will remain forever grateful to Professors Maribel Dietz and Suzanne Marchand of Louisiana State University for nurturing my interest in history of all kinds early on and for their patient instruction. Last but not least, thank you to my oldest and closest friends, who for some reason still choose to associate with me in spite of my incessant prattling about strange corners of the past. I would not be the person that I am today without you, all of those listed here, and many others besides. Words are small compensation for what you have given me.

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## ABSTRACT

Jean d’Espagnet (c. 1564 – 1637?) was a magistrate and presiding judge at the *parlement* of Bordeaux in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. He served on the court from 1590 until retiring in 1615, from 1600 as a *président*, a venal office of significant power and social standing. After retirement he wrote three books which comprise his literary and intellectual legacy. Together they speak to the fertile philosophical ground of the late Renaissance and present a vision of order and God’s cosmos deeply influenced by Neoplatonism, Hermetism, Paracelsianism, Neostoicism, and medieval alchemy, as well as d’Espagnet’s judicial education and social experience as a magistrate. This dissertation explores the foundations of d’Espagnet’s philosophy of nature, tracing the development of certain philosophical ideas from ancient sources such as the Platonic and Hermetic traditions through medieval and Renaissance philosophers like Ramon Lull, Pseudo-Geber, and Marsilio Ficino to d’Espagnet and his contemporaries. Paracelsian chemical medicine found some acceptance during d’Espagnet’s lifetime, though not without struggle and dangers to its adherents. This project also examines the context of d’Espagnet’s life and experience as a judicial elite in a kingdom and community beset by religious strife and political uncertainty. It argues that d’Espagnet and his fellow magistrates desperately sought order in the midst of these troubles, and that d’Espagnet echoed across all his writings this concern for order alongside a particular set of ideas about gender, shared by his fellow magistrates, according to which feminine passions were the root of disorder and masculine reason was the antidote. This gendered understanding of order was fundamental to d’Espagnet’s thought and reinforced by his syncretic reading of ancient and modern philosophical texts alongside his own experience, leading him to produce a unique and consistent syncretic philosophy that sought to answer definitively some of humanity’s oldest questions about the nature of matter, man, and the cosmos.

## INTRODUCTION

Jean d’Espagnet, the man whose life and ideas I will reflect on here, was a French *parlementaire*, philosopher, and alchemist in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. What initially fed my interest in d’Espagnet was his high social status and clear proximity to King Henri IV, whom he served in numerous prestigious capacities, on the King’s *conseil privé*, *conseil d’état*, and *grand conseil*, in addition to the office of *président* at the *parlement* of Bordeaux and the *Chambre de l’Édit* at Nérac. This success and esteem seemed potentially at odds with the suspicion, derision, and legal dangers that alchemists could face, especially from those physicians, theologians, and university faculty whose authority, knowledge, and competence they often called into question. Delving into d’Espagnet’s writings only strengthened this sentiment, for in his *Enchiridion Physicae Restitutae* he promised to ‘restore’ philosophy to its ancient purity, following Paracelsians and alchemists in treading on the toes of theologians and challenging traditional positions on the nature and relationship of matter, form, and being.<sup>1</sup> His *Secret Work of Hermetic Philosophy*, published together with the *Enchiridion* in 1623, offered detailed instructions on how to craft the fabled philosopher’s stone, the *magnum opus* of alchemical practice. In these works, d’Espagnet weighed controversial ideas like Copernican heliocentrism, atomism, and even the possibility of an infinite universe filled with sentient, God-worshipping beings on other planets. In this the influences of a number of ancient and non-Christian

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<sup>1</sup> Jean d’Espagnet, *Enchiridion Physicae Restitutae, in quo verus naturae concentus exponitur, plurimique antiquae Philosophiae errores per canones & certas demonstrationes dilucide aperiuntur. Tractatus alter inscriptus Arcanum Hermeticae Philosophiae Opus, in quo occulta Naturae & Artis circa lapidis Philosophorum materiam & operandi modum canonice & ordinate fiunt manifesta. Utrumque opus ejusdem authoris anonymi Spes mea est in Agno* (Paris: Nicholas Buon, 1623). For a modern edition of the Early Modern English translations, see Thomas Willard, ed., *Jean d’Espagnet’s The Summary of Physics Restored (Enchyridion Physicae Restitutae): The 1651 Translation with d’Espagnet’s Arcanum (1650)* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999).



philosophies, from Platonism and Hermetism to Epicureanism, Stoicism, and Kabbalah, were readily visible in his understanding of the cosmos, leading him to some decidedly unorthodox conclusions. It is unsurprising that he chose to publish these anonymously.

Alchemy and Hermetic philosophy were not d’Espagnet’s only intellectual interests. In 1616 he had published a treatise of moral philosophy on the education or *institution* of a prince, ostensibly for the benefit of the young Louis XIII.<sup>2</sup> D’Espagnet told his readers that the inspiration to write and publish his *Institution* came after finding in a *château* in Nérac what he misunderstood to be an unfinished, unpublished manuscript written by King Louis XI for his son more than a century prior. Although this manuscript, called *Les Roziers des Guerres*, was in fact already known, after retiring many years later d’Espagnet prepared it for publication and took the opportunity to attach to it his own *Institution* which at 216 pages somewhat ironically dwarfed the *Rozier* in length and sophistication.

As with his alchemical writings, in his *Institution* d’Espagnet displayed a knowledge of a wide range of ancient authors, drawing on many classical philosophers and moralists to argue for a model of ideal kingship based in moral virtues and an overarching ethic of rational self-discipline garnered through proffered historical and philosophical knowledge as well as various physical exercises with men who themselves exhibited these qualities. D’Espagnet took a position deeply influenced by Stoicism and put forth moral and intellectual virtues like temperance as the foundation for overcoming the bodily passions, which were perceived by numerous jurists, moralists, theologians, and physicians as being at the root of disorders of their day, both personal

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<sup>2</sup> Jean d’Espagnet, *Le Rozier des guerres composé par le feu roi Louis XI... pour Monseigneur le dauphin Charles son fils, mis en lumière sur le manuscrit trouvé au château de Nérac dans le cabinet du roi par le sieur président d’Espagnet,... Et en suite un traité de l’institution d’un jeune prince, fait par ledit sieur président d’Espagnet* (Paris: Nicolas Buon, 1616).

and societal. This was in line with the goals of many other authors of *institutions* during the minority of Louis XIII, and when considered alongside his more eminent sixteenth-century counterparts d’Espagnet’s emphasis on moral virtues as the basis for ideal kingship was much more akin to Erasmus than to Machiavelli, whose shadow lingered over political philosophy.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, owing to the philosophical associations, especially in Platonism, between materiality, imperfection, and corruptibility, the bodily passions, especially lust, were strongly associated with the female and feminine. By the same dichotomy, reason, thought, and intellect, considered gifts of form with divine origins, were masculine. The prince, trained to exercise his reason toward control of himself and his passions, would be able to effectively command both his person and by extension his state. These fundamental qualitative truths based on sexual distinctions would also be essential to d’Espagnet’s natural philosophy, as all things in his universe functioned accordingly.

D’Espagnet, the son of a physician who had once served Henri of Navarre, was most likely born in 1564 and began his twenty-five-year judicial career on the *parlement* of Bordeaux in 1590 amidst the struggle for the throne that followed the assassination of the childless King Henri III the previous year. The civil Wars of Religion still raged in Guyenne and in France at large, as they had on and off for d’Espagnet’s entire life up to this point. It took much of the next decade for the future Henri IV to secure the throne and a tenuous peace, converting to Catholicism along the way. Yet as Henri faced more than twenty assassination attempts throughout his reign, many of his subjects feared that the only thing preventing another civil war was the person of the king himself.<sup>4</sup> When François Ravailac succeeded in claiming Henri’s life in 1610, prince Louis XIII

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<sup>3</sup> For an overview of contemporary works in this genre, see Isabelle Flandrois, *L’Institution du Prince au début du XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> For an analysis of the assassination and contemporary debates on regicide, tyranny, and theories of legitimate resistance, see Roland Mousnier’s *The Assassination of Henry IV: The Tyrannicide Problem and the Consolidation of the French Absolute Monarchy in the Early Seventeenth Century*, trans. Joan Spencer (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1973).

was only eight years old, and the Queen Mother, Marie de Médicis, shrewdly maneuvered her way to control of the regency. Over the next decade discontentment, fear, and opportunism provoked armed resistance and rebellion against Louis' government from the princes of the blood, various *grandeues*, the Huguenot party, and eventually even the Queen Mother herself. Henri's peace was unraveling, and after an abortive attempt at retirement in 1611, d'Espagnet stepped down from the bench for good in 1615, complaining later in the *Enchiridion* of the dangers and cares of a courtier's life. The specific circumstances of his retirement are unknown, and it is possible he was forced out amidst the tensions of the regency. Whatever the circumstances of his retirement, he completed work on his *Institution* the following year.

Viewed in the context of the return of civil war and the chaos that had plagued much of d'Espagnet's life, for which a strong, respected, and authoritative king like Henri IV seemed the only remedy, many aspects of d'Espagnet's publications begin to make a great deal more sense. While distrust of the passions was already a central theme in sixteenth-century moral philosophy, owing to the influence of Roman moralists such as Seneca, Quintilian, Plutarch, and Cicero, as well as contemporary Stoics like Justus Lipsius, familiar themes were given new social and political imperatives.<sup>5</sup> D'Espagnet's writings provide a clear window into this aspect of early modern philosophical, medical, and legal discourse, concerning the problem, keenly felt by jurists like d'Espagnet, of order, disorder, authority, and sexuality.<sup>6</sup> As James Farr has shown, magistrates in Burgundy took the connection of the female and the passions to disorder seriously as well, and attempted to counter it by using the law and prescriptive literature to construct an ethic that "associate[d] self-discipline and social control – in a word, order – with piety, civility and

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<sup>5</sup> See d'Espagnet, *L'Institution*, 75, where he explicitly recommends Plutarch.

<sup>6</sup> James R. Farr, *Authority and Sexuality in Early Modern Burgundy (1550-1730)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 18-22. See also Gerhard Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State*, trans. David McLintock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

obedience.”<sup>7</sup> That is, they attempted to translate into reality the moral order that existed in their minds and in doing so created a new one. It was their means toward a moral and godly society, and men like d’Espagnet became the champions of this order, associating disorder with the passions and the feminine while privileging reason and self-discipline as its effective counter. This was clearly d’Espagnet’s vision of order as well, for in his writings we find a full flowering of this ideology that embraced all of God’s creation as a macrocosmic natural law.

In addition to gendered themes of discipline, d’Espagnet also clearly argued a position of divine right absolutism, according to which the King’s person was inviolable and he was accountable only to God, by whose will alone he ruled. This was understandable, considering the two previous kings had been murdered by men who had believed themselves justified in removing a tyrant. Radical political ideologies and theories of legitimate resistance against an unfit ruler had circulated for decades from both embattled Huguenots as well as the zealous Catholics of the League who believed that Henri III had failed to fulfill his duty of eliminating heresy. To insulate themselves from instability and uncertainty, d’Espagnet and his peers built a conceptual edifice that justified and reinforced hierarchy, patriarchy, and sacralized the monarchy in the name of order. They contributed to a new model of behavior and civility that valued composure and self-control and promoted an agenda of social reform based in discipline of the bodily passions, both for the ruled and the ruler.

This was the primary purpose of the education d’Espagnet envisioned for the prince. Man was a *petite monarchie*, where the body must obey the rational mind. Prudence would “assist and fortify reason, as its good angel,” for instance, while fortitude’s purpose was to resist “concupiscent power... from where derive the strongest and most dangerous passions.”<sup>8</sup> To hold

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<sup>7</sup> Farr, *Authority and Sexuality*, 8, 18-22.

<sup>8</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 131.

the soul of the prince in a morally good state, the ultimate purpose of the *Institution*, he must “strengthen reason, weaken the passions, and incline the will to reason...” for this, he says, is “the entire effect of moral science.”<sup>9</sup> Ideally, the temperance and virtue of a well-educated King would also avoid the problem of potential tyranny altogether and eliminate any need for resistance or regicide, for in d’Espagnet’s eyes abuses of power would only occur if the King were enslaved by his passions. However idealized his vision of Louis’ education, there is little doubt that d’Espagnet shared and perpetuated the moral vision of his contemporaries as a means toward social and political stability.

When we turn to d’Espagnet’s natural philosophy and cosmology, we see many of the same themes and concepts at work and begin to understand the depth of the metaphysical convictions behind his ideas about gender and order. They informed his theories of matter and form, generation and corruption, ideas and perfection, and of alchemical processes, as well as his understanding of the divine creation of the universe. He gathered these ideas from many places, and his eclectic philosophy speaks to the breadth and vitality of scientific debate in an era of unprecedented literary and philosophical access and variety. The vast landscape of Renaissance rediscoveries and translations, widely available in print, lay open to him. In deeply syncretic fashion he tried to reconcile numerous concepts originating in disparate times, places, and traditions, building a consistent and well-ordered universe that accorded with his theological commitments and was confirmed by a synoptic reading of many ancient texts, including Christian scripture.<sup>10</sup> Following the concept of *prisca theologia*, d’Espagnet was convinced that these recovered texts of antiquity spoke of the same truths, revealed by the Holy Spirit to great sages of ages past and hidden behind

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<sup>9</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 130.

<sup>10</sup> For an analysis of syncretism as an intellectual phenomenon, see Stephen A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West: Pico’s 900 Theses (1486): The Evolution of Traditional Religious and Philosophical Systems: With Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Tempe, AZ: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1998).

diverse tongues and symbolic terms. It fell to the pious philosopher, with the aid of God and the guiding Light of Nature, to decode these seemingly disparate texts and unravel their mysteries, rediscovering the unified philosophy of nature. Further, d’Espagnet claimed that his goal was to share this secret knowledge with others for the benefit of man and feared criticism from other *adepti* for his revelations. Many of the traditions and ideas he heavily relied on originated and evolved in antiquity but once again found prominent expression in the Renaissance. D’Espagnet absorbed, compared, and reconciled these texts and traditions, alongside the foundational ideas inculcated by his education and experience as a magistrate, to formulate in his writings a syncretic natural and social worldview that expressed his vision of God’s right order. It is not insignificant that this truth predated, and could thus be found independent of, the confessional struggles and theological debates of his day.

The themes of gender and order, for him natural and cosmological truths, featured prominently across d’Espagnet’s writings, a consistent aspect of his worldview that spoke not only to his education and preoccupations as a *parlementaire* during the Wars of Religion but also to his deep-rooted beliefs about the very laws of God’s universe. His *Institution* established among other things his position on reason and the passions, one likely familiar to his judicial colleagues, and his alchemical works presumed and further argued for the profound and universal reach of these truths. Beliefs about the feminine as corrupt, lustful, destructive, and antithetical to the reasonable, active, and vivifying power of the masculine were old, yet given expanded and intensified expression in d’Espagnet’s day. His work reflects and reinforces this, giving it the weight of divine and natural law. Through the microcosm and the macrocosm his presumptions about gender and order extended across, and were fundamental to, his entire universe. Patriarchy and hierarchy were the laws of the cosmos, and as a microcosm human society reflected this. He attempted to

communicate his understanding of this cosmic order in text, so that others, including his prince, might live according to it, and presumably tried to do so himself in his social world and his role as a magistrate. What was true of the macrocosm was also true of the world of man: “as above, so below.”

### **D’Espagnet and Alchemy in Modern Scholarship**

D’Espagnet is in something of a strange place, especially when it comes to alchemy. He is well-known enough to have prompted multiple modern edited editions of the French and English translations of his alchemical works, presumably as a step toward promoting in-depth studies of his philosophy, but these have not yet materialized.<sup>11</sup> Thomas Willard edited the English translations, offering a biographical sketch and some commentary, and a year prior published an article discussing d’Espagnet’s considerations on the doctrine of a plurality of worlds.<sup>12</sup> Didier Kahn lamented in his monumental *Alchimie et Paracelsisme* that no one has yet provided a deep analysis of d’Espagnet, making any comparison of his thought to that of others and his placement in a history of alchemy difficult.<sup>13</sup> This seemingly led Kahn to edit a new edition of Jean Bachou’s 1651 French translation, to follow Desagues’ modern edition from 1972.<sup>14</sup> The lack of extensive studies of d’Espagnet’s thought is somewhat understandable: d’Espagnet does not seem to have been instrumental in any particular field or the originator of any specific groundbreaking theory, and his overall philosophy and worldview was an amalgamation of interpretations of many familiar

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<sup>11</sup> Jean d’Espagnet, *L’Oeuvre secret de la philosophie d’Hermès; Précédé de La Philosophie naturelle restituée*, ed. J. Lefebvre Desagues (Paris: E.P.: Denoël, 1972).

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Willard, “The Many Worlds of Jean d’Espagnet,” *Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies* 41 (1998): 201-214.

<sup>13</sup> Didier Kahn, *Alchimie et paracelsisme en France à la fin de la Renaissance (1567–1625)* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2007), 530-534.

<sup>14</sup> Jean d’Espagnet, *La philosophie naturelle retablie en sa pureté suivi de l’ouvrage secret de la philosophie d’Hermès*, ed. Didier Kahn (Greze-Doiceau: Beya, 2007).

ideas and themes, some more unique than others. He flirted with a number of controversial and revolutionary ideas like the doctrine of many worlds but ultimately held back from bold pronouncements. In the comparative studies in which he is featured, he is most often merely listed alongside numerous others who each are given a few sentences as evidence of a broader trend. This present work is far from exhaustive but attempts to outline and provide some analysis of what I consider to be his most interesting ideas, those that resonated with his moral philosophy, and those topics that also occupied his contemporaries. His *Institution* has not been studied, as far as I am aware, beyond his appearance in Flandrois' *L'Institution du Prince au début du XVIIe siècle*, where it remains in the shadow of others' and does not feature prominently.

Alchemy has long been a troubled subject for historians. Beginning slowly and sporadically, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries alchemy began to be meaningfully differentiated by philosophers from chemistry, and by the mid-eighteenth century was largely tarred with the brush of ignorance and superstition and placed in opposition to the enlightened science of chemistry.<sup>15</sup> Until the mid-twentieth century alchemy was overwhelmingly dismissed outright by historians of science as a subject unworthy of serious study in relation to science, relegated to the dustbin of history as a regretfully long-lived misadventure in the history of chemistry. Its practitioners were misguided magicians steeped in esoteric thinking or self-serving charlatans who hoodwinked rulers into believing that the alchemical secrets of gold-making (*chrysopoeia*) would ease their perennial financial problems. A reinterpretation began in the mid-nineteenth century, as some with an interest in the occult and the esoteric like Mary Anne Atwood

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<sup>15</sup> Lawrence M. Principe and William R. Newman, "Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy," *Secrets of Nature: Astrology and Alchemy in Early Modern Europe*, ed. William R. Newman and Anthony Grafton (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 386, and William R. Newman and Lawrence M. Principe, "Alchemy vs. Chemistry: The Etymological Origins of a Historiographic Mistake," *Early Science and Medicine* 3, No. 1 (1998): 38.



and Ethan Allen Hitchcock turned to the study of alchemy. They arrived at an interpretation of alchemical works and the operations they described as entirely metaphorical, describing a spiritual transformation or journey through the soul's perfection rather than an actual physical process that might take place in a laboratory.<sup>16</sup> Man became the laboratory, with his soul or conscience the subject of the operations. This esoteric or transcendental view has a strong popular following among non-academics even to the present day.

In a similar vein the psychoanalyst Carl Jung (1875-1961) argued in the first half of the twentieth century for another interpretation of alchemy that also divorced it from physical chemical processes. His was essentially an attempt to use psychology to understand alchemy. He believed that the unconscious psyche projected itself onto matter, as alchemists saw with their eyes the symbolic imagery that was in their minds.<sup>17</sup> The transformations of matter alchemists believed they witnessed were projections of their psyche, a "hallucinatory reality."<sup>18</sup> Of course, by this logic attempts to decode a chemical recipe from alchemical imagery would be a pointless endeavor, because the 'white swans,' 'green lions,' and other symbols never necessarily corresponded to anything 'real' to begin with. Jung also saw the gradual transformation, inaugurated by Paracelsus, of alchemists into mere laboratory technicians as the beginning of the decay of 'true' or 'good' alchemy.<sup>19</sup>

The other side of the coin in these interpretations leaves physical or technical chemistry as a separate development, and this general approach until the mid-twentieth century was followed by historians seeking to trace a lineage for 'real' chemistry without the uncomfortable

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<sup>16</sup> Principe and Newman, "Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy," 388-401.

<sup>17</sup> Principe and Newman, "Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy," 388-403, and Hereward Tilton, *The Quest for the Phoenix: Spiritual Alchemy and Rosicrucianism in the Work of Count Michael Maier (1569-1622)* (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 4.

<sup>18</sup> Principe and Newman, "Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy," 405.

<sup>19</sup> Principe and Newman, "Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy," 404.

complications that alchemy presented. Of course, the artificial and ultimately positivistic division between chemistry and alchemy is fraught with issues readily recognizable, if not easily solved, by modern historians. Allen Debus credits Walter Pagel and then Frances Yates with turning the discipline from a positivistic approach to the history of medicine and science toward attempts to understand thinkers and their ideas in their entirety and in their cultural context.<sup>20</sup> Studying only those individual ideas that resonate with current scientific theories gives only a narrow and distorted view of the past and the nature of scientific change. Pagel sought to understand well-known philosophers such as William Harvey and Paracelsus on their own terms and in the light of their complete intellectual output, and began to highlight the important links between alchemy, iatrochemistry, and developing medical theories.<sup>21</sup> For Yates' part, she drew scholarly attention to the influence of Hermetism and other esoteric currents on philosophers otherwise considered champions or precursors of modern scientific theories, even if many of her claims, chief among them that Hermetism was at the core of the scientific revolution, are now considered to be overstated.<sup>22</sup>

What has resulted is a greater awareness of the ties between and coexistence of those ideas traditionally viewed as progressive and 'scientific' with the more magical explanations within alchemy and natural philosophy more broadly, as well as the experimental potential of alchemical theories.<sup>23</sup> Alchemical transmutation, *chrysopoeia*, and the philosopher's stone were prominent

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<sup>20</sup> Allen G. Debus, "Chemists, Physicians, and Changing Perspectives on the Scientific Revolution," *Isis* 89, No. 1 (Mar., 1998): 66-81.

<sup>21</sup> See Walter Pagel, *The Smiling Spleen: Paracelsianism in Storm and Stress* (New York: S. Karger, 1984).

<sup>22</sup> See Brian Vickers, "Frances Yates and the Writing of History," *The Journal of Modern History* 51, No. 2 (Jun., 1979): 287-316, and Brian P. Copenhaver, "Natural Magic, Hermetism, and Occultism in Early Modern Science," in *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution*, ed. David C. Lindberg and Robert S. Westman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 261-290.

<sup>23</sup> For a recent overview of the state of the field, see Marcos Martín-Torres, "Some Recent Developments in the Historiography of Alchemy," *Ambix* 58, No. 3 (Nov. 2011): 215-237, and Lawrence M. Principe, "Alchemy Restored," *Isis* 102, No. 2 (June, 2011): 305-312.

fixtures in the thought of Robert Boyle and Isaac Newton, for example, a remarkable revelation considering past biographers had deliberately hidden these elements of their work as antithetical to the model of true science and the true scientist.<sup>24</sup> Numerous works now link alchemical ideas and techniques to metallurgy and fire-assaying and to the operations and knowledge involved in artisanal work from the making of glass or inks to something as simple as cooking.<sup>25</sup> This is not to mention the more obvious ties to natural philosophy and developing matter theories like corpuscularism and atomism. In addition to numerous deep and holistic studies of individual alchemical philosophers, another significant trend is to trace the development of ideas instead, considered within their broader cultural and socioeconomic context.<sup>26</sup> Numerous edited critical editions of alchemical and other esoteric works have appeared in recent years, with the *English Renaissance Hermeticism* series in which the English translations of d’Espagnet’s alchemical works appear providing an example. Alchemy has taken a place in the history of science, and its restoration expands our understanding of ‘science’ and our historical conceptions of it.<sup>27</sup>

Historians now recognize that alchemy was not a static or uniform enterprise. There were a huge number of theories and disagreements over methods, starting materials, the nature of matter and its interaction with form, the number of principles or elements in nature and whether they could be separated and manipulated by human arts. If this is the case, though, a fundamental

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<sup>24</sup> See Betty Jo Teeter Dobbs, *The Foundations of Newton’s Alchemy: or, “The Hunting of the Greene Lyon”* (Cambridge University Press, 1975), 6-20, and Lawrence M. Principe, *The Aspiring Adept: Robert Boyle and His Alchemical Quest* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

<sup>25</sup> For example, Bruce T. Moran, *Distilling Knowledge: Alchemy, Chemistry, and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), Pamela Smith, *The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), William R. Newman, *Atoms and Alchemy: Chymistry and the Experimental Origins of the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), and Marco Beretta, *The Alchemy of Glass: Counterfeit, Imitation and Transmutation in Ancient Glassmaking* (Sagamore Beach, MA: Science History Publications, Watson Publishing, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> For example, Hiroshi Hirai, *Le concept de semence dans les théories de la matière à la Renaissance: De Marsile Ficin à Pierre Gassendi*, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> Principe, “Alchemy Restored,” 311-312.

problem remains within the historiography; what do we mean when we say alchemy or chemistry, and how were the two terms used and related in the early modern period? Lawrence Principe and William Newman, among others, have pushed back strongly against Jung and his occultist predecessors, arguing that those earlier spiritual or psychoanalytic attempts to understand alchemy do it a disservice by denying any continuity between the alchemy of the early modern period and modern physical chemistry.<sup>28</sup> There was no clear or prevalent distinction made between alchemy and chemistry for most of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as immediately evident via simply comparing the titles of alchemical works and collections to their contents (e.g. the numerous recognizable laboratory processes described in Andreas Libavius' *Alchemia*, or the regular presence of works about the philosopher's stone and gold-making in Lazarus Zetzner's *Theatrum Chemicum* edited collections).<sup>29</sup> D'Espagnet, for his part, does appear to use these terms differently, at least on one occasion. In Canon 6 of the *Arcanum* he refers to "practical chemistry" (*chymiciae praxeos*) as only being a part, a subset of the broader, holistic field of knowledge that was alchemy. For the most part, though, he uses them interchangeably. Generally speaking it was not until the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that these "synonyms became non-synonymous," and thus such a divide in the works of historians is anachronistic.<sup>30</sup> Attempts to separate the two based on the presence of vitalist or corpuscularist ideas, or separating theories into mystical and physical, have ignored the complicated realities of natural philosophy in this period and seem woefully inadequate given the number of in-depth studies of alchemical works in recent years.

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<sup>28</sup> See Newman and Principe, "Alchemy vs. Chemistry," *passim*.

<sup>29</sup> Newman and Principe, "Alchemy vs. Chemistry," 33, 38.

<sup>30</sup> Newman and Principe, "Alchemy vs. Chemistry," 41.

Having established the usage of these terms by contemporaries as haphazard and most often indistinguishable, a problem of language nevertheless remains for modern historians. Newman and Principe have gone so far as to suggest that historians cease using the words ‘alchemy’ and ‘chemistry’ for the early modern period altogether, and instead replace it with another contemporary, and less historiographically burdened, term in “chymistry.”<sup>31</sup> This solution carries its own issues, though, as others like Hereward Tilton have argued. In his work on Michael Maier, Tilton argues that the term ‘alchemy’ is “indispensable” especially as it relates to the history of Western esotericism, as it implies a set of intellectual debts and connections as well as theoretical and religious presuppositions that are inextricable from the pursuits of many early modern alchemists.<sup>32</sup> To use Tilton’s example, Maier drew on sources from before the term *chymia* was in widespread use, and his goals with respect to iatrochemistry were closer to his medieval counterparts than early modern chemists. Importantly as well, in spite of the eventual shelving of alchemy as a legitimate scientific pursuit by later generations in the field of chemistry, the term continues to be used in the context of esotericism well into the modern period and even to the present day.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, while perhaps the negative connotations associated with the term outweigh its usefulness, I have chosen to follow d’Espagnet’s usage and meaning of alchemy and believe that it can still be valuable should we accept that it signifies the relationship between chemical laboratory processes and a broad landscape of related ideas within early modern natural philosophy. The term ‘chymistry’ seems at a glance empty of the associations that I would argue are essential

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<sup>31</sup> See Newman and Principe, “Alchemy vs. Chemistry.”

<sup>32</sup> Tilton, *The Quest for the Phoenix*, 235-236.

<sup>33</sup> Of course, the term ‘esotericism’ too suffers from a similar problem of categorical vagueness: see Michael Bergunder, “What is Esotericism? Cultural Studies Approaches and the Problems of Definition in Religious Studies,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 22, No. 1 (Mar., 2010): 9-36.

to understanding d’Espagnet’s arguments, interests, authorities, and overall worldview, and it is not clear that eschewing the term entirely is worth what is lost, particularly in his case.<sup>34</sup> As stated above, d’Espagnet used both terms, and mostly interchangeably, though he uses ‘alchemy’ much more frequently. For my part, I use the term as Tilton does, to indicate the wide range of beliefs and metaphysical commitments underlying d’Espagnet’s approach to nature and its manipulation through chemical processes. That is, the entire constellation of ideas about natural processes and matter that was informed by the late medieval tradition of alchemy as well as the currents of Renaissance esoteric philosophy that embraced Hermetism and Neoplatonism. These include, especially in d’Espagnet’s case, the theory of the microcosm and macrocosm, celestial virtues, solar mysticism, and the general notion that alchemy represented a universal tradition of philosophy historically embodied by the *prisca theologia*, syncretically tied to religious piety and knowledge. These were the disparate sources of an eternal truth, once lost but now recovered.

### Structure of the Work

The first chapter will consider what biographical information we have concerning d’Espagnet’s life and career as a *parlementaire* and contextualize it within the history of the Wars of Religion, focusing on the breakdown of order and the experience of the magistrate in French society during d’Espagnet’s lifetime.

The second will examine his first book, *L’Institution du jeune prince*, a treatise on the education of an ideal prince. D’Espagnet’s greatest concern was training the prince through moral education to resist the dangerous and unruly passions of the body by means of virtue, self-

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<sup>34</sup> Further, it is difficult to dismiss the reality that d’Espagnet’s writings are much better characterized as speculatively philosophical, examples of deductive reasoning, analogical thinking, and syncretic abstraction, rather than detailed technical instruction. Any novice in laboratory operations would have an extremely difficult time using d’Espagnet’s work as a primer.

discipline, and reason. His approach demonstrated the deep influence of Neostoic philosophy among ruling elites and jurists and their attempts to reify a vision of order based in this ethos. A prince shaped thus would be in control of himself and his state, not enslaved by his passions and therefore disinclined to tyranny. This was the counterpart to his other arguments for the sacralization of the monarchy as an antidote to regicide. The king was God's vicar on Earth and it was not for man to question this order. With tyrannicide off the table, d'Espagnet's solution was to prevent the king from becoming a tyrant in the first place.

The third chapter explores the philosophical background to early modern alchemy and chemistry, from classical antiquity to the late Middle Ages to the late Renaissance, focusing on what I consider to be the sources of d'Espagnet's alchemical philosophy. The hermeneutical techniques and modes of thinking that d'Espagnet employed were influenced by Hermetism, classical philosophy, especially Neoplatonism, and Christian Cabala<sup>35</sup>, among other philosophical traditions. The cosmic significance of the sun and light, an essential and interesting aspect of d'Espagnet's thought, was also established in these traditions. The chapter provides some background on the influence of medieval alchemy on that of the early modern period, with extended attention paid to the Pseudo-Lullian tradition due to d'Espagnet's affinity toward the works attributed to Lull. These works established the understanding of the nature and capabilities of the philosopher's stone, as well as ideas for the process of creating it and starting ingredients, and they were readily available in the sixteenth century.

In chapter four I highlight the major figures involved in the Renaissance revival of antique philosophy, particularly Hermetism and Neoplatonism. It focuses on Marsilio Ficino and

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<sup>35</sup> The distinction between the spellings of 'Kabbalah' and 'Cabala' is in modern scholarship usually dependent on the context: the former generally refers to the practices of Jewish mystics within their own traditions, while 'Cabala' is used to designate Christians who made use of these techniques and practices for their own religious and philosophical goals.

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, with an emphasis on their attempts to reconcile and syncretize those philosophical traditions with Christianity and the establishment of the *prisca theologia* tradition to justify the authority of these ancient traditions. Here I discuss religious and philosophical syncretism as an intellectual phenomenon, Christian Cabala as a hermeneutical system aimed at decoding scripture, and the late Platonic metaphysical ideas like emanationism and the unity of creation in the One that help to explain d’Espagnet’s understanding of the relationship between the divine and nature, including man. In the same vein, I analyze the Hermetic *Pimander* and *Emerald Tablet* and point to their influence on early modern alchemists including d’Espagnet. The ideas considered here help to explain the evolution of western alchemy and the development of ideas in this tradition that were essential to d’Espagnet’s alchemical philosophy.

The fifth chapter opens with an examination of sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century *chymia* and medicine, focusing on the ideas of Paracelsus and those who followed him, the reception of these ideas, as well as the opposition Paracelsians faced from established medical authorities. I briefly trace the development of a “chemical philosophy” in Europe and the arguments of its critics. I describe the background and events of the incident of the Rosicrucian placards in Paris primarily as an example of the reception of Paracelsus in France, and as the immediate context in which d’Espagnet’s alchemical works were published. Theologians and physicians alike pushed back strongly against Paracelsianism, chemical medicine, and the chemical modes of interpretation of scripture and nature employed by philosophers like d’Espagnet.

The sixth and final chapter features my analysis, for the most part organized thematically, of d’Espagnet’s alchemical works and his self-image as a philosopher. For the *Enchiridion* I detail



his understanding of the creation, of matter and form, of the divine sun and its vivifying light, of the radical moisture and immanent form, of the elements and principles, especially Fire, of ideas and perfection, the hierarchy of being, and the microcosm and the macrocosm. I emphasize especially the role played by gender in these and in d’Espagnet’s overall vision of the cosmos. This study of the *Enchiridion* ends with a discussion of d’Espagnet’s position on controversial theories concerning atoms and corpuscles, heliocentrism, and the doctrine of many worlds. My analysis of the *Arcanum* covers d’Espagnet’s instructions on creating the philosopher’s stone, including its stages and ingredients (particularly his understanding of sulphur and mercury) as well as their analogical significance.

The work concludes with a brief epilogue, focused on the intellectual interests of d’Espagnet’s translator Elias Ashmole during the English Civil War, Interregnum, and Restoration in the mid-seventeenth century. I draw parallels between the lives and philosophical pursuits of d’Espagnet and Ashmole during a period of political turmoil characterized by civil war and regicide and draw attention to the similar manner in which they both turned to familiar themes of a shared, heterodox philosophy in order to glorify and justify divine right monarchy as a cure for the disorders of their day.

## CHAPTER 1. ORDER AND THE EXPERIENCE OF THE MAGISTRATE DURING THE FRENCH WARS OF RELIGION

When Jean D’Espagnet joined the *Parlement* of Bordeaux in 1590, he already had lived through three decades of religious civil wars. He published the *Institution* in 1616, in the midst of the tumultuous regency period following the assassination of Henri IV in 1610 that only highlighted the weakness of the authority of the French crown and the need for a return to stability. This regency period was punctuated by a divisive and inconclusive summoning of the Estates General, the rise and fall of the Italian courtier Concino Concini, as well as rebellion by the Prince of the Blood Henri de Condé and his allies. D’Espagnet published his works of natural philosophy in 1623, during the final phase of the civil wars.

The roughly three decades of conflict up to the accession of Henri IV coincided with the first thirty years of d’Espagnet’s life, including his judicial training and intellectual formation. Judges played an important role in the maintenance of order, especially in their own estimation. D’Espagnet’s career and self-image as a judge in the service of the crown undoubtedly played a significant role in his intellectual formation as well. The disorder of the period and the impotence of the monarchy clearly left its mark on him, and that the murder of Henri IV in 1610 threatened a return to the chaos and uncertainty of the 16th century was clearly a cause for alarm. The period of the Wars, with its regency governments, regicides, rebellion, factionalism, and fanaticism, must be understood as one of intense crisis for the people and government of the kingdom of France and a period of weakness for royal authority. James Collins opens *The State in Early Modern France* by calling Henri IV’s France “a society in chaos;” those who experienced the wars “never forgot

the climate of fear” and “longed for order.”<sup>36</sup> William Bouwsma has argued for a broader cultural malaise in the late Renaissance rooted in uncertainty, anxiety, and perceptions of disorder as the ties of the familiar social, intellectual, and religious world came loose. The new realities of urban living and social mobility broke down traditional boundaries and modes of communal relations, giving rise to an immense sense of anxiety that the inherited culture of the past struggled to alleviate. Denis Crouzet spoke as well of the desacralization of the monarchy and the body politic, apocalypticism, and the *civilisation de l'angoisse* of post-Reformation France.<sup>37</sup> In response, elites, particularly jurists, sought order: “lawyers everywhere... were looking for patterns of order, whether in tradition or the cosmos, that might be applied to contemporary needs,” and reinforcing class boundaries, for instance, was perceived as being essential to this goal.<sup>38</sup> The culture of anxiety and uncertainty clearly had an impact on the culture of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and the aftermath of the religious wars in France saw an intensification of arguments supporting a hierarchical and patriarchal order, aimed at the solidification of what elites, especially magistrates, perceived as proper societal order. This sentiment is especially apparent in the Neostoic philosophies espoused by *parlementaires* including d’Espagnet, which pointed to unbridled bodily passions as the source of societal disorder and prescribed as the remedy self-control and the rule of reason. These men were trying to reestablish an imagined order of the past, and in doing so they created something new.

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<sup>36</sup> James B. Collins, *The State in Early Modern France*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1. For similar sentiments, see also Mark Greengrass, *France in the Age of Henri IV: The Struggle for Stability* (Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley Longman Ltd, 1984), Penny Roberts, “Royal Authority and Justice during the French Religious Wars,” *Past & Present* 184 (Aug. 2004): 1, J. H. M. Salmon, *Society in Crisis: France in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Benn, 1975), 13-14, and David Parker, *The Making of French Absolutism* (London: St. Martin’s Press, 1983), 12, among others.

<sup>37</sup> See Denis Crouzet’s *Les Guerriers de Dieu: la violence au temps des troubles de religion, vers 1525-vers 1610* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1990).

<sup>38</sup> William J. Bouwsma, *The Waning of the Renaissance, 1550-1640* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 143-146, 163

Beyond these cultural growing pains, the kingdom of France suffered particularly in a series of civil wars historians call the French Wars of Religion. The term denotes a period of intermittent warfare within France that took place against a backdrop of considerable religious divisions and tensions but were also driven by dynastic ambitions and political maneuvering. These wars represented the most immediate and tangible source of disorder in France, as confessional violence unraveled the very fabric of an intensely Christian community. Significantly in the case of D’Espagnet, the years of conflict coincide almost exactly with the years of his life. Consequently, violence between neighbors, factional struggles, ineffectual kingship, fear of foreign invasion, and open rebellion characterized the first several decades of his intellectual formation and training as a magistrate. *Parlementaires* in particular had the unenviable responsibility of enforcing the crown’s often conciliatory policies with regard to the Huguenot minority, which put them at odds, sometimes violently, with the popular sentiment of the Catholic majority and the preachers who stoked the fires of zeal. Mack Holt is justified in calling the period “the most serious crisis of the French state and society” before the French Revolution.<sup>39</sup>

Toleration and freedom of conscience with regard to religion were in 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe antithetical to conceptions of a healthy and unified Christian belief community. The mass was more than a theological exercise, and as a communal event served to strengthen the bond between participants as well as their bond with God.<sup>40</sup> Medical terminology of pollution and infection was employed to describe the insidious effect of heterodoxy on a community of believers. This does much to explain the ritualistic behaviors of purification, as well as the inhuman cruelty, to which perceived heretics might be subjected. They were not merely misguided neighbors, but an

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<sup>39</sup> Mack P. Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562-1629*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3.

<sup>40</sup> Holt, *The French Wars of Religion*, 18.

existential threat to the fabric of an ordered Christian society. Thus, peace treaties that provided for limited toleration of Protestantism must be understood as merely temporary measures, and not a permanent settlement intended to ensure conviviality between Catholics and Huguenots indefinitely. It was a difficult position for magistrates, for traditional wisdom held that unity in the Catholic religion was the bedrock of society and state: Grégory Champeaud writes specifically regarding the *Parlement* of Bordeaux that they were obsessed with unity both as a social reality and as a philosophical concept, even citing the influence of Neoplatonic thought regarding unity in the One as a representation of God.<sup>41</sup> Novelty and change break the old order, leading to instability and disunity. Through the sixteenth century, registration of the various edicts of toleration presented them with a paradox in their position as loyal agents of both religion and the crown, and *parlementaires* balked as the monarchy itself seemed to threaten the religious unity that they believed was one of the traditional and most significant foundations of order.<sup>42</sup> Over the course of the wars, though, some magistrates softened on this position in favor of toleration, not because it was a good in itself but because it was a lesser evil of sorts, and an alternate means of achieving the original goal of order through peace.<sup>43</sup>

Even before the wars began, Protestantism was perceived as a threat by the monarchy. The King and his agents believed themselves to be responsible for disciplining the body social and maintaining a godly, ordered society. The view of Huguenots as not only religious dissenters but rebels against the state began as early as the 1530s with the “affair of the Placards.” Francis I empowered secular judges to hear cases of heresy, explicitly associating Protestantism with

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<sup>41</sup> Grégory Champeaud, “Les édits de pacification: une source originale pour l’histoire du parlement de Bordeaux au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Histoire, Économie et Société* 31, No. 1 (Mars 2012): 11.

<sup>42</sup> Jonathan Powis, “Order, Religion, and the Magistrates of a Provincial Parlement in Sixteenth-century France,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 71 (1980): 180-183.

<sup>43</sup> Jonathan Powis, “Gallican Liberties and the Politics of Later Sixteenth-Century France,” *The Historical Journal* 26, No. 3 (Sep., 1983): 529-530.

sedition and disruption of public peace and tranquility. Henri II created a judicial chamber specifically for the prosecution of heretics, and the Edict of Chateaubriand in 1551 was aimed at Protestantism in a number of ways. It targeted assemblies and publications as seditious, while banning Protestants from public offices, especially those on the sovereign courts, while simultaneously requiring these courts to periodically examine their members for heretical ideas.

