

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA

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Abstract

The philosophy of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, shaped by the historical context of the Renaissance and an academic environment inclined toward syncretism, leaves an impression of a complex and stratified system to this day. In his philosophical approach to the knowledge of God, Pico relies on various philosophical and theological sources, thereby constructing a distinctive representation of the spiritual journey toward a mystical union with God. The authors explore his philosophical approach to the knowledge of God through three points, or degrees, by which human introspection, philosophical inquiry, and theological reflection lead toward God. After a brief overview of Pico's thesis with respect to the capacity of knowing God, the authors go on to elaborate on the position of rationality and the capacity to abstract the attributes of God, as well as the nature of contemplation and the mystical union with God, relying on *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (*De hominis dignitate*) and *On Being and Unity* (*De ente et uno*).

KEYWORDS: Picco della Mirandola, knowledge of God, philosophy, theology, contemplation

Introduction

Renaissance philosopher Giovanni Pico della Mirandola developed his philosophical system with a desire to reconcile Aristotelian and Platonic schools of thought and demonstrate the synthetic structure based on the valuation of antique and contemporary theology. For this reason, Mirandola attempted to

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affirm a certain theory of knowledge of God that equally combines different approaches and concepts drawn from realism, nominalism, Platonism, Kabbalah, and the theology of pre-Socratics and Chaldeans.

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola was born on 24 February 1463 in the Castle of Mirandola near Modena in northern Italy. As a young man, he studied at the Universities of Bologna, Ferrara, Padua, Pavia, and Paris, where he earned degrees in canonical rights, literature, scholastic philosophy, and theology. He also learned the old Greek language, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic. He was a student of Marsilio Ficino, and he continued with Ficino's work in the translation of major works of antique philosophers. Besides his well-known work *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (*De hominis dignitate*), he also authored *On Being and Unity* (*De ente et uno*), theological papers, and treatises on prophecy and astrology. In *Oration*, he integrated his interpretations of Apocrypha writings, antique mysticism, Kabbalah, and alchemy. He died in 1494 at his estate near Florence.

Pico's concept of the capacity to know God (*capax Dei*) is founded on the biblical image of the man whom God created with reason and free will. Pico places the human being at the center of a hierarchical universe, constructed according to the Neoplatonic vision developed by his teacher, Marsilio Ficino. He addresses the first man Adam as the representative of the human race, to whom God gave freedom without imposing restrictions: "We have laid down; you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature." (Mirandola 1956, 7)¹ Pico's Adam, as a certain role model for humankind, represents different ideals than those of Prometheus or Heracles, which were introduced by Renaissance Humanists, and they are closer to the concept of "homo faber suae quisque fortunae", which was central to Italian Renaissance philosophy.

According to Cassirer's interpretation of Boccaccio, Prometheus became a symbol of the "second" creation during the Renaissance. Adam represents mere existence, while Prometheus symbolizes the hero of culture and the bringer of scientific development, and moral and political order (Cassirer 1951, 129). Nevertheless, Prometheus and Adam belong to opposite narratives with respect to the nature of myth and revelation, as well as the implications for knowledge. On the one hand, Prometheus symbolizes an achievement in scientific knowledge as a rebellion against the will and power of the gods. On the other hand, Adam represents, especially in *Oration*, perseverance to regain a beatitude and friendship with God which had been lost because of the Original Sin. Adam is not only a symbol of the human

1 "Defenitiva ceteris natura intra praescriptas a nobis leges coercetur. Tu, nullis angustiis coercitus, pro tuo arbitrio, in cuius manu te possui, tibi illam praeferis." (Mirandola 1942a, 106)

desire to regain communion with God that was lost—he embodies the vision of a free and rational human being who can seek the purpose of all his thoughts and actions in God.

Pico's Adam is depicted with a will that is open to the Divine Being as a possibility of its personal fullness and realization (Kušar 1991, 108). Given that Adam is at the center of the Universe, in the hierarchically organized reality, he is between the higher and lower layers of existence, between beings which are different in the metaphysical grade of perfection. Following the hierarchical construction of Being, Pico thinks that God did not create man solely as a celestial, earthly, immortal, or mortal being. Rather, he gave him the opportunity to become immortal or mortal, celestial, or earthly. God provided him with the choice to exist like the beings of higher or lower levels of the Universe (Mirandola 1942a, 106). Knowledge of God in Mirandola's philosophy has a gradual structure, presented with slight differences in both *Oration on the Dignity of Man* and *On Being and Unity*.

In *Of Being*, which is primarily dedicated to the issues of Aristotelian and Platonic concepts of the Being in relation to theological complexity, Mirandola demonstrates four degrees of theological knowledge. Firstly, we conceive that God is incorporeal; secondly, we understand that God cannot be either life or intelligence, or a subject that understands, or what He understands; thirdly, we conceive that God cannot be a combination of matter and form, spirit and body, or any other kind of combination; and fourthly, we ultimately gain the knowledge of God as the one who surpasses all the knowledge that we possess on transcendentia, all ideas that we form to conceptualize God (Mirandola 1942b, 420). In *Oratio*, Pico does not outline the knowledge of God as gradual, as represented in *Of Being*, but we can rely on Copenhaver's division: moral philosophy, dialectic, natural philosophy, theology, magic, Kabbalah, mystical union (The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2020). The same fields of Pico's interest we find in both of his works, *Oration* and *Of Being*. They are scattered in *Oration*, but in *Of Being*, Pico refers to them depending on the grade of knowledge. In the following chapters, we shall consider in a comparative way how Pico in both of his works develops his theory of the knowledge of God.

1. *From Moral to Theological Knowledge*

In philosophy, we define moral knowledge as the understanding of right and wrong, as well as the distinction between good and evil. In Pico's elaboration of the gradual knowledge of God, moral knowledge is the first degree, where a man begins his journey to God through moral reasoning. Unlike in *Of Being*, Pico elaborates in more detail the moral knowledge in *Oration*. In Pico's vision of the gradual knowledge of God, this moral reasoning is not merely

a form of moral judgment we apply in common circumstances—such as deciding whether to follow the voice of conscience in specific situations—but rather, it is a task discipline and scrutiny aimed at achieving a state of moral purity necessary for further spiritual development. We can recognize traces of Platonism, Christian Asceticism, and Stoicism. First, we shall consider the problem of free will appearing in Pico's view on moral knowledge, and then the relationship between moral knowledge and contemplation.

1.1 The Problem of Free Will

As mentioned earlier, Pico depicts Adam as a free and rational being. He is not concerned with the relationship between knowledge and the Original Sin nor with the impacts of the Original Sin on human knowledge. Pico mentions the term “original sin” at the end of his *Oration* (Mirandola 1956, 65), and there is no mention of original sin in *Of Being*. Additionally, Pico does not refer to Genesis to elaborate on the corruptive state of free will, that is, why this will lead to sin. The dignity that man possesses lies in the capacity of an immortal soul that thrives to know God. In some form of interpretation, Pico accepts the duality of the human being, present in Plato and Neoplatonists. The state of human nature is one of tension between the soul's desire to know God and the body's tendencies toward earthly pleasures. As Pico suggests, referring to Empedocles, at this stage, we remain in the state of tension between opposite tendencies, that is, “... is in our souls a dual nature; the one bears us upward toward the heavenly regions; by the other we are dragged downward toward regions infernal, through friendship and discord, war and peace; so witness those verses in which he laments that, torn by strife and discord, like a madman, in flight from the gods, he is driven into the depths of the sea.” (Mirandola 1956, 19–20)² The dualism of nature is inherent in Gnostic teachings. However, there is no further elaboration in that specific direction, and we cannot confirm that Pico is Gnostic. He rejects the dualism of cosmic principles, referring to Aristotle: There are no two causes of changes of becoming and perish, everything that exists, cannot exist having evil cause since God the Creator is the ultimate good (Mirandola 1943, 12). Everything that God created is good in its essence, so he created man as a good being, with free will to choose good over evil. The created material world is not evil, but man struggles with vices of pride of life, the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, which