When Henri II died in a jousting accident in 1559, he left his son Francis II, only fifteen years old, to the machinations of powerful members of the court. A particularly powerful family, the Guise, took the initiative in the days after Henri II's death, dominating several important offices and holding the young king's ear, much to the dismay of the Queen Mother, Catherine de Médicis. Catherine fought an uphill battle to protect her son from the predatory factions and families who sought to use him for their own gain, and this period was something of a balancing act as she attempted to keep these factions complacent while not allowing them to grow too influential. The fact that the Guise family, especially the Cardinal of Lorraine, were known for their zealous devotion to Catholicism also worried Protestants. A wave of evangelism from John Calvin's Geneva had from the mid-1550s strengthened their numbers and resolve, especially in southern France. Fearing never-ending royal hostility if the Guise remained ascendant, and with the support of Antoine de Bourbon, the king of Navarre, a group of Protestants led by Jean du Barry sought to free the king from Guise control. In what became called the conspiracy of Amboise, in 1560 du Barry and others made plans to kidnap the king. They were found out and captured by royal troops, after which several hundred were hanged. The failed conspiracy only lent further credence to the equation of Protestantism with sedition and danger to order. Even Condé was arrested, and escaped execution thanks only to the untimely death of Francis II in December.

The succession fell next to another young king in Charles IX, only eleven years old, and this time the Queen Mother was quicker to establish her place and solidified her power as regent for the king, a minor. She was more immediately interested in stability on behalf of her son and took a more pragmatic approach with regard to the Huguenots, surrounding herself with moderates, undermining the influence of the Guise convoking several assemblies over the next few years, including two Estates General. She even named the Protestant Henri of Navarre, first prince of the blood, to the position of Lieutenant-general of the realm, second in command of the royal armies. While these assemblies failed to reconcile the two parties, they did raise suspicion and fear among militant Catholics that the result of such negotiations would be compromise with the Huguenots. The Duke of Guise allied with other powerful Catholics including Anne de Montmorency, the constable and leader of the French royal armies, and together they sought Spanish aid with the intent of destroying the Huguenots.

In January of 1562 Catherine de Médicis issued the Edict of Saint-Germain, granting limited toleration of the Huguenot minority. Holt notes that this edict was the result of Catherine continuing to pursue a peaceful resolution to the religious question without events devolving into civil war.<sup>44</sup> This was not the result, however. To begin, the *Parlement* of Paris refused to register the edict, issuing to the Queen Mother a formal remonstrance in the hope she would withdraw or alter the edict. It was clear that the magistrates continued to perceive Huguenots as a threat to French unity and the social order, and that to tolerate them would bring the kingdom to ruin. As Katherine Crawford has noted in her work about France's female regents, part of the resistance that Catherine de Médicis faced was based on assumptions about gender and power.<sup>45</sup> For a female

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<sup>44</sup> Holt, *The French Wars of Religion*, 47.

<sup>45</sup> Katherine Crawford, *Perilous Performances: Gender and Regency in Early Modern France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 25.

to be in a ruling position would have been viewed as unnatural, and French magistrates were especially uncomfortable with the idea. The remonstrance of the Parisian *parlementaires* questioned the legality of Catherine's edict based on her sex and the minority of the king, arguing that they should follow in the footsteps of the family patriarch, Henri II, and not do anything prejudicial to the Catholic faith he had followed.

While the edict was eventually registered after receiving two explicit royal orders to that effect, the violence the magistrates feared had already occurred. On March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1562, soldiers of the Duke de Guise fired on unarmed Protestants worshipping in the town of Vassy, perhaps after an exchange of insults. The following month, French Protestants held a synod and turned to Louis de Bourbon, prince de Condé, for aid and protection from persecution, requesting that he raise troops for the purpose. Condé obliged and called upon French Protestants to defend themselves militarily against the Guise alliance, leading to a series of wars that would span nearly the entirety of d'Espagnet's life.

In these wars, the monarchy backed the Catholic side, seeking to defeat the Huguenots militarily and calling for peace when their coffers were exhausted. More than soldiers fighting soldiers, Catholics and Protestants feared each other and false religionists, sectarians, perhaps diabolical agents, a threat to the social fabric and order to be excised. Frenchmen assaulted their neighbors, "...excluding their victims from a shared national community, culture, and even humanity."<sup>46</sup> The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572 provided one of the most shocking examples, especially considering the hopes for peace the wedding celebration had represented, and its violent aftershocks reached as far as Bordeaux.<sup>47</sup> The populace suffered greatly, as did the

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<sup>46</sup> Keith P. Luria, *Sacred Boundaries: Religious Coexistence and Conflict in Early-Modern France* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), xv.

<sup>47</sup> Barbara B. Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Paris* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).



prestige and authority of the monarchy. Theories of legitimate resistance were articulated by Protestants, against their own monarch who apparently sought to exterminate them, and later by Catholics as well after Henri III had two of the most powerful Catholic leaders assassinated. Having fled Paris in 1588 in fear of the mob of zealous revolutionaries and the Paris cell of the Union of the Holy Sacrament, colloquially known as the Catholic League, Henri III was himself murdered the next year while besieging his own capitol.<sup>48</sup>

Bordeaux during the Wars of Religion held an interesting position, and the *Parlement* d'Espagnet would join had a long history with Henri of Navarre (the future Henri IV). In the 1570s and 1580s, Protestant leaders like Navarre and Condé wanted to use the city as a base of operations, and thus never besieged it. Navarre was also governor of the province, yet the *Parlement* was aware of their designs on the city and was so wary of allowing them or their partisans to gain a presence in the city that they refused Navarre entry altogether.<sup>49</sup> Navarre was of course offended at being barred from his own capital, yet the *Parlement*, aware of the gravity of this refusal and perhaps seeking excuses, claimed he had undertaken open acts of hostility, trying to gain control of the city through devious and even violent means.<sup>50</sup>

Bordeaux was majority Catholic by a great margin, and in 1577 the *Parlement* had all Protestants in the city imprisoned at the convent of the Jacobins, seemingly for their own protection: apparently the population wanted to massacre them.<sup>51</sup> The city fell in with the Catholic League in the late 1580s, and in April of 1589 a League procession became a rebellion. In a premeditated attack partisans tried to assassinate Henri III's *lieutenant du roi*, Jacques Goyon, *mareschal de*

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<sup>48</sup> Holt, *The French Wars of Religion*, 123-125, 135. See also Stuart Carroll, *Noble Power during the Wars of Religion: the Guise Affinity and the Catholic Cause in Normandy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>49</sup> Charles-Bon-François Boscheron Des Portes, *Histoire du Parlement de Bordeaux depuis sa création jusqu'à sa suppression (1451-1790)*, Tome 1 (Bordeaux: Charles Lefebvre, 1877), 262-3.

<sup>50</sup> Boscheron Des Portes, *Histoire du Parlement de Bordeaux*, 265.

<sup>51</sup> Boscheron Des Portes, *Histoire du Parlement de Bordeaux*, 264, 289.

*Matignon*, and seize control of the city, but *Matignon* and others managed to suppress the Leaguers, and public executions of the perpetrators followed.<sup>52</sup> Similar coups had been attempted elsewhere and with greater success, as in Rouen two months prior.<sup>53</sup> A few months later, on July 31<sup>st</sup> of 1589, by *arrêt* the *Parlement* expelled all Jesuits from Bordeaux upon receiving news from Toulouse that the *premier président* *Duranti* and the *avocat général* *Daffiz* had been murdered by partisans of the League.<sup>54</sup>

After the murder of Henri III in August of 1589, the *parlementaires* were in a difficult position. What most really wanted was for Navarre to convert to Catholicism and in one move remove their greatest impediment to supporting him, and for some conversion was a necessary precondition. Many argued that it was pointless to call him King as long as he remained a Protestant.<sup>55</sup> *Matignon* staunchly supported Navarre and would become mayor of Bordeaux: much of Navarre's success there can be attributed to *Matignon*. The *Parlement* was courted from both sides, with the Duc de Mayenne making personal overtures on behalf of the League, exhorting them not to side with a heretic prince. The *Parlement* temporized but sent envoys to Navarre urging his conversion multiple times. Roughly forty percent wanted to wait and convene an Estates General to reaffirm among other things the necessity of Catholicism as a prerequisite of kingship. Around twenty percent of the *Parlement* wanted to treat with the League regardless of Navarre's faith. The final forty percent were ready to support Henri in spite of his Protestantism but while continuing to press his conversion to Catholicism.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Boscheron Des Portes, *Histoire du Parlement de Bordeaux*, 293.

<sup>53</sup> Holt, *The French Wars of Religion*, 143.

<sup>54</sup> Boscheron Des Portes, *Histoire du Parlement de Bordeaux*, 296.

<sup>55</sup> Boscheron Des Portes, *Histoire du Parlement de Bordeaux*, 297-298.

<sup>56</sup> Boscheron Des Portes, *Histoire du Parlement de Bordeaux*, 302-304.

By early the next year the *Parlement* was mostly unanimous in support of Navarre, and ready to recognize him as king without precondition of conversion. His allies continued to promise that he would protect and maintain in all dignity the Catholic faith, and he was making good on his claims militarily. By July of 1590, when d’Espagnet joined the *Parlement*, the *premier président* still treated Navarre to a *harangue* exhorting him to convert. Civil war continued in Guyenne and across the kingdom, but Navarre was winning his battles, and when he abjured Protestantism at Saint-Denis in 1593, the single largest reason for opposition to his rule evaporated. D’Espagnet had joined the *Parlement* at a critical moment, though it is unclear that he played any decisive role in ensuring their support for Henri. It is entirely possible the battle, as it were, was already won, with d’Espagnet’s appointment a sign of Henri’s ascendance and consolidation of support there, though the *Histoire du parlement* makes clear their continued resistance to the monetary levies that helped to fund Henri’s campaigns.<sup>57</sup> Despite their reluctance, they likely knew that these exactions were preferable to sharing the fate of other towns in conquest and domination at the hands of the League. D’Espagnet rose quickly and would continue to serve Henri IV faithfully as his ally in Bordeaux throughout his reign.

### **D’Espagnet as a *Parlementaire***

The *Parlement* of Bordeaux was one of eight sovereign courts in the kingdom in the sixteenth century. It was quite possible in the sixteenth century for one of common birth to rise to nobility in the courts on his own merits but became much more restrictive in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It seems extremely likely that d’Espagnet’s position on the court was owed to his loyalty to Henri of Navarre, who from the death of Henri III in 1589 on was eager to secure

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<sup>57</sup> Boscheron Des Portes, *Histoire du Parlement de Bordeaux*, 309-310, and 309, note 1.

and maintain the loyalty of the towns.<sup>58</sup> D’Espagnet was the son of a physician who had known and treated Henri IV personally, and this likely aided him in achieving his position. D’Espagnet almost certainly underwent at least seven years of university study, receiving a classical and judicial education, and as there was no site for the latter in Guyenne, it is possible that he received his judicial training in Toulouse, as did many of the *parlementaires* at Bordeaux.<sup>59</sup> A humanistic program and Roman law were fundamental to this judicial education in the sixteenth century, and humanism and a deep interest in ancient history as well as political and natural philosophy formed the basis of d’Espagnet’s later intellectual activities. These judges took their work seriously and professionally, regardless of position, and absolutely saw themselves as the stewards of local society and defenders of peace and order. Perjury, brigandage, infanticide, and murder were consistently punished harshly, as they threatened social order. Dewald insists that these magistrates did not and in fact were forbidden to reveal the reasoning behind their decisions.<sup>60</sup> They saw themselves as “men of action” judging between conflicting arguments, with considerable freedom to make their own decisions in the midst of contradictory precedents and laws.<sup>61</sup> A solid moral foundation might be accounted of greater value and necessity than an expert legal knowledge. Without a police force or a direct means of enforcing their decisions, they relied on their positions in the hierarchical social order: “the basis of their authority was almost entirely moral.”<sup>62</sup> While *parlements* regularly refused to register royal edicts, this hardly indicated hostility or significant opposition. In some ways this was a structural tension built into the purpose of the courts and should not be construed to detracting from a strong, fundamental loyalty to the crown. They were

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<sup>58</sup> S. Annette Finley-Croswhite, *Henri IV and the Towns: The Pursuit of Legitimacy in French Urban Society, 1589-1610* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>59</sup> Powis, “Order, Religion, and the Magistrates,” 189, and Jonathan Dewald, “The ‘Perfect Magistrate’: Parlementaires and Crime in Sixteenth-Century Rouen,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 67 (1976): 288.

<sup>60</sup> Dewald, “The Perfect Magistrate,” 288.

<sup>61</sup> Dewald, “The Perfect Magistrate,” 289.

<sup>62</sup> Dewald, “The Perfect Magistrate,” 292.

performing their due diligence in defending local interests from a king whose could be captured by courtiers or other agents, or in the case of the edicts of pacification, defending the Catholic religion.<sup>63</sup>

D’Espagnet joined the court as an *avocat* in July of 1590, by October of 1592 for Henri IV a *conseiller au grand conseil* and rose to *conseiller* on the *Parlement* by January 1<sup>st</sup> of 1594.<sup>64</sup> He became a *président* on December 11<sup>th</sup>, 1600, one of twelve at the time, filling the vacant office of Christophe de Babiault, and in 1602 became a *conseiller d’état*.<sup>65</sup> The latter position according to Mousnier was often honorific, intended to “reward...supporters and win over....opponents” and could include anyone from a prince of the blood to a bishop or crown officer.<sup>66</sup> Under Henri IV, such councils were dominated by men of the robe like d’Espagnet with whom the king sought personal ties to aid in governance. The *arrêts* from the cases d’Espagnet presided over indicate that as far as the traditional courts, he served on the *tournelle* in 1601<sup>67</sup> and 1604<sup>68</sup>, as well as the *grande chambre* in 1606,<sup>69</sup> 1607<sup>70</sup>, and 1608.<sup>71</sup> His presence on these courts indicates his continued success and good standing. The chronicle of Isaac Pérès, consul of Nérac in 1604, claimed that d’Espagnet had five children by 1609, and we know that his son Étienne followed his father as a *parlementaire* in Bordeaux.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> See Champeaud, “Les édits de pacification.”

<sup>64</sup> Archives Départementales de la Gironde, *Série* 1B, 16, folio 65.

<sup>65</sup> ADG, 1B, 17, folio 197.

<sup>66</sup> Roland Mousnier, *The Institutions of France Under the Absolute Monarchy, 1598-1789*, Vol. 2, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 146-147. See also Nicole Reinhardt, *Voices of Conscience: Royal Confessors and Political Counsel in Seventeenth-Century Spain and France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 18- 19.

<sup>67</sup> ADG, 1B, 702.

<sup>68</sup> ADG, 1B, 709, 710.

<sup>69</sup> ADG, 1B, 718.

<sup>70</sup> ADG, 1B, 720, 722, 723.

<sup>71</sup> ADG, 1B, 724, 725, 726, 728.

<sup>72</sup> *Chronique d'Isaac de Pérès* (1554-1611) (Agen: F. Lamy, 1882), 237. For a study of the generation of parlementaires that followed d’Espagnet’s, see Caroline Le Mao, *Parlement et parlementaires: Bordeaux au Grand Siècle* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2007).

D'Espagnet also served on the *chambre de l'Édit* in 1605<sup>73</sup>, 1609<sup>74</sup>, 1610<sup>75</sup> and seemingly part of 1611 before his first attempt at retirement. This latter court was established by the Edict of Nantes, one of four in total including that in Guyenne at Nérac.<sup>76</sup> These courts were also known as *chambres mi-parties* due to the fact the judges and *conseillers* who served were supposed to be evenly divided between Catholics and Protestants and were intended to reassure Protestants that they would see equal justice in a kingdom dominated by Catholics. The *parlement* of Toulouse was set up this way and it appears that the *parlement* of Bordeaux was as well, though some *parlement* like that at Dijon never in reality had Protestant judges.<sup>77</sup> The King appointed the first members of the *chambre de l'Édit* by letters patent in June of 1600 and by March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1601, the court for Guyenne was established at Nérac.<sup>78</sup> Mousnier tells us that the *Parlement* of Bordeaux refused to register these letters unless the Protestant members, including the *président* were called “councillors in the Cour and Chambre de l'Edit,” rather than being named as members of the corps of the court of *Parlement*.<sup>79</sup> Initially neither the Protestant nor Catholic appointees were inscribed in the roster of the Court of *Parlement*, including the Catholic *président*, though d'Espagnet did not take up this position until a few years later. This post at Nérac it would seem was not much liked by Bordeaux's *parlementaires*, and several sought to be excused from it including Pierre de Lancre, though it is unclear why. Perhaps because they did not wish to reside in Nérac, away from the capital, though d'Espagnet appears to have brought his family with him, at least. Despite this dislike, considering d'Espagnet's other appointments, especially the prestigious *grande chambre*

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<sup>73</sup> ADG, 1B, 717.

<sup>74</sup> ADG, 1B, 730.

<sup>75</sup> ADG, 1B, 734.

<sup>76</sup> Mousnier, *The Assassination of Henry IV*, 146.

<sup>77</sup> For some information about Guyenne's *Chambre de l'Édit* in Nérac, see Mousnier, *The Institutions of France Under the Absolute Monarchy*, 307.

<sup>78</sup> Boscheron Des Portes, *Histoire du Parlement de Bordeaux*, 329.

<sup>79</sup> See Mousnier, *The Institutions of France Under the Absolute Monarchy*, 307.

from 1606 to 1608, it seems more likely that the post spoke of a particular trust between Henri and d'Espagnet, to uphold Henri's justice and peace between religions in a town and region that were politically and emotionally dear to him, rather than a sign of disfavor.

Two other episodes during d'Espagnet's tenure are worth noting. In 1607, a royal order was issued instructing the *Parlement* to investigate sorcery in the Labourd region in the extreme southwest of France near the border with Spain.<sup>80</sup> According to Cruseau's chronicle, a mission had already been dispatched to Bayonne in September of 1605 for the same reason.<sup>81</sup> In 1609 the order was reissued and d'Espagnet was chosen as the senior counselor, with Pierre de Lancre as his subordinate.<sup>82</sup> De Lancre is well-known among historians of witchcraft and demonology for his numerous published works and would become notorious for his role in the purported execution of some six hundred witches on this mission.<sup>83</sup> Recent scholarship has deflated this number considerably, but D'Espagnet and de Lancre's mission nevertheless saw the trial and execution of dozens of suspected witches. However, d'Espagnet's role in this expedition is less clear. It would appear that he was less energetic than de Lancre in pursuing the mission itself, waiting many months to leave despite a royal letter urging haste, insisting on concluding the mission before the feast of St. Martin, and then accepting a commission to survey the islands and waterways between France and Spain before even arriving in Labourd. Desagues is very insistent in assigning the responsibility for these events to de Lancre, and states that upon his return from the Spanish border d'Espagnet immediately put a stop to de Lancre's activities.<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, the words of a Spanish judge that Jonathan Pearl has drawn from Gustav Henningsen's research on the Spanish

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<sup>80</sup> ADG, 1B, 19, folio 123.

<sup>81</sup> Étienne de Cruseau, *Chronique*, tome 2 (1605-1616) (Bordeaux: Société des Bibliophiles de Guyenne, 1881), 3-4.

<sup>82</sup> ADG, 1B, 19, folio 124.

<sup>83</sup> Jonathan L. Pearl, *The Crime of Crimes: Demonology and Politics in France, 1560-1620* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999), 133-135.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17: "Sa (de Lancre's) dictature, et non celle de d'Espagnet . . . [d'Espagnet] arrêta net la procédure à son retour."

Inquisition suggest that D'Espagnet was present in Labourd and took part in these trials and executions:

“In many places on the other side of the border witches have been discovered, and the authorities are prosecuting them severely. They are burning one after another and conducting the cases very quickly. But I am assured (by Frey León) that the judge, who is a president of the Parliament at Bordeaux (Jean d'Espagnet) is conducting the cases very efficiently.”<sup>85</sup>

Desagues' evidence for his belief is unclear, and while the words of the Spanish judge appear conclusive, the latter's information was not firsthand. Fortunately, we might look to d'Espagnet's own words for further clarification. When de Lancre published a treatise in 1612 decrying the inconstancy with which practitioners of witchcraft were disciplined, probably as a result of the Bordeaux *Parlement's* unwillingness to pursue any further cases without physical evidence, D'Espagnet contributed two poems, one in Latin and one in French.<sup>86</sup> D'Espagnet's words in his French sonnet seem an attempt to distance himself from the affair: he specifies the “judgments” to be those of de Lancre and even seems to be gently reproaching his colleague for making martyrs out of suspected witches and giving them eternal life with his pen:

“Et maintenant tu fais par un contraire sort que l'immortalité succède à cette mort, ta plume leur donnant une immortelle vie; et pour un second mal tu feras naître ainsi mille et mille sorciers des cendres de ceux-ci, qui pour revivre auront de même mort envie.”<sup>87</sup>

D'Espagnet's words are admittedly ambiguous, but it seems difficult to read them as praise, and I do not understand de Lancre's reasoning for their inclusion in his treatise. In the end

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<sup>85</sup> Pearl, *The Crime of Crimes*, 135. See also, Gustav Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate: Baroque Witchcraft and the Spanish Inquisition (1609-1614)* (Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 1980), 109.

<sup>86</sup> Pearl, *The Crime of Crimes*, 136-138, and Gerhild Scholz Williams, ed., *On the Inconstancy of Witches: Pierre de Lancre's Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et demons (1612)* (Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 2006).

<sup>87</sup> Desagues, *L'Oeuvre secret*, 17: “. . . Mais quoy? Ne vois-tu pas combine peu de constance on te donna, voyant sur le bord des Enfers les ombres voltiger de ce peuple pervers desquels tes jugments ont fait juste vengeance. Et maintenant tu fais par un contraire sort que l'immortalité succède à cette mort, ta plume leur donnant une immortelle vie; et pour un second mal tu feras naître ainsi mille et mille sorciers des cendres de ceux-ci, qui pour revivre auront de même mort envie.”



d’Espagnet’s role in this mission is similarly ambiguous. When we look to his treatises d’Espagnet never mentions witchcraft a single time, though the apparent misogyny underlying his position on females raising the prince as well as his general understanding of the role of the feminine in the cosmos could match that of a witch hunter. Moreover, in his writings he is sympathetic to those who dabble in the esoteric yet are misunderstood and unjustly maligned by the uninitiated. The existence of, or difference between, natural magic and diabolic magic depended very much on who one asked. D’Espagnet shies away from discussing magic yet his interests were for many very closely aligned or even identical with it, as suggested by someone like his translator Elias Ashmole. As we shall see, the same celestial virtues that aided the success of alchemical procedures also justified astral or sympathetic magic, and the same texts were consulted for both. I choose to accept d’Espagnet’s apparent disinterest in the mission and his ambivalent promotion of de Lancre’s agenda against sorcery as evidence that d’Espagnet was not the architect of the executions in Labourd, though this remains unclear.

One other instance of note comes from the *registres secrets* of the *Parlement*, and is also related in Cruseau’s chronicle, though some details and emphasis differ between the sources. D’Espagnet only appears in the *registres secrets* in a single entry of any substance, yet one that shows his confidence, his sense of position, and willingness to defend his and the court’s prickly sense of honor. In January of 1608 the Cardinal de Sourdis, the future archbishop of Bordeaux who would go on to baptize Henri IV’s second son Alexandre and officiate the wedding of Louis XIII, remonstrated in the *grande chambre* against the court’s decision to allow a witness to inform against one of the cardinal’s servants.<sup>88</sup> According to the *registres secrets* he viewed this as a jurisdictional overreach, going so far as to call d’Espagnet, who had signed the permission and

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<sup>88</sup> The incident is recorded in Bibliothèque Municipale de Bordeaux, 828/039, *Copie du registre secret du parlement de Bordeaux, du 10 juillet 1584 au 31 octobre 1620*, 102-103.

spoke in defense of the court, his “mortal enemy,” who therefore could not also be his judge.<sup>89</sup> D’Espagnet upbraided the Cardinal for his audacity and lack of respect for the court and the honor of its members, telling him to “learn how to speak.”<sup>90</sup> They argued bitterly, with d’Espagnet eventually silencing the Cardinal (*fait taire*), according to the *greffier*, with threats to record and report his behavior to the king, and demanding reparation as well. Seemingly cowed, the Cardinal apologized, both immediately and again when he returned a few days later, both to the *compagnie* of the court and to individual judges including d’Espagnet, saying he had let his emotions carry him away. The *greffier* who recorded the events in the *registres secrets* praised d’Espagnet for his dignified and “magnificent response” to the Cardinal’s “insolent speech,” and he clearly saw the encounter as a victory for d’Espagnet and the court. The confrontation does not seem to have damaged their rapport too seriously, for the chronicle of Isaac Pérès records that they dined together and that the cardinal stayed in d’Espagnet’s abode in Nérac multiple times in 1610 and 1611.<sup>91</sup> Interestingly, Boscheron de Portes claimed with some surprise that these *registres secrets* were lost for a time, before being found in 1719 in d’Espagnet’s closet, with no explanation given for the mystery of how these public materials came to be in private hands.<sup>92</sup> In 1611 d’Espagnet resigned from his office as *président* yet seems to have occupied it again within months for reasons unknown – perhaps the untimely death of his replacement. He had apparently once before tried to sell his office in 1608, for the price of 100,000 *livres*, but the proposed buyer never joined the *parlement* and no information is offered in the chronicle as to why the sale was not finalized.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Cruseau, *Chronique*, 40: “...ledit sieur Cardinal ne cessa de l’offencer et luy dict qu’il estoit son enemy mortel, et que, par ainsin, il ne pouvoit ester son juge...”

<sup>90</sup> BMB, 828/039, *Copie du registre secret*, 102.

<sup>91</sup> E.g. *Chronique d’Isaac de Pérès*, 264.

<sup>92</sup> Boscheron Des Portes, *Histoire du Parlement de Bordeaux*, 286.

<sup>93</sup> Cruseau, *Chronique*, 50.

After the death of Henri IV, factionalism reared its head again almost immediately. Like 1559, many worried that things would devolve into civil war and anarchy once again. Sully prepared the Bastille for a siege. Marie de Médicis maneuvered her way into the regency immediately, seemingly in some partnership with the *Parlement* of Paris. She asked for their advice, as she claimed was customary, and they replied that the Queen was by tradition regent. Katherine Crawford states that neither of these claims were true, and that they were both inventing traditions.<sup>94</sup> The *Parlement* named her regent with the associated powers, with a *lit de justice* by the young Louis the following day adding confusion: was their *arrêt* the previous day insufficient? Was the king in his minority confirming it?<sup>95</sup> Marie's regency government tried to buy Condé's cooperation, but he took her bribe and turned against them anyway. He formed a league to oppose the regency and inaugurated years of political maneuvering and open conflict between the regency government, Condé and his embittered allies, and the Protestant towns and nobility as well, who questioned how much longer Marie would hold to Henri's promises.<sup>96</sup> The intrigue, factionalism, and even open rebellion characterized the years until d'Espagnet's retirement in 1615. Late that year, as King Louis XIII went to Bordeaux to marry Anne of Austria, a rebel army led by Condé dogged the King's train, held in check by royal armies. Less than two weeks after the wedding, d'Espagnet stepped down from the court for good, but the troubles would continue for years yet.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Crawford, *Perilous Performances*, 67.

<sup>95</sup> Crawford, *Perilous Performances*, 68-71.

<sup>96</sup> Arthur Power Lord, *The Regency of Marie de Médicis: a Study of French History from 1610 to 1616* (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1903), 15.

<sup>97</sup> Cruseau, *Chronique*, 214.

## CHAPTER 2. A NEW MORAL ORDER: REASON, SELF-DISCIPLINE, AND TYRANNY

The focus of this chapter will be d’Espagnet’s first major publication, *L’Institution du Jeune Prince*, published in 1616. In interpreting this text, we must consider the problems facing the kingdom of France, its magistrates, and monarchy across the years of d’Espagnet’s life. Historians have recognized the special preoccupation of seventeenth-century jurists and magistrates with the restoration and maintenance of what they perceived to be proper moral, societal order, which in their eyes had broken down during the Wars of Religion. This vision of order hinged primarily on self-discipline and the exaltation of reason as the antidote to the passions, especially concupiscent ones, which these men believed to be at the root of disorder. The resulting prescriptive legal and moral discourse through which they sought to reify their vision reinforced a specific social and gendered hierarchy and ordained the men who helped to construct it as its righteous and embattled guardians. Laymen and clergy alike defended the necessity of this order, which sacralized hierarchy, monarchy, and patriarchy and gave obedience to this social and political system the weight of divine sanction. The writings of Jean D’Espagnet, one among their ranks, offer us an extensive view into his philosophical foundations and justifications for this new moral order. His *Institution* reflects clearly these preoccupations and this vision of order, and his instruction on education is based primarily upon reason and self-discipline as essential virtues and the foundations of a good prince who is sovereign and capable of maintaining order without becoming a tyrant. The King must maintain this balance for his own person and his state, and his education and upbringing were essential to this.

More uniquely, the influence of d’Espagnet’s alchemical studies is clearly visible in the reasoning that shaped his thinking on moral education, individual character formation, and indeed

his entire worldview. He uses much of the same alchemical language and analogical thinking across all his writings and a consistent understanding of nature, human nature, and fundamental truths about God's universe that were equally true for the microcosms of the human body and soul as they were for the macrocosm.

The later reign of Henri IV was in many ways a time of reconstruction and healing, and he is fondly remembered in France for his willingness to forgive his former enemies in the name of peace. Yet his foreign policy and questionable personal track record in terms of religion nevertheless led many to doubt the sincerity of his conversion and by extension his legitimacy as king. Likewise, his domestic policies that increased taxation, limited provincial assemblies, and upended traditional systems of patronage through venality of office and the *Paulette* led some to view him as a tyrant.<sup>98</sup> Plots, rebellion, and more than two dozen assassination attempts speak to these tensions, and when Ravaillac claimed Henri's life in 1610, the kingdom was still bitterly divided and teetering on the edge of chaos. Once more, a female regent, Marie de Médicis, ruled in her young son's stead as Henri's temporary solutions to the problem of religious division in France unraveled. Factions jockeyed for power and favor with the Queen Mother. Princes of the realm like Condé, who believed the regency should have fallen to him, felt excluded from power and agitated against the regency. He teased an alliance with the Huguenots and even raised an army to oppose Louis' marriage to the Spanish *infanta*. The rise to prominence at court of the Italian Concino Concini, a favorite of Marie de Médicis but thoroughly resented and envied by much of the French nobility, including the young King Louis XIII himself, only exacerbated this sentiment. These tensions at court and the resurgent uncertainties of the 1610s threatened order

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<sup>98</sup> See Mousnier, *The Assassination of Henry IV*, Roland Mousnier, *La vénalité des Offices sous Henri IV et Louis XIII* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971), and J. Russell Major, "Henry IV and Guyenne: A Study Concerning Origins of Royal Absolutism," *French Historical Studies* 4, No. 4 (Autumn, 1966): 363-383.

and were clearly the dangers that d’Espagnet referred to when he wrote later of his decision to step down from the bench.<sup>99</sup>

In this decade appeared several examples of moral and political philosophy with a long tradition going back to the Middle Ages but given new importance at the opening of the seventeenth century: the Institution of the Prince. Historians such as Isabelle Flandrois have noted the popularity of this genre at this historical moment, and the 1610s saw the publication of a number of these works. In her work *L’Institution du Prince au début du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* she notes the wide variety of authors from diverse backgrounds and suggests that the new and young prince at a time of post-war reconstruction would have seemed an opportune moment for many to share their opinions.<sup>100</sup> The *Institutions* of the early seventeenth century took a practical angle and focused on Royal function alongside the institutions and advisors with whom the prince would interact. Authors in this genre included jurists, chaplains, and medical doctors, most notably the king’s physician Jean Héroard.<sup>101</sup> Among these was the recently retired Jean d’Espagnet, having in 1615 stepped down from his position as a *président* on the *Parlement* of Bordeaux.

While a few of these works have been studied, according to Flandrois many remain ignored or even completely unknown. This ignorance is owed in part to the attitude, held by some contemporaries and modern historians alike, that these works often lacked originality and were derivative; as she cites, Pierre de l’Estoile expressed this sentiment and his disappointment even in 1609 upon acquiring a copy of Héroard’s *Institution*.<sup>102</sup> It is also likely a result of the fact that

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<sup>99</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Author’s epistle, §1.

<sup>100</sup> Isabelle Flandrois, *L’Institution du Prince*, 3.

<sup>101</sup> For example, Pierre de Lancre, *Le livre des princes, contenant plusieurs notables discours, pour l’instruction des Roys, empereurs et monarques* (Paris: Nicolas Buon, 1617), Guillaume du Peyrat, *La philosophie royale du jeu des eschets pour Monseigneur Monseigneur le Dauphin, et autres œuvres meslées dédiées au Roy* (Paris: Pierre Mettayer, 1608), or Jean Héroard, *De institutione principis, Liber singularis [...] in latinum vertit* (Paris: Joannes Degorris, 1617).

<sup>102</sup> Flandrois, *L’Institution du Prince*, 1.

virtually none of these early seventeenth-century authors were otherwise renowned, remaining in obscurity within their varied professional fields, as opposed to the fame of Erasmus or Machiavelli a century prior and Jacques-Bénigne Lignel Bossuet, François Fénelon, and others later in the seventeenth century. Rather than an excuse for dismissal, Flandrois instead reinterprets this apparent “banality” or “tenacity” as deliberate repetition with intention, that reason being the “transmission of fundamental values to safeguard a necessary order.”<sup>103</sup> That is, they demanded, repeatedly, moral virtue as a balancing force under the shadow of absolute sovereignty and potential tyranny. While the dangers of the passions were a fairly regular concern in this literature, as one of the enemies to be combatted by moral education, she recognizes d’Espagnet’s as a leading voice against them.<sup>104</sup> She also recognizes the influence of Neostoicism on arguments against the passions. As much as these various means of shaping the prince were idealized, Flandrois’ overall conclusion that the driving force behind these efforts came not from a desire to recreate a past, utopian golden age but was firmly grounded in memories of the religious wars is, I believe, only partially correct in d’Espagnet’s case. In line with his other intellectual commitments, he most certainly viewed the ancient and mythological past as a golden age, whose sensible and effective teaching methods and precepts had been lost or degraded over time.<sup>105</sup> Throughout his *Institution* he regularly referred to past rulers whose educations, or aspects of them, were ideal and effective. D’Espagnet is overall given only a few pages of attention, like numerous other authors, and some of which is devoted to biographical information. Héroard occupies by far the most prominent place in her work, thanks in part to the attractive possibility of comparison between his *Institution* and his extant diary. Flandrois understandably never considers

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<sup>103</sup> Flandrois, *L’Institution du Prince*, 2, 6.

<sup>104</sup> Flandrois, *L’Institution du Prince*, 73-75.

<sup>105</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 12.

d’Espagnet’s *Institution* alongside his alchemical works or in the context of his broader natural philosophy.

D’Espagnet told his readers that the inspiration to write and publish his *Institution* came after finding in a *château* in Nérac what he understood to be an unfinished, unpublished manuscript written by King Louis XI for his son more than a century prior. The work had in fact already been published, though d’Espagnet did not realize this. After retiring many years later, d’Espagnet prepared for publication this manuscript, called *Les Roziers des Guerres*, with the privilege of the King, and took the opportunity to attach to it his own *Institution*. He certainly believed that he had exceptional insight into the nature of man and cosmos, including human reason and the soul, and thus was in a uniquely informed position to advise his prince about virtues, proper behavior, and the means to ensuring a godly and harmonious society.

D’Espagnet’s *Institution* is worthy of study for a number of reasons. Much more than a practical educational program, its chapters tell us much about his understanding of human character and psychology, and of what constituted right and virtuous thought and behavior. It explored the ideal relationships of the prince with his teachers, his courtiers, his subjects, and his God, who had placed the prince above other men. Central to the arguments that informed d’Espagnet’s *Institution* was his consistent and overarching worldview of analogy and scale, of man as a microcosm, wherein human relationships and qualities reflected those of a cosmic hierarchy. As a result, there is considerable overlap between the ‘moral’ or ‘political’ philosophy of the *Institution* and his later alchemical publications, for the same natural truths and ‘laws’ apply universally across the cosmos and human experience as he understands them. For instance, our microcosmic reasonable souls served a similar function for our bodies and consciousnesses to the Sun in the cosmos, representative of divine intellect and of unparalleled cosmic importance.



Moreover, he almost exclusively describes change or improvement, no matter the subject, in alchemical terms like distillation or extraction or as a step in the creation of the philosopher's stone. This may simply be the language he uses to convey his point, but it is nonetheless significant in indicating how he thinks. It is also further proof that he held a deep interest in alchemy long before he wrote his *Enchiridion* and *Arcanum*, and of its role in his broader worldview.

Perhaps the most significant and foundational of his goals was establishing the necessity of disciplining the body and the passions through reason and will, and this is stressed at every turn throughout the treatise. This early modern incarnation of Stoicism also featured a particular understanding of gender qualities, readily apparent in d'Espagnet's philosophy and shared by educated elites of his time, especially, as the work of James Farr has demonstrated, by men of the robe. The writings and *harangues* of jurists and *parlementaires* stressed again and again the necessity of privileging reason and self-control, considered masculine qualities, over the unruly passions, associated with the feminine. It was unbounded passions that had led to the chaos and excess of the wars of religion, and which always threatened to undermine the proper, godly order they believed they were restoring. The view of the feminine as fundamentally imperfect that dominated the intellectual sphere appears to have been based in ancient medical theory, especially that of Galen. The traditional union between medical theories and natural philosophy that persisted through the early modern period meant that this theory would have been popular among philosophically literate elites in general. The result was a worldview that singled out women as the element of society most responsible for enflaming the passions of men and endangering the rule of reason, and thus the subjects most in need of reform. This attitude undeniably informed the philosophy of d'Espagnet's *Institution* and formed the bedrock of the education of the prince in control of his person and by extension his state. Its influence is also apparent in his matter

theory and alchemical philosophy, wherein d’Espagnet assumed these qualities of uncontrolled passion and lust were also possessed by matter and anything of a ‘feminine’ nature.

Another way the *Institution* should be read relates to the common purpose that Flandrois has argued ran through many of the institutions of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century: the preoccupation of authors with moralizing and legitimizing the increasing power of the French monarchy, as well as insisting upon the sacredness and inviolability of the person of the King. Theories of legitimate resistance to perceived tyranny flourished during the Wars of Religion and contributed significantly to the assassinations of both Henri III and Henri IV. The general thrust of these theories was that a king could lose the favor of God through immoral behavior or failure to adequately defend the ‘true’ religion, Catholic or Reformed, and such kings forfeited their right to the obedience of their subjects. The implications of these arguments were not lost on d’Espagnet and his peers, for indeed they could potentially privilege an individual regicide’s conscience over traditional order and societal stability. Thus, d’Espagnet and others defended the monarchy by arguing strongly for the holiness and inviolability of both the office and the person of the king. Consequently, regicide was inexcusable, but d’Espagnet and others simultaneously sought solid ground for the king to avoid tyrannical behavior through a good moral education.

In this vein many Institutions, including that of d’Espagnet, can be read as a response, an attempt to rein in this way of thinking while suggesting reasonable means to counter potential bad behavior on the part of the king. The ideal moral education of the prince explored in these treatises would serve as a substitute for external checks on his power and render them unnecessary. The most important elements of this education to achieve this goal were Stoic self-discipline alongside a healthy fear of and respect for God. Effective moral education and the self-control it engendered would form the bulwark against a prince’s worst impulses and excesses.

D’Espagnet’s *Institution* is a treatise on the proper education of a prince with the goal of ensuring the moral uprightness and happiness of a ruler, and by extension, the state of which he is a microcosm. At its core, though, it is a discussion on contemporary understandings of the natures of people, of princes, laws and virtues, and of the nature of nature itself. For individuals to adopt and internalize the virtues and behaviors he endorsed was essential to rebuilding the ordered Christian community that he and others envisioned and believed had existed in the past. The worldview that underpinned his reasoning was chiefly informed by his Christian faith, his judicial and classical education, the experience of magistrates in the wake of the Wars of Religion, and the alchemical and natural philosophy in which his understanding of the entire cosmos was based. Ultimately, he gave these positions the weight of natural and divine law and used them to argue for a specific manner of living and ruling that he believed would actualize and secure his vision of an ordered and godly society.

### **Nature, Education, and Perfection: Crafting the Prince**

The first major question d’Espagnet tackled in the opening chapters of the institution was the relationship between nature and education and the necessity of a sound education for a good prince. On one hand this discussion served as a justification for the work itself, but it also tells us much of interest about d’Espagnet’s understanding of man’s, and a prince’s, essential nature. He found a compromise between the cultural belief in inherent virtue and value according to birth, which undergirded a hierarchical society of rank and privilege, and an argument for the efficacy and necessity of education upon which his entire project depended. The argument he put forth can be summarized as follows: while a prince was still a man, subject to vice and bad behavior as any other, the prince nevertheless has stronger or more pronounced innate natures. D’Espagnet likened the prince to a ship with an exceptionally large cargo hold, capable of storing more virtue, or vice,

than those of lesser birth.<sup>106</sup> Yet as even the most fertile field will only produce an “overabundance of weeds” if not properly cultivated, d’Espagnet states, the prince’s high potential must be nurtured and perfected by education: “even the strongest souls if neglected will turn all the more to vice.”

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Thus, the prince requires a tailored education, designed by one familiar with the inherent nature of men and executed by a governor and preceptor of the utmost quality and virtue. This education, or institution, was a “second nature” which d’Espagnet claimed was often stronger than innate nature in “mediocre persons,” though he suggests this was rarely the case for princes.<sup>108</sup> Because this was so, he claimed, even judicial astrologers were forced to admit that their maxims were refuted by the possibilities of education and environment: that is, worldly events and the dispositions of men were not wholly predetermined and forecast in the movements of the heavens.<sup>109</sup> A prince would be particularly stubborn, and his teachability and openness to instruction would have a significant impact on the outcome of his education. This view was broadly consistent with his understanding of the importance of counsel to the king which he and other judges could provide. This characterization of stubbornness was also not entirely negative, for d’Espagnet tied it also to qualities of leadership and decisiveness: the prince acted by instinct, easily giving in to his inclination, which was to confidence and action rather than contemplation.<sup>110</sup> Yet it remained that one of the most important things a prince could learn was how to listen: they must learn the importance of hearing advice, and listen to the pleas and remonstrances of his officers and subjects as well as his councils. D’Espagnet made it clear that education had power

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<sup>106</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 23.