2 “Hic duplicem naturam in nostris animis sitam, quarum altera sursum tollimur ad caelstia, altera deorsum trudemur ad inferna, per litem et amicitiam, sive bellum et pacem, ut suam tescordia actum, furenti similem profugam ad diis, in altum iactari conqueritur.” (Mirandola 1942a, 116)

come from the world, not from the Father (God) that is unity, goodness, and truth (Mirandola 1943, 13). In this passage, Pico does not differentiate between the terms “world” and “cosmos”. The world described in St. John³ is not only an external “world” of sensible objects; it is a realm in which man experiences temptations, and it is different from the world in Neoplatonism.

As Charles Taylor states, comparing the Renaissance and Middle Ages, in Pico’s universe, man’s ends are still set by cosmically realized order of good (Taylor 2012, 200). How, then, do we reconcile this image of a statical and arranged cosmos with the existence of free will that humans possess? The will is free, but this freedom may be the cause either of a moral growth or a downfall. Therefore, this relationship between free will and reason is the one in which reason steers will, which is relevant to the knowledge of God. Pico first and foremost aims to show that rational knowledge is more or less utile for moral growth. Secondly, he portrays its role in discursive thought (both of which are mutually complemented).

Pico asserts in *Of Being* that rational knowledge is imperfect because it is vague and uncertain (Mirandola 1942b, 408). This imperfection of rational knowledge corresponds with the function of reason in *Oration*, the function for dialectic understanding of philosophical truths, to dissipate “darkness” (Mirandola 1956, 16). However, the sense knowledge of other living beings and the intelligence of angels are equally imperfect, just as the rational knowledge of human. Can man surpass this imperfection of rational knowledge to become similar to the intelligence of angels? While in *Of Being* Pico defines the difference between the angelic and human knowledge of God, in *Oration* he tries to demonstrate that man is equal to angels considering the dignity that God had given him. Man has an equal capacity to conceive God as angels, depending on his free will, and what form of being he chooses to be like. Pico states: “If vegetative, he will become a plant; if sensual, he will become brutish; if rational, he will reveal himself a heavenly being; if intellectual, he will be an angel and the son of God.” (Mirandola 1956, 8–9)⁴ Pico is more accurate in *Of Being* regarding the difference between these forms of knowledge appropriate to different classes of beings, than how it is presented in *Oration*. It seems that Pico follows the Aristotelian definition of “appetition”⁵ but as an analogy for the perfection of Being, and in relation

3 In the theology of St. John the Apostle, there is also the dualism between the world and the Holy Spirit (Paraclete); they are opposites, and the term “world” refers to the world of human affairs, politics and corruption that has rejected the Son of God. (Dugandžić 2004, 143)

4 “Si vegetalia planta fiet, si sensuality obrutescet, si rationalia caeleste evadet animal, si intellectualia angelus erit et Dei filius” (Mirandola 1942a, 106).

5 We suppose that Pico refers to Aristotle’s concept of appetite and its definition we find in *Rhetoric*. In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle defines an appetite as the cause of all actions that appear pleasant (Aristotle 1908, 57).

to the imperfection of other beings and the rational knowledge of human. As he states, sense knowledge is “merely” knowledge, it is not an appetite, and it is imperfect since it depends on sense organs that are brute and corporeal, but necessary for us (Mirandola 1943, 5). In this passage, we again encounter the dualism of soul and body, but in the context of the gradual knowledge of God. However, in *Oration*, this sort of dualism is presented with ultimate examples of how man can give in to behavior conducted by appetite, and in the other case, how he can be elevated to eternal truths. Man can become brute, driven by the wiles of Calypso and totally driven by senses (Mirandola 1956, 10). Opposite to this and from the Augustinian perspective, he can be attracted and guided by the light of truth, the same light that inflames Cherubim and Seraphim (Mirandola 1956, 32).

Sense knowledge is inherent in lower beings, plants and animals; they cannot conceive the meaning or the purpose of their desires, as man can. Man is summoned to surpass that form of cognition through rational knowledge. We believe, as Pico does, that angels are more perfect than humans, yet their knowledge of God is also limited (Mirandola 1943, 5). In line with Pico’s claims, we should desire to be as refined as Seraphim, as intelligent as Cherubim, and as righteous as Thrones (Mirandola 1942a, 110). To have direct knowledge of some degree means that angels possess knowledge of things in general, not only about their cause or purpose, material constitution and such, but also about all their states and changes. However, God cannot be subjected to this form of knowledge. In other words, even the angelic intelligence cannot possess the object of desire, if this object is God. God is equally unreachable to the knowledge of angles as he is to the knowledge of humans. To be elevated in heaven, in the spheres of celestial beings and angels, man must surpass his current state of inner conflict between a soul and body.

Furthermore, this insight into inwardness is not actualized without the discipline of the mind in dialectics. More broadly, it is found in philosophical disputes, often in the fields of natural philosophy. If we understand Pico literally, the philosopher and the contemplator can be at the same time interested in inner reflection and in debates with their companions. If we apply the classic division into *theorein* and *praxis*, there is *theorein*, observation and dwelling into inwardness, and there is *praxis*, formed in discussion with others in searching for the truth. This stage on the path toward knowledge of God can be considered as a phase of moral reasoning. Pico suggests that moral reasoning can assist us in differentiating between our physical impulses and the light of reason, that is, in cleansing our soul of affections and feelings that are obstacles toward a truthful knowing of God (Mirandola 1942a, 116). When we return to the Socratic meaning of this concept, we find that the purpose of dialectic argumentation does not lay in the satisfac-

tion of victory over the opponent in discussion, but in the acceptance of ignorance.

In the context of Pico, this ignorance is derived from the influence of affections and impressions. In other words, living in line with ethical rules, and applying these ethical rules in dialectic practice is a means of self-improvement. Thus, Pico emphasizes two distinct philosophers of the West—Plato and Aristotle—who were, as he states, deeply convinced that there are no other means of achieving the truth besides training in discourse (Mirandola 1942a, 134). Knowing others and knowing self is as important as studying the arche of all things created. Understanding the mysteries of nature includes knowledge from both natural philosophy and magic. Pico emphasizes that magic can be used in two ways: for the invocations of demons or evil spirits, and other purposes within natural philosophy (Mirandola 1942a, 148). He speaks positively about this branch of magic, referencing ancient and medieval philosophers such as Alkindi, Roger Bacon and Wiliam of Paris (Mirandola 1942a, 152). Therefore, Pico does not engage in the experimental aspect of this magic, which includes the study of different chemical elements, liquids, and blends, as well as the varieties of their preparations and preservation. He is more focused on the theoretical background of natural magic that can offer a unique insight into the harmony between creatures and phenomena wisely governed by God (Mirandola 1942a, 152).

1.2 Theological Knowledge and Contemplation

Even this insight into the relationship between God, the natural world, and man is not sufficient for theological knowledge as the second step. In order to deepen these insights from natural philosophy and dialectics, the philosopher is called to contemplate like Moses, and closer to angels:

Therefore the Cherub is the intermediary and by his light equally prepares us for the fire of the Seraphim and the judgment of the Thrones. This is the bond that unites the highest minds, the Palladian order which presides over contemplative philosophy; this is then the bond which before all else we must emulate, embrace and comprehend, whence we may be rapt to the heights of love or descend, well instructed and prepared, to the duties of the practical life. (Mirandola 1956, 14–15)⁶

What is the subject of the philosopher's contemplation? Pico argues that all created beings can be a subject of contemplation, in order to be more