<sup>107</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 23.

<sup>108</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 17.

<sup>109</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 4.

<sup>110</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 17.

over nature, and he cited Lycurgus' lessons with dogs, according to which nature had birthed them the same but training shaped their behavior.<sup>111</sup>

Part of making a willing student of the prince was ensuring that his teachers be impeccably respected and commanding, lest the prince look down on them as his inferiors, which would lead him to despise their council and nurture in him a potentially disastrous arrogance. On the other hand, because the prince learned by example, the impact of "men of vice and bad influences" had to be limited or eliminated as much as possible. D'Espagnet took the opportunity at a few points to honor the late Henri IV, in addition to "infinite benefits" he had otherwise bestowed upon France, for his strong choices of preceptor and governor.<sup>112</sup> Toward the Queen Regent d'Espagnet was slightly more circumspect, flattering Marie for her decision to follow Henri's wishes and policies during the "golden age" of her regency, potentially implying that that age had already passed.<sup>113</sup> In particular he praised Marie's selection of Monsieur de Breves as tutor for King Louis' brother Gaston, duc d'Orleans, and expressed his hope that the "little Hercules" Louis grew into would one day "crush the monsters, the enemies of public repose."<sup>114</sup>

The entire enterprise of education is an exercise in the study of the prince's nature. The governor and preceptor must understand it and adjust their program to it, and d'Espagnet says this was to be their first job.<sup>115</sup> The ideal was to work with and manipulate nature in order to perfect the prince over time. The governor and preceptor would pull from their knowledge of nature and nature's laws to design a program that accorded with prince's natural disposition. The alternative d'Espagnet compares to the Gigantomachy, the myth of the battle between the Giants, children of

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<sup>111</sup> D'Espagnet, *L'Institution*, 3.

<sup>112</sup> D'Espagnet, *L'Institution*, 14.

<sup>113</sup> D'Espagnet, *L'Institution*, 15-16.

<sup>114</sup> D'Espagnet, *L'Institution*, 16.

<sup>115</sup> D'Espagnet, *L'Institution*, 37.

the titans Gaea and Uranus, and the Olympian gods. That is, to force the prince against his nature was to violate nature's laws, a rebellion against the natural order and a "revolt against the elements, heavens and stars."<sup>116</sup>

It was in the kingdom's best interest to raise the prince in this manner because as king he was the microcosm of the kingdom, just as man was the microcosm of the universe. He was the soul of the state, its brain, its heart.<sup>117</sup> His movements, dispositions, and habits corresponded to its laws. He led by example, and his happiness and virtue became those of the kingdom writ large. Likewise, the king's vices, more dangerous than foreign enemies, could in short order destroy the laws and good morals of the state.<sup>118</sup> D'Espagnet's overarching view of man was generally negative and rather Hobbesian, morally speaking. A "good and strict" education was required because without one Nature would "make a man run freely seeking pleasure."<sup>119</sup> The natural turn to pursue self-gratification was an easy trap to fall into, and conscious self-discipline was the means to avoiding it.

Perhaps more interesting than d'Espagnet's straightforward advice was the language and imagery he used to describe the process of educating the prince, of forming and shaping his body and mind, of perfecting him. D'Espagnet frequently used artisanal and artistic metaphors as well explicitly alchemical language to describe this process of transformation. The prince is portrayed as a crafted work of art or as one perfected by the "philosopher's tinctures of knowledge and virtue."<sup>120</sup> Artifice and knowledge were of more use than force for his teachers to "arrest the

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<sup>116</sup> D'Espagnet, *L'Institution*, 40.

<sup>117</sup> D'Espagnet, *L'Institution*, 3, 17.

<sup>118</sup> D'Espagnet, *L'Institution*, 14.

<sup>119</sup> D'Espagnet, *L'Institution*, 11.

<sup>120</sup> D'Espagnet, *L'Institution*, 41.

volatile mercury” of the young prince’s disposition, just as an alchemist lacking these was doomed to failure.<sup>121</sup>

On one hand, d’Espagnet discusses this as a natural process, and often as an alchemical process as well. Like a tree, the prince would shed, or be made to shed, his lowest branches, what was most base, terrestrial, and superfluous as he was raised towards the heavens in growth.<sup>122</sup> Nature does not birth things perfect, and the “order” that must be maintained for education must follow the “progress of Nature”, to be completed over time. This is a gradual process of “addition and retrenchment,” of adding what lacked and removing the superfluous and the bad: this is word for word the language he uses in his instructions on the sublimation of philosophical mercury, and by extension the crafting of the philosopher’s stone.<sup>123</sup> Man’s natural dispositions were of lead, not steel, and as such were malleable and perfectable.<sup>124</sup> Care must be taken with those who will influence him, lest those of bad birth or instruction “corrupt the mixture” when his “purity must be conserved.”<sup>125</sup> For the prince’s intellectual growth, rhetoric and dialectic would be his primary tools for searching out truth. They “express and press the truth to distinguish it from appearances” like “*l’eau de depart*” which separated gold from the mix of other metals.<sup>126</sup> Through the “alembic” of discourse, the prince will distill the “quintessence” of books, his “intellectual fire” consuming them and separating the “salt, mercury, and sulphur,” just as the chemists practice.<sup>127</sup> It is

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<sup>121</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 41.

<sup>122</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 43.

<sup>123</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 43-44. See also d’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 51. When citing d’Espagnet’s *Enchiridion* and *Arcanum*, I have chosen to specify sections or “canons,” as he calls them, rather than page numbers. Unlike page numbers, sections or canons are consistent across the numerous languages and editions of d’Espagnet’s printed works, and this is simply to facilitate ease of reference and comparison considering differing levels of accessibility. For the *Institution*, there is only one edition.

<sup>124</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 42.

<sup>125</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 53.

<sup>126</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 72.

<sup>127</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 78.

remarkable the lengths to which d’Espagnet regularly stretched to make use of alchemical metaphors.

The prince would be the masterpiece, d’Espagnet wrote, the *chef d’oeuvre*, of the governor and preceptor. Like the painter, engraver, or sculptor they must use the tools of their trade in order to one day make him the “frontispiece” of a great state.<sup>128</sup> The sculptor can make the material conform to his ideal, and his chisel would “remove what was brutal and vicious in nature to give form and polish to the subject.”<sup>129</sup> The painter’s brush would add virtues, as “the most beautiful and vivid colors and the most divine graces and rich ornaments of royalty.”<sup>130</sup> Like a young squire’s shield, or coat of arms, the prince’s spirit was blank to begin, with no stain or bad impression in its natural state.<sup>131</sup> It must be filled with deeds and monuments painted and engraved. It was the same as “the blank *tableau* of infancy, all field and polish, ready to receive as its own the divine characters of the sciences and virtues.”<sup>132</sup> The governor and preceptor formed his countenance, the words and actions of the young prince, to compose his ‘*front*’, to “temper the movements of his head, his eyes, his hands, his feet, and of all his body of a majestic gravity.”<sup>133</sup>

On one hand they were to fashion an image, what was to be seen by his subjects. The king was “entirely language,” d’Espagnet wrote; his body, behaviors and comportment were read just as his words were heard.<sup>134</sup> His body spoke, and prognosticated as if it was made of the sacred wood of Dodona, like the prow of the Argo on the *Croisade* for the Golden Fleece, a myth especially popular with alchemists.<sup>135</sup> His body language was evidence of his thoughts and mind

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<sup>128</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 69.

<sup>129</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 44-45.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 68.

<sup>132</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 68-69.

<sup>133</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 47.

<sup>134</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 50.

<sup>135</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 50.



and will, and because everyone watched him, he must watch himself, lest he spoil the image with some unworthy action. D’Espagnet was careful to say, though, that the king was not and should not be a mere façade: his interior constitution was of no less importance. D’Espagnet quoted King Philip of Macedon to say that kings are the images of divinity; they must purge from their souls anything base, have their conceptions entirely divine, elevate their cognizance to things most high, and leave behind the swaddling clothes of infancy to become men while others remain children. It was not merely a “royal painting” the governor and preceptor were creating, but a generous prince who would proceed through virtue to the true glory of royalty.<sup>136</sup> Behind the image he must also be strong of mind and virtue, relying on reason to guide his rule.

### **Reason and Passions**

Perhaps the most essential point of concern for d’Espagnet, pervading the entire *Institution*, was the necessity of the rule of reason and the rational mind over the body and the passions. Man was a “*petite monarchie*” in which the intellect was king and the body was supposed to obey.<sup>137</sup> The metaphorical ties between soul and body, king and kingdom, were a common refrain for authors like d’Espagnet, according to which the rule of the monarch’s rational faculty corresponded to proper order in the kingdom more broadly. The distinction between immaterial or spiritual rationality and the material body was strongly supported by Neoplatonic philosophy, which enjoyed considerable influence in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, particularly among men like d’Espagnet.<sup>138</sup> In a Christian context, the intellect that separated man from beast

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<sup>136</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 45.

<sup>137</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 24.

<sup>138</sup> James R. Farr, *Authority and Sexuality*, 7.

was a gift from God, in whose image man was made, and to use it to understand God and his creation was to fulfill a divine purpose and intention.

This understanding of soul and body was also sharply gendered, with reason considered masculine while the passions, especially lust, were associated with the female. Passions, unrestrained by masculine rationality and the self-control it engendered, were seen by jurists and magistrates like d'Espagnet as being at the root of disorder and society's ills. James Farr has explored this mindset among *parlementaires* in Burgundy to find an elite legal culture strongly influenced by Stoic philosophy, preoccupied with disciplining the passions through self-control.<sup>139</sup> The influence of Neostoicism can be traced to texts such as Guillaume du Vair's *Moral Philosophy of the Stoics* (1585) in French, or Justus Lipsius' *Six Books of Politics* (1589), which "spread stoic doctrine among the ruling classes of Europe."<sup>140</sup> Farr argues that these men sought to "reorder their world" following the turmoil of the Wars of Religion by using the law and prescriptive literature to define a "new ethos" that "associate[d] self-discipline and social control – in a word, order – with piety, civility and obedience."<sup>141</sup> This divinely sanctioned ethos based around the dangers of the bodily passions reinforced hierarchy and patriarchy, while these men privileged themselves as the defenders of this right and sacred order.<sup>142</sup> They emphasized a set of values that privileged reason, self-discipline, temperance, and honor as the essential marks of refinement, quality, and nobility. In short, in the name of an ordered, moral, and holy society, a group of men of rising social and political prominence and from similar social and educational backgrounds

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<sup>139</sup> Farr follows the studies of Anthony Levi, Gerhard Oestreich, and others in emphasizing the influence of Neostoicism on this view on morality and the passions. See Anthony Levi, *French Moralists: The Theory of the Passions, 1585-1649* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), and Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State*.

<sup>140</sup> Bouwsma, *The Waning of the Renaissance*, 154.

<sup>141</sup> Farr, *Authority and Sexuality*, 8, 18-22.

<sup>142</sup> Farr, *Authority and Sexuality*, 18.

reinforced and enshrined as holy a particular set of ideas and behaviors that they believed would safeguard the vision of society they sought to build.

D’Espagnet clearly subscribed to these ideas, and his writings all speak to a similar attitude in Guyenne. His work was filled with references to these topics, and this worldview formed the foundation of the entire *Institution* and strongly influenced his natural philosophy as well. Translated into an instructional program, this system emphasized self-control, temperance, and measured behavior above all else as a mark of quality and as the counterforce to the disorderly influences of the bodily passions. Several of d’Espagnet’s chapters revolve around virtues, all of which in turn were based on the central necessity of self-control and strengthening the will to resist the passions. Temperance, for instance, is our armor against “sweet venom of the arrows of love,” and this explanation is preceded by a discussion of the dangers of concupiscent passions.<sup>143</sup> Passions, especially sexual ones, deny us knowledge and virtue while enslaving man to his body and senses, corrupting our judgment and rationality, the keys to self-control and thus personal order.

The infancy of the prince was an especially important time in his moral formation. In his early age the prince did not yet have the fortitude required to “temper his passions and regulate his appetites.”<sup>144</sup> The “weakness of his young age” meant that he would easily follow his inclinations, lacking the strength or judgment to do otherwise.<sup>145</sup> To counter these predispositions the prince needed men to emulate and imitate, from whom to learn good habits and temperaments. His governor and preceptor therefore needed to be men of the highest quality and character, exemplars of the virtues of temperance and stoicism. Above all they needed to be masters of themselves,

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<sup>143</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 155.

<sup>144</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 38.

<sup>145</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 38.

“subordinating themselves to the stewardship and intendancy of reason.”<sup>146</sup> Like Chiron, the centaur, preceptor of Hercules and Achilles, their reasonable, human part must dominate and master the passions of the brutal, animal part below, which must serve the former. From their example the prince would learn that “the first command a prince must exercise was upon himself,” because self-rule was a prerequisite for external rule.

In turn, the best way for a prince to lead was by example, making it more important that the prince’s soul and body “submit themselves to reason and good habits.” The king’s morals were more important than laws, and thus above all he must command himself and his passions; this was “the first place to establish his kingdom, the first empire he must acquire.”<sup>147</sup> The monarch was the microcosm of the state, upon whom its happiness depended, just like man was the microcosm of the universe, an abridged version (*abrégé*) and image.<sup>148</sup> For the prince to maintain himself in good order translated directly to the health of the kingdom, just as the head bore responsibility for the health of the body.

In discussing the infancy of the prince, a general distrust of the influence of the feminine is evident. He accepts the propriety of early care by women and breastfeeding, judging it a quasi-universal custom “established by the council of nature.”<sup>149</sup> Yet by the age of five he argues the prince should “be taken from the commerce and empire of women... lest the softness of their sex insinuate itself like a sweet poison, sliding past eye and ear” to the heart.<sup>150</sup> At this point he would be given into the care of his male teachers. A few further choice metaphors make clear his distaste for female influences on the young prince: he speaks of the “impurity of their touch,” their “bitter

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<sup>146</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 35.

<sup>147</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 114, 120.

<sup>148</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 3.

<sup>149</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 27.

<sup>150</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 28.

breath” and “fiery glances” singeing the prince’s “tender bark,” turning him sour and acidic, like *verjus* made from grapes struck by lightning or the “ray of some sinister star.”<sup>151</sup>

The prince’s struggle against his passions would continue and even intensify as he grew. “Unregulated appetites, passions, which grow and fortify with the body,” would threaten to “throw it out of its habits and mislead it.”<sup>152</sup> There were many tools at the disposal of the governor and preceptor to shape the prince. Playing games could teach the prince restraint, not to gloat or lash out when he won or lost, to “contain his action in indifference either in loss or gain.”<sup>153</sup> By playing against his men, too, he could discover their nature and how to read them; the right games were “trials of wisdom and moderation” in which the prince could “discover the mood of his man.”<sup>154</sup> Once again, the focus is on temperance and stoic self-control as the most important character traits to encourage in the future ruler.

D’Espagnet remarked upon how easy it was for one, even a king, to “abandon morals and self-government in favor of gratification.”<sup>155</sup> On the topic of dancing, d’Espagnet argued that the custom once served a wholesome purpose but by his day had degenerated into an exercise in wantonness and carnal debauchery. It was originally a form of religious expression, used when words were insufficient to give thanks and praise to God, “rais[ing] the soul upwards” toward the heavens.<sup>156</sup> Yet its current practice had become “a bad use of a good invention,” where “the corruption of centuries has transmitted its use to private assemblies, and so depraved it by the mixture of the two sexes that its now entirely devoted to love.”<sup>157</sup> It was love’s “pimp”, merely an “exercise to warm the body to sensual appetites,” rather than to warm the soul. He compares it

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<sup>151</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 28.

<sup>152</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 39.

<sup>153</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 67-8.

<sup>154</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 67.

<sup>155</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 13.

<sup>156</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 63.

<sup>157</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 64.

to the practice of “beating vipers” to extract their poison; one was playing with fire, perhaps inviting disaster.<sup>158</sup> But, the prince needed to know how to dance, and participate in balls and events in order to maintain his image, for “his credit was founded on it.”<sup>159</sup> It was something of a necessary evil, unavoidable considering they took place in the King’s palace, yet d’Espagnet’s distaste was clear. The “dirty and imprudent motions” in question “nature has reserved... for the veil of night” while jugglers, acrobats, games of chance and other entertainments were a bad influence, beneath the dignity and gravity of the prince.<sup>160</sup>

The entire second half of the *Institution* is devoted to discussing the nature of the soul and the virtues, essential in men of quality, that enhance it and promote a just, reasonable, and godly life. This information d’Espagnet claimed was necessary to understand the “moral science” behind virtues and their functions and was a prerequisite for the Prince to “enter into research and knowledge of himself, which is the most exquisite science of all.”<sup>161</sup> He presumes the divinity and immortality of the “reasonable soul,” our source of rationality and that which sets us apart from plants and animals and which reflects our status as created in God’s image.<sup>162</sup> The influence of antique philosophy on d’Espagnet’s solar mysticism and his association of universal form with God’s light-essence in the Sun will be discussed in detail in a later chapter, but for the moment it is worth noting its microcosmic equivalent in the human soul. It is our “essential form” or “formal principle,” the “noble part of man, the Sun which gives light” to our “little world.”<sup>163</sup> He agreed with Plato that it is unknowable and incomprehensible in life: its “wings are broken... its divinity rendered powerless by its entrance into that decrepit and mortal home... its sepulcher.”<sup>164</sup> Neither

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<sup>158</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 64-65.

<sup>159</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 64.

<sup>160</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 65.

<sup>161</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 112, 130.

<sup>162</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 114.

<sup>163</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 114-115.

<sup>164</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 114.

virtues nor vices are an inherent or essential part of the soul, for to be so would mean they were born with it, of its essence and inseparable.

Virtues instead act as an agent of perfection, attaching themselves to a soul properly infused with religion, which like a *pantaure* (a stone with magnetic properties and associated with astral magic) attracts them to itself, incorporating them to “increase its value and esteem.”<sup>165</sup> They mimic a philosopher’s stone, he states, a “divine Elixir” to transform and perfect the soul.<sup>166</sup> D’Espagnet, following Aristotle, describes a hierarchy of three degrees of life, a “gradation or ladder” of rationality, going from vegetable to animal to reasonable human soul. Where Plato, Aristotle, and those he calls “the Egyptians” understood three separate types of souls, vegetable, animal, and human, with man possessing all three together, d’Espagnet instead argues in favor of man’s single, reasonable soul which “heats and animates the qualities” of the former two, which he calls “faculties” rather than souls.<sup>167</sup>

This third kind of soul must nevertheless pass through stages that share characteristics with its vegetable and animal cousins. Man, like everything in Nature, is perfected by time, passing through the unreasonable stages, corresponding to infancy and childhood, “as through vessels and alembics... purified of its grosser soil, stripped of its phlegm... as by fire” to attain the perfection of the third and final degree.<sup>168</sup> A “vivifying breath of the spirit of God” introduced into the “glass vessel” allows us to take control of our reason, freeing us from our “swaddling clothes” of impotence and ignorance.<sup>169</sup> Again, d’Espagnet’s understanding of education and character formation was based upon a relatively familiar notion of a divine and reasonable soul as the seat

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<sup>165</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 112.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 116.

<sup>168</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 117.

<sup>169</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 118.

of our rationality, in conflict with the passions, but he imagined all in terms of alchemical qualities, change, and transformation. Indeed, his understanding and description of change in general seems to be alchemical.

Yet the most significant of d’Espagnet’s disagreements with Plato, and the most relevant to our understanding of jurists in this period, concerned the source of bad action in humans. Plato and the Ancients, d’Espagnet said, gave to the human soul a dual and contradictory nature, like a chariot pulled by two horses: one was docile and obedient to the commands of the driver, the other “restive, capricious, wild, and quasi-brutal,” often leading its counterpart and the driver into danger.<sup>170</sup> D’Espagnet expanded upon the description of this second horse, giving it two heads, one “foaming” at the mouth with anger and vengeance, the other “gaping with ardor after desires and voluptuousness.”<sup>171</sup> Together they “vomit the torrents of their passions on the reasonable part” and would very often submerge it.<sup>172</sup>

While d’Espagnet followed Plato in his understanding of the internal struggle between reason and the passions, for d’Espagnet the dichotomy between the reasonable and the bestial existed not within the soul itself but between the soul and the body. D’Espagnet does not agree with the notion that the soul was from its conception designed to be at war with itself, and he excuses Plato for this error in positing contradictory natures within the soul by saying that perhaps he only used this explanation to simplify a confusing topic.<sup>173</sup> Instead, it was the body that was “entirely brutal,” animated by the soul but also subject to the sensual appetites that assailed it. The innocent will resided between the body and soul, free to choose. For it to side with reason would produce good and just actions, with virtuousness and happiness resulting, while siding with the

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<sup>170</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 122. This metaphor likely derives from Plato’s *Phaedrus*.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 124.



other rendered man little better than a beast.<sup>174</sup> The “greatest evil” and bad action came from the joining of the passions and a will which had departed from the “obedience of reason.”<sup>175</sup> This state was antithetical to societal harmony, and to God’s intention for us: “God created the soul entirely good, to live under the law of reason, which is his image.”<sup>176</sup> The reasonable qualities of the soul could and should resist the disruptive power of the passions.

An important purpose of the soul according to d’Espagnet was to allow us to sense and experience reality, to conceive of their species or categories, to seek through rationalization “the truth of the nature of things beyond their mere appearances,” and to store and safeguard this knowledge in the “reservoir” of our memory.<sup>177</sup> These functions were essential to moral science, to recognize the manner in which we should live, but their most important function in his eyes was the regulation of our will, manners, and actions, from which proceed virtue and the good life.<sup>178</sup> In short, d’Espagnet insisted that the Prince and his teachers understand the nature of the soul because it was the source of our self-regulation from its location seated in our immortal soul. It is this which he argued set us apart from beasts, connected us to our creator, and allowed us to recognize good action and lead our will to match it. Yet also in d’Espagnet’s understanding there was implicit a divine imperative to bend thought and behavior to reason and self-discipline, because their existence and explanation as such spoke of God’s intentions for us. In doing so, d’Espagnet made self-control a divine imperative by coupling it with God’s intended purpose for man, and he offers us a thorough explanation of a Platonic and Christian understanding of the soul that strongly supported the exaltation of reason and the distrust of the passions.

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<sup>174</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 123.

<sup>175</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 130.

<sup>176</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 129.

<sup>177</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 119.

<sup>178</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 120.

It was important for every man to live in this manner, and even more so for the prince, whose morals could carry the force of law in his kingdom. In order to “put the soul of the prince in this state and to hold it in defense against the effort of the passions,” his soul must be “provided with and filled with” four powerful virtues: Prudence, Fortitude, Temperance, and Justice. These are classic virtues, and d’Espagnet devoted entire chapters to each, but his primary purpose in discussing them nevertheless revolved entirely around their utility in recognizing and resisting the allure of the bodily passions and the impulses toward self-gratification. Prudence would “assist and fortify reason, as its good angel,” for instance, while Fortitude’s purpose was to resist “concupiscent power... from where derive the strongest and most dangerous passions.”<sup>179</sup>

To hold the soul of the prince in a morally good state, the ultimate purpose of the *Institution*, he must “strengthen reason, weaken the passions, and incline the will to reason.” This, he says, is “the entire effect of moral science.”<sup>180</sup> By behaving in a manner worthy of man’s purpose and potential, the prince would follow “the order that god held in his production of his universal work.” In a society of hierarchy and patriarchy, each individual also animated their own personal hierarchy, with reason at the top, and d’Espagnet’s philosophy gives these the weight of natural and divine law.<sup>181</sup> As we will understand in later chapters, for d’Espagnet the reasonable soul in man was also a microcosm of the divine Sun, an expression of an ultimate cosmic good, participating in the universal form emanating from the Sun through its light.

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<sup>179</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 131.

<sup>180</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 130.

<sup>181</sup> D’Espagnet, *L’Institution*, 116.

## Tyranny and Tyrannicide

The other central theme of the prince's moral education, and a prerequisite for the cultivation of the virtues discussed above, was d'Espagnet's emphasis on humility, obedience, and a religious faith characterized by a healthy balance between fear of and respect for God. This emphasis was in part born out of a concern shared by d'Espagnet and other authors of *Institutions*, over the threat of tyranny on the part of the monarch. It took on further importance considering the arguments these authors were making to defend the sacrality of the person of the ruler as well as his office. As they defended the King's sacred power and authority, they also defended the moral legitimacy of that authority, and in d'Espagnet's educational program significant energy was to be devoted to shaping the king's conscience and religious faith. These were of increasing importance given the centralizing direction of the French state and monarchy in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and in d'Espagnet's mind as evidenced by the *Institution* the king's reason and personal morality were among the few remaining checks remaining on his actions. D'Espagnet argues that while the king is above the law, he must nevertheless always act according to the law and what is right, and the means to do this lay in Justice.<sup>182</sup> Justice is the difference and the barrier between royalty and tyranny, its splendor the "true purple" in which Kings are clothed, just as the Sun is by light.<sup>183</sup> Of course, Justice is born of the will's submission to reason, and d'Espagnet once again draws parallels between policing one's will and policing society, then equated to "natural" and "civil" laws.<sup>184</sup>

Concerns about tyranny held another aspect considering that, by the 1610s, the previous two kings had both been assassinated by men who believed they had been justified in committing

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<sup>182</sup> D'Espagnet, *L'Institution*, 167.

<sup>183</sup> D'Espagnet, *L'Institution*, 168.

<sup>184</sup> D'Espagnet, *L'Institution*, 161-162.

regicide. During the Wars of Religion numerous treatises and pamphlets published by Huguenots and Catholics alike had argued for legitimate disobedience toward a monarch, based on his affiliations and behaviors towards members of the participant factions and confessions. Some Protestants had claimed that the king's authority derived from the people, and an anonymous pamphlet in 1564 stated that a king who had lost the love of his people was no king, but a tyrant.<sup>185</sup> Works such as François Hotman's *Francogallia* of 1573 further pushed the right of legitimate resistance to tyranny, and even argued that France had historically been an elective monarchy.<sup>186</sup> These arguments and the general tone of these publications undermined sacral kingship and assaulted the legitimacy of the French monarchy.<sup>187</sup> Though Hotman and the Protestant resistance theorists stopped short of explicitly endorsing regicide, radical Catholics from the late 1580s did not, allowing in their arguments for the violent removal of monarchs and surely contributing to the murders of Henri III and Henri IV.

The drama regarding tyranny and regicide played out in texts as well as *parlements* and general councils. In the immediate aftermath of Henri's death, a pamphlet war ensued that would last for years over the role the Jesuits played in Ravaillac's assassination of Henri IV, and the degree to which the Jesuits supported regicide or tyrannicide in general. Many of these pamphlets tried to implicate the Jesuits directly in the assassination of Henri IV or in other attempted regicides, with the most extreme imagining rituals and black masses in which Jesuits blessed the assassin and his knife.<sup>188</sup> These were encouraged by the testimony of Ravaillac, who implicated a Jesuit

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<sup>185</sup> Holt, *The French Wars of Religion*, 78.

<sup>186</sup> Holt, *The French Wars of Religion*, 100, and François Hotman, *Francogallia*, ed. and trans. Ralph E. Giesey and J.H.M. Salmon (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

<sup>187</sup> Holt, *The French Wars of Religion*, 76. See Mousnier's *The Assassination of Henry IV* for an exhaustive overview of medieval and early modern theories of legitimate resistance and tyrannicide.

<sup>188</sup> George A. Rothrock, Jr., "The Gallican Resurgence after the Death of Henry IV," *The Historian* 24, No. 1 (Nov., 1961): 5-6.

by telling the court that he had spoken to a Father Daubigny about his visions and his discontent with Henri's attitude toward the Papacy and the Huguenots, and even showed him a knife.<sup>189</sup>

The *parlementaires* of Paris certainly believed literature on tyrannicide had contributed to the assassinations of the two previous kings. Following the death of Henri IV, they believed it their duty to take action against elements they deemed philosophically and physically dangerous to the monarchy. They inserted themselves into this debate concerning the Jesuits and regicide, much to the dismay of the Regent Marie de Médicis, by issuing *arrêts* to suppress the writings of several Jesuits, Cardinal Bellarmine, and other Catholic clergymen that they deemed destructive to the power or prestige of the monarchy. They also asked that the faculty of Theology at the University of Paris renew a centuries-old censure against tyrannicide.<sup>190</sup> Attacks on the Jesuits as a threat to the monarchy were also intimately tied to the opposition between Gallicans, or regalists, who defended the sovereign authority and independence of kings from the power of the Pope, and Ultramontanists, those who argued for Papal supremacy over secular governments, including the French monarchy and its courts. *Parlementaires* had long feared that the efforts of Ultramontanists would see the decrees of the Council of Trent accepted in France, which would potentially elevate the role of the Roman curia within the kingdom and in turn diminish their own jurisdiction, power, and prestige.<sup>191</sup> Yet they were also intensely disturbed by the murders of Henri III and Henri IV, as well as the Gunpowder Plot in England five years prior.<sup>192</sup>

Meanwhile pamphlets and published works continued to question the wisdom of Henri IV allowing the Jesuits to return to France in 1603 after their expulsion by the *Parlement* in 1594, and of allowing Jesuits to be close to the person of the king or the regent. One of these sought to

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<sup>189</sup> Rothrock, Jr., "The Gallican Resurgence," 3.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Rothrock, Jr., "The Gallican Resurgence," 1-2.

<sup>192</sup> Rothrock, Jr., "The Gallican Resurgence," 7.

demonstrate that several Jesuit writings approved by the order supported regicide, especially that of the Spanish Jesuit Mariana, which defended Jacques Clément's murder of Henri III as just tyrannicide and glorified Clément as a martyr.<sup>193</sup> Coincidentally titled *De Rege et Regis Institutione*, or *On the King and the Education of the King*, this work had been condemned and burned by the *Parlement* of Paris in 1610. Another, called the *Anti-Coton* in reference to Henri IV's confessor, Father Coton, asked questions that aimed to demonstrate the threat the Jesuits presented as potential agents of the Papacy whose loyalty was in serious doubt; for instance, would a Jesuit act against the King if ordered by his superiors? Could the Pope absolve subjects of their oaths of fidelity to the King? If the Pope excommunicated and deposed a king, did his subjects still owe him obedience? Would his subsequent murder still be considered regicide?<sup>194</sup> Broadly, how would the Jesuits and people in general react should the Pope turn his authority against the King? A number of these questions were a revival, or continuation, of a centuries-old controversy over the temporal powers of the pope but in the present circumstances also bled into serious concerns over the sacrosanctity and safety of the king and the societal order and stability that depended on them.

This pamphlet war continued into 1612, when the *Parlement*, at the request of Edmond Richer, the Syndic of the University of Paris' Faculty of Theology, ordered the Jesuits to subscribe to four doctrines: "the superiority of councils over the Pope, the absolute independence of the temporal power of kings, the obligation of confessors to reveal any threats to the sovereign of which they had knowledge, and the submission of ecclesiastics to the temporal power."<sup>195</sup> The Jesuits submitted eventually, but the Queen Regent was sympathetic to the Ultramontanist position

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<sup>193</sup> Mousnier, *The Assassination of Henry IV*, 101.

<sup>194</sup> Rothrock, Jr., "The Gallican Resurgence," 6-8.

<sup>195</sup> Rothrock, Jr., "The Gallican Resurgence," 10.

and later that year forced Richer, who was also excommunicated, from his position, alongside his ally the *premier président* of the *Parlement*, Achille de Harlay. This effectively silenced the most outspoken and powerful partisans of Gallicanism, but the desire to defend the power, independence, and safety of the French monarchy from Rome did not simply disappear.

Indeed, Gallican sentiment was shared widely enough that at the Estates General of 1614 some representatives of the Third Estate in Paris made the first article of their *cahier* the ‘Gallican Oath,’ which strongly supported the divinely ordained sacrality and sovereignty of the French monarchy.<sup>196</sup> It called for an oath to be sworn by all officeholders to this effect, the violation of which would be considered *lèse-majesté*, that it be accepted as a fundamental law of the kingdom that “holding His crown of none but God, there is no power on earth... which has any claim on His kingdom to deprive it of the sacred persons of our Kings, nor to dispense or absolve their subjects of the fidelity which they owe... that all subjects, whatever quality or condition they might be, will hold this law as sacred and inviolable, as conforming to the Word of God, without equivocal distinction or any sort of limitation...”<sup>197</sup> The *cahiers* of other provinces reflected this sentiment, and the statement was agreed upon to be the first article of the Third Estate’s *cahier*.<sup>198</sup>

Though the clergy agreed that protecting the life of the king was a worthy and necessary goal, they were extremely concerned over the implications of the oath as well as the perceived overreach on the part of the Third Estate. To let a lay institution such as the Estates General decide on the question of Papal power over kings, an issue they argued even a council had not yet broached, was too much, and the clergy campaigned for its removal from the *cahier*. The nobility sided with the clergy completely and the king was eventually pressured to simply halt the debate,

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<sup>196</sup> See also George Rothrock, Jr., “The French Crown and the Estates General of 1614,” *French Historical Studies* 1, No. 3 (Spring, 1960): 295-318.

<sup>197</sup> Rothrock, Jr., “The Gallican Resurgence,” 14-15.

<sup>198</sup> Rothrock, Jr., “The Gallican Resurgence,” 15.

such that the issue went no further and was soon overshadowed by other major events, including another revolt by the Prince de Condé and the marriage of the king to the Spanish *infanta*.<sup>199</sup> The *Parlement* did, however, issue a confirmation of all its *arrêts* since 1561 against regicide.

The pamphlet wars, the *arrêts* of the *Parlement*, and the Ultramontanist-Gallican controversy and the issues it considered regarding the King's safety and sovereignty highlighted some of the consequences of the assassination of Henri IV. D'Espagnet would have been aware of these debates, and his treatise, ostensibly about education, reflected many of the Gallican sentiments about sovereignty and sacrality that were discussed during the Estates General. The years before he published were also a constant demonstration of the need for a strong and respected monarch. The Gallican controversy was but one stage upon which debates around this idea played out. D'Espagnet's was one of several *institutions* that grappled with the problem of regicide while also remaining wary of the potential for tyranny. One solution to the problem of tyrannicide was to enhance the sacrality and majesty of the king, and d'Espagnet participated in this, emphasizing the King's role as God's vicar and the rightness of his rule within the hierarchy of the divine order, not to be questioned by men even if they believed themselves justified.

Yet, as d'Espagnet was aware, the threat of tyranny remained. His given solutions were the more platitudinal fear of and respect for God, the faith, humility and obedience learned from religion, and lessons learned from examples of great kings of the past, but most importantly, the turning of the will toward the virtue of his reasonable soul as the counter to the dangers of the passions. He provided an educational program to inculcate these characteristics in the prince to make his own conscience, morality, and virtue based in reason the primary barrier against tyranny. This program assumed man's conscience and character formation to be malleable, and d'Espagnet

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<sup>199</sup> Rothrock, Jr., "The Gallican Resurgence," 24.



went so far as to suggest that in infancy a person is mostly if not entirely a blank slate, ready to be shaped like a work of art by those with knowledge and vision. Rather than leave things up to chance, he wanted to help craft the ideal prince to keep steady the ship of state. Of course, his timing was a little late for Louis XIII, assuming the potential effectiveness of such a program in the first place. Yet his work gives us considerable insight into his theory of the soul and the passions, which bled over into his alchemical works a few years later.

### CHAPTER 3. ALCHEMY AND PHILOSOPHY IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES AND RENAISSANCE: THE SOURCES OF D'ESPAGNET'S ALCHEMY

In June of 1623 Jean d'Espagnet brought to the Paris publisher Nicholas Buon two treatises on alchemy and natural philosophy. Buon had worked with D'Espagnet previously, having also published his *Institution du Jeune Prince* in 1616. On this occasion, however, d'Espagnet chose to hide his identity as author behind two anagrams. The main title page for the *Enchiridion Physicae Restitutae* (Handbook of Physics Restored) and the *Arcanum Hermeticae Philosophiae Opus* (Secret Work of Hermetic Philosophy) offered the phrase *Spes Mea Est in Agno* ("my faith is in the lamb") in place of the author's name, while a second title page for the *Arcanum* also added *Penes Nos Unda Tagi*, indicating his ancestral connection with the waters of the Iberian river Tagus.<sup>200</sup> The *Enchiridion* was roughly twice the length of the *Arcanum*, and between them comprised almost three hundred pages. These works were published together *cum privilegio regis* and dedicated to Prince Henri de Bourbon, illegitimate son of Henri IV and bishop of Metz, as "two little tracts which promise great things."<sup>201</sup>

The *Enchiridion* was a general work of science or natural philosophy that purported to explain the laws and workings of the universe. It touched on the creation of the cosmos, the seeds of things and their impregnation with form via the divine Light of the Sun, the cycle of generation and corruption of living things, the Elements and principles of matter that comprised bodies, and the relationship of matter with metaphysical or Platonic forms. The Latin term *physica* that appeared in the title was derived from the Greek word for nature and referred not only to the

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<sup>200</sup> The anagram *Spes Mea Est in Agno* is potentially a nod to Michael Sendivogius' authorial anagram *divi leschi genus amo*, from his *De Lapide Philosophorum Tractatus duodecim e naturae fonte et manuali experientia depromti* of 1604 (also known as *Novum Lumen Chymicum*).

<sup>201</sup> Willard, *Jean d'Espagnet's Summary of Physics Restored*, xi, and Kahn, *Alchimie et paracelsisme*, 534.

science of motion and forces in the modern sense but to a science of all natural phenomena, and it was this universal knowledge of nature, lost, confused, or diluted since antiquity, that d’Espagnet claimed to be restoring. The title of the French translation conveys this message even more clearly, claiming to “reestablish in its purity” mankind’s knowledge of nature and the cosmos.

The work communicated aptly and thoroughly d’Espagnet’s cosmology and demonstrated that the syncretic lens through which he perceived God’s creation was primarily Hermetic, alchemical, and Christian, built on a foundation of Christianized Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics such as could be found in the thought of Thomas Aquinas, the great Medieval synthesizer. It is ironic that as much as some early modern thinkers like d’Espagnet criticized aspects of Aristotle and Plato’s thought as they understood it and claimed to be moving away from dogmatic obedience to them, it was incredibly difficult to fully retreat from Aristotelian and Thomistic paradigms. There were many Aristotelian and Platonic structures that underlay all European philosophy and theology, like hylomorphism, the assumption that all material objects are a compound composed of matter and form, that were not so easily jettisoned. One would have to invent an entirely new theory of matter, in rejection of two millennia of accepted philosophical authority and centuries of Christian orthodoxy. Consequently, as was the case with many natural philosophers in this period, even though d’Espagnet challenged Aristotle on a number of issues his explanatory models of natural systems and phenomena were nonetheless firmly based in a fusion of Christian theology and ancient and Late Antique Greek philosophy. What was noteworthy about d’Espagnet and some other Hermetists and alchemists, was that they also sought to explain natural processes through analogies to chemical laboratory processes, and their explanations were also predicated on assumptions of hidden correspondences between different parts or levels of the universe. Here the influence of Paracelsus and his followers, proponents of

a new chemical philosophy, can be felt in d’Espagnet’s thought. Additionally, one can also find the influence of what John Dillon called the “underworld of Platonism,” a reference to the mystical aspects of Middle and Late Platonism like those expressed in the thought of Plotinus or Proclus, the Hermetic writings, the Chaldean Oracles, or other gnostic literature.<sup>202</sup> These aspects could include mythologized metaphysics, a mind-body dualism with the soul as a divine spark trapped in matter, solar mysticism, an interconnected hierarchy of being to explain the relationship of the many to the One, and the possibility of enlightenment and reunification with the divine *logos* or the One through the ritual ascent of the soul.<sup>203</sup>

The ancient concept of cosmic relationships in the “great chain of being” came to be discussed by many chemical philosophers in the language of the microcosm and macrocosm, wherein a ‘little world’ reflected the greater: for example, the relationship between the organs in the human body would be said to mirror that of the stars and planets, or the central fire of the earth might be compared to the chemist’s refining fire. As two scholars of esotericism put it, philosophers like d’Espagnet assumed “symbolic and real correspondences... among all parts of the universe, both seen and unseen,” making the entire universe “an enormous theatre of mirrors, an ensemble of hieroglyphs to be encoded.”<sup>204</sup> This assumption about occult correspondences between the celestial and terrestrial worlds informed contemporary beliefs about astrology, medicine, and even natural or astral magic. In the context of Renaissance philosophy, the writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, alongside other mystical and Neoplatonic texts often read in tandem, gave clear and convincing expression as well as the weight of ancient authority to this

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<sup>202</sup> See John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977).

<sup>203</sup> The history of the general concept of a hierarchy of being between the world and some variety of divinity is explored in Arthur O. Lovejoy’s *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 60, and *passim*.

<sup>204</sup> Antoine Faivre and Karen-Claire Voss, “Western Esotericism and the Science of Religions,” *Numen* 42 (1995): 60.

concept, and fixed this fundamental truth about the universe in the minds of d’Espagnet and other contemporaries. Perhaps the clearest and most succinct expression of this belief is found in the Emerald Tablet or *Tabula Smaragdina*, which despite its brevity was an important source of alchemical interpretation. D’Espagnet took to heart one of its early lines that would later be printed on the frontispiece to the English translation of the *Arcanum*, which depicted a banner hanging from the symbol for mercury bearing the creed “that which is above is just as below.” While the oldest known record of the Emerald Tablet is found in an Arabic book probably written in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, its authorship was attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, and the maxim of cosmic correspondence “as above, so below” was fundamental to the cosmology of many early modern alchemists.<sup>205</sup>

The *Arcanum* continued discussion on many topics of instruction in the alchemical arts in order that the practitioner, versed in the lessons contained in both works, might perform the great work of crafting the Stone or Tincture of the Philosophers. The Philosopher’s Stone, the materials and processes required for its production, its capabilities, and mechanisms of action were topics of debate over many centuries through the European Middle Ages and Renaissance. Suffice it to say for the moment that by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, many alchemists including d’Espagnet considered the Stone to be a perfect substance that was capable of transmitting or sharing that perfection with other bodies or substances. Some of the most well-known benefits of this substance would be the perfection of base metals into silver or gold, or the repair or maintenance of the human body to a state of perfect working order, the result of which would be increased vitality and potentially eternal life.