6 “Ergo medius Cherub sua luce et saraphico igni nos preaeperat et ad Thoronorum iudicium pariter illuminat; hic est nodus primarum mentium, ordo palladicus, philosophiae contemplativae praeses; hic nobis et aemulandus primo et ambiendus, atque adeo comprehendendus est, unde et ad amoris rapiamur fastigia et ad munera actionem bene instructi paratique descendamus.” (Mirandola 1942a, 112)

similar to Cherubim, Seraphim, and Thrones. As discussed above, angels perceive things differently than we do, experiencing them directly through intuition. To “see” creation in the way that Cherubim sees it, implies a direct experience. Human beings do not possess such direct knowledge; our understanding is reflective and presumes perceptual experience. Nevertheless, this knowledge differs from a mere experience, and it is not defined solely by our exposure to reality but also by the “knowing about” that reality. In this sense, knowledge is simultaneously a reflection; it is close to the object being known and, at the same time, present to itself (Kušar 2001, 53). In the context of epistemology, a mere reflection of the subject perceived remains a reflection, but in the context of Pico’s view on religious knowledge, a mere reflection of a created and contingent thing becomes the subject of inner engagement, a subject of the contemplative mind.

In contemplation, the philosopher overcomes his passions and desires and focuses on abstractions and ideas. Having dwelled within his own soul, he needs to organize this dynamic content—his reflections—in a certain way. Reflections come from perceptual experience, the experience that we see, observe, or hear. An admiration for the beauty of creation can be determined as a kind of aesthetic experience. There is, according to Otto, *mysterium tremendum* and *mysterium fascinans* (1952, 15). Mountain peaks, earthquakes or volcanic eruptions are simultaneously frightening and fascinating. Yet, the philosopher does not stay fixated or scared when contemplating the creations; instead, he examines their deeper meaning. To relate the creation to the Creator, to contemplate His creation, is to grasp an ontological difference not only on the level of metaphysical speculation. In nature, we encounter phenomena that are interconnected through causal relations. One thing serves as the cause of another, and that effect can, in turn, become the cause of a third. On the level of metaphysical speculations, reason uses concepts that are abstract, and far from custom perceptual experience trying to explain reality in an organized way. In this state of contemplation, the mind is, in a sense, passive towards the external world, as the contemplator “stays” within their own soul, undisturbed by the perceptually conceived content. Pico reflects more profoundly on contemplation in *Oration* than in *Of Being*. While in *Of Being* contemplation is only mentioned in the context of the moral conduct of life (Mirandola 1943, 13), in *Oration*, contemplation is the key element, not only of life in devotion and prayer, but as a necessary instrument of the gradual knowledge of God.

2. *The Second Degree: Approaching Darkness*

We thus arrive at the second degree of theological knowledge. Pico describes it as an approach to darkness in which we purify our notion of God from all the attributes He surpasses (Mirandola, 1942b, 412). If, in the first degree, the philosopher has achieved peace of mind and recognized his limitations and weaknesses, and understanding the boundaries of his rationality, then at the second degree, he moves closer to the darkness of ignorance, purifying not the soul but the conception of God. We should consider two different approaches to the concept of God: scholastic and apophatic.

The scholastic position holds that man can know who God is, depending on his capacity for reason, by beginning with individual beings and progressing toward God as the ultimate and first cause. It is the scholastic argumentation that justifies the possibility and capacity for the knowledge of God. It is also the basis for the concept of reality, a moderate realism in which “mind and its objects are thus linked by an essential kinship, knowledge is due to the presence and effects of the object; object is different from the subject; but is also a phase of the self-actualization of the subject” (Carré 1946, 76). St. Thomas and St. Anselm both defended the possibility of the rational knowledge of God, and we presume that Pico does not question the realistic approach of scholastics. Pico’s main question is not if God exists, but how we can know him, not excluding the realistic approach. In this context, *Oration* is not the apology of different concepts of God that could be doubtful from the dogmatic aspect (and eventually subject of accusations), but from the aspect of the nature of theological knowledge.

Since the time of Meister Eckhart, the Magisterium of Church was cautious with, in a wider sense, non-conventional views on knowledge of God, especially those referring to or including interpretations of works of apophatic theologians. We presume that, for Pico, the realistic attempt of scholastics to grasp adequate concepts of God remains equally limited as the analogical approach of antique philosophers.

It appears that Pico does not engage with the theoretical distinctions between Scholastic schools of thought or their implications for theological statements. He approached all philosophers and theologians with the same respect and a wish to read and understand their teachings (Mirandola 1942a, 163). The scholastic approach is relevant, but insufficient according to his vision of theological knowledge. At the second degree of knowledge, the mind is equally conflicted with the concepts of God, derived from conceptual metaphysics and analogies.

The philosopher remains in a state of contemplation, and his mind, now at peace, no longer reflects on created things and beings according to their individuality, as induction and analogy are no longer sufficient. In the passive state of contemplation, reason is occupied with reflections on both

things experienced and those eternal. Reason of the contemplator is akin to the two-faced Janus: when contemplating the eternal, they neglect the perceptual and corporeal aspects of reality (Mirandola 1914, 30). On the abstract level of reasoning, we understand reality in its totality, even if totality cannot be grasped. Pico's depiction of the mind of a contemplating philosopher who encounters the abyss between limited reason and the created infinitive cosmos corresponds to the "learned ignorance" of Nicola of Cusa, although there is no reference to him in *Oration*. According to Paul Tillich, reason is capable of functioning with certain categories such as time, substance, and space, but strives to find explications out of the bounds of categories that are reachable to it, "and tries to grasp the infinite with the categories of finitude, the really real with the categories of experience, and that it necessarily fails" (Tillich 1967, 48). That is the key to understanding infinity in Cusanus. Even if Pico does not mention this kind of infinity of beings, we assume it is related to his epistemic problem of analogy. The philosopher refrains from drawing analogies between created beings, recognizing that the perfect being—the one that possesses all categories and attributes—cannot exist in the empirical world.

There are abstract concepts such as measurements, and temporal or spatial categories that we use in describing and determining. Analogy is characteristic of mythological faith when it arises from comparisons between divine beings and natural phenomena. However, in Pico's analysis, analogy is no longer suitable, as rational knowledge uses analogy to attribute to God concepts that are particular and distinct from one another. Life differs from intelligence, cause from purpose, and spirit from body. This is the paradox that reason uncovers in its attempt to attain a union with God. To be alive, to be the cause of something, or to be intelligent—these are concepts that we can equally attribute to ourselves and God, even if we can fall into the trap of anthropomorphizing in argumentation, that is, "imitation and reduction of concept of God on human measurement seems in same time unavoidable and unacceptable. Our argumentation needs this, but perfection and infinity of God are opposing that." (Kušar 2001, 69)

There is a rational element in that we can explain certain things through categories such as space, time, or causality. Yet, there remain aspects that are unexplainable, leaving us in a state of ignorance. Pico relies on Denys the Areopagite. On this level of the mystical path, the philosopher distinguishes philosophical concepts from theological ones on the level of proposition. Pico interprets God's revelation to Moses and, in agreement with Denys, asserts that this claim demonstrates that Oneness surpasses Being (Mirandola 1942b, 398). There is no word to describe or to determine the existence of God as One. To demonstrate this degree of knowledge, Pico suggests we imagine two abstract concepts that are used in the common language: "life" and "wisdom". We attribute life to all living beings, plants, animals and hu-

mans, yet we attribute wisdom only to human beings. We can imagine life and wisdom in the most perfect form. Pico argues that the problem with this thought experiment is that we cannot attribute perfect life without also attributing perfect wisdom (Mirandola 1942b, 408). The concept of perfection involves the totality of categories and attributes. Therefore, we cannot attribute perfection to a single being that is created or contingent.