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<sup>205</sup> Florian Ebeling, *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus: Hermeticism from Ancient to Modern Times*, trans. David Lorton (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 49.

There was considerable overlap and continuity of thought between the two works, and there is no reason to suspect that they were not written by the same author or that any great length of time separated their production. In a similar manner to the *Enchiridion* and *L'institution du jeune prince*, the *Arcanum* employed many literary, religious, and mythological allegories to demonstrate the rationality of its arguments and reinforce their universal applicability. It also gave much more explicit instruction on the exact nature, production, and use of the specific materials and physical apparatus needed by the alchemist to perform his work. These instructions relied on knowledge of astronomy and astrology to identify suitable times to begin stages of the work. This fact is worthy of note considering that in spite of commonly held modern assumptions about the so-called 'occult sciences' of astrology and alchemy, these were not necessarily connected in Early Modern Europe, and it should not be assumed that the two were practiced together.<sup>206</sup> Alchemists varied in their opinions of the influence of the heavens on their work, and many astrologers would have rejected alchemy as a legitimate science. In short, we may consider d'Espagnet's *Enchiridion* as a broadly based cosmological 'textbook' that describes the laws and nature of nature, and this work did the most to lay out d'Espagnet's strange and fascinating understanding of the universe. The shorter of the two works, the *Arcanum*, offered specific and directed instructions, understood within the parameters of the universal philosophy established by the *Enchiridion*, to allow the practitioner to produce the Philosopher's Stone, which alchemists commonly referred to as the 'Great Work.'

Beginning in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, a series of major translations and commentaries by philosophers such as Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola stimulated and made

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<sup>206</sup> William R. Newman and Anthony Grafton, "Introduction: The Problematic Status of Astrology and Alchemy in Premodern Europe", in *Secrets of Nature: Astrology and Alchemy in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001).

possible a renewed interest in several esoteric philosophical traditions of Late Antiquity, including the Hermetic writings and the works of numerous Platonic philosophers from roughly the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E. These traditions, which will be explored in greater detail below, once reconciled with Christianity, were very influential and important to 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century alchemy and natural philosophy. For his part, d’Espagnet leans heavily on Hermes’ authority to justify his cosmology and his unorthodox interpretations of scripture and of other philosophers. These works had a clear impact on contemporaries and posterity and were published in a period of great interest in Hermetic and Neoplatonic natural philosophy and of chemical medicine especially.

A century after Ficino and his like, the program of Hermetic alchemy championed by d’Espagnet was never more popularly discussed or intensely debated. By mid-century, a decade or so after his death, d’Espagnet’s works had been translated into French, German, and English, and his identity had been puzzled out by Jean Bachou, his French translator.<sup>207</sup> Both the *Enchiridion* and the *Arcanum* were well-received by contemporary alchemists and even found a place in the libraries of celebrated figures including Isaac Newton, John Locke, and Elias Ashmole.<sup>208</sup> Pierre Bayle considered him worthy and learned enough to grant him his own entry in his *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, naming d’Espagnet “one of the learned men of the 17<sup>th</sup> century” before offering a brief summary of works and distinguishing his books as the first published in France to offer a complete system of physics contrary to that of Aristotle.<sup>209</sup> Charles Sorel used almost the same words of recognition in his 1655 work *De la perfection de l’homme* and it is possible Bayle borrowed them. The treatises went through numerous editions and

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<sup>207</sup> As Bachou reveals in his French translation of 1651. See Willard, *Jean d’Espagnet’s Summary of Physics Restored*, xii.

<sup>208</sup> See Willard, *Jean d’Espagnet’s Summary of Physics Restored*, xxx, and B. J. T. Dobbs, *The Foundations of Newton’s Alchemy*. Newton was especially interested in d’Espagnet’s thoughts on magnetic forces.

<sup>209</sup> Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, 1741 edition, Vol. II, 407-408. Bayle also showed interest in d’Espagnet’s *Institution* and its publication.

translations and were readily available across Europe, finding an especially warm reception in England.<sup>210</sup>

Knowledge of d’Espagnet’s other work, namely his *Institution*, allows us some points of comparison with his alchemical writings, and we find a number of significant parallels in his thought as well as the shared philosophical and religious goals. This continuity is perhaps unsurprising considering they were written at most eight years apart, but nonetheless is worth noting.<sup>211</sup> As we saw in the previous chapter, d’Espagnet was trying to solve the problem of order that preoccupied him and countless others. Disorder threatened France for almost his entire life, and at so many moments the tenuous peace established by Henri IV threatened to dissolve. With his later publications on natural philosophy, he was communicating knowledge of God’s pervading order. This search was thoroughly informed by his Christian beliefs which formed the foundations of his thought. Through the lens of these beliefs he studied numerous philosophical traditions which, as others had before him, he saw as inherently linked by threads of an ancient revealed wisdom. The goal of this search was a kind of enlightenment, true knowledge of the cosmos and God through the study of his creation.

The clearest shared characteristic evidenced across his works was the unified nature of his philosophy. There were no separate spheres where different laws applied, and via the mechanism of the microcosm and macrocosm d’Espagnet posited the same fundamental forces and qualities across the breadth of existence, up and down the great chain of being. The desire of the feminine for unity with the male via copulation, for instance, was exhibited by all feminine matter from its

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<sup>210</sup> Robert M. Schuler, “Some Spiritual Alchemies of Seventeenth-Century England,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 41, No. 2 (Apr. - Jun., 1980), 299.

<sup>211</sup> Willard notes a letter written by Marie de Gournay as evidence that d’Espagnet held an interest in alchemy as early as the 1590s, when he was already a *conseiller* on the *Parlement* of Bordeaux, though d’Espagnet tells his readers in the *Enchiridion* that he did not follow this path in earnest until after his retirement in 1615. See Willard, *Jean d’Espagnet’s Summary of Physics Restored*, xvi.



smallest, Elementary components to the complex mixed body or organism of the female human being. All mixed bodies were comprised of only two classical elements of opposite genders, and alchemical operations were to be done with only two reagents, for God and law would suffer neither homosexuality nor a third participant in ‘marriage’ or generative union. The noble qualities of metals like gold were not lost or lessened by their commerce with lesser substances or by any other means, just as the *noblesse* of a man could not be lost through fallen fortunes or by interacting with those of lesser social standing. Nobility was not merely a social convention but a real and transcendent quality that applied beyond human civilization, and the battle between masculine reason and feminine passion was fought everywhere and at every level of being. D’Espagnet’s cosmology spoke to a vision of social order that would have resonated with other members of France’s intellectual and judicial elite, many of whom were making similar arguments.

D’Espagnet’s natural philosophy and alchemy were based in a syncretic fusion of Christian theology, the Pseudo-Lullian alchemical tradition, ancient as well as emerging chemical and medical theories, and a variety of esoteric, gnostic, or mystical traditions including Hermetism and Christian Cabala. This universal philosophy should be understood as an attempt to describe the laws and workings of the divinely ordered cosmos whose true nature was known to the great sages of the past, and which accorded with and affirmed the truths of the Christian religion. The adept’s understanding of this order, achieved with divine guidance, could be used to manipulate natural processes through human art to produce chemical tinctures and medicines, most coveted of which was the Philosopher’s Stone. This legendary substance was not naturally occurring, but instead bore a closer relationship to the ancient prime matter described in the Book of Genesis and other ancient cosmological and cosmogenical writings. The Stone allowed the alchemist to ‘perfect’ things, such as minerals into gold, or the human body to an ideal state free of sickness or

impurity, or, in the understanding of some alchemists like Elias Ashmole, even to perfect one's knowledge or understanding in order to speak with animals, communicate with angels, and other superhuman feats. While many of d'Espagnet's ideas appear unorthodox, or as the results of questionable extrapolation and analogical reasoning, there is no doubt that he saw himself as a devout Christian who was only searching, with divine help, for the truths that God had intended to be discovered by the dedicated.

D'Espagnet mentions a few other Early Modern chemists and philosophers who influenced him significantly, including Michael Maier and Michael Sendivogius, though the works of these authors are themselves interpretations of, and thus based in, the same esoteric traditions such as Hermetism. Each of these sources and traditions are deep and nuanced, and this section will give an overview of their characteristics, origins, and how they fit into d'Espagnet's cosmology.

The ultimate origins of many of these traditions lay in classical and late antiquity, yet Hermetic and Neoplatonic ideas were reintroduced to Europe in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century at the hands of Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, and Ludovico Lazzarelli, among others. Jewish Merkabah (from the Hebrew word for chariot, a reference to the Book of Ezekiel) mysticism had similarly ancient origins from perhaps as early as 800 BCE, though the provenance and authorship of influential texts like the *Sefer Yetzirah* are still unknown. The origins of Kabbalah were more recent, first seen in 12<sup>th</sup> century Europe, but also saw a transformation in the Renaissance owing to the mystical and polemical interest of Christian scholars such as Pico della Mirandola and Johann Reuchlin. The primary aim of Christian Cabalists was to prove the truth and superiority of Christianity, specifically Trinitarian theology and Christology, utilizing some of the same hermeneutical techniques. These major figures of the Italian Renaissance were also important exemplars of religious and philosophical syncretism, the significance of which cannot be

overstated. The modes of interpretation and philosophical systems of these men should be considered as attempts to reconcile accepted Christian truths and concepts with the ideas of robust non-Christian philosophical systems from antiquity, and d’Espagnet followed in their footsteps in this regard.<sup>212</sup> Over the course of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, numerous other scholars and doctors such as Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, Paracelsus, John Dee, and Robert Fludd continued to bring together these various traditions to produce sophisticated, albeit unorthodox, cosmologies and systems of philosophy, medicine, and natural knowledge that promised to the adept a profound and spiritually meaningful understanding of God’s creation and the place of humankind within it.

D’Espagnet nurtured his interest in alchemy and natural philosophy in a period of increasing interest as well as intense debate across numerous connected fields of knowledge. By the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when his interest was first evidenced, there was a vast wealth of literature to which he could turn to stimulate and develop his broad alchemical worldview. In d’Espagnet’s mind alchemy held a much more universal and interconnected place in the system of human knowledge than simply that of a technical art used to make gold or medicines. It signified a particular understanding of matter, the nature of things, the role of celestial bodies and forces, and the capabilities of man to imitate and exercise power over nature, all deeply influenced by Neoplatonic and Hermetic cosmological traditions that had been revived through the late 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The result, as expressed through the *Enchiridion* and *Arcanum*, was a unified science that promised to explain everything through universal laws made applicable through the analogical paradigm of the microcosm and macrocosm. Numerous aspects of d’Espagnet’s alchemical philosophy also concurred well with facets of what we might call his social, political,

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<sup>212</sup> Like Pico, d’Espagnet will insist that disagreements among ancient authorities are only verbal or apparent disagreements, not substantial ones.

and judicial experiences, and d’Espagnet took as a foundational assumption the fact that the same laws applied across these different venues of experience.

Imbuing alchemical practice and philosophy with this kind of universalism was neither necessary nor inevitable. By the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, though, many traditions had been transformed or converged to make such an understanding possible, even reasonable, and d’Espagnet was clearly drawn to several compatible traditions that would support this broad and syncretic outlook. His worldview represented a unification of at least two traditions of Hermetic thought with Platonic and Christian Cabbalistic influences, ideas he encountered through dozens of authors who represented centuries of Christianized alchemical and philosophical traditions. Several of these authors he names for us, and we can identify others to whom he was directly or indirectly indebted. Among those he mentions directly were Morienus Romanus<sup>213</sup>, Abū Mūsā Jābir ibn Hayyān (abbreviated as Jabir and latinized as Geber)<sup>214</sup>, Bernard Trevisan (Count Trevisanus)<sup>215</sup>, Michael Sendivogius, Nicholas Flamel, Ramon Lull, Michael Maier, and Hermes Trismegistus. He also references Zoroaster, Pythagoras, Lucretius (and through him Democritus and other Presocratics), as well as Aristotle and Plato. He never mentioned Paracelsus by name, though he engaged with Paracelsian ideas at various points such as the *tria prima* of Salt, Sulphur, and Mercury as a replacement for the classical four elements, and d’Espagnet disagreed with Paracelsus and Aristotle as to the true first and second matter of being. It is extremely unlikely that d’Espagnet

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<sup>213</sup> See Romanus Morienus, *A Testament of Alchemy: Being the Revelations of Morienus, Ancient Adept and Hermit of Jerusalem, to Khalid Ibn Yazid Ibn Mu'awiyya, King of the Arabs, of the Divine Secrets of the Magisterium and Accomplishment of the Alchemical Art*, trans. Lee Stavenhagen (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1974).

<sup>214</sup> The original Geber, if he was indeed a historical person, presumably died early in the 9<sup>th</sup> century C.E. Thousands of works are attributed to him. Pseudo-Geber, whose works d’Espagnet refers to, was a European who wrote about chemistry and metallurgy in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, very possibly Paul of Taranto, the author of *Theorica et Practica*. See William R. Newman, *The Summa Perfectionis of Pseudo-Geber: A Critical Edition, Translation, and Study* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991).

<sup>215</sup> *De alchemia liber (De chymico miraculo)* published in *Theatrum Chemicum* Vol. 1. See also his ‘Parable of the Fountain,’ a work of alchemical poetry also referenced by Sendivogius in his *New Light of Alchemy*.

did not know of Paracelsus or those who defended his ideas, many of whom were French contemporaries of d’Espagnet. It is far more likely that d’Espagnet made a deliberate choice not to invoke his name considering the intensely contested nature of contemporary medical debates and the very real political and legal consequences that Paracelsians could face for voicing too loudly their opposition to the medical establishment.

Many of the authors d’Espagnet chose to recognize were popular in the field at the time, and almost all were represented in various edited alchemical collections, above all Lazarus Zetzner’s *Theatrum Chemicum*, the first three volumes of which were published in 1602 in Oberursel and Strasbourg. Within these volumes were the works of Flamel, Trevisanus, Gerard Dorn, Arnold of Villanova, Joseph Duchesne (known as Quercetanus), Roger Bacon, John Dee, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, John of Rupescissa, Ramon Lull (Pseudo-Lull), Giovanni Agostino Panteo, Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle alongside numerous others. Volume 4, published in 1613 in Strasbourg, also featured Michael Sendovogius (represented by the anagram Divi Leschi Genus Amo), Avicenna and Hermes Trismegistus, as well as further works by Pseudo-Lull and Arnold of Villanova. Together these volumes contained 143 tracts (over 200 including the final two volumes) and six centuries of chemical tradition for d’Espagnet and others to draw on, and it is an understatement to say that the breadth and variety of philosophical views and interests represented in these volumes alone is breathtaking. D’Espagnet’s contemporaries Sendivogius and Maier, with whom he shared many opinions and gave great praise to, would also have had recourse to many of these sources, making establishing something like a ‘genealogy of ideas’ difficult. Interestingly, D’Espagnet never mentions Joseph Duchesne, who was also a contemporary and one of Henri IV’s physicians, making it possible that d’Espagnet knew of him and perhaps was even personally acquainted.

## Quintessential Alchemy and the Legend of Lull

As we are beginning to see, by the later 16<sup>th</sup> century alchemy and the many philosophical traditions that became tied to it were growing in popularity, busying printing houses and prompting intense debates especially among physicians and theologians. To be an alchemist at this time could mean many things, and individuals maintained their own unique constellations of knowledge, of old and new ideas plucked from the ever-growing intellectual firmament of possible interpretations of the world. Men like d’Espagnet crafted complex systems of thought by reconciling the authors they read and their lived experience, filtered through their cultural and religious beliefs and assumptions, to make intelligible the natural and supernatural world and fashion a tangible art to manipulate them for humanity’s benefit.

Many important developments in late medieval alchemy prepared the stage for many early modern alchemists, including d’Espagnet, informing their goals and expectations of what an alchemist was capable of and what place alchemical knowledge should be afforded within philosophy broadly. The ideas and reputations of several late 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century philosophers and chemical practitioners would converge, and in some cases be made to do so through accidental misattribution and deliberate forgery by later authors and copyists, to form a powerful and cohesive chemical tradition that favored distillation of specific substances as the means to extracting and purifying a certain vital essence of matter that could then be used to purify or perfect other bodies and substances. This substance was often called the fifth essence or quintessence (the Latin prefix ‘*quinta*’ meaning fifth) and was later known in the West as the tincture or philosopher’s stone. It became the tangible goal of most alchemical practice besides the production of simpler chemical medicines, though not all authors followed this Lullian tradition and held varying opinions on what the stone could be used for, the exact process of obtaining it, and from what material to begin the work.

Several medieval texts and their central ideas would come to form a tradition that would strongly influence d’Espagnet’s alchemy, and one of the earliest was the Catalan *Testamentum*, which appeared in the early 1330s. The unknown author was an experienced alchemist searching for the ‘*al-iksir*’ or ‘elixir,’ a substance referred to in earlier medieval Arabic chemical texts as an agent of transmutation and healing.<sup>216</sup> The author followed in the footsteps of a few 13<sup>th</sup> century chemists, most notably Pseudo-Geber/Jabir (a European who may also have been familiar with the works of the original Arabic Jabir) and Roger Bacon, and tied the elixir to the concept of a perfect ‘fifth essence’ that could be extracted from matter via distillation. Roger Bacon, a 13<sup>th</sup> century Englishman, had also sought through distillation and alchemy a means to prolong life and create precious metals. The elixir of life, philosopher’s stone, or fifth essence that he discussed was something like a spiritual form residing in mixed bodies and was a perfect substance that could perfect other substances.<sup>217</sup> Significantly in his case the starting ingredient was to be organic as opposed to mineral, and he looked most expressly to human blood as the ideal primary substance.<sup>218</sup>

Pseudo-Geber’s work, most importantly the *Summa perfectionis magisterii*, confirmed by the mid to late-13<sup>th</sup> century the European use of condensation as a method of distillation, and he provided the first known method for producing nitric acid as well as detailed descriptions of chemical equipment and processes for assaying and transmuting metals.<sup>219</sup> The text indicated a deep knowledge of Islamic alchemical practice and laboratory experience, and took the position that human arts such as alchemy were capable of producing things at least equal in quality to nature.

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<sup>216</sup> Michela Pereira, *The Alchemical Corpus Attributed to Raymond Lull* (London: Warburg Institute, 1989), 6.

<sup>217</sup> Moran, *Distilling Knowledge*, 21-24, and William R. Newman, “An Overview of Roger Bacon’s Alchemy,” in *Roger Bacon and the Sciences: Commemorative Essays 1996*, ed. Jeremiah Hackett (Boston, MA: Brill, 1997).

<sup>218</sup> Pereira, *The Alchemical Corpus Attributed to Raymond Lull*, 14, and Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 19.

<sup>219</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 12. The recipe for nitric acid appears in *De Inventionem Veritatis*.

It relayed an older, Islamic theory that all metals were fundamentally composed of different ratios of mercury and sulphur. Pseudo-Geber also demonstrated a clear interest in alcohol, reflective of a broader growing trend in medieval chemistry. Bruce Moran argues that this was understandable given the many fascinating properties of alcohol (another chemical word of Arabic origin signifying a dehydrated distillate), as it was a distilled liquid that could burn as well as dissolve matter that water would not.<sup>220</sup> It could also slow the decomposition of organic matter, lending weight to beliefs that it was linked to an elixir of life or universal medicine. William Newman also points to the *Summa perfectionis* as evidence for a medieval theory of corpuscles, according to which the basic particles of things are arranged in different ways as to alter permeability and susceptibility to change.<sup>221</sup> The *Summa perfectionis* was an incredibly influential medieval text on alchemy with a reputation for clarity and candidness, and d’Espagnet would recommend Geber centuries later in his own work.

By the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century the *Testamentum* and its later versions were attributed to Ramon Lull, a 12<sup>th</sup> century Catalan philosopher and polymath. Lull had written genuine medical works that were known at that time in Spain and Southern France, though he was not known to practice alchemy and did not write any of the 143 alchemical works misattributed to him.<sup>222</sup> Ironically, by d’Espagnet’s lifetime Pseudo-Lull’s alchemical thought would be much more popular than Ramon Lull’s genuine works. The author of the *Testamentum* did not claim to be Ramon Lull, but used similar figures and symbolic alphabets to the real Lull while also citing his genuine books.<sup>223</sup> The same author also claimed to have written the *Liber Lapidarii*, another

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<sup>220</sup> Moran, *Distilling Knowledge*, 12-13.

<sup>221</sup> William R. Newman, “The Corpuscular Theory of J.B. Van Helmont and its Medieval Sources,” *Vivarium* 31, No. 1 (1993): 167-170.

<sup>222</sup> Pereira, *The Alchemical Corpus Attributed to Raymond Lull*, 13.

<sup>223</sup> Pereira, *The Alchemical Corpus Attributed to Raymond Lull*, 7.



alchemical book that discussed the production of precious stones using *aqua subtiles* and mercury, a practice that he claimed was presided over by celestial influences.<sup>224</sup> The text supported catarchic astrology and the idea that the stars influenced medicine and alchemy among other terrestrial affairs, making astrology an essential topic of study for any physician or chemist.<sup>225</sup> The *Testamentum* suggested that the starting material for extraction of the elixir should be as near to perfect as possible to start, and thus gold or silver were recommended.<sup>226</sup> In the hands of the author of the *Testamentum*, known to us as Pseudo-Lull, alchemy had the three linked functions of transmutation, healing, and gem-making, and the distilled elixir or fifth essence was the chemical key to these goals.

Once the *Testamentum* had been attributed to Ramon Lull by the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, a number of summaries or supplemental texts appeared that attempted to explain the ideas of the *Testamentum* while also reconciling them with the concept of the fifth essence according to both Roger Bacon and another important 13<sup>th</sup> century alchemist, John of Rupescissa. These appeared under the titles *Testamentum ultimum* or *Testamentum novissimum*, and the composite tradition featured in this text became ‘the cornerstone of late 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century alchemy.’<sup>227</sup> John of Rupescissa was well-known in his own right in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, though Lull would eventually be given first billing for the idea of the fifth essence.

John of Rupescissa, like Roger Bacon, had also written about the fifth essence and its production via alchemy in his widely read *Book Concerning the Contemplation of the Fifth Essence of All Things*. Rupescissa is credited with developing the theory of distillation of the fifth essence of wine as the means to obtaining the elixir of life, which Pseudo-Lull would expand upon,

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<sup>224</sup> Pereira, *The Alchemical Corpus Attributed to Raymond Lull*, 9.

<sup>225</sup> Pereira, *The Alchemical Corpus Attributed to Raymond Lull*, 7.

<sup>226</sup> Moran, *Distilling Knowledge*, 21-22.

<sup>227</sup> Pereira, *The Alchemical Corpus Attributed to Raymond Lull*, 10.

though Rupescissa did also argue that the distillation processes were more important than the initial ingredients being distilled. Arguably more significant was his claim that the quintessence distilled from terrestrial matter was the same substance that composed the heavenly spheres, and that each individual metal contained a celestial essence that corresponded to a particular planet and medicinally affected a particular part of the body.<sup>228</sup> This position was questionable considering the prevailing matter theory of Aristotle, but was accepted by some later alchemists including d'Espagnet and was supported by other alchemically important writings such as the *Emerald Tablet*. According to the books more securely attributed to Rupescissa, such as the *Book Concerning the Contemplation of the Fifth Essence*, he seems to have only considered the quintessence to be a medicine. In the *Book of Light*, however, which is sometimes attributed to Rupescissa, the author is more concerned with metallurgy and gave the quintessence, a red tincture distilled from mercury, the power to perfect lesser metals into gold.<sup>229</sup>

Another text that further developed the theory of a connection between terrestrial and celestial matter was the *Codicillus*, first written as a supplement to the *Testamentum*. Its author explicitly claimed to have written the *Liber de intentione alchimistarum* as well as the *Testamentum*, and he claimed to be Ramon Lull. It is possible that the *Codicillus* was a later work by the same author, though it expressed many themes not found in the *Testamentum* that followed a more Hermetic view of man and his place in the cosmos.<sup>230</sup> The work imagined alchemical processes in terms of human reproduction and generation, expanding upon the theoretical themes of universal correspondences between things, especially between man the microcosm and the macrocosm. It emphasized the spiritual character of the true alchemist who received divine

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<sup>228</sup> Moran, *Distilling Knowledge*, 17-18.

<sup>229</sup> Pereira, *The Alchemical Corpus Attributed to Raymond Lull*, 14, and Moran, *Distilling Knowledge*, 19.

<sup>230</sup> Pereira, *The Alchemical Corpus Attributed to Raymond Lull*, 10-11.

illumination directly from God, giving the alchemist priestly qualities. These ideas were immensely influential for d’Espagnet. The text discussed a supernatural bond of ‘Love’ that tied the entire world together, and it is probably from this work that d’Espagnet came upon this same idea, as he would repeat it in his own alchemical works.<sup>231</sup> The *Codicillus* also reflected the notion found in John of Rupescissa that a form of divine mercury was to be found in all things, and that this substance was the first matter of creation described in Genesis. The fifth essence was a form of this mercury, and through it the heavenly bodies corresponded with plants, animals, metals, and things of creation. The vitality and activity of matter arose from this fifth essence, and thus to extract it would allow the alchemist to share this vital principle of perfection with other substances.<sup>232</sup> These two texts were extremely important sources for d’Espagnet’s alchemy.

The final significant Pseudo-Lullian alchemical text from this late medieval tradition was the *Liber de secretis naturae seu de quinta essentia*, which was written probably at the end of the fourteenth century.<sup>233</sup> The author of this text claimed to have written some of Lull’s genuine books, in spite of the centuries between their lifetimes, and clearly made a conscious effort to imitate the writing style of the real Lull as seen in his works on the *ars magna* or *ars combinatoria*. He acknowledged the ideas of the *Testamentum* and the other texts discussed above, and incorporated John of Rupescissa’s ideas on the fifth essence of wine.<sup>234</sup> The *Liber de secretis* ultimately represented an attempt to unify the alchemical practices described in the Pseudo-Lullian tradition with Rupescissa’s ideas on the fifth essence of wine, with the notable distinction that the fifth essence of wine or alcohol was now clearly directed toward transmutation. The book took over

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<sup>231</sup> Marsilio Ficino also made much of a cosmic force of ‘love’, considering it the most powerful magical force in the universe. See György E. Szönyi, “The Hermetic Revival in Renaissance Italy” in *The Occult World*, Vol. 2, ed. Christopher Partridge (New York: Routledge, 2014), 64.

<sup>232</sup> Moran, *Distilling Knowledge*, 20.

<sup>233</sup> Pereira, *The Alchemical Corpus Attributed to Raymond Lull*, 11.

<sup>234</sup> Pereira, *The Alchemical Corpus Attributed to Raymond Lull*, 11-12, Moran, *Distilling Knowledge*, 21.

and fully developed the alchemical technique of the fifth essence of wine, unifying it with complex alchemical systems including alchemical medicine, transmutation of metals, and the artificial production of precious stones.<sup>235</sup> The author proposed the notion that the quintessence was composed of the four classical Aristotelian elements in perfect balance, and suggested mercury, specifically the philosopher's mercury or 'our mercury,' as the primary agent of alchemical works.<sup>236</sup>

It was with this text that Lull's name began to overshadow that of John of Rupescissa, even when contemporary readers knew that both men had written works on the fifth essence. From this point onward the origins of the idea of the fifth essence and its uses were mistakenly attributed to Lull, and more and more alchemical books began to be credited to him, contributing to the legend of Lull the alchemist.<sup>237</sup> Psuedo-Lull's fifth essence was securely tied to transmutation and medicine as well as the metallic theories of the alchemical tradition, with the work creating an elixir from metallic ingredients that could both work as a medicine and perfect base metals.<sup>238</sup> This legend would be borne out not only by the books attributed to him but also by stories written about how he came to be converted to the science of alchemy, and the trials, tribulations, and triumphs he experienced as a result of his coveted knowledge of the secrets of nature. These stories had a semi-mythological bent and attempted to place Lull, alchemical knowledge, and the authorship of alchemical texts securely within a historical narrative. They tied him to kings and famed personages and offered explanations for the original production of the texts, theoretically in violation of a tradition of secrecy, that now purported to reveal his alchemical secrets. These

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<sup>235</sup> Pereira, *The Alchemical Corpus Attributed to Raymond Lull*, 9.

<sup>236</sup> Pereira, *The Alchemical Corpus Attributed to Raymond Lull*, 14.

<sup>237</sup> Pereira, *The Alchemical Corpus Attributed to Raymond Lull*, 18.

<sup>238</sup> Pereira, *The Alchemical Corpus Attributed to Raymond Lull*, 18, and Chiara Crisciani, "From the Laboratory to the Library: Alchemy According to Guglielmo Fabri," in *Natural Particulars: Nature and the Disciplines in Renaissance Europe*, ed. Anthony Grafton and Nancy Siraisi (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), 297-298.

stories and legends continued to be read and printed in the seventeenth century and lent spirit to the image of the alchemist as one tapping into an underground of occult knowledge.<sup>239</sup> In the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries Pseudo-Lullian alchemy continued to garner attention and was linked in varying degrees to the systems of natural and religious knowledge crafted by some of the major esoteric thinkers of the Italian Renaissance, who will be the subjects of the next chapter.

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<sup>239</sup> For example, the legend from the *Testamentum Cremeri*, published in Michael Maier's *Tripus aureus* in 1618. *Tripus Aureus* or The Golden Tripod was written by Maier and published in 1618 by Lucas Jennis. It contained three alchemical texts: the "twelve keys" of Basil Valentine, Thomas Norton's *Ordinal of Alchemy* (1477), and the *Testament of Cremer*.

## CHAPTER 4. RENAISSANCE ESOTERICISM: MARSILIO FICINO, LATE ANTIQUE PHILOSOPHY, AND THE *PRISCA THEOLOGIA*

Other intellectual developments of the 15<sup>th</sup> century were also essential prerequisites to the formation of d’Espagnet’s worldview and philosophical interests. Linked to the development of Pseudo-Lullian alchemy but more widely influential was the Renaissance revival of several esoteric traditions from Classical and Late Antiquity, especially Neoplatonism and its related theological-philosophical bodies of ideas such as Hermetism. These traditions reemerged in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century predominantly thanks to Marsilio Ficino, though others, especially Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Ludovico Lazzarrelli, contributed significantly in their own way and with their own special emphases that would also pave the way for d’Espagnet’s thought. These men spent their scholarly careers interpreting mystical philosophical traditions as part of a unified body of ancient and divinely revealed wisdom that they believed to be intimately interlinked with Christian theology, revelation, and salvation.

Marsilio Ficino worked as a translator, commentator, and author under the patronage of the Médicis in Florence, where over more than three decades he translated numerous works of Classical and Late Antiquity and wrote several books and commentaries of his own. These translated texts included a nearly complete copy of the *Corpus Hermeticum* (published in 1471 under the title *Liber de Potestate et Sapientia Dei* or *Pimander*, the latter being the name given to the *nous* or mind of the One in the first tract), the entire extant works of Plato, the works of Alcinous, Xenocrates, Porphyry, Proclus, Psellus, Plotinus, the *Mystic Theology* and *Divine Names* of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, 39 of the Pythagorean *symbola*, and Iamblichus’ four works on Pythagoreanism including *On the Pythagorean Life*, to name some of the most significant.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Ebeling, *Secret History*, 60, and Szönyi, “The Hermetic Revival,” 55-56.

Ficino's patron Cosimo de Médicis had been so excited by the potential translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* that he had Ficino postpone the planned translation of Plato's major works, the *Republic* and *Symposium*.<sup>241</sup> Ficino founded a Platonic academy in Florence, drawing scholars from across the Mediterranean world to lend new energy to the study of esoteric texts of late Antiquity. In 1473 he was ordained a priest, and there is no doubt that Ficino perceived a resonance between his Christian beliefs and the mystical Neoplatonic works he had and would continue to translate. Ficino's own writings included *On the Christian Religion* (1476), *Platonic Theology* (1482), *Three Books on Life* (1489) and *On the Sun and Light* (1493). His *Platonic Theology* was named after, and heavily influenced by, Proclus' own *Platonic Theology*. In 1497 he collected his 'esoteric' translations into a single anthology and finally began a commentary on the letters of St. Paul, though this was left unfinished at his death in 1499. A simplified chronology of his intellectual life and work over these decades began from orthodox Christian theology, then to Platonism, followed by Hermetic esotericism before returning to strongly Platonic understanding of Christian theology, thanks to the influence of Plato and the Neoplatonists he had devoted so much time to studying.<sup>242</sup>

Along with his contributions to Renaissance Neoplatonism, thanks to his translations of the *Corpus Hermeticum* Ficino was responsible for the birth of modern Hermetism in Europe.<sup>243</sup> Though some of the Hermetic writings, like the *Asclepius*, were known, at least in part, to medieval theologians like Peter Abelard, Nicholas of Cusa, and Meister Eckhardt, the profile of Hermes was

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<sup>241</sup> Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), 12-13.

<sup>242</sup> Szönyi, "The Hermetic Revival," 55-56.

<sup>243</sup> On the distinction between Hermetism and Hermeticism, see Wouter J. Hanegraaf, "Ludovico Lazzarelli and the Hermetic Christ: At the Sources of Renaissance Hermetism," in *Lodovico Lazzarelli (1447-1500): the Hermetic writings and Related Documents*, ed. Wouter Hanegraaff and Ruud M. Bouthoorn (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), p.2, note 1, and Antoine Faivre, "Renaissance Hermeticism and the Concept of Western Esotericism," in *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times*, ed. Roelof van den Broek and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 109-23.

known through Arabic Hermetic texts. Ficino lent them new life and authority, and the *Pimander* went through 24 printed editions by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>244</sup> Ficino drew on the writings of Cicero, Lactantius, and Augustine of Hippo to craft a biographical sketch of the life and legacy of Hermes Trismegistus, often called Mercury.<sup>245</sup> This narrative, outlined in the preface to the *Pimander*, drew on the “classical topos of Egypt as the origin of wisdom” and established Hermes as the incarnation of this wisdom.<sup>246</sup> Ficino discussed ancient Egyptian history and the time of Moses, placing Hermes among famous doctors and astrologers named after mythological figures and gods, and even claiming that Hermes himself was worshipped as a God by the Egyptians. Hermes had received through the Holy Spirit knowledge of the sacred mysteries of the cosmos, which he then preserved through secret oral traditions as well as in writing (Ficino credits him with the invention of writing), helping to cement his place as the father of philosophy and theology and explaining the ancient origins of the Hermetic writings.<sup>247</sup> Ficino’s Hermes prophesied the downfall of ancient religions, the coming of Christ, and the Biblical Judgment and Resurrection, explained through the revelatory intervention of the Holy Spirit. He was first in a line of ancient sages that featured Pythagoras, Orpheus, Philolaus (and in Ficino’s later thought, Zoroaster), among others, culminating in “divine Plato.”<sup>248</sup> Ficino even considered that Moses and Hermes might have been the same person, given their Egyptian origins and role as patriarchs of theology. Wouter Hanegraaf has recently pointed out that after his work on *Pimander* and its influential preface, Ficino changed his mind and promoted Zoroaster to the first or eldest position the

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<sup>244</sup> Maurizio Campanelli, “Marsilio Ficino’s Portrait of Hermes Trismegistus and its Afterlife,” *Intellectual History Review* 29, No. 1 (2019): 53, and Ebeling, *Secret History*, 54.

<sup>245</sup> Augustine was ultimately critical of the Hermetic writings and concluded that Hermes’ prophecies and revelations had actually come from demons, and consequently Ficino relied more heavily on Lactantius. See Campanelli, “Marsilio Ficino’s Portrait of Hermes Trismegistus,” 54-55, and Ebeling, *Secret History*, 63.

<sup>246</sup> Ebeling, *Secret History*, 61-62.

<sup>247</sup> Ebeling, *Secret History*, 64.

<sup>248</sup> Ficino, preface to *Pimander*, as quoted in Ebeling, *Secret History*, 62.



chronology of the *prisca theologia*.<sup>249</sup> Yet, as Maurizio Campanelli demonstrates, the original picture of Hermes that Ficino laid out in *Pimander* was repeated almost verbatim in several further editions and commentaries and would have been an extremely familiar and likely the preeminent image of the mythical sage.<sup>250</sup> That is, even if Ficino changed his own mind later, his original depiction still strongly influenced philosophers interested in the Hermetic writings.

Ficino had in *Pimander* established a genealogy of knowledge, revealed by the Holy Spirit and stewarded by a succession of great philosophers whose unfortunate paganism did not prevent them from confirming the truth of Christianity long before its historical conception. In doing so he developed the concept of a “single, internally consistent, primal theology” (*prisca theologia*) of which Hermes was the progenitor, granting him a place of great significance and authority in a teleological history of religious truth.<sup>251</sup> It also positioned Plato and his philosophy, as descended from Hermes, as divinely sanctioned participants in this transmission of knowledge, even fashioning him into a prophet of Christianity. Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim taught a course on Hermes based on Ficino’s translations in 1515 at the University of Pavia and agreed with Ficino about Hermes’ great age.<sup>252</sup> The term ‘Platonic Orientalism’ is sometimes used, for instance by John Walbridge and Wouter Hanegraaf, to refer to the interest of Ficino, Pico, and others in ancient Egyptian, Persian, and Hebrew philosophy, as represented by the works attributed to Zoroaster, Hermes, and Moses.<sup>253</sup> This framework suggested that Christianity had inherited an “extremely ancient tradition of universal wisdom” handed down through Platonic sources, and that these

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<sup>249</sup> Hanegraaf, “Hermes Trismegistus and Hermetism,” 5-6.

<sup>250</sup> Campanelli, “Marsilio Ficino’s Portrait of Hermes Trismegistus,” 58-59.

<sup>251</sup> Ficino, *Pimander*, as quoted in Ebeling, *Secret History*, 62.

<sup>252</sup> Campanelli examines in detail the textual legacy of Ficino’s biography of Hermes in “Marsilio Ficino’s Portrait of Hermes Trismegistus.”

<sup>253</sup> John Walbridge, *The Wisdom of the Mystic East: Suhrawardi and Platonic Orientalism*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001).

teachings of pagan philosophy and religion could be fruitfully reconciled with Christian doctrine.<sup>254</sup>

In short, Ficino gave these men and their ideas a place in the history of Christianity and incorporated these ideas into his own religious outlook with the weight he believed they deserved. This portrayal would persist in the minds of many philosophers despite later philological studies, like those of Isaac Casaubon in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, that sought to correct this narrative.<sup>255</sup> Indeed, Casaubon published in 1617 his arguments placing the origins of the Hermetic writings in Late Antiquity, just as D’Espagnet was preparing to write his alchemical works. Yet d’Espagnet neither mentioned Casaubon nor ever questioned the antiquity or authority of the Hermetic writings. Even a generation later two of d’Espagnet’s English translators, John Everard and Elias Ashmole, remained fully convinced of Hermes’ antiquity and authority, and Everard’s preface to his own translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* reflected the same sentiments of reverence and credulity.<sup>256</sup>

Ficino had little to say explicitly about alchemy, but some of his metaphysical ideas indirectly gave alchemists a strong foundation to build on. In his cosmology Ficino adopted from Plotinus an idea of seminal principles, which Plotinus had derived from the Stoic doctrine of the “seeds of the logos” (*logoi spermatikoi*).<sup>257</sup> Theories of seeds played a major role in early modern alchemical cosmologies and theories of matter, and Ficino’s influence can be seen in the work of Paracelsus, Jean Fernel and beyond.<sup>258</sup> Newman and Grafton credit Ficino with connecting the

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<sup>254</sup> Wouter J. Hanegraaf, “Hermes Trismegistus and Hermetism,” *Encyclopedia of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Marco Sgarbi (Springer International Publishing, 2018), 4.

<sup>255</sup> Ebeling, *Secret History*, 91-92

<sup>256</sup> John Everard, *The Divine Pymander of Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus in XVII Books* (London: Robert White, 1650).

<sup>257</sup> Hiroshi Hirai, “*Logoi Spermatikoi* and the Concept of Seeds in the Mineralogy and Cosmogony of Paracelsus,” *Revue d’histoire des sciences* 61, No. 2 (2008): 16-19.

<sup>258</sup> Hirai, “*Logoi Spermatikoi* and the Concept of Seeds,” 20

quintessence extractable by fire with the vital celestial spirit of the cosmos, though as we have seen this connection had already been made in the Pseudo-Lullian corpus.<sup>259</sup> While one could fill volumes with analyses of Neoplatonic and Hermetic philosophy and their implications for Renaissance thought, suffice it to say that Ficino and the philosophers who followed him saw in Platonism and its later interpretations many characteristics that resonated with and expanded their own metaphysical ideas as established in their Christian religious outlook. Neoplatonists like Plotinus and Proclus in their day had attempted to build and flesh out a theology and cosmology based on Platonic foundations, and remnants of their ideas and the ideas they adapted linking the many to the one informed medieval philosophy and alchemy.<sup>260</sup>

Beyond this, establishing the *prisca theologia* paradigm essentially legitimized a huge number of ancient polytheistic spiritual texts, carrying over their mystical ideas too. Some of Ficino's own writings, especially his *Three Books on Life*, delve deeply into the magical and mystical spaces opened by these traditions, discussing occult sympathies between stars and the human body (a common basis for medicine and astrology and reflective of Ficino's training as a physician) but also talismanic magic and ceremonies to commune with the *anima mundi*.<sup>261</sup> Ficino also clearly knew of the medieval Arabic magical handbook *Picatrix*, a work concerned with Hermetism, sympathetic magic, astrology, spirits, and demons, for he referenced it in personal letters if not in any published work.<sup>262</sup> This is a deep issue that I will not deal with here, for it is not directly relevant to d'Espagnet as far as I understand his thought. It is nonetheless significant that these kinds of magical agency represent paths not taken for d'Espagnet, choices I believe were

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<sup>259</sup> Newman and Grafton, "Introduction: The Problematic Status of Astrology and Alchemy," 24-25.

<sup>260</sup> For instance, Augustine's theory of seminal reasons transmitted the Stoic *logoi spermatikoi* into the Middle Ages: see Hirai, "Logoi Spermatikoi and the Concept of Seeds," 3, and Michael Lapidge, "The Stoic Inheritance," in *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, ed. Peter Dronke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 81-112.