3. *The Third Degree: Darkness*

Pico defines the final stage of the mystical path to the knowledge of God as “total ignorance”—the highest degree of understanding, in which we recognize God as surpassing the four transcendentals and any idea we can conceive that could be essential to Him (Mirandola 1942b, 412). Principally, we suppose that Pico describes this third degree of mystical path as emerging in God, a certain mystical union in which the person has surpassed his moral state, following the discipline of rational discourse and apophatic understanding of who God is. How does a mystic, according to Pico, at this stage of reasoning, understand God? Is he still the unreachable one, *Deus Absconditus*? Mirandola asserts that the third degree is the final point in this journey of reason and soul, while also claiming that after that, in the fourth, that is, the highest degree, we are in the darkness of knowledge, that is, “with this total ignorance does true knowledge commence.” (Mirandola 1943, 10) It seems difficult to connect ignorance and knowledge in this manner, since logically, the lack of knowledge implies ignorance, a vice versa, the lack of ignorance implies knowledge. Again, we find relations to Cusa’s concept of *docta ignorantia*, although Pico does not refer to him by name. For Cusa, it is not the ignorance of those who do not possess the knowledge of God, or who never enforce themselves to understand who God is—it is a “psychical” consequence of the mind finding itself before the object empirically inaccessible (Copleston 1953, 346). Mirandola presumes that the philosopher, before becoming a mystic, must abandon all the concepts that he had attributed to God, to find him and unite with him in the mystical encounter.

The mystical experience in the lives of saints is described as a moment of unification with God. In fact, many of them recount how they became united with Christ. For the mystic, the union with God is a plain wish. It is the ultimate goal to be attained, with philosophical and theological study serving only as helpful tools. In the history of the Church, there have been mystics—both men and women—from the laity and from religious orders—who did not possess formal education. They were not familiar with scholastics or any other philosophical or theological systems. Nevertheless, they left their own testimonies about their mystical experiences that we cannot a priori define as irrational. At the epistemic level, familiarity is different from

mere knowledge and experience. Our familiarity with a certain person before us encompasses both experience and knowledge, yet it does not solely reside in them. It develops and grows, much like the friendships we build throughout our lifetime, during which we gather and form various experiences about the people with whom we have formed connections.

To support his claims, Pico quotes St. Anselm's ontological argument in a different way: "From all this we conclude that God is not only the being than which, according to St. Anselm, nothing higher can be conceived, but the being who infinitely transcends all that can be imagined ..." (Mirandola 1942b, 420)⁷ St. Thomas criticized St. Anselm because the latter had tried to execute the existence of God from the concept, that is, from the order of thought to the order of reality, from the logical to the ontological order (Devčić 1984, 212). The category of infinity that Pico attributes to the concept of God in his ontological argument is an abstraction derived from something arithmetically conceivable. While we can assert that the universe is infinite, this remains a hypothesis rather than a fact.

If we cannot describe God on the level of abstraction, as He transcends every idea attributed to any other being, then He is ineffable. The problem with ineffability is that it is itself a concept, creating a contradiction in claiming that something is truly and literally ineffable (Yandell 1999, 224). In this context, the use of Kabbalah, as suggested by Pico, is also grounded in the concept of ineffability rather than in the concept of personality. What is the purpose of Kabbalah? To understand the context of a biblical word? We assume that Mirandola's interest is more profound than hermeneutical analysis. Kabbalah is not merely a skill for translating words, but rather a means of uncovering their deeper meanings. Kabbalah combines the contemplation of tradition (written and transmitted word of God) and intuition. This is why Jewish mysticism asserts that even when ecstatic, a mystic feels and perceives the distance between God and man (Špehar 2010, 65).

At the same time, it involves reading the words and sentences while also uncovering their hidden meanings in light of theistic knowledge. The special meaning lies in the composition of words that describe who God is, His names, which reveal his nature. The problem with Kabbalah is that the object of mystical experience is the divinity of God rather than His personality; it emphasizes God's attributes rather than God Himself (Špehar 2010, 66). In other words, Kabbalah, as a hermeneutical tool, remains within the bounds of interpreting God's attributes rather than serving as an asset for understanding His Revelation.