<sup>261</sup> Szönyi, "The Hermetic Revival," 61, and Copenhaver, "Natural Magic, Hermetism, and Occultism," 270-276.

<sup>262</sup> Szönyi, "The Hermetic Revival," 63.

reasoned and deliberate. Ficino was far from alone in his magical interests, as we shall see, and these interests and beliefs made perfect sense within the context of the traditions they were drawing on. D’Espagnet never betrayed any affinity for ritual or talismanic magic, but his cosmology depended on sympathetic and occult forces, and he must have drawn a distinction between these kinds of forces and mankind’s control over them. Like Ficino, though, d’Espagnet was undoubtedly a Christian Platonist who sought to defend and explain Christian theology through recourse to the philosophy of Plato and his successors.<sup>263</sup>

### **Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Christian Cabala, Neoplatonism, and Syncretic Philosophy**

A contemporary of Ficino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s contributions to Renaissance philosophy and Christian occultism were significant despite his short life. Pico was associated with Ficino and the Platonic Academy, as a colleague and even a rival interpreter, not merely as a disciple as he has sometimes been cast.<sup>264</sup> Like Ficino, he was intensely interested in the mystical traditions of Antiquity and spent his life engaged in translation projects with the help of other scholars, notably of Arabic, Hebrew, and Aramaic, attempting to learn many languages to gain access to further sources of ancient knowledge. He was enthralled by many of the same Neoplatonic philosophers and sought the same syncretic harmony with his Christian faith, believing that there was ultimately one body of true and ancient philosophy that could be arrived at through his syncretic methods. Beyond Ficino’s translated sources Pico cast his net even wider, working on the writings of other Neoplatonists, several commentaries on Plato and Aristotle

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<sup>263</sup> Jörg Lauster, “Marsilio Ficino as a Christian Thinker,” *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, ed. Michael Allen et al. (Boston, MA: Brill, 2002), 68.

<sup>264</sup> Szönyi, “The Hermetic Revival,” 57.

(especially medieval Arabic ones) not yet widely known to his fellow scholars, as well as, most significantly, his own take on the Kabbalistic tradition of scriptural interpretation.

Pico is most well-known for his incredibly ambitious *900 Theses* or *Conclusiones DCCCC*, published in 1486 and which he proposed to debate at Rome before the college of cardinals and Pope Innocent VIII, whom he expected to act as judge. At his proposed disputation, Pico planned to discuss “all teachings” and “all sects,” believing that with his methodologies and ‘*philosophia nova*’ he could answer “every proposed question on natural and divine things” and reconcile ancient philosophers with one another and with Christian teachings.<sup>265</sup> Innocent VIII quickly suppressed the idea, but the theses were printed nonetheless. Thirteen of the theses were condemned as heretical, forcing Pico to write an *Apologia*, and the work as a whole became the first printed book “banned universally by the church.”<sup>266</sup>

The scope of Pico’s *Theses* was truly massive, engaging with a range of traditions unparalleled in the fifteenth century, discussing “hundreds of philosophical and theological conflicts... Renaissance Neo-Platonism and classicism (or so-called humanism) in general... natural magic, numerology, astrology, Kabbalah, and related esoteric traditions... and scores of other topics tied to the complex traditions of the period.”<sup>267</sup> Pico wrote to Ficino in September of 1486 to tell him of the discoveries he had made in unknown and ancient Arabic and Chaldean writings, including proof that Zoroaster had predicted the coming of Jesus Christ, discoveries that compelled him irresistibly to continue his studies in this direction.<sup>268</sup> Pico had a reputation for a sharp mind and incredible powers of memory, and at the age of twenty-three Pico was already

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<sup>265</sup> From Pico’s *Conclusiones DCCCC*, as quoted in Stephen Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, x, 10-11.

<sup>266</sup> Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, x.

<sup>267</sup> Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, x.

<sup>268</sup> Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 42.

promising a discussion of “everything knowable.”<sup>269</sup> One of his boldest claims was that he could prove that Aristotle and Plato in fact agreed with one another completely in meaning and substance, and that any perceived conflict was only verbal, not actual; they only seemed to disagree.<sup>270</sup> His was a self-consciously syncretic project, and in fact would have been the most extreme and wide-ranging example of syncretism in Western history.<sup>271</sup> Pico drew on Platonic and Aristotelian commentaries, esoteric writings attributed to Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Pythagoras, Orpheus, and other ancient theologians in accordance with the idea of *prisci theologia* to build “comprehensive systems of natural magic and... numerological prophecy...,” and looked to Jewish mysticism in Kabbalah to further confirm these understandings.<sup>272</sup>

Christian Cabala, of which Pico was the first practitioner, was essentially a theory and practice of biblical hermeneutics aimed at discovering the hidden and encoded meanings in words and individual letters, including their physical shapes and numerical values according to the alphanumerical system of *gematria*, within scripture: “... in Pico’s first or historical set of Cabalistic theses, we find that there is no letter or even part of a letter in the Torah that does not conceal divine secrets; in his second set, presented ‘according to his own opinion,’ Pico was prepared to unveil the Christian truths that Moses hid in the Law in the order of otherwise trivial words... or even in single strokes of single letters...”<sup>273</sup> Most early Cabalistic ventures by Christians were aimed at borrowing these techniques to prove the truth of Trinitarian Christianity and to confirm the divine and messianic status of Jesus Christ. In a sense they saw themselves as utilizing the Jews’ own weapons against them, and often did so with help and intimate knowledge

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<sup>269</sup> Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, x.

<sup>270</sup> Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 56.

<sup>271</sup> Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, p. 17, footnote 47, and 93. The sheer quantity of traditions and primary sources available for synthesis meant that Pico’s project was unmatched in scale.

<sup>272</sup> Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 11.

<sup>273</sup> Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 63.

about Judaism from *conversos* like Flavius Mithridates, who was one of Pico's instructors and translators in Aramaic and Hebrew.

But Kabbalah could be much more than this, and in the hands of Pico the Christian Platonist, in a similar fashion to Neoplatonic theurgy, it was a means of understanding and unlocking hidden paths to the soul's ascension, understanding the secrets encoded in scripture and returning up the ontological hierarchy toward mystical union with God, the One.<sup>274</sup> Pico's Kabbalah was primarily based on the writings of two thirteenth century Jewish scholars, Abraham Abulafia (ecstatic) and the Italian Rabbi Menahem Recanati (theosophical-theurgical).<sup>275</sup> Recanati was interested in ten sefirot as divine emanations and engaged in symbolic exegesis of Scripture as the way to unravel their mysteries. Abulafia was interested in the names (*shemot*) of God and their permutations as a spiritual discipline by which man could attain union with the divine.<sup>276</sup> Pico was the first author raised as a Christian who had an appreciable understanding of genuine Jewish Kabbalah, marking a new era of Hebrew studies in Europe.<sup>277</sup> Pico brought together Kabbalah, magic, and Christian theology and laid the foundations for future Christian Kabbalists to be theologians, magi, or both.<sup>278</sup> He was a major reference for the Kabbalistic interests of 16<sup>th</sup> century occultists like Agrippa, Reuchlin, Panteo, and Khunrath.<sup>279</sup>

Pico followed Ficino in considering the importance of the *prisca theologia* tradition, but complicated it by arguing that there was another secret lore hidden in the biblical writings of Moses

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<sup>274</sup> See Brian Copenhaver, "The Secret of Pico's Oration: Cabala and Renaissance Philosophy," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 26 (2002): 63-66, and passim.

<sup>275</sup> Peter Forshaw, "Christian Kabbalah," *The Cambridge Handbook of Western Mysticism and Esotericism*, ed. Glenn Alexander Magee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 71.

<sup>276</sup> Forshaw, "Christian Kabbalah," 144.

<sup>277</sup> Forshaw, "Christian Kabbalah," 143-144.

<sup>278</sup> Forshaw, "Christian Kabbalah," 145.

<sup>279</sup> Forshaw, "Christian Kabbalah," 146. See also Christopher S. Celenza, "The Search for Ancient Wisdom in Early Modern Europe: Reuchlin and the Late Ancient Esoteric Paradigm," *Journal of Religious History* 25, No. 2 (June, 2001), 115-133.

in addition to a common or surface level one.<sup>280</sup> 119 in total of the *900 Theses*, especially the final 72, concerned Kabbalah, and Pico sought to ground the *prisca theologia* tradition in Kabbalah more than the pagan wisdom of ancient Chaldea and Egypt like Ficino.<sup>281</sup> Because of its perceived links to Moses he viewed it as more holy than the Zoroastrian or Hermetic writings, and this emphasis is seen in the theses. Pico appears less interested in the Hermetic writings than Ficino and Lazzarelli and later alchemists like d'Espagnet; only 10 of the theses referred directly to Hermes.<sup>282</sup> He did cite Asclepius in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, to stress that man was unique in his freedom and capacity to behave as an animal or through piety and learning approach divinity.<sup>283</sup> Spiritual union with God was possible in this life through purification, illumination, and perfection, like the cherubim according to Pseudo-Dionysius. Pico argued that we must purify our souls through reason and moral science to restrain the impulses of our passions so that we might receive while mortal the gift of immortality.<sup>284</sup>

There was considerable overlap between Pico's interests in Kabbalah and Neoplatonism. This assimilation to God was also the purpose of philosophy for late Platonists, though some disagreed as to how to go about this and on the exact place of the human soul in the cosmic hierarchy. The writings of the late Antique Neoplatonists were very systematic in their approach to theology and cosmology. Plotinus' *Enneads*, edited by his student Porphyry, laid out his emanationist ontology, according to which the levels or hypostases of being "emanated" outward or downward from the transcendent One. The One "overflows" to the next level of the *Nous* or Intellect, where Platonic forms dwell. *Nous* overflowed into the level of *Psyche* or Soul, which

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<sup>280</sup> Szönyi, "The Hermetic Revival," 64.

<sup>281</sup> Forshaw, "Christian Kabbalah," 144.

<sup>282</sup> Ebeling, *Secret History*, 66-68.

<sup>283</sup> Ebeling, *Secret History*, 67-68.

<sup>284</sup> György E. Szönyi, "The Hermetic Revival," 60.



then emanated the final and lowest level of matter or *Hyle*, and the human soul straddled the line between these final two, giving us a foot in both worlds, as it were.<sup>285</sup> This understanding of reality and creation was known as emanationism and was not particularly difficult to reconcile with the account of Genesis, and Farmer writes that emanationism had already been reconciled with creationism.<sup>286</sup> Especially relevant for Pico, it was also easy to link with Kabbalistic notions of the ten *sefirot* as emanated attributes of God.<sup>287</sup> Iamblichus and Proclus argued (against Plotinus, Porphyry, et al.) that the human soul had descended through the realms of being that had emanated from the One *fully* into the body in the lowest, material plane, and advocated theurgical ritual practices as opposed to purely contemplative philosophy as the means to bridge this gap back to the One. Pico was deeply influenced by Proclus, his single greatest source for the *900 Theses*, over 100 of which were based on Proclus' writings, and both Pico and Proclus sought confirmation of their cosmologies in the Chaldean Oracles and the Orphic writings.<sup>288</sup> Szönyi tells us that Pico described the processes of mystical ascension and union in terms of Neoplatonic Hermetism, though the practice itself would utilize kabbalistic techniques. Pico shared with Ficino and others the worldview that the "mobilization of occult willpower" was a means to a form of enlightenment.<sup>289</sup> Humans could return the soul through the hypostases of the Plotinian emanation to an exalted and ecstatic union with the divine.<sup>290</sup>

Ficino and Pico saw in the writings of Hermes, the Neoplatonists, and other oracular and mystical texts of late Antiquity a set of metaphysical principles very much in line with those of Christianity, especially regarding theories of Forms and matter (i.e. hylomorphism), the dichotomy

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<sup>285</sup> Christopher S. Celenza, "Late Antiquity and Florentine Platonism: the 'Post-Plotinian' Ficino," in *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, ed. Michael J.B. Allen et al. (Brill, 2002), 75.

<sup>286</sup> Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 19-21.

<sup>287</sup> Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 71.

<sup>288</sup> Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 20.

<sup>289</sup> Szönyi, "The Hermetic Revival," 64.

<sup>290</sup> Szönyi, "The Hermetic Revival," 58.

between spirit and matter as good and evil or superior and inferior, and of the immortal Soul and the possibility of its ascension to God. In many ways this would not have been difficult, for the metaphysics of Christianity were based in Hellenic philosophy to begin with and the Church Fathers<sup>291</sup> and later schoolmen who helped to solidify Christian doctrine were themselves deeply steeped in Hellenic thought.<sup>292</sup>

Further, the texts modern scholars identify as ‘Neoplatonic’ were produced in the same Hellenic Mediterranean period and milieu of early Christianity and can be largely characterized as works of syncretic philosophy. The writings that Ficino found the most fascinating, like those of Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Proclus, were in their own time attempts at the systematization and reconciliation of Classical Greek and near Eastern bodies of thought, and often with recourse to the same mystical texts, like the Chaldean Oracles or Orphic tradition, that Ficino also connected with them in formulating his own thought. For example, Iamblichus, in his *De Mysteriis*, self-consciously identified his own thought as a synthesis of Platonic philosophy, Egyptian wisdom (i.e. the Corpus Hermeticum) and notions drawn from the Chaldean Oracles.<sup>293</sup> Already in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century he believed he was hearkening back to an earlier, ancient wisdom, while simultaneously recognizing a contemporary need for agentic and ritualistic practices if Platonism was to flourish. Ironically, what appeared to Ficino and other syncretists like Pico as further evidence for the idea of a common divinely inspired thread of knowledge is to historians an

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<sup>291</sup> E.g. St. Augustine of Hippo. See Celenza, “Late Antiquity and Florentine Platonism,” 82. See also Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923): 523-547, for a discussion on the fusion of pagan and Christian thought in late Antiquity.

<sup>292</sup> Celenza, “Late Antiquity and Florentine Platonism,” 79: “Late ancient thinkers, both Christian and pagan, were in the throes of creating new religious paradigms and were attempting to satisfy the religious needs which were being manifested in the Mediterranean world. In the late third and early fourth centuries, Christianity was one among hundreds of religions. Despite the fact that its early architects were utilizing many Platonic themes in constructing Christian ideology among them the immortality of the soul, themes of return, and a radical spirit/matter distinction there were certain things which Christianity possessed that were lacking in Platonic paganism. Especially important among these factors were a well-defined soteriology and efficacious rituals that aimed at uniformity.”

<sup>293</sup> Celenza, “Late Antiquity and Florentine Platonism,” 81.

example of the human and historical processes of philosophical borrowing and accrual in textual traditions over a very long period.<sup>294</sup> They also misidentified authors and their chronology, lending ancient authors authority that helped to justify their syncretic projects: they condensed an “epoch of vast changes into a unity... a coherent ancient wisdom of Chaldean, Orphic, Hermetic, Pythagorean, Platonic, and other philosophies, a *prisca theologia* of Greek and barbarian doctrines to support the revelations of the Bible.”<sup>295</sup> Hermes is the most obvious example, with the mystical and angelic theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite as another: Ficino, Pico, and contemporaries believed the latter to be a first century companion of St. Paul, though he most likely lived and wrote in the late fifth and early sixth centuries, chronologically near to Proclus from whom he borrowed heavily for his writings on Christian theology.

In short, misunderstanding the nature of historical causality in exegetical traditions, Ficino and others mistook the ubiquity of Platonic themes and the frequent ease of reconciling ancient texts as proof that they were on the right track in hunting a shared divine revelation. He wove Hermetic and Neoplatonic ideas into a workable syncretic Christian worldview that would be clearly reflected in the cosmologies of later Hermeticists and alchemists like d’Espagnet. The result of this belief for Ficino and those who followed him in this interpretation was a search for common themes and characteristics in many ancient doctrines of religion and philosophy, driving a robust syncretism that assumed threads of divinely revealed truth to be woven through ancient traditions. Farmer has suggested that textual exegetical traditions tend toward syncretism as they mature. These cumulative syncretic processes over time tend toward complexity, hierarchical organization, and relationships of correspondence or proportion, descriptors that are applicable to the cosmologies described here; ontological hierarchies with microcosmic and macrocosmic

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<sup>294</sup> See Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 71, 91

<sup>295</sup> Copenhaver, “The Secret of Pico’s Oration,” 59-60.

sympathies between them. Also evident in these traditions is the tendency toward abstraction of concepts and signifiers as reconciliation became more difficult, with the result that as complexity and syncretism increased the philosophical laws and concepts in question drifted ever further from their original meanings. That is, side by side comparisons of texts considered authoritative, something less feasible in oral traditions, demanded attempts at reconciliation that resulted in increased abstraction and insistence on allegorical readings. As a consequence, Early Modern Christians could stretch their interpretations of these traditions to support their own religious and scientific positions. After this high point of syncretism in the Renaissance, Farmer argues that it began a slow decline.<sup>296</sup> Yet d’Espagnet is a clear example of exactly this manner of syncretism over a century later, and he was not alone (e.g. Robert Fludd), even if some contemporaries like Francis Bacon do appear to have been moving away from this way of thinking.<sup>297</sup>

### Hermetism and Alchemy

Ficino had translated the first fourteen tracts or dialogues of the *Corpus Hermeticum* which were printed under the title *Pimander*, and these were perhaps based on a version of the texts that was compiled by Michael Psellus in 11<sup>th</sup> century Byzantium.<sup>298</sup> These were not the only Hermetic tracts and were seemingly the product of a deliberate pruning of the dialogues with more explicitly magical elements during the middle ages.<sup>299</sup> Ludovico Lazzarelli (1447-1500), who like Pico

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<sup>296</sup> Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 133-134. “As we see in Pico, printing made more sources more widely available than at any earlier stage of Western history, encouraging syncretically minded thinkers to incorporate increasingly broad bodies of traditions into their systems and rendering those systems progressively open to philological and scientific attack. With each leap in complexity, those systems retreated further and further from the original sense of the traditions involved in their synthesis and from any views of nature even remotely suggested by empirical observation.”

<sup>297</sup> Francis Bacon, *New Organon*, ed. Lisa Jardine and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 45.

<sup>298</sup> See Brian Copenhaver, *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a new English translation with notes and introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), xlii. These were printed without Ficino’s knowledge or permission and contained numerous errors.

<sup>299</sup> Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, xli.

sought confirmation of his Christian religion in Kabbalah and Late Antique philosophy, translated the remaining three dialogues known to us under the title *Diffinitiones Asclepii* (published in 1507 by Symphorien Champier, one of King Louis XII's physicians), as well as a final one called *Asclepius*.<sup>300</sup> Lazzarelli went even further than Ficino had and argued that Hermes had lived before Moses, a controversial chronology that drew attention in the debates surrounding Hermetism, considering the importance of Moses' revelations in the Judeo-Christian tradition.<sup>301</sup>

Lazzarelli also wrote his own work around 1492-1494, *A Dialogue on the Supreme Dignity of Man, entitled The Way of Christ and the Mixing-Bowl of Hermes (Crater Hermetis)*, which was modeled on the Hermetic writings in which Lazzarelli himself played the role of Hermes or Asclepius as the enlightened and semi-divine guide to the hermetic mysteries.<sup>302</sup> In the dialogue Lazzarelli led his initiates, who represented King Ferdinand of Aragon, known as Ferrante and to whom the text was originally dedicated, as well as the King's Secretary of State, Giovanni Pontano, through allegorical exegeses of scriptural passages. Lazzarelli claimed that his knowledge and understanding were a result of Pimander entering into his body as he had for Hermes, and Lazzarelli boldly identified Pimander as the second person of the Trinity who would be incarnated as Jesus Christ.<sup>303</sup> The *gnosis* offered by Pimander-Christ allowed man to take up the powers of creation like God his father and even attain the ability to create souls. In part thanks to ideas like these Hanegraaf argues that Lazzarelli was the truest inheritor of the Hermetic legacy in the Renaissance, even more so than Ficino or Pico. It is also noteworthy the Lazzarelli was

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<sup>300</sup> Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Lodovico Lazzarelli and the Hermetic Christ," 4. These final three tracts are confusingly numbered XVI-XVIII, a consequence of the addition of a fifteenth Hermetic excerpt by Adrien Turnèbe in a Greek edited version of 1554. Subsequent editors removed the added excerpt but retained the numbering. The Latin *Asclepius*, based upon a Greek original that is not extant in its entirety, was available to Western European scholars in the Middle Ages.

<sup>301</sup> Campanelli, "Marsilio Ficino's Portrait of Hermes Trismegistus," 58.

<sup>302</sup> Hanegraaf, "Ludovico Lazzarelli and the Hermetic Christ," 57.

<sup>303</sup> Hanegraaf, "Ludovico Lazzarelli and the Hermetic Christ," 61-62.

demonstrably interested in the Geberian and Pseudo-Lullian alchemical traditions as well as some Cabalistic texts such as Eleazar of Worms' commentary on the *Sefer Yetzirah*. While the *Crater* is not an alchemical work, Chiara Crisciani argues that it borrowed heavily from and generally agreed with alchemical and magical texts like those of Pseudo-Lull and the *Picatrix*, among others, when it came to cosmology and natural philosophy.<sup>304</sup>

Despite Lazzarelli's work, Ficino's version of the first fourteen tracts was much more widely known and printed, appearing in several editions with commentaries over the next several centuries; nine of the seventeen editions of the *Corpus Hermeticum* printed up to 1600 were based on Ficino's translations. Some editions, including a widely read Basel edition of 1576, included the *Asclepius* but not C.H. XVI-XVIII.<sup>305</sup> New Latin translations were produced by Francois Foix de Candale, at Bordeaux in 1574, to be reprinted in Cologne in 1600, and by Francesco Patrizi in Ferrara in 1591.<sup>306</sup> Annibale Rosselli, borrowing extensively from Ficino's vision of Hermes, wrote a lengthy commentary on the *Asclepius* and *Pimander*, the fourth volume of which was published 1584.<sup>307</sup> In short, there were numerous commentaries on and editions of the *Pimander* between Ficino and d'Espagnet, and one need not go directly to Ficino's work to encounter the revered sage that was Ficino's Hermes.

It is not clear what version or edition of the *Corpus Hermeticum* d'Espagnet encountered, only that he referred to it as "Pimander," but I have not noted any direct citation of any of the three tracts that Lazzarelli translated or the *Asclepius*. This suggests that d'Espagnet may have been familiar with only the first fourteen that were translated by Ficino. Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples

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<sup>304</sup> Chiara Crisciani, "Hermeticism and Alchemy: The Case of Ludovico Lazzarelli," *Early Science and Medicine*, 5, No. 2 (2000): 155, and *passim*.

<sup>305</sup> See the Introduction to Copenhaver's *Hermetica* for an overview of the textual and publication history of the Hermetic writings.

<sup>306</sup> Campanelli, "Marsilio Ficino's Portrait of Hermes Trismegistus," 59, Ebeling, *Secret History*, 65.

<sup>307</sup> Campanelli, "Marsilio Ficino's Portrait of Hermes Trismegistus," 60, Ebeling, *Secret History*, 69.

published Lazzarelli's *Crater Hermetis* alongside the other *Hermetica*, for which he wrote individual chapter commentaries, in 1505, and Ebeling credits him with popularizing the *Corpus Hermeticum* in France.<sup>308</sup> However, his edition was edited and purged of potentially heretical elements and the *Crater* was changed significantly, with one of the pupils and his arguments, those ascribed Giovanni Pontano, being removed entirely.

Lefèvre is also significant in d'Espagnet's case in that he, alongside other scholars like Charles de Bovelles and Bernard de Lavineta, were also intensely interested in Ramon Lull's writings and were arguably responsible for the revival of Lullism in France beginning in the 1490s. Over the next three decades Lefèvre edited eight of Lull's works on his *ars combinatorio* as well as many mystical writings that were "aimed at explaining the ascent of the soul to God."<sup>309</sup> While these works of Lull's were not explicitly associated with alchemy, they still discussed at length topics like the four elements and made claims to a universal art reminiscent of Renaissance *magia*, while being easily adapted into the 16<sup>th</sup> century frameworks of Christian Hermetism, Cabalism, and Neoplatonism while contributing to the legend of Lull the magisterial adept.<sup>310</sup> Didier Kahn As noted above, Lazarus Zetzner re-edited Ramon Lull's works alongside his work editing and publishing the many volumes of *Theatrum Chemicum*, and by the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Lullism was peaking in popularity: Didier Kahn points to Pierre Morestal and Jean Belot, Robert Le Foul, sieur de Vassy as prominent examples of Lull's popularity, especially in connection with Cabalistic and alchemical interests.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Ebeling, *Secret History*, 64-65.

<sup>309</sup> John Lewis, "Rabelais and the Reception of the 'Art' of Ramón Lull," *Renaissance Studies* 24, No. 2 (April, 2010): 271.

<sup>310</sup> Lewis, "Rabelais and the Reception of the 'Art' of Ramón Lull," 275, note 52.

<sup>311</sup> Didier Kahn, "The Rosicrucian Hoax in France (1623-1624)," in *Secrets of Nature: Astrology and Alchemy in Early Modern Europe*, William R. Newman and Anthony Grafton, eds. (Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press, 2001), 251-252.

D’Espagnet’s interest in Lull seems to have been limited to the alchemical writings attributed to him, but the substantial breadth of Lull’s ideas, both real and misattributed, created a broader culture around Lull during d’Espagnet’s lifetime, where he was both revered as a great Christian sage by some, like d’Espagnet, but ridiculed by others like Marin Mersenne as a mystic and was associated with groups like the Alumbrados or the Rosicrucians (insofar as they were believed to be a real brotherhood). The mnemonic systems of both Pico della Mirandola and Giordano Bruno, the latter of which was burned at the stake for heresy, were similar to or even based on Lull’s *ars combinatoria* and Bruno was a known Lullist.<sup>312</sup> Kahn has demonstrated that a crucial part of the context of the so-called ‘Rosicrucian Scare’ in Paris in the 1623 (coincidentally, the same summer that d’Espagnet published his *Enchiridion* and *Arcanum*), was anti-Lullian and anti-Paracelsian sentiment and the assumptions that the Rosicrucian texts were linked to them. Kahn’s work on the ‘Rosicrucian Scare’ is an exhaustive testament to the hostile reception in Paris faced by ideas that could be viewed as Paracelsian, Epicurean, Cabalistic, or Rosicrucian, all descriptors that apply to d’Espagnet’s thought, and in that environment it is little wonder that he published anonymously.<sup>313</sup>

The *Hermetica* were written in Egypt in the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries CE, just before or concurrent with the early Neoplatonists like Ammonius Sakkas, Plotinus and Porphyry discussed above, and are thematically tied to late Antique Platonism in many ways. The corpus can be generally characterized as group of dialogues, ranging from a few to a dozen or so pages, that discuss the nature of the world in accordance with the ideas of Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic philosophy in the Hellenic Eastern Mediterranean, and in this milieu they were probably not particularly original or groundbreaking. At the time of their production their primary purpose seems to have been to

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<sup>312</sup> Ingrid D. Rowland, *Giordano Bruno: Philosopher/Heretic*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 64.

<sup>313</sup> Kahn, “Rosicrucian Hoax,” 252 and *passim*.



provide a “solid intellectual foundation for those who desired to go beyond philosophy to attain ultimate religious salvation through firsthand experience of and unity with the divine.”<sup>314</sup>

The first and perhaps the most important of the tracts, one that d’Espagnet certainly drew upon, was that called *Poimandres*, a dialogue between an anonymous interlocutor (understood to be Hermes) and the *Nous* or mind. We have seen that in the context of Plotinian Neoplatonism, the *nous* referred to a specific godlike entity emanated from the One, but syncretically minded Christians like d’Espagnet would likely have understood this entity to function and behave as God or one of the persons of the Trinity, especially since it refers to itself in this language.<sup>315</sup> After much time spent ruminating on the nature of things and expressing a desire to understand God and the world, Hermes enters into an altered or out of body state, perhaps understood as a vision, and encounters the mighty Poimandres, who depending on the translation is described as the “mind (*nous*) of the great Lord,” the “mind of sovereignty,” or the like, but which in any case was clearly divine and awe-inspiring and a manifestation of the will of a supreme entity. Hermes bears witness to the creation of the cosmos and observes the primal matter, described (as in d’Espagnet’s *Enchiridion*) as a dark, moist, smoky substance. This prime matter was then set upon by a Light from which a “holy word” emerged and joined itself to the primal substance, resulting in its separation into the four elements and the creation of a recognizable earth and heavens as fire and air climbed out of the watery and earthy mass below.

In this newly created world God or his craftsman-mind made the seven governors, creatures, and, in his own image, man. God loved man as his own child and gave him creative powers. Man wished to emulate his father’s creative drive, and God was pleased to allow this. Man “entered

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<sup>314</sup> Hanegraaf, “Hermes Trismegistus and Hermetism,” 3.

<sup>315</sup> This Plotinian framework is clearly borne out in Copenhaver’s translation, where in CH I, section 9 (page 2-3 in Copenhaver’s translation) it is established that God the mind emanated a second mind of the same substance, the craftsman, who in turn created the seven planets or governors.

the craftsman's sphere, where he was to have all authority," and the planetary governors loved and were impressed with man, such that each gave to him "a share of his own order."<sup>316</sup> This made man want to reach the heavens, to see the throne and observe the rule of the one given power over the fire. This and other dialogues also explain the nature of man and his origins in the material world, concluding that he is a being of two natures, an immortal soul in a mortal body. While the latter makes him temporary, subject to corruption and death, his soul makes him godlike:

"... the human rises up to heaven and takes its measure and knows what is in its heights and its depths, and he understands all else exactly and – greater than all of this – he comes to be on high without leaving earth behind, so enormous is his range. Therefore we must dare to say that the human on earth is a mortal god but that god in heaven is an immortal human."<sup>317</sup> Man cannot be compared to any other animal, over whom it is his lot to rule, for God has given man "all power."<sup>318</sup>

Poimandres confirms that he is "that Light," and "God," and also refers to the Light as "the word of the Lord" and "the Son of God."<sup>319</sup> He followed this explanation immediately with the statement that these things, the Word of the Lord, the Mind the Father, and God, are all the same thing and that their union is Life. Poimandres encouraged Hermes to dwell further upon the Light, until Hermes realizes that all things, including himself, were made with and participate in this divine Light. Thus, as Hanegraaf puts it, man's salvation lay "not so much in unification with the divine as in the recognition that he has always been one with it."<sup>320</sup> After receiving this wisdom, Poimandres sends Hermes forth as a prophet, to instruct mankind "on the nature of the universe and on the supreme vision" and the "beauty and reverence of knowledge."<sup>321</sup> Again it clearly establishes the goal of philosophy and religion as the spiritual ascent to the divine. Having let go

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<sup>316</sup> Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 3 (CH I, section 12).

<sup>317</sup> Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 36 (CH X, section 25). See also Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 3 (CH I, section 15).

<sup>318</sup> Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, CH I, passim. This sentiment is repeated regularly.

<sup>319</sup> See Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 1 (CH I, section 6), and John Everard, *Divine Pymander*, Book 2.

<sup>320</sup> Hanegraaf, "Hermes Trismegistus and Hermetism," 4.

<sup>321</sup> Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 6 (CH I, section 27).

of the material world and his body, the philosopher will “rise up to the father in order and surrender themselves to the powers, and, having become powers, they enter into god. This is the final good for those who have received knowledge: to be made god.”<sup>322</sup>

Other dialogues discuss further important theological, philosophical and metaphysical themes, many of which resonated with Renaissance scholars. They establish that a love of philosophy is a prerequisite for true piety, theological wisdom, and an understanding of God. True religion asks the faithful to search for God the Workman’s benevolent designs in nature and give thanks to him for them. The order of the operations of the universe, which are in equilibrium, are evidence of God’s wisdom and benevolence. God exists in everything to a potentially pantheistic extent, and if he were not, all would cease; “God is not idle, else all would be idle, for each and every thing is full of God.”<sup>323</sup> Knowledge is the virtue of the soul and a means to ascension to God, which the soul can achieve through contemplation of the Good, while passions and the love of the body lead to death. Concupiscence and appetite are equated with brutishness and unreason, and Continence, the power over Concupiscence, is “the stable and firm foundation of justice.”<sup>324</sup> The body is a prison, tortured by the ‘torments’ of intemperance, greed, anger, lust, ignorance, and other vices and evils.<sup>325</sup>

The dialogues assume a Platonic, Formal understanding of the universe and argue that all things of the material world are mere idols and shadows. They cement emanationism as the means of cosmological creation, and state that the world was emanated by God’s word, not his hand. Man participates in divinity, sharing his essentiality with God, as the Mind shares in God’s essence and

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<sup>322</sup> Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 6 (CH I, section 26).

<sup>323</sup> Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 38 (CH XI, section 5).

<sup>324</sup> See Everard, *Divine Pymander*, Book 7, section 39, though Everard’s translation does not compare well to Copenhaver’s, which is more of a basic listing of virtues and vices. Thus we may read in some of Everard’s own preoccupations with the evils of passions here.

<sup>325</sup> Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 50-51 (CH XIII, sections 7-8).

as Light shares in the Sun's essence.<sup>326</sup> The *Hermetica* elsewhere establish that the Sun is the king of Gods, the greatest of the Gods in heaven.<sup>327</sup> The dialogues routinely reinforce the notion of female matter and substances as inherently desirous of copulation with their male counterparts. They establish a cycle of creation and destruction, of life and death, of generation and corruption as the way of things, which d'Espagnet will repeat.<sup>328</sup> Things do not truly die though, but merely pass into a change, and death is more akin to forgetting or hiding, while life is coming back into sensibility. These lessons are predominantly delivered to Hermes through a kind of divine illumination, as in a vision or dream, and God has the power to bestow understanding upon the worthy.

Considering this abbreviated overview of some of the themes and characteristics of the Hermetic writings, one can see many points of resonance for early modern Christians. Its creation myths closely parallel those of Genesis, for the cosmos and man, and it is probable that the authors were aware of the Genesis creation myth. The dichotomy between the bad, material world and the good, spiritual one is prevalent, and the rejection of fleshly and worldly pleasures and vices prominent throughout. In contrast, the contemplation of the good and godly and the search for knowledge is the path to spiritual realization and ascension to God. Many were convinced by the arguments of Ficino and subsequent Hermetists as to the antiquity of Hermes and the divine providence of his revelations, and the Hermetic writings spoke to their religious and philosophical sensibilities:

“Hermeticism suited the times, and it suited the structures of a thinking that was chiefly Platonic and Neoplatonic; it was mostly concerned with the concept of soul and spirit and saw in Hermes a first-rate exponent of a religiously articulated

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<sup>326</sup> Copenhagen, *Hermetica*, 43 (CH XII, section 1).

<sup>327</sup> Copenhagen, *Hermetica*, 18 (CH V, section 3).

<sup>328</sup> See D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 10, 12, 183-188, and *passim*.

form of this thinking. To that end, Hermeticism served as an interface between Christianity and Platonism.”<sup>329</sup>

For alchemists like d’Espagnet these texts alongside scripture also formed a solid referential foundation for theories of matter and natural laws. The corpus discussed the nature and origins of the elements as well as creation as an elemental or chemical separation and could be understood as blueprints for chemical processes for those who sought them and sought to mimic them in a laboratory. They made strong reference points for a chemical interpretation of nature, and there was much appeal and potential for synthesis in the hands of 16<sup>th</sup> century Christian philosophers.

We have seen the importance attached to the Hermetic writings in the Italian Renaissance by scholars like Ficino and Pico, how the writings fit into the context of a broader Platonic revival, as well as how they were incorporated into a Renaissance Christian wisdom tradition. Yet the *Corpus Hermeticum* revived by Ficino was not the only source of Hermetic wisdom, and readers may have noticed the absence thus far of one of the most iconic writings attributed to Hermes in the *Tabula Smaragdina* or *Emerald Tablet*. North of the Alps the *Emerald Tablet* and other examples of technical Hermetic writings associated with chemistry and medicine effectively represented another tradition of Hermetism which understood Hermes as the father of alchemy and chemistry and less as a spiritual or gnostic guide. After their origins in Antiquity, the writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus were “disseminated along two paths, which only seldom crossed prior to the seventeenth century and, afterward, long ran separately.”<sup>330</sup> Medieval Arabic sources list thirteen books or tracts about alchemy and chemistry ascribed to Hermes, who is cast as a

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<sup>329</sup> Ebeling, *Secret History*, 69.

<sup>330</sup> Ebeling, *Secret History*, 50.

“Master of Wonders” rather than a divine prophet or a deity.<sup>331</sup> According to Florian Ebeling this Hermetic and alchemical tradition was largely unknown to the Italian Renaissance, and is sometimes categorized by modern scholars as ‘technical’ *Hermetica* as opposed to the ‘philosophical-theological’ translated by Ficino and Lazzarelli.<sup>332</sup> The two threads of Hermetism remained largely separate even into the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and scholars like d’Espagnet and Michael Maier represented exceptions to this rule in that they knew of and drew on both.<sup>333</sup>

The words of the *Emerald Tablet* itself, divided into 13 canons most of which are only a single sentence, could fit into a single page, yet the document had an impact out of proportion with its length. The first substantive sentence states that “what is below is like that which is above, and what is above is like that which is below...,” supporting the doctrine of the microcosm and macrocosm and a theory of sympathetic correspondence of essence and causality. This theory is essential for many traditions of esoteric thought including d’Espagnet’s alchemy, and he cites the *Emerald Tablet* directly numerous times in the *Enchiridion*.<sup>334</sup> It also appears word for word on the frontispiece of Elias Ashmole’s translation of the *Arcanum* (1650), on a banner unfurling down to a tree from a depiction of the alchemical symbol for mercury (☿) with a face bearing the sun’s corona around superimposed upon the symbol. Next to the symbol and the banner are the words “the stars rule man” on a piece of parchment, replete with zodiacal symbols, held up by a hand extending down from a cloud to cover the face of a bust inscribed *Mercuriophilus Anglicus* (English lover of Mercury) presumably a reference to the otherwise anonymous translator Ashmole.

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<sup>331</sup> Ebeling, *Secret History*, 49.

<sup>332</sup> Ebeling, *Secret History*, 90, and Hanegraaf, “Hermes Trismegistus and Hermetism,” *passim*.

<sup>333</sup> Ebeling, *Secret History*, 69. Ludovico Lazzarelli may also have been an exception; see Crisciani, “Hermeticism and Alchemy: The Case of Ludovico Lazzarelli,” 151-155.

<sup>334</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 3, 47.

The majority of the remaining canons of the *Emerald Tablet* are concerned with what it termed “the operation of the Sun.”<sup>335</sup> In a broader sense some may be understood to refer to the creation of the cosmos but were certainly interpreted by early modern alchemists as referring to the qualities and production of the philosopher’s stone, a process which would approximate the original act of creation using the same artificially created primal matter. The description of the process begins enigmatically with “Its father is the Sun, its mother the Moon; the wind carries it in its belly, its nurse is the earth.”<sup>336</sup> Like the descriptions of creation and natural substances in the book of Genesis, many alchemists including d’Espagnet read such cryptic statements as chemical instructions and as recipes to be parsed, or at the very least as hints to guide the adept in the right direction. The Sun and Moon here most obviously correspond to Gold and Silver, respectively, but also could refer to the major alchemical processes of *solve et coagula* or dissolution and coagulation/rejoining. ‘Father’ and ‘Mother’ could be read as symbolic characters in popular alchemical literary device of *coniunctio* or the ‘chemical wedding,’ wherein the production of the stone is discussed in terms of sexual union between male and female and the subsequent issue of this union, the *filius philosophiae* or *filius sapientiae*.

To create the stone, one must “separate the earth from the fire, the subtle from the gross...” and “ascend with the greatest sagacity from the earth to heaven, and then again descend to the earth, and unite together the powers of things superior and things inferior.”<sup>337</sup> Again, d’Espagnet and other alchemists would have understood these canons to refer to the progressive stages of the stone’s creation, and to the chemical and metallurgical laboratory processes that purified the substance through distillation or reduction in a retort or alembic. The language of ascending and

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<sup>335</sup> The following quotes are from Florian Ebeling’s translation of the *Emerald Tablet*, as appears in *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus*, 49-50.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

descending likely alluded to the stone's transcendent and heavenly qualities as well as to its quintessence which corresponded to a celestial quintessence. The term 'subtle' references the essential spirits of things hidden inside their gross, earthly exterior, which must be extracted to be purified, leaving the gross physical substance behind. The dichotomous correspondence here between subtle, active spiritual agent and the gross, mundane, passive body should appear familiar and reflected broader cultural and religious understandings of the distinction between body and spirit.

The *Tablet* continues that the subject in question, presumed to be the stone, is "... the cause of all perfection..." and "its power is perfect if it be changed into earth..." after which it will be capable of overcoming "...all subtle things and penetrat[ing] every solid thing." That is, this perfect substance holds transmutational power no matter what matter it is acting upon, penetrating to its essence which will then share in the substance's perfection. The text is quite easily reconcilable with the Pseudo-Lullian alchemical corpus summarized in a previous section, which is very relevant in d'Espagnet's case, but there are numerous other possible interpretations of the lessons here, a testament to the wide breadth of allegorical readings possible within these traditions of alchemy and natural philosophy. Indeed, the veiled imagery of such texts, a safeguard against vulgar eyes, was commonly understood by practitioners to *demand* the privileged interpretation of those adepts initiated into the Hermetic and alchemical mysteries. The text concludes with Hermes' claim to authorship and characterization of the processes of the "operation of the Sun," but not before stating that in accordance with this operation were created "all things," or as it is sometimes rendered "thus the world was created" (*sic mundus creatus est*). These processes are not limited or specific but universal in relevance and application, and to understand and reproduce them was the ultimate secret of alchemy and nature.