7 "Ex quibus colligi illud potest non solum esse Deum, ut dicit Anselmus, quo nihil maius cogitari potest, sed id esse quod infinite maius est omni eo quod potest excogitari..." (Mirandola 1942b, 420)

Another problem with Pico's concept of God lies in its reference to the concepts of simplicity and perfection. We attribute perfection to beings to varying degrees in different aspects of life or wisdom. As Pico states, we cannot attribute to God this kind of perfection that is relative. The concept of God cannot be constructed from other concepts—God is conceived as the pure simplicity of the Being (Mirandola 1942b, 432). However, at this level of the knowledge of God, there are also challenges with properly understanding the concepts of unity and the being in relation to simplicity. Pico does not present anything new in philosophical theology; St. Thomas Aquinas regarded the Being of God as “undifferentiated unity”, rather than a construct of distinct or opposing categories such as matter and form or mind and body. Furthermore, the simplicity we attribute to God is based on concepts of space and time (Aguti 2017, 233). Everything that is contingent is constructed in one way or another, in space and time, and simplicity *a priori* derives from that is considered simple, as a whole, referring to the temporal and spatial categories that enable the structure of a contingent being. According to Pico, God cannot be conceived since He is perfectly simple, but we cannot conceive simplicity without the categories of union or existence. The third degree says that we cannot conceive God with attributes, since His Being surpasses all attributes and their content just because he is perfectly simple. However, the concept of simplicity is problematic due to the theoretical construction in space and time. To claim that something is simple we must construct simplicity from the combination of various elements and attribute it to God, even though God surpasses simplicity just as He does other categories.

Conclusion

When discussing the knowledge of God in the philosophy of Pico della Mirandola, we must acknowledge that Pico did not intend to provide a systematic presentation of the theological episteme in his philosophical work. His treatises on human dignity and discussions on the nature of God's Being carry a trace of an apology before those who had doubts about his orthodoxy, and it seems to the reader that was the only purpose of the written word. Those who could read and write were still thinking in terms determined by scholastic and not by Renaissance philosophy. Thus, Pico focused on representing a method of theological knowledge (Martínez Gómez 1984, 79). It is not systematic but is profoundly based on the analysis of the philosophical and theological past from Antiquity to Scholastics, in which he included a plethora of various theories and concepts of knowledge of God. Pico begins with the Socratic understanding of moral knowledge and the limited human condition. Since every man is a philosopher, called to reevaluate his notions

about what he already knows, the moral struggle with wishes and desires for the corporeal and the physical is a starting point for a deeper reflection, a reflection on creation that becomes a contemplative state of philosopher's mind. But even in the state of contemplation, a philosopher is occupied with certain concepts about the Divine, about God, the concepts that are derived from senses. It is a step closer to approaching "darkness", but not to entering it. Then, in the end, in the state of blessed ignorance, far from moral struggles, higher from the state of contemplation, and in possession of notions of God that cannot be rationally derived, a philosopher is in union with God. While reading his works in an attempt to present a theologically consistent concept of God, we encountered certain issues with the coherence of his ideas and theories. Pico della Mirandola approached religious knowledge in a certain syncretic way. Nevertheless, his insight into the mystical path to knowledge and union with God is worthy and relevant in every aspect of study in the fields of Renaissance philosophy.

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*Sažetak***SPOZNAJA BOGA U FILOZOFIJI PICA DELLA MIRANDOLE**

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Filozofija Giovannija Pica della Mirandole, oblikovana povijesnim kontekstom renesanse i akademskim okruženjem sklonim sinkretizmu, do danas ostavlja dojam složenog i slojevitog sustava. U filozofskom pristupu spoznaji Boga Mirandola se oslanja na različite filozofske i teološke izvore, gradeći tako osebujan prikaz duhovnog puta prema mističnom sjedinjenju s Bogom. Njegov filozofski pristup spoznaji Boga autori istražuju kroz tri točke, ili stupnja, u kojima se ljudski um preko introspekcije, filozofskog i teološkog promišljanja uzdiže prema Bogu. Nakon kratka izlaganja o Mirandolinim tezama o sposobnosti spoznaje Boga, u daljnje tri točke autori razrađuju položaj racionalnosti i apstrahiranja Božjih atributa, narav kontemplacije i opis mističnog sjedinjenja s Bogom. Kao izvore za svoj rad koristili su traktate *De hominis dignitate* i *De entis et uno*.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: Picco della Mirandola, spoznaja Boga, filozofija, teologija, kontemplacija

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