The *Emerald Tablet*, alongside other ‘technical’ *Hermetica* preserved in Arabic through the Middle Ages, were at the center of Northern European and German alchemical practice. German chemists in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> century, like Christoph Balduff, Joachim Tancke, considered Hermes to be the father of *chymia*.<sup>338</sup> They did not rely on the *Corpus Hermeticum* but made similar arguments to their Italian Renaissance counterparts in defending the antiquity and divinely revealed nature of Hermes’ philosophy in order to legitimate their own philosophical outlooks. Tancke in particular looked to Hermes as an alternative to the legacy of and influence of Aristotle, and understood the entire Platonic tradition, of which Hermes was the progenitor, to be linked to alchemy.<sup>339</sup> Following this, he saw the German physician and chemist Paracelsus as the modern reviver of a tradition that had been suppressed by Aristotle through the Middle Ages and until his day. Tancke is also interesting in that he understood classical myths as ‘symbolic encodings’ of alchemical processes: for example, he interpreted the tale of the Golden Fleece as a story of the spread of alchemical knowledge through different cultures, an interpretation that both d’Espagnet and Ashmole also seem to have shared.<sup>340</sup> Beyond the *Emerald Tablet*, though, d’Espagnet to my knowledge does not cite any of the technical *Hermetica*. It is possible that d’Espagnet read the *Emerald Tablet* in Volume I of the *Theatrum Chemicum* where it was printed within the work of Gerhard Dorn, but this is uncertain.

Even in this alternative tradition the appeal of the Hermetic writings for early modern alchemists was much the same. Hermetic philosophy as represented in these texts was understood to be complementary to the Judeo-Christian tradition and legitimated via the providential agency of the Holy Spirit. In this view Christianity had inherited a universal wisdom through Hermes,

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<sup>338</sup> Ebeling, *Secret History*, 70-73.

<sup>339</sup> Ebeling, *Secret History*, 75.

<sup>340</sup> Ebeling, *Secret History*, 73, as well as D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Preface, and Canon 36, 138.

Plato, and other exalted sages and thus ostensibly pagan philosophy could be reconciled with Christian teachings. Indeed, in Ficino's hands Hermes had become the original source of Platonism. This reconciliation of Christianity with the philosophy of antiquity was not incredibly difficult, owing to their shared historical roots and the influence of Neoplatonism on many of the church fathers. Yet it could still open philosophers to accusations of heterodoxy and occasion theological controversy, just as it had in the early centuries of the Christian religion. While d'Espagnet never explicitly offers instructions on natural magic or ecstatic spiritual ascension, these were possible and even the intended interpretations of the Hermetic writings. The Hermetic view of man and his powers of agency in the world clearly differed from the fallen Adam of the Judeo-Christian tradition to the extent that Szönyi, a half century after Yates, still argues that Renaissance Hermetism contributed to the emergence of the adept as a "new, Faustian type of Western hero."<sup>341</sup> Yet the wonders and miracles of d'Espagnet's cosmos still lay in privileged knowledge, wherein God reveals individually to his faithful seekers the secret workings of his operations. D'Espagnet certainly considered himself one such seeker, a divinely guided explorer among the secrets of nature, correcting the errors of the ancients and moderns with the help of Hermes' revelations. He would craft his own cosmology and position himself somewhere between the Aristotle of the scholastics and revived Plato, thanks to his and his contemporaries' Hermetic and Pseudo-Lullian influences especially, further confirmed by forays into Cabala. Moreover, several of the doctrines essential to d'Espagnet's worldview were indebted to ideas about divine emanationism and the nature of the participation of the many in the One through the great chain of being, ideas from late antique philosophy that authors like Ficino and Pico helped to revive and reconcile with Christian teachings. These ancient sources provided the justification and the lens

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<sup>341</sup> Szönyi, "The Hermetic Revival," 55.

through which to properly interpret scripture and nature, and the syncretism of those like Ficino and Pico provided an influential model for doing so.

## CHAPTER 5. PARACELSUS, HIS RECEPTION, AND LEGACY

One of the most widely known 16<sup>th</sup> century philosophers whose impact must be recognized is Paracelsus. D’Espagnet never mentions him by name, for reasons that will become clear shortly, but his direct and indirect influence on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century medicine and chemistry is so significant that it would have been impossible for d’Espagnet to be ignorant of the man or his ideas. D’Espagnet and Paracelsus also shared many ideas, and while these could easily have been transmitted to d’Espagnet through other chemical authors, d’Espagnet should be considered among the French Paracelsians.

Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim (1493-1541), also known as Paracelsus, was a Swiss doctor, surgeon, and philosopher, one of the first and most fervent champions of iatrochemistry or chemical medicine. His father was a physician with an interest in alchemy, and Paracelsus himself served as an apprentice in the Fugger mines, a lecturer and practicing physician, and as an army surgeon, something traditionally considered beneath the dignity of a scholarly physician.<sup>342</sup> Paracelsus was trained at an early age by churchmen, most likely including the alchemist Johannes Trithemius, and probably had university medical training as well, though there are no matriculation records to prove he received a degree. Like d’Espagnet and the numerous others discussed above, Paracelsus was familiar with medieval alchemical thought as well as the Neoplatonic, Hermetic, and other esoteric literature of antiquity. Pagel characterizes his education and resulting theory of knowledge as pansophic or encyclopedic, aimed at a universal art of interpreting symbols and concordances reflective of the ‘kabbalistic’ tradition

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<sup>342</sup> Allen G. Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy: Paracelsian Science and Medicine in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 2 vols. (New York: Science History Publications, 1977), 46-47.

which led “from Lull to Pico, Reuchlin, Agrippa of Nettesheym, Bruno, Alstedius and Leibniz.”<sup>343</sup> He is famed for his vehement and iconoclastic opposition to the traditional medicine of the non-Christians Galen and Aristotle, and by extension to the knowledge and practice of the doctors of university faculties. The reformed alchemist Bernard G. Penot, defending him against the criticisms of Andreas Libavius, called Paracelsus the ‘Luther of medicine,’ reforming medicine as Luther had reformed theology.<sup>344</sup> Paracelsus publicly burned Avicenna’s medical books and lectured in his Swiss-German vernacular rather than Latin. As a result of such behaviors and the mindset they suggested, he often found himself in conflict with authorities, at times fleeing towns and employment in haste, leaving angry physicians and churchmen, as well as his manuscripts, behind.<sup>345</sup>

During his lifetime Paracelsus published some of his ideas on medicine, mineral baths, surgery, and diseases including syphilis, though he faced opposition and censure from authorities and vested interests and many of his works were left unpublished or unfinished. It fell to followers over the decades following his death to publish and to attempt to systematize and evangelize for much of his philosophy as they sought to reform medical practice along chemical lines. Paracelsus also wrote on social, ethical, and religious topics that may appear separate from his medical, chemical, or scientific interests. While it can be difficult to tell what ideas were Paracelsus’ rather than borrowed or reinterpreted from earlier alchemical and medical writings, Walter Pagel has argued that the central and distinguishing feature of Paracelsus’ philosophy was his analogical understanding of the correspondences between microcosm and macrocosm and the employment

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<sup>343</sup> Walter Pagel, *Paracelsus, An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (New York: S. Karger, 1982), 9.

<sup>344</sup> Didier Kahn, “The Rosicrucian Hoax in France,” 291.

<sup>345</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 48.

of this reasoning across theology, cosmology, natural philosophy and medicine.<sup>346</sup> This interpretive lens was common in alchemy and natural philosophy like that of d’Espagnet, and Pagel has insisted that to understand an “individual savant” like Paracelsus, his world, and his place in the intellectual life of his day, we must try to grasp this approach in which “mystical, magical, and scientific elements are all blended together into a single doctrine.”<sup>347</sup> While the general doctrine of the microcosm was not new, what was original to Paracelsus was his consistent application of this system of correspondences across all fields of knowledge.<sup>348</sup>

Paracelsus used somewhat modified versions of the traditional four elements but identified Fire with heaven, as d’Espagnet would later as well. He also utilized a second set of basic principles in sulphur, mercury, and salt, with the last added to form a symbolic trinity that many alchemists like d’Espagnet would also adopt, though most continued to rely on the traditional four elements as well. Paracelsus also looked for the intelligence or reason (*logoi*) in matter, arguing that they were found in seeds: his *tria prima* were invisible seminal principles.<sup>349</sup> Whether this idea was derived from Plotinus, Augustine, or medieval alchemical works is unclear. Paracelsus rejected Galenic medicine’s associations of the four humours with the four elements, instead identifying the causes of disease as localized malfunctions of parts and organs whose *archei* – vital guiding spirits of body parts which behaved as microcosmic alchemists inside our bodies – were failing to complete the necessary chemical processes to maintain health. The stomach separated the nutriment from the poison in our food, for instance.<sup>350</sup> This basic function of chemical separation of the pure from the impure was fundamental to chemical philosophers with the

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<sup>346</sup> See Pagel, *Paracelsus*, as well as Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 53 and Moran, *Distilling Knowledge*, 80.

<sup>347</sup> Pagel, *Paracelsus*, 4.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., and Moran, *Distilling Knowledge*, 75.

<sup>349</sup> Hirai, “*Logoi Spermatikoi* and the Concept of Seeds,” 5, and Pagel, *Paracelsus*, 85, 87-88, 100, 103, and 225.

<sup>350</sup> See Paracelsus’ *Volumen medicinae paramirum*, as discussed in Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 58-59.

distiller's fire as a primary means of analysis. When things went awry in human health, the best solutions lay in chemically prepared medicines. The essences of particular plants or minerals that had a sympathetic affinity with parts of the body could be extracted through the spagyric art of separation and fashioned into medicines. The prudent physician also understood man's body as a micro/macrocsmic layer, a firmament amongst the firmament and reflective of that of the stars. Cosmic relationships were made possible by astral emanations, whose signatures could be discovered by pious man through observation of nature and by the grace of God. Paracelsus instructed his readers to understand how everything is connected in a universe alive with occult, vital forces, and a new investigation into nature was needed to grasp them.

Paracelsus' greatest influence was in his attempts to reform medical teaching and to move away from the reliance on the books of a select few pagan authors in favor of chemistry, and a chemical interpretation of scripture, as the key to medical philosophy. He had rejected the teachings of the ancients in part due to their apparent lack of knowledge about chemistry, in addition to their paganism. In their stead he insisted upon Scripture and observation or experience as the foundations of knowledge, although his understanding of 'experience' requires some clarification lest we paint him too much as a modern. Paracelsus argued that the natural philosopher himself had a sympathetic or magnetic correspondence with the occult inner mechanisms of natural things like plants, and he can link with and 'overhear' the object's functions to acquire true knowledge of them.<sup>351</sup> This way of knowing was very different than book learning, and this kind of knowledge would not be found in the universities. Paracelsus instructed the physician to "wander the library of the whole world" and to understand the elements above and below.<sup>352</sup> Paracelsus' *Philosophia ad Atheniensis* (unpublished until 1564) also discussed the

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<sup>351</sup> Pagel, *Paracelsus*, 51.

<sup>352</sup> Moran, *Distilling Knowledge*, 79.

Creation of the world, as described in the book of Genesis, as a chemical separation. This too was very significant for many alchemists like d’Espagnet who looked to the book of Genesis as a chemical recipe or set of instructions to be mirrored.<sup>353</sup>

Many physicians, chemists, and philosophers were drawn to Paracelsus’ ideas, in part owing to a shared disappointment with the contemporary medical education of the universities. Rather than accept his philosophy as a whole (especially considering that to even conceive of his holistic philosophy from his own writings would have been difficult), many of Paracelsus’ followers syncretically adopted piecemeal or qualified versions of his doctrines. A common refrain, though, centered on the perceived need for a general reform of medicine and medical education and a prominent place for chemistry within them. Practical chemistry and chemical processes related to metallurgy and other useful applications were increasing in importance as well; for example, techniques used in mining precious metals or the production of gunpowder, inks, and dyes. Some members of the traditionally conservative medical faculties admitted the efficacy of chemical remedies, especially against new diseases unknown to Galen and the ancients, but debates would rage for decades as to the place of Paracelsian and chemical ideas in medicine and natural philosophy.

The roughly half-century from the 1570s through the 1620s was a particularly contentious time within the European medical community as it reckoned how to respond to these criticisms and new approaches to medicine with chemistry at the forefront. The publication of Paracelsian texts increased significantly, with over a hundred new texts prepared between 1565 and 1575 alone.<sup>354</sup> A few examples of the reception of Paracelsian medicine in Europe from the late 16<sup>th</sup> to

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<sup>353</sup> See Michael T. Walton, *Genesis and the Chemical Philosophy: True Christian Science in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 2011).

<sup>354</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 128.



the early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries will suffice to demonstrate the impact and the potential for controversy these ideas brought. Charles Gunnoe and Katharina Häusler-Gross have examined how Thomas Erastus (1524-1583), a well-known theologian, physician, and critic of Paracelsianism, and Michael Toxites (1514-1581) vied for the favor and influence of Elector Augustus of Saxony (r. 1553-1586).<sup>355</sup> Augustus was curious about pharmacology, medicine, and *chymia*, and Toxites saw him as a potential patron. Toxites specifically sought funding for an edition of Paracelsian manuscripts in 1571-2. In 1571 he wrote a nineteen-page dedication to the prince in his publication of the first edition of Paracelsus' *astronomia magna* or *philosophia sagax*, the latter of which promised to detail the theory of analogy of the microcosm and macrocosm and the unity of chemistry, medicine, occult philosophy, and cosmology.<sup>356</sup> Thomas Erastus attacked Toxites and Paracelsus' ideas when he feared they would be viewed favorably by the Elector Augustus and potentially enter the cultural mainstream. Erastus penned a four-volume refutation of Paracelsus' ideas, specifically those of the *astronomia magna*, likewise dedicating the books to Augustus and accompanied by a personal letter in which he argued that among general lies and falsities, Paracelsian doctrines promoted numerous Christological heresies and blasphemies in addition to defenses of divination, black magic, communion with devils, and every kind of condemned magical art.<sup>357</sup> He rejected the reading of Genesis as a chemical separation, the *tria prima* as a

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<sup>355</sup> Charles Gunnoe and Katharina Häusler-Gross, "Paracelsianism as Heresy: Thomas Erastus, Michael Toxites, and Elector August of Saxony," in *Minera discipulorum: Vorstöße in das Fachschrifttum der frühen Neuzeit Gedenkschrift für Joachim Telle*, ed. Laura Balbiani and Katharina Pfister (Heidelberg: Mattes-Verlag, 2014), 67-82. See also Charles Gunnoe, *Thomas Erastus and the Palatinate: A Renaissance Physician in the Second Reformation* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2010).

<sup>356</sup> Paracelsus, *Astronomia Magna: oder die gantze Philosophia sagax der grossen und kleinen Welt*, ed. by Michael Toxites (Frankfurt: Martin Lechler for Hieronymus Feyerabend, 1571).

<sup>357</sup> Thomas Erastus, *Disputationum De medicina nova Philippi Paracelsi Pars Prima: In qua, quae de remediis superstitiosis et Magicis curationibus ille prodidit, praecipua examinantur* (Basel, 1571); *Disputationum de nova Philippi Paracelsi medicina Pars Altera: In qua Philosophiae Paracelsicae Principia et Elementa explorantur* (Basel, 1572); *Disputationum de nova Philippi Paracelsi Medicina Pars Tertia* (Basel, 1572); *Disputationum de nova medicina Philippi Paracelsi Pars Quarta et Ultima* (Basel, 1573). See Gunnoe and Cross, "Paracelsianism as Heresy," 73, for a translation of this letter.

fool's innovation, and the prescription of metallic cures like mercury as easily poisonous. He delayed the first volume to respond to Toxites publication of the *Astronomia magna*, and in the end Toxites received neither patronage nor funding, perhaps thanks to Erastus' intervention.<sup>358</sup>

Peter Severinus (1542-1602) stands as an early and important example of a physician deeply influenced by both Paracelsus and medieval alchemical ideas.<sup>359</sup> His work the *Idea medicinae philosophicae* (1571) especially stood as a synthesis and summary of Paracelsian texts, embracing the analogy of the microcosm and macrocosm, the importance of signatures, and the efficacy of chemical medicines to treat new diseases where Galenic medicine failed.<sup>360</sup> Like Sendivogius and numerous others he sought an aerial explanation for vital principles that sustained life, and in similar fashion to some scholars including d'Espagnet he argued for a theory of 'astral' seeds that persisted through death.<sup>361</sup> Pagel and Debus rank him as a significant precursor to Harvey in his discussion of the heart and blood as central to distributing a life force throughout the body.<sup>362</sup> Thomas Erastus' anti-Paracelsian publications were directed just as much at Severinus and others like him as they had been Toxites.

Johannes Guintherius von Andernach, Pietro Mattioli, and Albertus Wimpeneus helped to situate Paracelsian ideas within the framework of ancient and more respected medicine and to make them more recognizable and palatable to contemporaries.<sup>363</sup> Von Andernach (1505-1574), a member of the medical faculty first at Paris, then Metz, and eventually Strasbourg, wrote a 1700-page work also published in 1571, *De medicina veteri et nova tum cognoscenda, tum faciunda*

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<sup>358</sup> Gunnoe and Gross, "Paracelsianism as Heresy," 69.

<sup>359</sup> For a recent treatment of Severinus, see Jole Shackelford, *A Philosophical Path for Paracelsian Medicine: The Ideas, Intellectual Context, and Influence of Petrus Severinus: 1540–1602* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2004).

<sup>360</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 127-128.

<sup>361</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 130.

<sup>362</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 131, and see also Walter Pagel, *William Harvey's Biological Ideas. Selected Aspects and Historical Background* (New York: S. Karger, 1967).

<sup>363</sup> Moran, *Distilling Knowledge*, 84-85.

*commentarii duo*, on all aspects of medicine and seeking common ground between old and new. He insisted that some elements of Paracelsian medicine were useful and should not be ignored even if other aspects were wrongheaded.<sup>364</sup> He also translated much of the work of Galen and other ancient physicians. Albertus Wimpennaes likewise published in 1569 a work titled *De concordia Hippocraticorum et Paracelsistarum* in an attempt to synthesize Paracelsian ideas with those of traditional authorities. He also published two editions of Paracelsus' *Archidoxis* in 1570. Wimpennaes took the position that those who attacked himself and Paracelsus did so out of ignorance, lacking the understanding of philosophy, mathematics, alchemy, Cabala, and medicine which together were necessary to appreciate the truths of these doctrines and of natural philosophy in general. He argued that they had ignored the favorable opinion of metallic medicines found in works they otherwise respected, such as those of Arnold of Villanova. Yet there was plenty to condemn in the Paracelsian writings, like magic, alongside other false or misleading ideas. The truly learned and earnest would seek harmony and wisdom and the best information from both ancient and modern texts.<sup>365</sup>

The case of Roch le Bailiff serves to demonstrate the influence of the Parisian medical faculty and the consequences for challenging their authority. Bailiff served Henri III as *médecin ordinaire*, and published his own summary of Paracelsian medicine, *Le Demosterion*, in 1578, promoting an alchemical reading of scripture and an insistence on the analogy of the microcosm and macrocosm as well as astrological causation as essential to medicine.<sup>366</sup> The same views informed his *Traicté de l'homme et son essentielle anatomie*, begun in Paris and published in 1580. When these views came to the attention of the Parisian medical faculty in 1578, he was ordered to

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<sup>364</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 140, 145.

<sup>365</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 136-140.

<sup>366</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 156.

halt his medical practice and lectures. He refused and was summoned before the *Parlement* of Paris for a three-day trial in what was essentially a showdown between Paracelsian ideas and Galenic medicine, with Etienne Pasquier representing Bailiff. Bailiff's side lost, and on June 2<sup>nd</sup> of 1579 Bailiff was ordered by the *Parlement* to leave the capital. Just as Bernard Penot had called Paracelsus the 'Luther of medicine' so did Henri de Monantheuil, who was the dean of the medical faculty in Paris at the time, only Henri in his speeches used the title pejoratively, as would many after him, to instill fear and revulsion.<sup>367</sup> Like Luther, Paracelsus was a hero to some and a villain to others.

Considering these debates, Andreas Libavius (1550-1616) tried to be discerning with his criticism. He defended Galenic medicine and the ancients but was interested in alchemy and the possibility of extracting pure essences of things via separation by fire, calling it a divine art. His 1597 work *Alchemia* Moran calls "the first real textbook in the history of chemistry."<sup>368</sup> He considered metallic transmutation and the production of the philosopher's stone a realistic possibility. Some of the *chemiatri* he thought were reasonable, synthesizing the best and most useful elements of chemical medicine with traditional practices. Some of these *chemiatri*, though, particularly the 'Hermetics', he disdained as sophists who in their search for universal science of nature and medicine wrongly coalesced matter, spirit, and soul into a single discipline and generally distorted everything to the detriment of all. The radical Paracelsians he condemned as bad magicians, enabling a diabolic enterprise to the corruption of all knowledge so that the devil might rule at his pleasure.<sup>369</sup> They proved their idiocy by rejecting basic and obvious truths, while

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<sup>367</sup> Kahn, "Rosicrucian Hoax," 291.

<sup>368</sup> Moran, *Distilling Knowledge*, 8-9.

<sup>369</sup> Moran, *Distilling Knowledge*, 81-82.

some embraced black magic, cabala, and the manipulation of spirits via words and signs.<sup>370</sup> Chemistry could be useful, but fools, charlatans, and misguided sophists necessitated wariness.

Many French Paracelsians were Huguenots, a number of whom left the country under Henri III, and as Henri IV consolidated his reign from 1593 they returned as well.<sup>371</sup> Though the Paracelsian debates continued, some chemical physicians found some success and security with Henri. A circle of the King's physicians, some of which were Paracelsians or at least sympathetic to chemical medicine, defended and advocated for one another. In 1594 Jean Ribit (1546-1605), *Sieur de la Rivière*, was named *médecin premier* to the king. He was friends with Théodore Turquet de Mayerne (1573-1655) and Joseph Duchesne, both of whom served Henri IV in the role of *médecin ordinaire*. Mayerne gave lectures on iatrochemistry beginning in 1599 and defended Duchesne. When the university medical faculty recommended that Henri rescind Mayerne's public offices, the king sided with Mayerne.<sup>372</sup> The first decade of the 17<sup>th</sup> century saw numerous publications on chemistry and botany. Rivière and Mayerne aided Jean Beguin in securing approval from King Henri for a chemical laboratory and regular lectures on chemical medicine, the earliest of which were based in Libavius' *Alchemia*. Beguin's textbook on chemical medicine, the *tyrocinium chymicum*, went through 41 editions between 1610 and 1690.<sup>373</sup> Another royal physician, Pierre Richer de Belleval, served Henri IV and Louis XIII and in 1593 established an herb garden of medicinal plants at Montpellier at Henri's request. Guy de la Brosse did the same in Paris under Louis XIII, founding the *Jardin du Roy* or *Jardin des Plantes* in the 1630s.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>370</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 169-173.

<sup>371</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 159.

<sup>372</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 186.

<sup>373</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 168, and Antonio Clericuzio, *Elements, Principles, and Corpuscles: A Study of Atomism and Chemistry in the Seventeenth Century* (Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), 36-37.

<sup>374</sup> Clericuzio, *Elements, Principles, and Corpuscles*, 36-37.

The Huguenot Joseph Duchesne (1546-1609) was a member of this circle and another central figure in the chemical debates of the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Under the name Quercetanus he published *De priscorum philosophorum verae medicinae materia* (1603) and *Ad veritatem hermeticae* (1604), both defending the chemical approach to medicine.<sup>375</sup> He was a Hermeticist and moderate Paracelsian, informed by a belief in the *prisca theologia* and echoing the legitimizing refrain of alchemical and Platonic apologists that Plato had known of the book of Genesis.<sup>376</sup> Duchesne argued that elements of iatrochemistry and the Paracelsian *tria prima* were prefigured in the work of Hippocrates, and that rather than an iconoclastic innovator Paracelsus was instead the latest of a long line of chemical physicians stretching back to antiquity. Duchesne discussed sickness and health in terms of perfection of the minerals of disease in the mines of the microcosm, man, and chemical medicine as a product of reason and experience rather than dogmatism and book learning.<sup>377</sup> For Duchesne as in Paracelsus and Severinus, and in a similar fashion to d’Espagnet, Fire was no longer an ordinary element but heaven itself.<sup>378</sup> In general he made no claims of defending Paracelsus’ theology but maintained that his medical ideas were important and worthy of fair consideration on their own terms.<sup>379</sup>

These trends continued into the early decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Oswald Croll’s *Basilica chymica* (1609) went through eighteen editions and several translations over the following half-century.<sup>380</sup> The second edition of Heinrich Khunrath’s *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae*, first published in 1595, appeared in 1609. In the case of Michael Maier, one of the authors

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<sup>375</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 160-161.

<sup>376</sup> Hiroshi Hirai, “The World-Spirit and Quintessence in the Chymical Philosophy of Joseph Du Chesne,” in *Chymia: Science and Nature in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Miguel López Pérez et al. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 248-249.

<sup>377</sup> Moran, *Distilling Knowledge*, 87, and Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 161.

<sup>378</sup> Hirai, “The World-Spirit and Quintessence in Du Chesne,” 254.

<sup>379</sup> Hirai, “The World-Spirit and Quintessence in Du Chesne,” 247.

<sup>380</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 118.

recommended by d’Espagnet in his works, we see the further confluence of Hermetism and alchemy with roots, like d’Espagnet and as discussed previously, in the Italian Renaissance. D’Espagnet specifically praises Maier’s “*Emblemata*,” by which he meant *Atalanta Fugiens* (1617). Maier, like d’Espagnet, found alchemical themes in classical myths, and understood the steps of process for creating the philosopher’s stone to correspond with the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>381</sup> He believed that Adam had brought the philosopher’s stone out of paradise and that this explained his long life.<sup>382</sup> Maier followed the Rosicrucian saga actively and in vain attempted to get the attention of the brotherhood. In this vein he thought of Germany as the “New Egypt,” at once an optimistic tribute to his homeland where the divine wisdom of the ancients was being revived as well as a deferential nod to the ancient land from which he believed that knowledge originated.<sup>383</sup> Tilton calls him the ‘chief exponent of the *prisca sapientia* doctrine’ among the early modern German alchemists.<sup>384</sup>

Robert Fludd published his work *Utriusque cosmi historia* in two volumes just as d’Espagnet was preparing his own, and the two are striking in their similarity of thought. Fludd was a physician and chemist whose mystical inclinations worried and drew critical responses from those like Mersenne, van Helmont, and Kepler, who insisted that Fludd’s ‘true alchemy’ was the wrong direction for chemistry to be moving. Fludd, like other Paracelsians and Hermeticists, found difficulties with the London College of Physicians thanks to his lack of respect for Aristotle and Galen and the modern medical authorities who followed them. He failed his admission exams repeatedly and only after many years was admitted to the College in 1609. He did not publish

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<sup>381</sup> Willard, “Alchemy and the Bible,” in *Centre and Labyrinth: Essays in Honour of Northrop Frye*, ed. Eleanor Cook et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 121, and Tilton, *The Quest for the Phoenix*, 65-66.

<sup>382</sup> Willard, “Alchemy and the Bible,” 118.

<sup>383</sup> Tilton, *The Quest for the Phoenix*, 37.

<sup>384</sup> Tilton, *The Quest for the Phoenix*, 37.

until the age of 42, and after the Rosicrucian manifestos had been published. His early work defended the brotherhood and their goals aimed at the reform of education and a move away from reliance on pagan authors. In 1617 he published this defense of the Rosicrucians, as well as his *Tractatus theologo philosophicus* and first book of his *Utriusque cosmi historia*, the second of which came out the following year.<sup>385</sup> Many of d’Espagnet’s arguments a few years later followed Fludd very closely, and though he never mentions Fludd, many of their sources are the same.

These works outlined a familiar position, according to which the philosopher must learn from the two complementary books of nature and scripture. Fludd understood Genesis as a chemical separation, just as Paracelsus had, of the primeval dark abyss, which he believed was discussed by various authors in the form of Aristotelian *prima materia*, Platonic *hyle*, or Hermes’ *umbra horrenda*, all derivative of Moses’ abyss. D’Espagnet would echo these sentiments exactly in the *Enchiridion*. Like many alchemists, Fludd preserved Plato’s reputation by arguing that he had known the books of Moses, whereas Aristotle relied too heavily on mundane, human knowledge.<sup>386</sup> Fludd drew parallels between the strata of the Ptolemaic cosmos and the letters of the Hebrew alphabet from which god created the world, according to which each letter corresponded a layer of the elements, the planets and celestial bodies, and then various angelic realms including *Archangeli* and *seraphim*, ultimately leading to god.<sup>387</sup>

Central to Fludd’s philosophy was the equation of light with heat, and these with an aerial spirit of life, an association that had been made already by Paracelsus and some of his followers.<sup>388</sup> Fludd thought that this concept had been familiar to ancient philosophers like Hermes and

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<sup>385</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 224-225.

<sup>386</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 225.

<sup>387</sup> See Robert Fludd, *Utriusque cosmi maioris scilicet et minoris metaphysica, physica atque technical historia... tomus primus de macrocosmi historia in duas tractatus divisa* (Oppenheim: J.T. De Bry, 1617).

<sup>388</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 232. See d’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 189-192 for his own theories of aerial vital spirits.



Zoroaster as well and was hinted at in their writings, rather than some monstrous modern innovation.<sup>389</sup> Originating in the Sun, which Fludd called Phoebus in his royal chariot, the visible emperor, Fludd understood the Sun to house the spirit of the Lord, as reflected in Psalm 18:5 which stated that God had placed his tabernacle in the sun.<sup>390</sup> In his *Philosophia sacra et vere Christiana* (1626), Fludd shows God placing his tabernacle in the Sun at the beginning of creation to breathe life into the cosmos, and Debus compares this to Copernicus' characterization of the Sun as a temple at the center of the universe from which God, the Lamp, the Mind, illuminated all.<sup>391</sup> Copernicus too had quoted Hermes on this point. Man's heart is the microcosmic equivalent of the sun, chemically extracting a supercelestial nutriment from air.<sup>392</sup> According to Debus, "light and divinity" as terms and concepts were "constantly related" in Fludd's writings, a description that applies equally to d'Espagnet's thought.<sup>393</sup> Fludd defended transmutation scripturally, arguing that the elixir or philosopher's stone was real and material.<sup>394</sup>

These positions he debated frequently in letters that survive to us, giving us a unique understanding of his intellectual evolution in dialogue with contemporaries and a sense of the fundamental disconnect between some alchemists and their critics who viewed chemistry, its methods, and its purpose in a different light. The disagreements between Fludd and those critics like Marin Mersenne paint clearly their different senses of what constituted true chymia. Fludd agreed with Mersenne that charlatans and the ignorant gave chymia a bad reputation but insisted that unlike them he was a practitioner of the true science of occult qualities, schooled in the wisdom of Hermes and Cabala and trained in alchemy, astrology, and other essential fields. Meanwhile,

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<sup>389</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 231.

<sup>390</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 230.

<sup>391</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 230, note 7

<sup>392</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 235.

<sup>393</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 229-230.

<sup>394</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 255.

Mersenne insisted that beliefs like his were precisely the problem he was identifying. Forshaw writes that in Mersenne's *Quaestiones celeberrimae in Genesim* (1623) the latter "excoriates" Fludd as "a raving Haeretico-magus for his alchemical interpretations of Holy Scripture, his co-identification of the *Ruach Elohim* of Genesis 1:2 with the Neoplatonic Soul of the World, and his promotion of the Paracelsian notion of the uncreated *Mysterium Magnum*."<sup>395</sup>

In other words, what was for d'Espagnet, Fludd, and innumerable other Paracelsians the starting point and primary justification for their chemical interpretation of nature and its creation, was for Mersenne, Gassendi, Bacon, and others a reprehensible confusion of nature and theology, physics and metaphysics, to the detriment of both.<sup>396</sup> Pierre Gassendi leveled many of the same arguments against alchemists like Fludd, arguing that mixing theology and chemistry and using scripture as the ultimate justification for a chemical interpretation of nature would make "alchemy the sole religion, the alchemist the sole religious person, and the tyrocinium of alchemy the sole catechism of the faith."<sup>397</sup> The Paracelsians and alchemists were guilty of impiety, blasphemy, heresy, and distorting the bible to suit the needs of their chemical doctrines. These criticisms would be very fair when applied to d'Espagnet, whose philosophy by the nature of its aims makes constant statements about God, the universe, and the human soul. As Mersenne and his like saw it, a natural philosopher and alchemist like d'Espagnet tread on the toes of theologians to the injury of men and God both, and they pushed back, seeking to reestablish those boundaries.

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<sup>395</sup> Peter J. Forshaw, "Vitriolic Reactions: Orthodox Responses to the Alchemical Exegesis of Genesis," in *The Word and the World: Biblical Exegesis and Early Modern Science*, ed. Kevin Killeen and Peter Forshaw (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 125. Debus too relates these interactions in *The Chemical Philosophy*.

<sup>396</sup> Forshaw, "Vitriolic Reactions," 126.

<sup>397</sup> Cornelis de Waard, ed., *Correspondance du P. Marin Mersenne Religieux Minime*, 16 vols. (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne et ses fils, 1932), vol. 1, 62, as quoted in Forshaw, "Vitriolic Reactions," 126.

### The Incident of the Rosicrucian Placards of Paris

Even closer to d’Espagnet, another set of texts published in the 1610s, the *Fama Fraternitatis* (1614), *Confessio Fraternitatis* (1615), and the *Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz* (1616), excited many due to their mystery and promise.<sup>398</sup> The idea for what have come to be known as the Rosicrucian manifestos originated among the circle of Tobias Hess, Christoph Besold, and Johann Valentin Andreae, among some others, though Andreae alone authored the *Chemical Wedding*.<sup>399</sup> The texts reiterated a number of ideals associated with Paracelsianism and the new medicine, among them a divinely guided renewal of natural knowledge, religion, and society, the belief in man as a microcosm of nature, and a distrust of Aristotle and Galen. The promised general reformation would be spread by an old and secret brotherhood of pious scholars, founded by the legendary Rosenkreutz and versed in the true philosophy of alchemy, *magia*, cabala, and other arts of the adept.<sup>400</sup> This fraternity of the Rose-Cross caused scholars some puzzlement and fascination, as the likes of Michael Maier, Robert Fludd, and René Descartes among others tried to locate, join, or otherwise enter into discourse with the brotherhood. Maier’s *Themis Aurea*, published in 1618, was a commentary on the laws of the Rosicrucians, and François Garasse wrote that Michael Maier was the secretary of this “secret sect” in Germany.<sup>401</sup> Some authorities like the Archduke Maximilian of Austria and landgrave Moritz of Hessen-Kassel, on the other hand, sensed sectarians and false prophets and had printers of the manifestos imprisoned to set an example.<sup>402</sup> Much of the curiosity of the movement stems from the fact that to our knowledge no such brotherhood ever existed, and the

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<sup>398</sup> The *Fama* and *Chemical Wedding* appear to have been written around 1607-1608 and circulated in manuscript form prior to publication. See Kahn, “Rosicrucian Hoax,” 238-242.

<sup>399</sup> Kahn, “Rosicrucian Hoax,” 238.

<sup>400</sup> Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 42-45.

<sup>401</sup> Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, 104, and Tilton, *The Quest for the Phoenix*, 167-169.

<sup>402</sup> Kahn, “Rosicrucian Hoax,” 240-242.

gradual disillusionment of those like Maier and Fludd is evident in their letters and publications as their entreaties went unanswered.

The mythical brotherhood reignited public discourse about Paracelsism and alchemy in Paris just as d’Espagnet was publishing the *Enchiridion* and *Arcanum*. Didier Kahn has written an exhaustive reevaluation of the incident of the Rosicrucian Placards, in the course of which he renames what Yates had called the “Rosicrucian Scare” to the “tragicomic” episode of the “Rosicrucian Hoax.”<sup>403</sup> Kahn lays the agency for the event at the feet of one Étienne Chaume, a future medical student between seventeen and twenty years of age, who posted several placards in Paris, possibly in more than one stage, and most likely in the weeks between June 13<sup>th</sup> and late July of 1623.<sup>404</sup> Though contemporary accounts differ somewhat in the details, the primary thrust of the posters seem to have been a proclamation of the arrival of members of the college of the Rose-Cross within Paris, who were able to speak many languages, blend in to their desired environment in dress and custom, and remain unseen or invisible, come to the city by the grace of God to teach and draw men from error and death.<sup>405</sup> The posters were probably intended to mock Lullists, Rosicrucians, and Paracelsians, playing on the preexisting literature and mythology of the Brotherhood and poking fun at the mystical philosophers who viewed themselves as uniquely enlightened, as many alchemists like d’Espagnet did.<sup>406</sup> Yet Chaume’s elaborate jest caused more of a furor than he anticipated. As accusations of heresy and witchcraft flew from the pens of clerics and scholars and authorities reacted with interrogations and arrests, he deemed it prudent to leave the city.

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<sup>403</sup> Kahn, “Rosicrucian Hoax,” 242.

<sup>404</sup> Kahn, “Rosicrucian Hoax,” 244.

<sup>405</sup> Based on Gabriel Naudé’s *Instruction à la France*, 1623. See Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, 103, and Kahn, “Rosicrucian Hoax,” 244.

<sup>406</sup> Kahn, “Rosicrucian Hoax,” 251-252.

While some details of the episode remain mysterious, what stands more clearly is the maelstrom of anti-Paracelsian, anti-Lullian, and anti-Libertinian sentiment that intensified as a result. Examining letters and publications surrounding the incident, Didier Kahn demonstrates that the Rosicrucians were frequently associated and equated by their critics with Paracelsians, Lutherans, magicians, alchemists, libertines, atheists, mystics, Epicureans, Cabalists, and other heretics or sectarians such as the Alumbrados in contemporary Spain. That is to say, they were viewed with suspicion and hostility as an extension of the preexisting distrust of these groups discussed above, especially Paracelsians: “most often, the diverse comments on the fictitious Brotherhood especially fed the anti-Paracelsian polemic that had been latent in France uninterrupted since 1578.”<sup>407</sup> Yates characterizes the reaction from those like Garasse and his *La Doctrine curieuse* as an attempt to start a “witch craze.”<sup>408</sup> Kahn argues that Lullism was doubtless in fashion in 1623, perhaps even at its high point as a movement of ideas.<sup>409</sup> Zetzner had reedited Lull’s works alongside publishing the *Theatrum Chemicum*, while Bruno and Robert le Foul, Sieur de Vassy, had been very interested in Lull. Pierre Morestel’s 1621 *Artis Kabbalisticæ Academia* and Jean Belot’s 1623 *L’Oeuvre des Oeuvres ou le plus parfait des sciences paulines, armadelles et lullistes* had borrowed much from Lull as well.

Reaching beyond medical debates, these polemics stirred the “latent quarrel of the ancients and the moderns as well as the problem of religious orthodoxy.”<sup>410</sup> Kahn argues that these attacks on Paracelsism had mostly been confined to the medical domain before this point, but that after 1623, as exemplified by the writings of Father Garasse, Jean Boucher, and Marin Mersenne, these

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<sup>407</sup> Kahn, “Rosicrucian Hoax,” 263.

<sup>408</sup> Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, 104-105.

<sup>409</sup> Kahn, “Rosicrucian Hoax,” 251.

<sup>410</sup> Kahn, “Rosicrucian Hoax,” 275.

debates entered the sphere of the public and of theologians.<sup>411</sup> The poet and libertine Théophile de Viau was imprisoned in July of 1623 on the orders of the *Parlement* on suspicion of atheism and having written a book about the Rosicrucians.<sup>412</sup> At least three other poets were also arrested by the same order in connection to the publication of the *Parnasse des Poetes Satyriques*, a collection of licentious poems.<sup>413</sup> In June of 1623 in his *Couronne mystique*, Jean Boucher, a priest and former Leaguer, remarked that atheism and magic, exemplified by the Rosicrucians and the theory of the weapon-salve, followed where the Protestant heresy had spread.<sup>414</sup> Gabriel Naudé, though he was critical of Jesuits like Garasse and their overreactions to the Rosicrucian episode in his *Instruction à la France sur la vérité de l'histoire des Frères de la Roze-Croix* (1623), still placed the Rosicrucians thematically in the same intellectual milieu as John Dee, Trithemius, Bruno, Lull, Paracelsus, and François de Candale, who had prepared a French translation of the Hermetic *Pimander* in 1579, among others.<sup>415</sup> That is, he thought Paracelsians, Rosicrucians, and any practitioners of alchemy or natural magic were fools, pretending enlightenment while pursuing an intellectual path empty of real knowledge.<sup>416</sup>

This was the context in which the *Enchiridion* and *Arcanum* were published. If we consider the imprimatur of June 17th, 1623, and Kahn's probable temporal window for the placards of early June to late July of that year, we understand the incredibly close proximity of the two events, though not which came first. Even if one likely cannot argue that d'Espagnet chose to conceal his name as a direct result of the incident of the Rosicrucian placards, it is clear that there were tensions and debates being had with real consequences for more 'innovative' philosophers that d'Espagnet

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<sup>411</sup> Kahn, "Rosicrucian Hoax," 283.

<sup>412</sup> Kahn, "Rosicrucian Hoax," 268-269.

<sup>413</sup> Kahn, "Rosicrucian Hoax," 284.

<sup>414</sup> Kahn, "Rosicrucian Hoax," 277.

<sup>415</sup> Kahn, "Rosicrucian Hoax," 262, and Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, 107.

<sup>416</sup> Kahn, "Rosicrucian Hoax," 290-291.

would have wanted to shield himself from. We witness in numerous publications how the Rosicrucians were connected with the heresies of Protestantism and the Alumbrados of Spain, with Lullism, alchemy, magic, libertinism, mysticism, atheism, and most importantly, Paracelianism, which was perceived to be at the dark heart of many of these deviant intellectual strains.<sup>417</sup> There were real consequences as many were arrested, exiled, or banned from teaching, and this attitude continued in France beyond 1623.

Even before the Rosicrucian incident attracted the ire of Marin Mersenne, he had already established himself as a fierce opponent of Paracelsism and alchemy in his *Quaestiones celeberrimae in Genesim* (1623). Mersenne, in his horror at the chemical reading of scripture and the sacred mysteries of faith perpetuated by Paracelsians and alchemists, followed Erastus.<sup>418</sup> Mersenne said much the same of Heinrich Khunrath, and wrote approvingly when in 1625, the Faculty of theology of the Sorbonne condemned Heinrich Khunrath's *Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom* (first published in 1609) as "blasphemous, impious and dangerous to faith [...] a most pernicious book [...] censored as much for its explanations of scriptural verses as for the inferences made, a damnable book swarming with impieties, errors, and heresies and the continuous sacrilegious profanation of passages from Holy Scripture, and abusing the very sacred mysteries of the Catholic Religion, in order to entice its readers into the secret and pernicious arts."<sup>419</sup> Khunrath too had voiced a universal and theosophical approach to science and theology as mutually reinforcing, where understanding alchemy and the book of nature was a path to understanding God; to know Christ was to know the philosopher's stone, and to know the stone was to know Christ.<sup>420</sup> In Khunrath's view, Moses was a cabalist and a chemist, and the authority

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<sup>417</sup> Kahn, "Rosicrucian Hoax," 280-281.

<sup>418</sup> Kahn, "Rosicrucian Hoax," 282-283, and Forshaw, "Vitriolic Reactions."

<sup>419</sup> Forshaw, "Vitriolic Reactions," 111.

<sup>420</sup> Forshaw, "Vitriolic Reactions," 119.

of Hermes was second only to his.<sup>421</sup> Debus paints Jean Baptiste van Helmont (1579-1644) as another victim of these times, a ‘period of retrenchment’ for traditionalists. Over the next decade, beginning with *De Magnetica vulnerum curatione* in 1621, his positions on the weapon-salve controversy saw him condemned by the faculty of medicine and theology at Louvain, interrogated and tried by the Spanish inquisition, forced to recant his errors multiple times, then jailed and confined to house arrest for over two years for his ideas.<sup>422</sup>

Even closer to d’Espagnet, when in August of 1624 Jean Bitaud, Étienne de Clave, and Antoine de Villon circulated and proposed to dispute fourteen theses against Aristotle, the *Parlement* of Paris prohibited the disputation on pain of death and sent the theses to the Sorbonne for examination.<sup>423</sup> When some theses were censured as heretical, the *Parlement* ordered the authors to leave the city and forbade them from teaching again within its jurisdiction. Many of the fourteen theses touched on the same problems that d’Espagnet attempted to deal with, and d’Espagnet’s ideas agreed with many of those found in the theses. De Villon and de Clave agreed that the elements cannot be freely transmuted between one another, and that fire was not one of the four elements, but also had very different ideas about the fundamental principles of nature, adding the Paracelsian *tria prima* to only two traditional elements.<sup>424</sup> Their theses also consider the Sun to be of incomparable importance, the font of a universal spirit springing from the soul of the world.<sup>425</sup> In general they rejected many traditional theories, such as prime matter, privation,

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<sup>421</sup> Forshaw, “Vitriolic Reactions,” 120.

<sup>422</sup> Moran, *Distilling Knowledge*, 89, Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 303-310, and Kahn, “Rosicrucian Hoax,” 276. See also Georgiana D. Hedesan, *An Alchemical Quest for Universal Knowledge: The ‘Christian Philosophy’ of Jan Baptist Van Helmont (1579-1644)* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>423</sup> See Didier Kahn, “La condamnation des thèses d’Antoine de Villon et Étienne de Clave contre Aristote, Paracelse et les “cabalistes”” (1624), *Revue d’histoire des sciences* 55, no. 2, (Avril-Juin 2002): 143-198, Roger Ariew, *Descartes and the Last Scholastics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 87, and Clericuzio, *Elements, Principles, and Corpuscles*, 42-43.

<sup>424</sup> Kahn, *Alchimie et paracelsisme*, 530.

<sup>425</sup> Kahn, *Alchimie et paracelsisme*, 532.



and substantial forms, and put forth an atomic theory of matter based in their five principles. Kahn suggests they might have been influenced by the *Enchiridion* alongside the work of Khunrath, Fludd, and others, though they disagreed with d’Espagnet as often as they agreed.

These are only a few of the dozens of authors and philosophers of d’Espagnet’s generation interested in chymia who challenged the educational and medical establishment and inspired subsequent generations to do the same. In short, the period saw debates about sources of authority in medicine and chemistry, the relationship of chemistry to medicine, and even what constituted real ‘chemistry’ or ‘alchemy’ and what did not. Those like Libavius tried to distance practical chemistry from alchemy, with the metaphysical and theological speculations of the latter. Many physicians and philosophers saw merit in chemical medicines but were wary of proof by analogy and recourse to microcosms and macrocosms as explanatory frameworks. Those like Fludd and d’Espagnet embraced the mystical and metaphysical aspects of alchemy and a broadly based natural philosophy that cross-referenced scripture with ancient philosophical and mythological stories. They drew on Renaissance Hermetism, Cabala, and other branches of mystical thought that offered ways to approach God and obtain knowledge of his creation that were hardly out of place in premodern Europe and would have felt familiar to many Christians. Many subscribed to and helped justify ideas about the true knowledge of a previous age being restored through the rediscovery and exegesis of ancient texts with recognizable metaphysical themes. If they believed that Genesis was the bridge between theology and chemistry or natural science, and creation was a chemical process, then perhaps nature’s ongoing operations were based in those same chemical processes and principles. Of course, those like Mersenne responded to such an approach with accusations of philosophical overreach if not outright heresy. Mersenne wanted to purify chemistry of the cosmological presumptions of the Paracelsians, arguing that chemists should stay

in their lane, as it were.<sup>426</sup> Any new theory of matter had to consider the scholastic approach to thorny theological litmus tests such as the transubstantiation of the Eucharist, a particularly symbolic and divisive point of disagreement between Catholics and reformed confessions. Yet whatever their conflicts all challenged the fundamental tenets of Galenic and Aristotelian positions and contributed to a lively, knowledge-seeking discourse about man, God, and nature.

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<sup>426</sup> Clericuzio, *Elements, Principles, and Corpuscles*, 48-49.

## CHAPTER 6. THE ALCHEMICAL COSMOS OF JEAN D'ESPAGNET

### D'Espagnet's Self-image as Philosopher and Author

As we have seen, d'Espagnet would have been right to fear trouble for the ideas in his work on natural philosophy, and this gives us some insight as to why he may have chosen to publish anonymously. Indeed, in the opening epistle to readers of the *Enchiridion* he states directly that he considered keeping his thoughts to himself for fear of public opinion and the possibility that it might prove dangerous to himself. He sympathized with other philosophers who he felt were unjustly attacked by critics who ventured and produced nothing of their own, but nevertheless were quick to judge and tear down others who sought to improve human knowledge. There is an air of elitism in this view, though, as the overly critical positions adopted by these detractors he believes are based in the ignorance of the uninitiated. Perhaps it is for this reason that he never mentions Paracelsus by name, though d'Espagnet does not hesitate to name other authors who were deeply and obviously influenced by Paracelsus. On the other hand, d'Espagnet does refer directly to Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, another work with a reputation for impiety and immorality, alongside other controversial works.

D'Espagnet characterizes his study of natural philosophy as a journey or quest, a scholarly retreat from the dangers and uncertainties of his life and career as a magistrate to a sanctuary where he could seek out the laws and secrets of the universe. He began from a place of ignorance himself, but his desire to know propelled him forward. He studied and weighed the verity of various doctrines and authors, and with the guidance of the light of nature, was able to grasp some of their faults. His devotion to this light of nature and to truth led him to seek to correct the errors of the ancients despite their presumptive authority, especially concerning current and accepted ideas about matter, form, and the elements. Again, he tells us of the difficulties and dangers of

challenging traditional wisdom to which he has watched many others fall victim. Yet despite the revered names of Plato and Aristotle, we must not obstinately cling to received truth, but keep an open mind and give him first a fair reading. He still holds great respect for these philosophers of old, responsible for capably nourishing philosophy from its infancy into maturity, but in his current day he believed that man could build upon and move beyond them toward an advancement of learning. Expanding upon the theme of an ongoing improvement of human knowledge, he asserted that despite their undeniable greatness the ancients did not know everything. The sheer number of things of which man was ignorant was clearer than ever, but he commended his contemporaries for their efforts which were bearing great fruit. Philosophy was not a garment that wore out with age, but rather would be perfected by time in an ongoing, cooperative process in which he considered himself a participant. He closes his opening epistle beseeching his readers not to leap too quickly to condemn him, even should it seem that his ideas are sacrilegious or unsettling to the boundaries of philosophy. Instead, they should consider whether he is building a stronger foundation for philosophy, honoring and confirming her privileges but based on firmer truths. The envious and ignorant will snipe at him from below, but he walks above them, out of their reach and under the patronage of the Deity of truth. He ends optimistically with a nod toward a cooperative understanding of science, that he will have accomplished his goal if others in the future have even greater success than he.

The *Arcanum*'s epistle to the reader is strongly reminiscent of the first. D'Espagnet knows that the successful production of the 'Hermetic' stone is almost a miracle, due to the complexity and labyrinthine nature of the operations. The mind of man requires divine illumination to see his way through, and this difficulty is compounded by the lengths authors have gone to in order to hide these secrets. These obstacles have led alchemy to acquire a bad reputation undeservedly,

borne from the failures of jealous and unskilled plunderers who, rather than consider anything beyond their knowledge and capabilities, would instead accuse practitioners of fraud and falsehood. Only those who cannot obtain it disdain the treasure of Nature and Art, and these slanderers have never been led into the sanctuary of this holy science. They condemn what they know not. Though he is aware he may face reproach for revealing to the vulgar crowd what should remain secret, d’Espagnet claims that it is out of pity for the ignorant that he published these secrets, judging it worthwhile to try to rescue future philosophers from error.

### **Natural Philosophy Restored**

By the period of the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, when d’Espagnet was engaging with natural philosophy and finally publishing his thoughts, the field was replete with controversial discourses and facing challenges even on an epistemological level. In the minds of men like d’Espagnet natural philosophy was extremely broad, intimately overlapping with numerous other disciplines. Authors continued to seek answers to some of philosophy’s oldest and most central questions about causality and the nature and origins of life, matter, and consciousness, with consequences for medicine, theology, astronomy, and the burgeoning field of technical chemistry. D’Espagnet’s contemporaries also began to look for new methods to interpret nature. Those like Galileo looked to number and shape, quantification and geometry, as the primary means to read the book of nature, while others like Robert Fludd saw numbers as mystical symbols and the means to hidden harmonies. Kepler, although he had his differences with Fludd, also sought to understand nature in terms of geometrical and musical harmonies. D’Espagnet and his son were collectors of mathematical manuscripts, with the latter befriending the eminent mathematician Pierre de Fermat, yet mathematics in any form were conspicuously absent from his natural

philosophy.<sup>427</sup> Numerous physicians like Joseph Duchesne and Daniel Sennert sought to reconcile new theories and techniques of chemistry and chemical medicine with traditional medical thought. Seeking new means to understand matter and motion, men like Descartes sought to eliminate occult forces entirely, leading him toward corpuscular or atomic means of explaining motion over distance. Those like Francis Bacon argued against exactly the kind of universally sweeping, perfectly ordered, and conceptually beautiful worldbuilding that d’Espagnet undertook.

In this sea of ideas d’Espagnet crafted his own cosmological system, a syncretic union based on the concept of universal microcosmic and macrocosmic correspondence and similitude and built on the conviction that over two millennia of philosophical inquiries spoke of the same truths hidden behind diverse tongues and terms. Strongly influenced by his belief in this ancient wisdom tradition of *prisca theologia*, d’Espagnet often had recourse to texts and ideas from various ancient spiritual and philosophical traditions such as Hermetism, Platonism, or Pythagoreanism, as well as classical literature and mythology, all of which he sought to reconcile with Judeo-Christian scripture. The Hermetic writings especially emphasize the wonder of the creation and the connection between philosophy and piety, rational knowledge (*episteme*) and ineffable, divine truths (*gnosis*), an outlook d’Espagnet embraces and discusses. He imbibed the anti-Aristotelianism of his day but nevertheless still looked to the past for intellectual authorities and was deeply influenced by Platonic philosophies and the writings of those of his day who were also drawn to Platonism. The result was a science of creation, practiced in accordance with Christian metaphysical and theological commitments and understood through the lens of Platonic philosophy and alchemical conceptions according to which laboratory experiments were

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<sup>427</sup> Willard, *Jean d’Espagnet’s The Summary of Physics Restored*, xxii.

microcosms of natural processes of creation, transformation, and destruction in the world at large.<sup>428</sup>

The best way to characterize the *Enchiridion* is to take it at its name: that is, as a summary or handbook. On our behalf d’Espagnet has read the relevant works, ancient and modern, and through his diligence and judicious exercise of reason has arrived at the truths of our universe. The natural laws he presents within are God’s just order, fully revealed to a select few over the millennia. Alchemy sat at the intersection of theories and ideas about life, matter, man, and the cosmos. Roughly the first twenty percent of the *Enchiridion*’s 245 canons deal with the creation of the universe and its initial ordering. This is not only important to his understanding of life, the forces of creation, the qualities of matter, and of God, but also to his alchemy, for his instructions for the creation of the philosopher’s stone mimic and are confirmed by this understanding of the original processes of creation. These processes were most explicitly outlined in divinely inspired texts about that creation, especially Genesis and the Hermetic *Pimander*. D’Espagnet begins in deeply Neoplatonic fashion, establishing that before the creation God was an infinite unity or “Oneness,” eternal and omnipotent, the “radical principle” of all things and whose essence is boundless light.<sup>429</sup> A thematic microcosm of this radical principle exists in all things and is explored later in the *Enchiridion*. This light he shared initially only with himself, before manifesting a duplicate of the “ideal world” that lay in the womb of his mind and unfurling himself to shed his light upon it.<sup>430</sup> D’Espagnet believes that this is what Hermes meant when he wrote that God “changed his form, and... all things were brought to light,” and that the world is nothing more than the manifested or opened “image of a hidden divinity.”<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> See D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canons 68-72 for an explicit linkage of the creation with alchemy.

<sup>429</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 1. *Radix, radicis* here meaning root, foundation, source, or origin.

<sup>430</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 2.

<sup>431</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 2, “*Nihil aliud quippe est mundus, quàm patens occultae divinitatis imago.*”

The world is a smith's work, all connected by links in a chain, in the middle of which "Nature" sits, continually ministering to it.<sup>432</sup> D'Espagnet imagines a three-tiered, hierarchical universe, divided into the Supercelestial, the Celestial, and Subcelestial. The Supercelestial is that closest to God, entirely spiritual and immortal, and sometimes known as the Intelligible realm. Below this sits the Celestial, replete with perfect bodies which share their vital spirits with the realm below. The lowest, the Subcelestial, also called the Elementary region, is corporeal, mortal, and imperfect, and thus subject to the cycle of corruption and generation. Life in this realm is dependent upon the Celestial for its spiritual benefits, which are only temporary and "loaned," of which the most important is life. God, the eternal Father and divine worker, ordered the universe such that the lowest and highest extremes are hierarchically interrelated, sharing a likeness by analogy and correspondence, linked by insensible mediums and secret bonds.<sup>433</sup> Again, d'Espagnet identifies the *Emerald Tablet* of Hermes as his primary source for this fundamental truth, according to which everything below is linked to something above. The laws of creation also establish and maintain that what is below is subservient to what is above, ascending the great chain of being, and this natural hierarchy is the "order of the whole universe."<sup>434</sup>

Light is perhaps the most fundamentally important force in d'Espagnet's cosmos. It is discussed frequently through the *Enchiridion* and at various points is identified with God, Platonic Forms, and Fire. After the creation it was embodied or made manifest in the Sun, the eternal fountain from which it flows. Light, associated by d'Espagnet with the masculine, is spiritual, active, vital, and informing, responsible for generation and life, and with the qualities of heat and motion. In contrast to the glory of the masculine, Divine Sun, those things that are feminine are

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<sup>432</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 9.

<sup>433</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 3.

<sup>434</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 11.



corporeal, imperfect, passive, chaotic, cold, and wet, associated with corruption and death.<sup>435</sup> The first or prime matter was female, lifeless until impregnated in the creation by masculine light. In this cosmic marriage, the light “tames the unbridledness”<sup>436</sup> of the female first matter and thus to the masculine light goes the power of ruling, while the female ‘body’ occupies the place of the passive and the servile.<sup>437</sup> To all subsequent matter this corruption, servility, and dependence on masculine form is endowed. After creation, the first matter went wholly into the Elements, no longer existing in its previous state, and things comprised of elemental earth and water retained these feminine qualities to be passive vessels of generation that receive the seminal virtues of life-giving spiritual forces.<sup>438</sup> Their nature is to be always desirous, lusting after and “greedily wooing” other forms, never satisfied.<sup>439</sup> Its appetite is an incurable weakness, and it “brings to its husband a dowry of corruption.”<sup>440</sup>

Although d’Espagnet explicitly denies the Aristotelian concept of privation (*steresis*), which in the hands of some other philosophers was conceived of in terms of appetite, the full status of a natural principle, his own explanations rely on similar metaphors.<sup>441</sup> More specifically, he says that in spite of what some philosophers say, nature would not admit a third principle that goes contrary to her intentions, and we would be more correct to consider “Divine Love,” and not privation, as the force that brings matter and form together.<sup>442</sup> Privation he understands as the mere absence of form, “the darkness upon the face of the depths,” a state of being rather than a

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<sup>435</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 25, 227.

<sup>436</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 223.

<sup>437</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 209.

<sup>438</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 227.

<sup>439</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 42.

<sup>440</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 42.

<sup>441</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 45. According to Aristotle, matter constantly seeks forms it has not yet possessed: ‘matter desires form as the female desires the male and the ugly the beautiful.’ *Physics*, Book 1, Section 9.

<sup>442</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 45. He is perhaps referring here to Giordano Bruno or Nicolas of Cusa, though he mentions no one by name.

force or principle in itself, while “Love” (*amor*) is the mediator between the desirer and the desired.<sup>443</sup> It is possible that d’Espagnet borrowed the word or concept of Love (*eros*) as presented in the Platonic dialogues like the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, or *Republic*, as a desire to possess that is linked to but not entirely subsumed by sexual desire, though d’Espagnet is clearly not subservient to Plato’s arguments on the subject. That is, it is possible to interpret *eros* in these dialogues as well as the *Symposium* as an inherently rational striving to possess the greater “Good,” rather than compare it directly with sexual lust and its negative associations we see regularly in d’Espagnet’s writings.<sup>444</sup>

After death, the carcasses of dead beings lay as a mass of corruption and confused elements because they have lost their male governor.<sup>445</sup> They wait, widowed, for masculine, informing rays of sunlight to once more make them fit for generation.<sup>446</sup> The failure of mixed bodies (i.e. disease, deformity, etc.) is not from contrariness of elements or form, which by definition only adds perfection, but from the initial penurious weakness of the first matter. D’Espagnet argues that Genesis never claimed that all of creation was ‘good,’ and especially not the initial Abyss; God made this statement only after the information of the world by the Light, about those things that had been touched by the Light.<sup>447</sup>

D’Espagnet makes several gendered comments that go beyond what is necessary to make his point and reveal his fundamental sense of the gendered and hierarchical nature of everything in the universe. D’Espagnet blames the feminine nature of a rainstorm for its unpredictability and destructive capacity: it troubles earth and air with its inconstancy, causing ruin and corruption to

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<sup>443</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 45.

<sup>444</sup> See Charles H. Kahn, “Plato’s Theory of Desire,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 41, No. 1 (Sept., 1987): 77-103.

<sup>445</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 183.

<sup>446</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 183.

<sup>447</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 99-100.

both. With its defects and excesses, it shakes the earth, raging tumultuously. As feminine, he explains, the creator put her in the world in the nature of a woman, a “necessary evil” who “arrogates all things as subject to her and turns those things given to her for a general good to a public ruin.”<sup>448</sup> As important as analogy is to d’Espagnet’s understanding of the cosmos, such examples are more than mere metaphor. D’Espagnet routinely attributes causal power to the gendered qualities of things, and this applies everywhere. All of nature is gendered, fundamentally divided between the opposing qualities of the male and female, and primarily understood in terms of premodern conceptions of sexual reproduction. In the mind of d’Espagnet and many of his learned contemporaries, feminine things were by their very nature inferior, destructive, corrupting, and passive compared to their male counterparts. As we have seen above this attitude was borne out in various media and was especially prevalent, or at least highly visible, among jurists and physicians. To justify this position, d’Espagnet presented an argument from natural philosophy that was thorough and rational, at least by his understanding. It was also based on numerous reliable sources that confirmed one another. He demonstrated clearly the depth of this conviction and the extent, realized and potential, of its explanatory power within scientific discourse.

D’Espagnet’s divine Light mirrors almost exactly the descriptions of Light and its role in the creation of the cosmos that, as discussed above, appeared in *Pimander*, though he expands upon these concepts significantly. Like *Pimander*, d’Espagnet calls the Light the Word of God, and as in *Pimander* this Light acts upon the prime matter, coming down from above to create the world and the Elements by separating the waters and dividing the subtle or spiritual from the thick or corporeal.<sup>449</sup> D’Espagnet uses a vast array of terms and metaphors to describe Light, but it is clear that he continues to follow *Pimander*, barely stopping short of arguing that God is the Light,

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<sup>448</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 131.

<sup>449</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 20.

just as the divine Mind (the Platonic *nous*) in *Pimander* tells Hermes that he is the Light. D’Espagnet calls Light the “most exact copy of the Deity”<sup>450</sup> and the “Spirit of God”<sup>451</sup> that was poured upon the waters (i.e. the Abyss or first matter) in Genesis, and states that the Light of the Sun is nearest that nature approaches to the divine glory, itself proceeding from the uncreated unity of God.<sup>452</sup> The Sun is not all of God, but it is of God. In what is perhaps a reference to the Kabbalistic text *Zohar*, d’Espagnet also refers to the opinion of the “rabbis” to support his conclusion that the first matter, the *Hyle*, or Abyss were the same thing and were a dark, smoky, moist, and almost incomprehensible entity.<sup>453</sup> This is also exactly how the *Pimander* describes the first matter.

After the separation of the Abyss by the Light, God gathered the Light into the globe of the Sun, where it behaves as a divine agent bestowing heat, light, and life upon the cosmos. He was far from the first to associate the Sun and its light with a life-giving cosmic heat, and Hiro Hirai has discussed how texts attributed to Hippocrates were interpreted by Gerolamo Cardano, Bernardino Telesio, Cornelius Gemma and others to support similar theories regarding life, heat, the Sun, and the world soul or *anima mundi*.<sup>454</sup> The divine light continually assails the waters, forcibly maintaining their separation as well as dry land.<sup>455</sup> This gathering of light into the Sun took place on the fourth millenary day of creation, and marked the first time that the Divine Nature or “uncreated Sun” (i.e. God) allowed an aspect of himself to be caged or bound in a corporeal body.<sup>456</sup> Here he also tries to establish a timeline linking the creation of the Sun to the resurrection

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<sup>450</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 200.

<sup>451</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 23.

<sup>452</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 28, 24.

<sup>453</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canons 18, 66. *Hyle* is the Greek word for wood or timber, denoting a building material.

<sup>454</sup> Hiroshi Hirai, *Medical Humanism and Natural Philosophy: Renaissance Debates on Matter, Life, and the Soul* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2011), 9.

<sup>455</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 27.

<sup>456</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 38.

of Jesus Christ, whose incarnation was the second time God allowed himself to be caged in a corporeal body. Thereafter the Sun functioned as God's viceregent or deputy, continually bestowing its vital gifts upon creatures and serving as the agent through which God maintains the power of ruling over his creation.<sup>457</sup> D'Espagnet argues that God imprinted in the Sun the threefold image of his divinity, to match the Trinity, and like the Trinity all things spring from the Unity of the one God and one Sun.<sup>458</sup> As the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, the heat of the sun proceeds from Light and motion; this is its trinitarian or threefold office.<sup>459</sup> He calls it also a "transparent mirror of divine glory," God's "Royal eye," and the "eye of the creator of the world."<sup>460</sup> If the universe is the hall of the great lord, the Sun is the "immortal lamp" hanging in its center.<sup>461</sup> It is the "sensible Monarch" to be set over the realm of our sensory perception, a God we can see, destined to rule of the Elements and the mundane as the soul rules the body.<sup>462</sup>

Ultimately the Sun is the visible God, a comprehensible manifestation of an infinite and otherwise imperceptible God, and his most obvious means of demonstrating himself to man.<sup>463</sup> This is what d'Espagnet believes Psalm 18:11 refers to when it states that God made darkness his cover or canopy; that is, God wrapped himself in a cloud or dark mask so that he could exhibit his brightness to mortal eyes without the destruction of the spectator.<sup>464</sup> There are numerous biblical passages that support the association of God with Light and the Sun. For instance, Psalm 36:9

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<sup>457</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canons 5, 35, 243.

<sup>458</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 35.

<sup>459</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 35.

<sup>460</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 36.

<sup>461</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 243.

<sup>462</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 243, 235.

<sup>463</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 87. Various phrases and imagery naming the Sun the "visible God," "immortal lamp," "Sun's chariot," "mind," "King/Royal," "Ruler," etc. also appear in Robert Fludd's *Utriusque Cosmi Maioris*, and were possibly borrowed by both Fludd and d'Espagnet from Nicolaus Copernicus' *De Revolutionibus Orbium*. See Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 230, and p. 230 note 71 for a discussion on the views of Fludd and Copernicus on the Sun.

<sup>464</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 117.

states that the Sun is the fountain of light, while Psalm 18:5 claims that God put his tabernacle in the Sun, an association Robert Fludd made as well.<sup>465</sup> Light is the essential agent of balance and order in the universe, having informed all things to differing degrees such that they might all establish a friendship, consent, and harmony for the purpose of stability, leaving no repugnance or enmity that might cause disturbance or disorder.<sup>466</sup>

The divine Sun is also critical to d’Espagnet’s theory of forms. He argues for the independent existence of perfect forms or “ideal copies” which corresponded with those of mixed bodies in the microcosmic world below.<sup>467</sup> These originals, being closer to the Eternal Being, are of far greater perfection, spirituality, and dignity, and everything in our inferior world is a copy transmitted from a superior celestial nature, dependent upon and acknowledging the dominion of its corresponding superior.<sup>468</sup> This hierarchical dependency and patronage is manifested through “secret seals and signatures.” The Sun is the font of universal form, the form of all forms, and plays the part of an activator for the formal imprints located and retained in the seeds of things; “the Fire of nature informs matter.”<sup>469</sup> Light also demonstrates the infinite nature of God, he argues, as it can always be called back into existence if fed with fuel, drawing on an unseen and inexhaustible spiritual reservoir of lightsome power. Human intellect or understanding mimics this nature and can be understood as a form of Light, producing thought and understanding without apparent diminution. In general, Light’s ability to multiply or give of itself without apparent loss is evidence of its divinity.<sup>470</sup> This view of the Sun and the nature of its formal union with beings

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<sup>465</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 230.

<sup>466</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 102, 47.

<sup>467</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 166, 226.

<sup>468</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 226.

<sup>469</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 32, 124.

<sup>470</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 201, 177.

is hardly a large conceptual leap from the many doctrines of the world soul frequently presented in the works of Renaissance philosophers, especially those influenced by Neoplatonism.

D'Espagnet identifies “Heaven” as the first formal principle, an agent of separation during the creation of the elements and the world from the Abyss, and makes arguments from scripture to support this thesis.<sup>471</sup> This interpretation he further supports with reference to Genesis, namely that the distinction made between Heaven and Earth in the creation referred to the two chief principles, formal and material, with the material principle being the dark Abyss.<sup>472</sup> Like many other alchemists and natural philosophers, he also takes a phrase in Genesis, according to which the spirit of the lord walks or moves upon the waters, as evidence for the interpretation that spiritual Light separated the waters.<sup>473</sup>

D'Espagnet's general theory of matter is in accordance with the traditional hylomorphic conception of mixed bodies as the union of body and form. This is made clear in numerous places, but especially Canons 22 and 213 where he specifically identifies God's two building blocks of the cosmos and of individuals as form and matter, or heaven and earth. Yet he explicitly rejects Aristotle's concept of “privation” and instead argues for a cosmic force he calls divine “Love” as the cause for the formation of bonds between form and body or the elements which compose them.<sup>474</sup> Elsewhere he states that the soul is encased in a shell or capsule of Air, which serves as a medium, knot, or bond.<sup>475</sup> This enclosing container is what he understands by the term “spirit.”<sup>476</sup>

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<sup>471</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 24.

<sup>472</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 22.

<sup>473</sup> D'Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canons 68-72.

<sup>474</sup> See D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canons 94-95 for his idea of Divine Love as a bonding force between matter and form, and his agreement with Plato's identification of ‘Love’ as the “Eldest of the Gods.”

<sup>475</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 163.

<sup>476</sup> Though d'Espagnet gives no indication, this belief may have originated from Aristotle's Generation of Animals 2.3.

D'Espagnet views the forms and souls of creatures as substantially the same, that is, they are a “spark” of Natural or Internal Fire and a “secret spirit” void of corruption.<sup>477</sup> Within mixed bodies lay a seed, containing a “celestial spark” of light<sup>478</sup> and inside which is enclosed “dark kind of knowledge of their original.”<sup>479</sup> The original forms of things come from heaven, and “their father is the Sun.”<sup>480</sup> The inset fire or form in the seed is the highest operating spirit, the bestower of order and *Archaeus* of Nature.<sup>481</sup> These forms are communicated from above as a “ray of light” to rest in their seeds, which also contain the radical moisture and serve as the microcosmic Sun in mixed bodies.<sup>482</sup> Radical moisture is the site where form and matter are bound together in a “marriage of light and darkness,” as a microcosmic version of the informed first matter.<sup>483</sup> This radical principle is also likened by d'Espagnet to a candle of life force burning within us, constantly fed fuel and nutriments from the air through respiration.<sup>484</sup> Visible sunlight, enclosed in encompassing air or spirit,<sup>485</sup> is the vehicle for the divine essence of the universe, the universal of form, to be transmitted to all bodies across the universe.<sup>486</sup> Perfect metals have this heavenly, fiery principle within them as well, though it is enclosed within an outer shell, explaining the absence of the motion that usually accompanies this principle.<sup>487</sup> This idea for d'Espagnet explains how metals gain the power of motion – that is, why they begin to melt, evaporate, or sublime – when acted upon by external fire and their internal principle is freed through heating.<sup>488</sup>

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<sup>477</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canons 162-164, and canon 124 explores in more detail the ‘double nature’ – universal and individual – of form or natural/internal fire.

<sup>478</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 32, 214.

<sup>479</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 171.

<sup>480</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 170.

<sup>481</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 209.

<sup>482</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 124, 178. It is responsible for “all things in this microcosm or little world man, according to an analogy with the sun in the macrocosm...”

<sup>483</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 223.

<sup>484</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 89, 213.

<sup>485</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 196.

<sup>486</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 199.

<sup>487</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 156.

<sup>488</sup> D'Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 94.



As evidenced by several agricultural and chemical techniques, d’Espagnet argues, such as the fecundity of ash or dung, the radical moisture survives through death and the most extreme fire, through the cycles of generation and corruption of matter to be continually reborn.<sup>489</sup> It is the seat and food of celestial fire and form in life, and after death encases form in a protective shell.<sup>490</sup> Radical moisture and the form within it persist after death, but weakly, until excited by the external heat of divine sunlight.<sup>491</sup> It does at times occur that the female matter, “plunging into lust,” prematurely attempts generation with this languishing shadow of the masculine principle, though this union predictably results in imperfect abominations, spurious and illegitimate children of Nature.<sup>492</sup> When properly activated by the universal form of light, what form was “hidden in the bosom of nature” now displays itself as a soul, moving from potentiality to activity.<sup>493</sup> Thus the radical principle is an “immortal graft” set upon a mortal and corruptible nature, the undying lynchpin around which the elements and things continuously turn, immune from death in its eternal succession to attain a permanence like that of the stars.<sup>494</sup> It is this radical principle, which in perfect metals d’Espagnet calls a “perfect seed,” that is the key to the philosopher’s stone and needs to be extracted by the alchemist.<sup>495</sup> The “multiplying virtue” is hidden within the seed and can be manifested by the help of human art.<sup>496</sup>

D’Espagnet surmises that this principle will be the last remnant of the world after its destruction, suitable in its purity to serve as the foundation upon which God to rebuild a world

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<sup>489</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 218, 215.

<sup>490</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 224.

<sup>491</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 158, 184.

<sup>492</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 222: “... *verum illa hoc igniculo tepescens ac languenti similis masculi magis imagine quam copulâ corrupta in libidinem proruit...*”

<sup>493</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 167. For further information on the degrees and nature of Fire, see *Arcanum*, Canons 93-107 and especially 98. In these discussions d’Espagnet refers students to Lull’s *Practica* for further reading.

<sup>494</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 186, 220.

<sup>495</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 18.

<sup>496</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 17.

vindicated from original sin.<sup>497</sup> It is the “root of nature” which survives the ruin of mixed bodies, for the “ancient matrimony” of matter and form cannot be untied.<sup>498</sup> Evidence for this cycle, a kind of conservation of life and matter, d’Espagnet draws from Hermes Trismegistus, who says that nothing truly dies but merely passes into a change.<sup>499</sup> He also links this concept to the “Pythagoreans” and their “Tenet of Transanimation” according to which souls after death return to their component parts and regions only to be reformed in Nature’s workshop.<sup>500</sup> Transmigration of the soul was a belief associated in the Renaissance with Orphism and Pythagoras, who some believed to have been a follower or initiate into the Orphic mysteries.

D’Espagnet’s is one of many variations on a theory of seminal principle or the seeds of things (*semina rerum*) as a fundamental origin point for the reproduction or continuation of life. Such theories were tied to theories of matter and sought to answer questions of the utmost significance, such as how matter, considered lifeless and inert according to the traditional hylomorphic framework, can demonstrate life or consciousness, how generation can continue after corruption or death, and how a thing ‘knows’ how to grow into or become what it will be. Was this formative force material or supernatural? In generation, was this force transmitted through reproduction, to be present in an embryo for instance?<sup>501</sup> The relevant components and steps of these processes are undetectable through ordinary sensory perception, and these questions were also intimately tied to religion and theories about the human soul and man’s relationship to God.<sup>502</sup>

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<sup>497</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 220.

<sup>498</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 220.

<sup>499</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 12.

<sup>500</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 182.

<sup>501</sup> For instance, d’Espagnet argues in Canon 166 of the *Enchiridion* that the forms of beings from their original creation are passed down through generations.

<sup>502</sup> See Hirai, *Medical Humanism and Natural Philosophy*, 1-11, and Ku-ming (Kevin) Chang, “Alchemy as Studies of Life and Matter: Reconsidering the Place of Vitalism in Early Modern Chymistry,” *Isis* 102, No. 2 (June 2011): 322-329.

The “seeds of things” were gradually, though not linearly, reinterpreted as corpuscles in early modern chemistry. The subject has been important enough to prompt dedicated comparative studies in recent years from Hiro Hirai and Antonio Clericuzio.<sup>503</sup> In *Le concept de semence* Hirai argues that theories about seeds were essential to the growth of ideas about corpuscular material mechanics, and thus were a transitional link between the vitalistic philosophies of the renaissance, the mechanical philosophies that emerged in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and atomism. These theories varied wildly though, as Hirai also demonstrates in *Medical Humanism and Natural Philosophy*, where he discusses the ideas of Jean Fernel, Marsilio Ficino, Jacob Schegk, Cornelius Gemma, and Daniel Sennert, among others. Clericuzio too traces theories of seeds from ancient Greek philosophers through Paracelsus, his followers like Severinus, Duchesne, Sendivogius, and even d’Espagnet.<sup>504</sup> The theories of these Paracelsians all differed to some degree but maintained the general sense that some kind of unseen universal spirit, form, or generative principle existed in mixed bodies. Whether this principle was material or immaterial was also dependent on who one consulted.

For d’Espagnet’s part, he retained a traditional understanding of the basic function of formal qualities but suggested in some canons that there are indivisible fundamental particles associated with the Elements. This would place him most likely among the many vitalistic corpuscularists, who tried to conceive of particles in physical and spatial terms but retained qualitative notions like spirit, form, or other occult qualities as forces that supplied a *telos* and causation in matter.<sup>505</sup> This formal aspect of d’Espagnet’s cosmology is most deeply reminiscent of the Stoic doctrine of *logoi spermatikoi*, which was adapted by Plotinus, Augustine, and others,

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<sup>503</sup> For example, Hiroshi Hirai, *Le concept de semence*, and Clericuzio, *Elements, Principles and Corpuscles*.

<sup>504</sup> Clericuzio, *Elements, Principles and Corpuscles*, 13-20, 37-39.

<sup>505</sup> Clericuzio, *Elements, Principles, and Corpuscles*, 4: Clericuzio notes that this was a relatively common position among French chemists, including d’Espagnet, Nuysement, Lefebvre, and others.

present in a fashion in theories of sulphur and the quintessence in medieval alchemy but also revived in its Plotinian strain by Ficino.<sup>506</sup> In d’Espagnet’s cosmology the divine Sun is the font of universal form, which he associated with the soul and reason. The immanent form contained in the radical moisture of things is its microcosmic equivalent, the quintessence, as he will make explicit later in the *Arcanum*.<sup>507</sup> This is the basis of how d’Espagnet links the many to the one.

Numerous versions of corpuscular theories were conceived in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, some of which, like those of Angelo Sala and Daniel Sennert, were connected with chemistry.<sup>508</sup> Other contemporaries, though, including Descartes and his followers, began to explore purely mechanistic theories according to which motion was the result of the impact of uniform particles that should be explained with mathematics.<sup>509</sup> Part of the appeal of the search for a mechanical theory of motion and nature was to eliminate the reliance on uncertain ‘qualities’ and action at a distance as explanatory mechanisms. But such a theory failed to address the questions posed above regarding teleology and the origins of consciousness and made it less appealing in other ways.

On the topic of matter d’Espagnet briefly but sympathetically discusses Democritus’ opinion that “all bodies are made of atoms,” arguing that “reason and experience” vindicate the latter from his critics.<sup>510</sup> D’Espagnet interprets Democritus’ theory and language as an attempt to address the problem that scholastics approached with the traditional notion of *minima naturalia*, theorized as the smallest size a particle could take while still retaining its formal identity, and how they could be integrated (*mixtio*). D’Espagnet is well aware that the physical size of bodies and

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<sup>506</sup> See Hirai, “*Logoi Spermatikoi* and the Concept of Seeds.”

<sup>507</sup> See d’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 48.

<sup>508</sup> Clericuzio, *Elements, Principles, and Corpuscles*, 3-4.

<sup>509</sup> E.J. Dijksterhuis, *The Mechanization of the World Picture: Pythagoras to Newton*, trans. C. Dikshoorn (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 408-418.

<sup>510</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 153: “... *omnia corpore ex atomis fieri...*”

particles is an impediment to mixing. He thinks that Democritus refers in an obscure manner to the truth that Nature by necessity mixes the Elements in their smallest and indivisible state, for if not they would not be able to mix well enough to create natural and continuous bodies.<sup>511</sup> He states that Nature is adept at making her materials so subtle as to be spiritual and believes that Democritus knew this too. This is of paramount relevance to the alchemist, whose business is the artificial dissolution and resolution of mixed bodies through distillations, which cannot be accomplished unless the materials be made as subtle as possible, as in vapors. The more vaporous or attenuated the alchemist can make a material, the better suited it is to mixture, and though the Elements themselves are beyond man's reach the alchemist must get as close as possible.

D'Espagnet clearly has a sense of the physical and spatial relationships between particles, particularly as it relates to chemistry. This is important to consider but not especially new or revolutionary, as chemistry and corpuscularism had long, if not necessarily or continuously, been associated. As Newman has demonstrated, the *Summa Perfectionis* of Pseudo-Geber had in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century considered the size and spatial relationship of particles of mercury and sulphur as essential to mixing and creating metals.<sup>512</sup> D'Espagnet's seminal or radical principle survives death undetectably and maintains a connection with form, allowing for regrowth when activated by divine light. It is also seemingly a nonmaterial principle. It bonds together matter and form in bodies, the expression of the cosmic force of divine Love.<sup>513</sup> He does not explicitly consider the relationship between the radical principle and *minima* or whether every indivisible atom or particle has its own, as Daniel Sennert argued with his theory of "living atoms," but does imagine the

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<sup>511</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 153: "... elementorum quippe mixtionem obscuro sermone velare, nec reticere omnino voluit ingeniosus philosophus, quae ut naturae intentioni congruat, per minima et actu indivisibilia corpuscula fieri necesse est, secus in corpus continuum et naturale non coalescerent elementa."

<sup>512</sup> William R. Newman (ed.), *The Summa Perfectionis of Pseudo-Geber*, and Newman, "The Corpuscular Theory of J.B. Van Helmont," 161-191.

<sup>513</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 223.

radical principle to be inside of something like a corpuscle.<sup>514</sup> Yet it is insufficient of itself to be the cause of fruitful generation, requiring the external aid of the Sun's formal light.

D'Espagnet's engagement with questions of atoms and corpuscles as material principles was not extensive and was generally limited to what knowledge he deemed necessary for mixing chemical principles. Thus, his corpuscular theory did not really extend far beyond what had already been established in the *Summa Perfectionis* and consulted by chemists in the late Renaissance. Indeed, he seems to argue that what Democritus had really meant by 'atoms' was really just an elemental corpuscle that still retained formative force, an understanding of principles that d'Espagnet agrees with. *Semen* and *semina rerum* were terms Lucretius used to translate *atomos* in *De Rerum Natura*, a work we know d'Espagnet owned, and Lucretius' conception of these principles provided for formative power within them.<sup>515</sup> If we recall, d'Espagnet argued that direct manipulation of the basic elemental principles was denied to human arts, though we could manipulate their combined principles of the *tria prima*. These building blocks or corpuscles were compounds, but which had their own qualities.

Formal power or the power of the soul is what d'Espagnet argues we should explicitly understand by the concept of Elemental Fire, which he also calls natural, internal, or innate fire and heat at various points throughout his works.<sup>516</sup> This was in agreement with Paracelsus, Duchesne, and Gerolamo Cardano, all of whom differentiated Fire from the rest of the Elements. Duchesne specifically associated Fire with a heavenly principle, though Debus tells us that Duchesne continued to speak of Fire as an ordinary Element when convenient.<sup>517</sup> According to

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<sup>514</sup> Hirai, *Medical Humanism and Natural Philosophy*, 151-172.

<sup>515</sup> Clericuzio, *Elements, Principles, and Corpuscles*, 14, and Ingrid Rowland, *Giordano Bruno: Philosopher/Heretic*, 217.

<sup>516</sup> See D'Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 10, where he cites Lull and his 'Testament,' 'Codicil,' and 'Practicks' as authoritative on the degrees of Fire.

<sup>517</sup> Debus, *The Chemical Philosophy*, 162.

D’Espagnet God placed the element of Fire in the sun as the principle of all generation as the first agent of the world and the heart of the whole fabric of the universe.<sup>518</sup> He believes it was for this reason that the Sun was called by many ancient philosophers as the “soul of the world,” and that this is what Zoroaster and Heraclitus were referring to when they called it such as well as the “spirit of fire.”<sup>519</sup> Ultimately d’Espagnet’s theory of form as fire, flowing out from the unity or oneness of the sun, and linked through the macrocosm to the microcosm in the radical moisture, is his means of linking the one to the many. It is the fundamental cosmic principle of his great chain of being and what links the many of the microcosm to the universal reason of the divine *logos*.

Because Fire is an analog of form, d’Espagnet separates it from the traditional four elements, leaving a symbolic Trinity of Water, Earth, and Air, with Fire as a formal principle active in various mixtures among the three. These first three Elements are the second principles of the cosmos, made of the original first matter but diversely informed.<sup>520</sup> A mixture of these d’Espagnet equates with the Paracelsian *tria prima*, the “issue of the threefold copulation” of three Elements.<sup>521</sup> Earth and Water together make Mercury, Earth and Air, Sulphur, while Air and Water combine to make Salt, with heavenly Fire informing each duo. The Trinitarian symbolic correspondences are strong here as well.<sup>522</sup> The Elements themselves, the second principles of creation, are beyond the reach of man and his arts, with the common worldly elements we regularly experience being only shadows of their originals.<sup>523</sup> The *tria prima* are the closest mankind can get to the original principles of creation.

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<sup>518</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 91.

<sup>519</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 7, 85-86.

<sup>520</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 44.

<sup>521</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 151.

<sup>522</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 150 for a deeper exploration of the symbolism of this “double trinity.”

<sup>523</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 52-54.

He breaks with the ancients and some contemporaries in other ways as well. Unlike Fludd, for instance, d’Espagnet argues that these Elements do not transform back and forth between one another, for this would invite change and chaos at the most basic foundations of the world.<sup>524</sup> The entire order of nature would become inverted eventually. This would not be a world, he says, but chaos, and “nature is a friend to order.”<sup>525</sup> He also denies the common conception that the Elements are opposite to one another in an antagonistic manner, again arguing that this would go against the nature of Nature to establish such violence by design.<sup>526</sup> Instead they seek a oneness or unity, comingling toward equilibrium and harmony as is the character of Nature.<sup>527</sup> They are not exactly opposite one another, only different. In like fashion, the humors are also not simple contraries or opposites, and any medical theory based on this presumption is incorrect. If heat, required for life, and water were repugnant opposites, he asks, how could life exist underwater?<sup>528</sup> How would the principles of the cosmos not be eternally at war with one another? There would be no stability or peace. Some, d’Espagnet says, sought to reconcile this law of contraries by resort to a fifth Element or essence, but he believes this unnecessary addition robs nature of her genius.<sup>529</sup> He does maintain though the Galenic notion that sickness is caused by an imbalance of humours, a “lack of consonance” or a “defect of proportion” in the Elements leading to disorder, disease, and death.<sup>530</sup> Proper health is he discusses as analogous to harmony in music.

The ancients mistook the hydrologic cycle as a transformation of water into air and back again.<sup>531</sup> Those with a deep understanding of nature, like himself, know that this could never be

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<sup>524</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 118-120.

<sup>525</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 119.

<sup>526</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 68, 98-99.

<sup>527</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 102-104.

<sup>528</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 104-108.

<sup>529</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 112-114.

<sup>530</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 229-231.

<sup>531</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 128.



true. Although rarified, water will never attain the nobility of air, and air can never fall from its intrinsic purity and nobility to become water.<sup>532</sup> That is, unlike Aristotle, d’Espagnet argued that water vapor remained water, and did not become air. This is a firm law: the Supreme Creator, he says, “decreed that a noble nature cannot degenerate into a lesser, abjuring its native privilege or birthright to come under a servile vassalage.”<sup>533</sup> This social truth of hierarchy and inborn nobility applies no less to Elements or cosmic principles. Continuing his explanation on these relationships, he states that the commerce between superior and inferior beings is not dishonorable or degrading to the former. Fulfilling their natural office of rule, superior entities do not lessen their nobility or submit themselves to any bondage in the interaction but “attain new honour and privileged power.”<sup>534</sup> Every mixed being is an “empire” in itself and everything has a spiritual form to rule it.

Instead, d’Espagnet imagines the earth as a vast alembic, inside of which the water only takes on a more vaporous form, as opposed to changing into a different Element altogether, before falling back to the bottom under its own power. As part of the genius and efficiency of the divine plan, the water high in the atmosphere can absorb celestial rays and virtues before returning to share them with the earth to promote generation.<sup>535</sup> This “seed of life” from heaven that impregnates the earth also imbues the air we breathe, feeding the flame of the radical moisture and giving life to us in another manner as well.<sup>536</sup> This vital aerial spirit circulates through the blood after being gathered via the lungs, which also cool the heart like a bellows.<sup>537</sup> This “spiritual diet” is the mirror and companion to material nourishment through food, and d’Espagnet takes that fact

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<sup>532</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 128.

<sup>533</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 175.

<sup>534</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 175.

<sup>535</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 129.

<sup>536</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 148-149.

<sup>537</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 189-192.

that this aerial spirit is insensible to warn against relying solely on the senses for knowledge and as evidence for the truth of invisible qualities in the world.<sup>538</sup>

D’Espagnet likewise attempts to explain numerous other terrestrial and bodily phenomena, like meteors (which he likens to kidney stones in the microcosmic bodies of humans) by recourse to this microcosmic and alchemical analogy of chemical laboratory devices and procedures which mirror the earth and natural processes.<sup>539</sup> Nature perfects the circulation of the water through the threefold action of sublimation, demission or refusion, and decoction.<sup>540</sup> His understanding of the cycle of nourishment, growth, and corruption in nature revolves around heat as a primary driver, just like the alchemist’s fire. For the most part this cycle is measured, efficient, and perfectly planned, but irregularities and disturbances can occur due to the volatile and inconstant nature of feminine Water.<sup>541</sup> Nature’s orders can be interrupted, and thus does d’Espagnet explain inconsistencies in the seasons, temperatures, air purity, and soil productivity. D’Espagnet also uses chemical processes to explain bodily healing and renewal in nature in general. Rarefaction and condensation are the means by which nature transmits or converts vital spirits into bodies and vice versa. This is how nourishment works, especially through respiration. “Spiritual food” is absorbed into corporeal bodies to repair decaying nature, entering into humours to be distributed throughout the body to feed the radical moisture and revitalize flesh, bones, nerves, and organs.<sup>542</sup>

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<sup>538</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 192. Michael Sendivogius is known for his work on oxygen, and it is possible that d’Espagnet is at least in part following the former’s thought. D’Espagnet references his *Novum Lumen Chymicum, Parabola* and *Enigma*, as well as a treatise on Sulphur in his *Arcanum*, Canon 11, though he does not use the same terminology as Sendivogius. For a modern treatment of some of Sendivogius’ work, see Zbigniew Szydło, *Water Which Does Not Wet Hands: The Alchemy of Michael Sendivogius*, (Warsaw: Polish Academy of Sciences, Institute for the History of Science, 1994), and Zbigniew Szydło, "The Influence of the Central Nitre Theory of Michael Sendivogius on the Chemical Philosophy of the Seventeenth Century," *Ambix* 43 (1996): 80-96. Szydło credits Sendivogius with stimulating the investigations of Robert Boyle and others into the life-giving and combustible qualities of oxygen through his theory of “central nitre” in air.

<sup>539</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 123.

<sup>540</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 135.

<sup>541</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 143-144.

<sup>542</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 212.

This notion of the human body as alchemist resonates strongly with Paracelsus' ideas on the matter as explored above and makes perfect sense within the microcosmic-macrocosmic framework. If the world is a giant alembic, then so is man.

He further criticizes the schoolmen and the ancient philosophers they follow for taking the position that the any region near the moon is Fiery, a claim that by his logic would break the laws of nature and destroy the universe if true.<sup>543</sup> D'Espagnet resorts to Genesis to justify his objection, where Moses speaks of the other three Elements but not of Fire. Indeed, he maintains that there is no Fire other than the formal and celestial Light of the Sun that serves as its seat and the heart of the universe, as well as its microcosmic equivalent in the radical moisture.<sup>544</sup> Were it to exist elsewhere it would wreak destruction, and he cites Ramon Lull to be correct in placing Fire among the "Giants and Tyrants" of the world, a "Devourer" of Nature.<sup>545</sup>

Before closing the *Enchiridion*, d'Espagnet engages in some rather extreme astronomical and cosmological speculation. He puts forth a theory of many worlds, according to which the universe is filled with inhabited worlds just like Earth, even suggesting that there is little to stop us from considering the Earth and the Moon to be no different than these bodies.<sup>546</sup> He reasons that the innumerable heavenly bodies are most likely their own worlds, "feodaries" in God's eternal empire just as ours, like cities or provinces of the cosmos whose inhabitants worship the glory of the creator.<sup>547</sup> Heaven is the "vehicle" or conveyance of nature, the medium that connects these worlds in their commerce.<sup>548</sup> It is absurd, he argues, to believe that these noble and superior bodies all exist only for the benefit of our low and despicable Earth, and it would be a great waste

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<sup>543</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 80.

<sup>544</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 85.

<sup>545</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 83.

<sup>546</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 241-242.

<sup>547</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 241-242.

<sup>548</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 241: "... *est enim coelum vehiculum naturae quo mediante omnes universi civitates inter se commercium exercent...*"

if they were uninhabited, idle and useless.<sup>549</sup> In his mind the idea is not disproven by scripture, which only tells us clearly about the creation of our world. Beyond this it is vague because men's souls are weak, already fallen for desire after knowledge, and the clouding of such truth is part of our punishment for sin.<sup>550</sup> This theory of many worlds, like d'Espagnet's discussion of atomism, likely emerged from Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*.<sup>551</sup> Giordano Bruno, a contemporary who like d'Espagnet was deeply influenced by Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* as well as Hermetism, also posited such a theory of many worlds within an infinite universe, and was a Copernican too.<sup>552</sup> D'Espagnet never mentions Bruno by name, though others such as Kepler and Galileo both knew of Bruno's theories and of the dangers in professing them.<sup>553</sup> Bruno was burned at the stake in 1600 for heresy, though radical cosmological theories such as these played a small role compared to his dissenting position on Catholic doctrines like Transubstantiation or his rejection of the authority of the Roman Inquisition.<sup>554</sup> Of course, one of Bruno's transgressions was his stubborn insistence on his right to interpret scripture contrary to the opinion of his ecclesiastical superiors.

Unsatisfied with contemporary astronomy, d'Espagnet argues that the universe is not a work of art, comprised of pretty circles and spheres which suggest artificial divides within its fundamental unity. Astronomers have depicted the cosmos as such not necessarily because it was true, but because it was simple and useful as a model for instruction. When we presume such simplicity to reflect reality though, we subject the power of God to the weakness of the mind of

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<sup>549</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 242.

<sup>550</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 244.

<sup>551</sup> Thomas Willard, "The Many Worlds of Jean d'Espagnet," 201

<sup>552</sup> Thomas Willard, "The Many Worlds of Jean d'Espagnet," and Rowland, *Giordano Bruno*, 60-61, 66-69, 214-220.

<sup>553</sup> Rowland, *Giordano Bruno*, 280-281.

<sup>554</sup> Rowland, *Giordano Bruno*, 273-274: Rowland argues that by obstinately insisting on his right to interpret scripture against the position of his ecclesiastical and institutional superiors, and by denying the reality of Transubstantiation, he was essentially behaving as a Protestant.

man merely for our convenience and at the expense of truth.<sup>555</sup> The heavenly bodies don't exhibit geometrical perfection as we might expect but an equilibrium and harmony, with unequal forces balanced against unlike bodies.<sup>556</sup> The movement and framework of the heavenly bodies is ordered by nature such that though it may seem unequal to us, yet the bodies themselves are unequal and thus their movements must be unlike one another to maintain balance.<sup>557</sup> Though it is not as pretty on its face, inequality in motion for bodies that differ in nature, distance, and magnitude is required by a greater "geometrical equity."<sup>558</sup>

Unfortunately, it is difficult to square his theory of many worlds with other aspects of his cosmology. In discussing heavenly bodies, he rarely distinguishes between 'stars,' 'worlds,' and 'globes,' or address how the clearly hierarchical nature of the universe would embrace multiple different 'inferior' places across the universe.<sup>559</sup> He does not say whether the inhabitants of these other worlds would be human or otherwise, or whether they are subject to the same corruption and inferiority as the inhabitants of the Earth. A presentist reading would suggest he was unsuccessful in reconciling, or even meaningfully differentiating, a symbolic or qualitative understanding of the location of stars and planets with a spatial one. How can one judge the relationship between bodies in space as hierarchical, in terms of superiority and inferiority, while still giving other bodies the same symbolic inferiority as the earth? These theories are demonstrative of the difficulties in stepping away from traditional explanatory frameworks to think about the heavens and earth in terms of something like Cartesian, material space while still retaining their presumed purpose in the cosmic hierarchy. His criticism of others for imagining the universe as a work of art is also

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<sup>555</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 237.

<sup>556</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 233.

<sup>557</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 233.

<sup>558</sup> D'Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 233.

<sup>559</sup> Bruno at least had distinguished in his *De innumerabilibus, immenso, et infigurabili* (1591) between the "hot" stars and "cold" earths that populated his infinite universe: see Rowland, *Giordano Bruno*, 218.

somewhat ironic considering the significant extent to which he is reliant on his own model of order for the cosmos as the starting point for his own speculative rationalism and analogical argumentation. His critics could easily accuse him of the same, of subjecting the power of God to the weakness of *his* mind.

A similar problem seems to arise in his treatment of the Sun. As we have seen in detail above, d’Espagnet gives it a central place in the cosmos, and he returns to this point at the end of the *Enchiridion* when he restates that the Sun is the “immortal lamp, hanging in the middle of the hall of the greatest prince” illuminating all as the “vicar of divine majesty.”<sup>560</sup> Yet this ‘middle’ and the location of the sun at the “center of the whole” as he states earlier are still not spatial indicators, but symbolic ones.<sup>561</sup> Earth, by its qualities and the description of the creation in Genesis must be at the center as well. Clearly aware of Copernicus’ theory, d’Espagnet understands that whether or not the Earth moves is a question of the utmost importance, yet he concludes that while we do not know for sure any motion of the Earth is unlikely because there is no logical need or reason for it.<sup>562</sup> Nature is not wasteful in her movements.

These final canons of the *Enchiridion* make some exceedingly bold suppositions but remain unsatisfying in their expansion and explication; in all they comprise only a few pages and leave much open to question. It is apparent that d’Espagnet was aware of and had considered many of the novel and controversial theories of his day, speaking in support of some but not necessarily expanding upon them to any great extent. I am confident that d’Espagnet was drawn to Copernican heliocentrism for the same reason that Copernicus, Bruno, Kepler, and many others

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<sup>560</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 243: “*Solem autem quasi lampadem immortalem in medio aulae summi principis suspensam, omnes eius angulos et recessus irradientem, aut tanquam divinae maiestatis vicarium omnibus universi creaturis lucem, spiritum ac vitam infundentem quis non venerabitur?*”

<sup>561</sup> See D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 30, 90.

<sup>562</sup> D’Espagnet, *Enchiridion*, Canon 242.

were: its conceptual beauty and the symbolic importance demanded by the Sun's near deification within a philosophical framework deeply influenced by Hermetism and Late Platonism. Yet many aspects of his cosmology as well as his Hermetic reading of Genesis still demanded a base and central earth, as far from the heavens as possible. He spoke approvingly of Democritus' atomism but chose to understand it in such a way that the indivisible particles still fit within a vitalistic theory of seeds and corpuscles. He reasoned his way to God's cosmic empire of many worlds, but stopped short of positing an infinite universe, although, to be fair, there was little else to do on this front but speculate. I believe his hesitation on these fronts ultimately stems from the fact that he is most confident when looking backwards, able to compare and corroborate accounts from multiple ancient sources. The doctrine of a plurality of worlds is probably his most significant departure from this way of thinking.

### **The *Arcanum* and the Great Work**

With the fundamental principles of the cosmos laid out in the *Enchiridion*, the *Arcanum* follows to offer instruction on the nature and means to preparing the philosopher's stone, the secret work of Hermetic philosophy referred to in the title. The early canons of the *Arcanum* reinforce the prevalent theme, characteristic of the Hermetic writings and some Renaissance alchemists, of the strong connection between science and piety. D'Espagnet establishes explicitly that the prospective adept's moral virtue and piety are essential preconditions for success.<sup>563</sup> He calls for an almost monastic or ascetic existence of spiritual purification, humility, frequent prayer and charity, constant tranquility, and total devotion to God and to the science, away from the cares of the world. He speaks of his own recent retirement from public life as his long-awaited opportunity

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<sup>563</sup> E.g. d'Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 1-2, 4-5.

to at last deeply and dutifully explore the secrets of nature. If piety is the gateway to this science, its purpose is manifold: charity and love, the endowment of temples and hospitals, the liberty of those in captivity and the aid of those wanting.<sup>564</sup> In short, to help humanity. In what he shares with readers he claims candidness where others have chosen secrecy and recommends Geber and Lull for their helpful and forthright instruction.<sup>565</sup> Indeed, he seems to criticize the current state of alchemy as overcomplicated, thanks to those who in getting it wrong have led others into error as well and through innumerable texts and arguments have heaped confusion upon the field.<sup>566</sup> Those seeking the truth, he argues, if possessed of the necessary piety and a quick wit, need only follow a few reliable authors, themselves of high esteem and established faith.<sup>567</sup>

His general approach to the alchemical *magnum opus*, the ‘great work’ of creating the Philosopher’s stone, reflects regular features of late medieval Western alchemy and speaks to traditional themes like the four digestions signified by colors, animals, and reproductive imagery. Tilton and others suggest the color sequence of black, white, yellow, and red may have originally derived from the changes visible when heating an amalgam of copper and mercury; Cinnabar (HgS), an ore of sulphur and mercury known since antiquity and a common source of mercury, is also distinctly red in color.<sup>568</sup> D’Espagnet, like many others including Lull and Maier, frequently discusses the creation of the philosopher’s stone in terms of human relationships and sexual reproduction. This is largely because the process mirrors, and indeed is a microcosm of, the original creation of the cosmos, which d’Espagnet understood as a chemical process of separation to be understood in terms of sexual relationships.<sup>569</sup> We have seen already the manner and extent

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<sup>564</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 1.

<sup>565</sup> E.g. d’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 24, 44, 107-108, 123.

<sup>566</sup> See d’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 6.

<sup>567</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 9.

<sup>568</sup> See Tilton, *The Quest for the Phoenix*, 66, and p. 66, note 130.

<sup>569</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 73.



to which d’Espagnet uses qualitative presumptions about gendered natural and cosmic forces to indicate their roles, capabilities, and tendencies. It makes perfect sense in his mind that this understanding would also suggest a means of controlling those forces that corresponded. As a faithful student of Hermes, the processes he describes mirror very closely the cryptic words of the *Emerald Tablet*. To explain these processes, he also references incredibly frequently classical mythological stories, which he believes carry explanatory weight and hint at forgotten truths. Myths are more than stories to him, both begging and rewarding deeper analysis, comparison, and reconciliation with other sources.

The primary components of the work, according to d’Espagnet, are Philosopher’s mercury (*luna*) and sulphur (*sol*). These should be understood both as modern chemical elements as well as cosmic principles with familiar symbolic qualities. For instance, in reference to the cosmic creation that the great work mimics, mercury and sulphur correspond with matter and form, female and male, respectively, with all that these symbolic correspondences entail. D’Espagnet candidly differentiates the former from “vulgar mercury,” a common point of confusion, usually intentional for the sake of secrecy, but one he hopes his students will avoid.<sup>570</sup> Philosopher’s mercury and the elixir will be created from common mercury through several stages he describes, each identified with certain colors and animals. Though wrongheaded alchemists have suggested more than two ingredients for the work, he laments, neither love nor proper wedlock admit a third; to call for more is “adultery, not matrimony.”<sup>571</sup> This union of principles must also be heterosexual, for otherwise would be “nefarious,” “against nature,” and perhaps most importantly, without issue.<sup>572</sup>

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<sup>570</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 23-24, 36-38.

<sup>571</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 25. “...*tertium enim Amor non admittit, et binario numero terminatur coniugium; Amor ultra quaesitus adulterium est, non matrimonium.*”

<sup>572</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 23. “...*duorum itaque masculorum nefariam et contra Naturam coniunctionem tentare nemo praesumat...*”

Procreation is the purpose of lawful marriage, and the stone is the offspring of stainless and purified parents. The female principle “mounts” the male, d’Espagnet writes, until she extracts the “furthest delights of Venus and the fertile seed” from him, not desisting until pregnant.<sup>573</sup> In this conjugal union the female mercury will receive a soul from her husband and a “most powerful King” will be born to them.<sup>574</sup>

Though some might suggest the use of gold, the Sun’s tincture cannot be extracted from gold because it is already the perfect union of sulphur and mercury.<sup>575</sup> True separation of such is denied to art, and even if it could be done crudely, for instance with *aqua fortis*, it would lose its efficacy and powers of perfection.<sup>576</sup> If trying to make a tincture, one must tincture their mercury from the white or red sulphur, as only these two are perfect, being filled with purest sulphur. Once it receives the tincture, it can share it.<sup>577</sup> His insistence on using only two ingredients or principles leads to some confusion though, as he is forced to specify several different kinds of both mercury and sulphur, some successively extracted from another.

Mercury in general has the qualities of the original chaos, associated with earth and water and the feminine in its volatility or changeability and purpose as a vessel.<sup>578</sup> The first stage, called *nigredo*, the black crow, or crow’s head owing to its color, is the reduction of the starting ingredient, “natural *argent vive*,” to its primordial state.<sup>579</sup> Calcination, liquefaction, and putrefaction drive the component elements toward their original state of disorder and confusion, corrupting the matter

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<sup>573</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 22. “...prior enim amore furens masculum scandit, donec ab eo extremas veneris delicias & foecundum semen extorserit; nec ab amplexu desistit, quousque pregnans facta lentam fugam experiatur.”

<sup>574</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 27. “...illâque à coniuge animam adulando recipiet: ex hac copulâ nascetur Rex potentissimus.”

<sup>575</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 31.

<sup>576</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 32.

<sup>577</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 28.

<sup>578</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 39, 41.

<sup>579</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 59, 61, 63-64.

and thus making it more fit for future generation: “the whole world finally returns to ancient chaos and dark abyss.”<sup>580</sup> Others have recommended vitriol, salt, or lime, he notes, but Genesis and Deuteronomy 33 mention only the pairs of heaven and earth, light and darkness, and the “apples of the sun and moon.”<sup>581</sup>

Though *argent vive* is not the philosopher’s mercury entirely, the latter can be extracted out of the former with the skills of an alchemist.<sup>582</sup> This philosopher’s mercury, “our mercury,” is the radical moisture of metals, its immortal quintessence, obtained via the gentle, painstaking application of the external fire of nature.<sup>583</sup> Basic *argent vive* is defiled by original sin and corrupted by its mixture with earth and water. This infection is accidental, however, and through a double purifying bath, of water and of fire, it can be cleansed.<sup>584</sup> In addition to removing that which is superfluous, he also suggests adding that which is lacking, additional natural sulphur, to multiply the invisible philosophical sulphur in the radical moisture already present in the mercury.

The second stage, *albedo* or the white swan, was the conversion of body into spirit and the sublimation and release of the essence of mercury.<sup>585</sup> It is regularly signified by white doves, linking Christian symbolism of the Holy Spirit to the spiritual power mediating between bodies and the heavens. This stage is the first degree of perfection, resulting in white sulphur if done correctly, called the “blessed stone.”<sup>586</sup> It mirrors the stage of creation where God separates the waters with Light. This of course is also reminiscent of d’Espagnet’s understanding of Earth’s hydrologic cycle described above, where rain absorbs heavenly influences in the sky before falling to earth to share them. The elements are extracted from the chaos and infused with spirit so that

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<sup>580</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 68: “...totus denique mundus in chaos antiquum et abyssum tenebrosam remeat.”

<sup>581</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 49.

<sup>582</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 44-45.

<sup>583</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 48.

<sup>584</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 50.

<sup>585</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 63.

<sup>586</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 64.

they might constitute a new world, a new heaven and earth.<sup>587</sup> The substance that remains is “protean,” changeable, able to embrace the qualities of things mixed with it and multiply them.<sup>588</sup>

The third phase, reduction, is usually yellow, *citrinitas*, halfway between the white of the second stage and the red of the final, although Ashmole translates it as orange.<sup>589</sup> This step is the symbolic dawn before the rising of the Sun, restoring the soul that had been removed from the material and nourishing it with “spiritual milk.”<sup>590</sup> The newly created earth receives the spiritual virtues of the quintessence, and spirit mediates the union of body and soul once more.<sup>591</sup>

The final step, *rubedo*, red or sometimes purple, fixes both sulphurs into the matter. It is like the *terra Adamica*, the clay from which God made man, receiving its divine soul and being able henceforth to multiply infinitely without diminution through generations, like mankind, assuming the presence of both sexes.<sup>592</sup> It is the perfection of red sulphur, and he calls it the “fire of the stone” and the “seed of the male,” the “royal crown” and the “son of the Sun.”<sup>593</sup> All is reunified in perfection and sublimity as the material is penetrated and tintured, fixed into the Elixir. Its virtue overflows and becomes a panacea for all diseases and imperfections of creatures.<sup>594</sup>

The middle sections that follow these instructions discuss humidity (*humidum*), dryness (*siccum*), and Fire at length, their various degrees and what they indicate. Fire is a primary tool of the alchemist and must be thoroughly understood. The alchemist must be slow and gentle with his

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<sup>587</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 69.

<sup>588</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 41.

<sup>589</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 64.

<sup>590</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 63: “*Reductionis munus est Lapidi exanimato Animam restituere, et rorido ac spiritali lacte eum nutrire...*”

<sup>591</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 70.

<sup>592</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 74.

<sup>593</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 64: “*...Rubedo autem fusca Solaris Sulfuris opus complet, quod sperma masculinum, Ignis Lapidis, Corona Regia, et Filius Solis nuncupatur...*”

<sup>594</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 71.

flame, and carefully manage the moistness and dryness of the matter lest he spoil the whole enterprise through carelessness or impatience. Philosophy is the “ape of Nature,” as he states often, and Nature achieves perfection through successive cycles and degrees.<sup>595</sup> The Sun is slow and gentle in its heating and receding, and so should be the alchemist’s fire. He explains the two trinities of Fire: celestial, terrestrial, and innate, and natural, unnatural, and that against nature.<sup>596</sup> The sets do not match up perfectly and seem to be more of an explanation on the terms philosophers use to discuss fire and heat. They do interact with one another, however. For example, through the proper application of unnatural, external fire (that is, everyday flame), the internal and natural fire in the radical moisture of metals can be excited or revived through its hard outer shell.<sup>597</sup> He describes for the reader the means and materials to construct the alchemist’s Athanor and vessels.<sup>598</sup> He concludes with instructions on how to perfect common materials using the finished Elixir, complete with mixture ratios.

Overall, d’Espagnet’s alchemical methods and instruments were not revolutionary. But nor were they supposed to be – after all, this was an ancient science known to the greatest minds of the past before being lost and rediscovered by the worthy. He instead prides himself on his accomplishment of piecing together the mystery through his studies of numerous sources, and then on his candidness in opening to students what had been hidden for centuries. His sources and interpretations suggest a deeply syncretic outlook, where authority derived from antiquity and from the symbolic resonance of the themes of these texts with his preexisting background and worldview. Even when some texts seemed to disagree though, just as Pico had, d’Espagnet believed that various authors who appeared to contradict one another only appeared to do so: they

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<sup>595</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 67, 92.

<sup>596</sup> See D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canons 92-107.

<sup>597</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 80, 94, 98, 122, 133.

<sup>598</sup> See D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 109-118.

“consent[ed] in the thing” even if they appeared not to in their words.<sup>599</sup> In constructing and explaining his cosmology he cemented a worldview that placed the feminine as the primary source of disorder and corruption in the cosmos, fundamental to the union responsible for all life and being but nonetheless inferior. As we have seen, the presumed qualities of gender are rationally necessary to every explanation he offers. He undertook this task among a huge number of chemical authors working and publishing, as they worked to redefine concepts of seeds, spirit, soul, the elements, principles, minima, atoms, form, matter, virtues, qualities, causes, and more, to answer some of the most fundamental questions about matter, being, and the cosmic order.

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<sup>599</sup> D’Espagnet, *Arcanum*, Canon 14.

## EPILOGUE

A generation after d’Espagnet published his alchemical works, they found new life in England during the Interregnum that followed the defeat and execution of Charles I. It seems that ‘occult sciences’ had lost little steam in the intervening years, in spite of the work of Gassendi, Descartes, or Francis Bacon. D’Espagnet had been exactly the kind of speculative rationalist Bacon criticized, the genius of the former carrying him with great speed, but with no guarantee he was moving in the right direction. D’Espagnet’s *Enchiridion* and *Arcanum* were translated into English in 1650 and 1651, respectively, the former probably by John Everard and the latter certainly by Elias Ashmole. The frontispiece of Ashmole’s first alchemical publication, the *Fasciculus Chemicus* (1650) which contained the *Arcanum*, depicted mercury unfurling a banner down from the heavens that read “*Quod est superius est sicut inferius*” the maxim of the Emerald Tablet stating that “what is above is just as below.” A hand emerged from a cloud to display an astrological nativity, in the center of which the words “the stars govern man” (*astra regunt hominas*) were inscribed. Objects associated with various human arts, from music to warfare, flanked these images, while Mercury, Sol, and Luna are seated above. The frontispiece aptly demonstrated the fundamental unity of knowledge and the interconnected nature of the cosmos according to Ashmole’s philosophy, to which his life and works were a testament.<sup>600</sup>

Ashmole (1617-1692), perhaps most well-known for his role in the foundation of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, moved in many circles and pursued a wide variety of interests in the course of his long life that spanned the tumults of the Civil War, the Restoration, and the Glorious Revolution. Outside of his unremarkable legal career, Ashmole displayed an inclination

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<sup>600</sup> Dee, *Fasciculus Chemicus*, i. This frontispiece was tastefully chosen as the cover art for Thomas Willard’s edition of d’Espagnet’s *Enchiridion* and *Arcanum*.

toward intellectual pursuits including the study of astrology and natural philosophy, particularly alchemy and talismanic magic. A lifelong Royalist, he was held in high esteem by King Charles II, with whom he held a personal relationship, and was accounted a talented and reliable man by Charles I before him.<sup>601</sup> He served briefly in the King's army, but affected political conformity during the Interregnum, preferring to spend his time in searching for a wealthy wife, relics of the past, and the secrets of heaven and earth.<sup>602</sup> Taking advantage of relaxed censorship during the Interregnum, Ashmole edited three publications of alchemical manuscripts, chief among them the *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*.<sup>603</sup> After the Restoration Ashmole also offered his talent in divination to Charles II, who was himself interested in chemistry and natural philosophy, as well as to other courtiers who sought further insight into the personal and political issues they faced.<sup>604</sup> In January of 1661, he became one of the founding members of the Royal Society.<sup>605</sup>

D'Espagnet's work appealed to those like Ashmole for reasons we have already suggested: they presented a vision of order that was familiar at a time of intense uncertainty, reinforcing values reflective of Ashmole's social and political world in hierarchy, patriarchy, and monarchy under God. Bruce Janacek has suggested a similar motive, arguing that Ashmole sought the harmony the works of d'Espagnet and others promised as a panacea for England's political and religious woes.<sup>606</sup> The parallels should not be ignored: civil war, regicide (or tyrannicide, depending on

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<sup>601</sup> C.H. Josten, ed., *Elias Ashmole (1617-1692): His Autobiographical and Historical Notes, his Correspondence, and Other Contemporary Sources Relating to his Life and Work*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 130, 780-81.

<sup>602</sup> Ashmole had served King Charles I during the Civil War, first as of one of the four Gentlemen of the Ordnance in the garrison at Oxford in 1645 (Josten, 367). He became a captain of foot in Lord Astley's regiment of the King's army barely a week before Astley's defeat and capture at Stow-on-the-Wold, though Ashmole's failure to mention the battle and his presence at Worcester five days later seems to suggest that he did not take part in the battle (Josten, 378).

<sup>603</sup> Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, 63-68, and Elias Ashmole, ed., *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (London, 1652).

<sup>604</sup> Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, 189, 1351.

<sup>605</sup> Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, 135.

<sup>606</sup> Janacek, *Alchemical Belief: Occultism in the Religious Culture of Early modern England* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 149.



one's perspective), and confessional strife, while Ashmole like d'Espagnet had received a legal education and sought to serve the king judicially or administratively. Janacek argues that alchemy in late Tudor and early Stuart England "became integrated into central tenets of Christianity" and that adepts saw themselves as "uniquely, even divinely, ordained to re-create the harmony that existed between humanity and nature before the Fall."<sup>607</sup> They were part of a larger movement within Europe seeking to lessen differences between confessions by recourse to ancient, eternal philosophy and theology independent of contemporary sects, and they turned to alchemy for proofs of their beliefs.<sup>608</sup> This position seems to be supported by Ashmole's beliefs. For instance, Josten notes that Ashmole recorded a quote from Edward Stillingfleet in the margins of his copy of the *Theatrum*, which read "certainely, whateuer is imagined to the Contrary, by men of weake understandings, the best way to cure the world of Atheisme, is true Philosophy, or a search into the nature of things."<sup>609</sup>

Ashmole held interests that d'Espagnet gives no space for discussion, such as natural and talismanic magic as well as astrology, but ones that easily fit within the general worldview suggested by a text like the *Arcanum* and the other alchemical works Ashmole went on to translate.<sup>610</sup> Of course, Ashmole's use of these adept arts was for mundane purposes like finding a rich wife or anticipating important and potentially lucrative events and appointments in his legal career.<sup>611</sup> Yet his self-image as a philosopher is strongly reflective of d'Espagnet's. In the *prolegomena* to the *Fasciculus Chemicus* Ashmole reproached practitioners uncritical of their

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<sup>607</sup> Janacek, *Alchemical Belief*, 3.

<sup>608</sup> Janacek, *Alchemical Belief*, 4.

<sup>609</sup> Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, 48.

<sup>610</sup> Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, 52, 442: for instance, Ashmole knew of and acquired for his acquaintance William Lilly a copy of the medieval book of natural magic *Picatrix*.

<sup>611</sup> E.g. Josten, *Elias Ashmole*, 72, 537-8: His diary entries also record his regular attempts at astrological prognostication as well as his construction and astral imbueement of talismans for such purposes as keeping rats out of his house or protecting him from his wife's "pox."

sources as well as those who deliberately disseminated false knowledge, blaming them for the poor reputation enjoyed by alchemy. He admitted that to discern true knowledge from falsehood in these matters “requires Judgment able to divide a Hair,” but clearly believed that he is fully equipped to perform this service for his readers.<sup>612</sup> He stated his intention “to remove, and purge this pure and heroick *Science* (almost generally contemptible) from the dross, and corruption of an *Imposture*.”<sup>613</sup> In defending alchemy, he compared it to other ‘arts,’ such as watchmaking, optics, and mathematics. These arts, like alchemy, produced wondrous results not from any diabolical affiliation but because their practitioners understood how to harness nature: “Art with the help of *Nature*, may arrive at such perfection, to work *Wonders*.”<sup>614</sup>

Unlike watchmaking, though, Ashmole clearly believed that alchemy was an art for the divinely elected. The reason that most failed in their endeavors to produce the philosopher’s stone, he asserted, was that “many are called, but few are chosen.”<sup>615</sup> It was only these chosen whom God admitted to “this *Sanctum Sanctorum* of philosophy,” for alchemists deliberately obscured their secrets and leave it to God to judge the worthy.<sup>616</sup> To the elect, God granted “*Eyes* that should pierce through the mist of *Words*, and [gave] them a ray of light which should lead them through this darkness.”<sup>617</sup> If one sought alchemical knowledge to exploit it to appease his greed or desire for fame, he would learn nothing. On the other hand, he who sought Wisdom for its own sake “shall sooner be acquainted with her.”<sup>618</sup> From his *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, it is clear that Ashmole considered himself one of the “Elected Sons of Art,” unto whom it was given to

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<sup>612</sup> Arthur Dee, *Fasciculus Chemicus: Or Chemical Collections . . . Whereunto is added, The Arcanum or Grand Secret of Hermetick Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Elias Ashmole (London, 1650), 3.

<sup>613</sup> Dee, *Fasciculus Chemicus*, 8.

<sup>614</sup> Dee, *Fasciculus Chemicus*, 11.

<sup>615</sup> Dee, *Fasciculus Chemicus*, 4.

<sup>616</sup> Dee, *Fasciculus Chemicus*, 4.

<sup>617</sup> Dee, *Fasciculus Chemicus*, 5-6.

<sup>618</sup> Dee, *Fasciculus Chemicus*, 21.

know the “Mysteries of the Kingdome of God.”<sup>619</sup> In the tradition of the *prisca theologia* he traced the lineage of alchemy, from Adam through Abraham, Moses, and Solomon to the present in an attempt to justify the art and prove the existence of the stone. Like Hermes Trismegistus, these ancient figures had access to divinely revealed knowledge, and in tracing the history of alchemical learning Ashmole was also acknowledging the loss and decay of this knowledge. He rescued these texts and their knowledge from the bottom of the “River of Ages” where, due to their “weight and solidity” they had sunk.<sup>620</sup>

When Charles II returned to England, Ashmole published a poem entitled *Sol in Ascendente* to glorify the king through comparison to the Sun. He thanked God for Charles’ return and the peace and harmony the king would surely bring: “That gracious Face we view through humble Tears, Brings healing to the wounds of these late years: Nor need we doubt, our great Apollo will Secure this Island... from all assaults of future storms and Fears.”<sup>621</sup> The Restoration was likened to the rising of the sun at dawn after a long night: “And now the Nights dire Tragedies are done, Woes are dissolv’d to Bliss, we have out-run The Ills . . . What Peace old Rome saw in Augustus dayes, Will England feel, while CHARLES shall wear the Bayes.”<sup>622</sup> The fire of the Sun that was Charles illuminated the heavens, Phoebus in his chariot, shedding “sacred lustre” to exhibit his fame and glory as he ensured England’s ascendancy.

Just as the sun bestows light and life upon the world, so would Charles’ rays bring harmony and prosperity upon England and its people:

“They are his Native Rayes, that render bright  
This *Morn*, and dress it with Celestial Light . . .  
Lo! Heav’n has now subscrib’d to our request,

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<sup>619</sup> Ashmole, *Theatrum*, A2r.

<sup>620</sup> Ashmole, *Theatrum*, A2r.

<sup>621</sup> Elias Ashmole, *Sol in Ascendente. OR, The glorious Appearance of CHARLES the Second, Upon the Horizon of London: in her Horoscopical Sign, Gemini* (London, 1660), 5.

<sup>622</sup> Ashmole, *Sol in Ascendente*, 1.

Here with a glorious *Sun* we all are blest . . .  
What thoughts dare then deny this *Sun* his Rayes,  
Who is the Spring and Fountain of our dayes;  
The brightest Eye, of this our little world;  
Whose spreading Rad̃y in rich glories curl'd,  
Grow from his own essential light; their power  
Raiseth the lustre, of this growing hour.  
From these all-glorious Beams, on us shall shine  
The light of Peace, and Happiness Divine . . .”<sup>623</sup>

The themes of the Sun, crowns, thrones, light glory, justice, righteous authority, and power were common refrains throughout the seventeen stanzas of the poem. He published this poem anonymously, and thus rather than an attempt to curry favor Ashmole seems to have been truly grateful for the return of the heaven-sent King Charles. The solar metaphors and the association of the Sun with the monarchy is reminiscent of d’Espagnet’s writings, and many others’ besides. Such ideas carried great weight and comfort even forty years after d’Espagnet published his works, representing the world as it should be, as Ashmole anticipated England recovering from her own crisis.

In this work I have attempted to trace some of the origins of the ideas that made d’Espagnet’s alchemy possible, as well as to analyze the use he made of them within the context of his world. He approached the science of alchemy from the position of a speculative, rational philosopher, rather than a technician, and from a worldview shaped by his education and experience as a magistrate. He proposed a hybrid, syncretic philosophy based on his interpretation and reconciliation of a number of texts and traditions from antiquity, the Middle Ages, and from his early modern contemporaries. He justified his recourse to the wisdom of the pre-Christian past through the doctrine of the *prisca theologia*, according to which elements of a universal and transcendent philosophy were divinely and providentially revealed to the great sages throughout

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<sup>623</sup> Ashmole, *Sol in Ascendente*, 6.

history, and he sought confirmation of his own theological beliefs in this wisdom. Like a Platonic ideal, the truths approached by d’Espagnet were eternal, and it was mankind’s grasp and memory of them that had changed, not the truths themselves.

On their own, d’Espagnet’s alchemical books provide an excellent window into the intellectual world of an alchemist in the early seventeenth century, highlighting the Neoplatonic, Hermetic, and Paracelsian influences as well as the possibility, even the ease, of their reconciliation with Christian belief in the mind of an educated elite. When viewed in tandem with his work on moral philosophy and considered within the historical context of his life as a judge during the Wars of Religion, as well as an understanding of the influence of Neostoicism and the theories about gender and order it inculcated within the ranks of those judges and ruling elites, we can anticipate some consistent themes and particular emphases within d’Espagnet’s broader philosophical worldview. Beliefs about the feminine as corrupt, lustful, destructive, and antithetical to the reasonable, active, and vivifying power of the masculine were old, yet given expanded and intensified expression in d’Espagnet’s day. His work reflects and reinforces this, giving it the weight of divine and natural law. Through the microcosm and the macrocosm his presumptions about gender and order extended across, and were fundamental to, his entire universe. Patriarchy and hierarchy were the laws of the cosmos, and as a microcosm human society reflected this. So did alchemical science, and one could not hope to create the philosopher’s stone without this understanding. His cosmos was in many important ways a mirror of his beliefs about the social world and his place in it, and more specifically of the role of sex and gender in that world. His books are attempts to understand and explain God’s order through recourse to a timeless tradition of eternal truth, independent of confessional strife and the uncertainties it brought. They give us

a sense of the power of analogical thinking in building an ordered philosophical and cosmological edifice as he reasoned his way to the edges of experience.

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