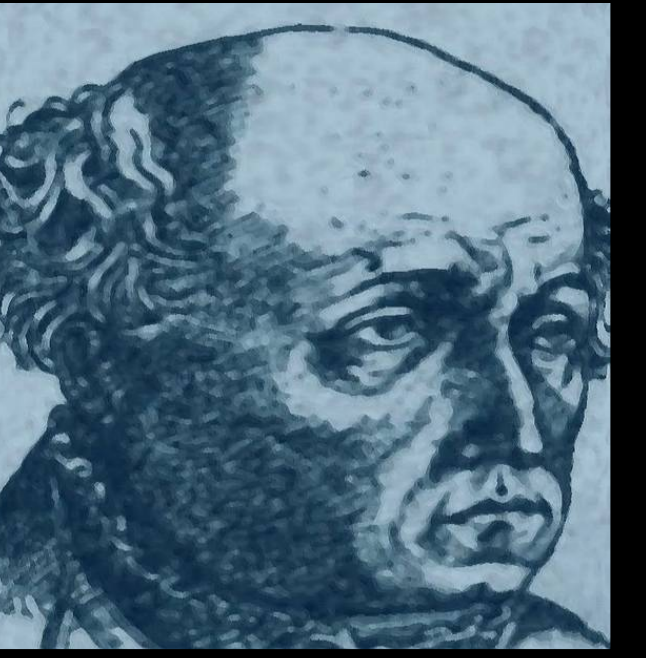


Paracelsus on Natural and Supernatural Sentient Beings, including Nymphs, Gnomes, Pygmies, Ghosts, Angels, and Demons

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PARACELSUS'S IMPORTANCE



Theophrastus Bombast von Hohenheim, usually called Paracelsus (1493/4-1541), was an exceptionally influential natural philosopher, medical practitioner, and lay theologian in German-speaking areas. A revolutionary in medical pharmaceuticals, he utilized chemical procedures to forge new and controversial medicines—Alchemy was for medicine, not to turn base metals into gold. His unique world view earned him thousands of posthumous followers. And Paracelsus's famous and infamous blend of natural philosophy and religion included discussions of non-human sentient beings, who—though usually invisible—existed in the realm of the believable in early modernity.

PROJECT: NON-HUMAN INTELLIGENT BEINGS

Paracelsus wrote over two dozen volumes of medical, philosophical, and theological texts in the sixteenth century. His most famous book, his *magnum opus*, was the *Astronomia Magna* (Great Astronomy).—This work discusses the whole of his natural philosophy and theology, including the characteristics (including ontologies) of such creatures as ghosts, angels and demons, and creatures of fairy tales (e.g., nymphs and sylphs).

MORE LIGHT ON THE INVISIBLE BEINGS OF PARACELUS'S COSMOS ON THE BASIS OF HIS ANTHROPOLOGY (I.E. STUDY OF THE COMPONENTS OF THE HUMAN BEING)

Of the invisible sentient beings, all contain one or more components of the human being, but not all. What are these components? The human being—per the Bible—is made of body, spirit, and soul (and Paracelsus adds that Christians have the further component of the resurrection body!). Paracelsus followed the Biblical model (albeit loosely): He thought that the body (the elemental *corpus*) is a mortal and tangible combination of mercury, Sulphur, and salt. The “spirit” is actually a mortal and invisible body made from the stars—the sidereal component. The soul is invisible and eternal; it is God's breath, the component of humans that is made in God's image. Of the sentient creatures, only human beings possess the soul.

Paracelsus's analogy of the microcosm and macrocosm also sheds light on the anthropology informing Paracelsus's view of humans and thus the other sentient beings as well: He taught that the human being is a microcosm, i.e. an analogy of the universe. Every item in the universe (the macrocosm) is in the human too; thus, man possesses his own inner Jupiter, oak tree, gold, and essence of every other being in the universe. He argued that the “dust of the earth” of Genesis 2:7, which Paracelsus called the “limbus,” contained every essence of the material universe in it (both sidereal and elemental); in Genesis 2:7, God put this limbus in his hand and created Adam by blowing life into it. Therefore man the microcosm contains within him the seeds of everything that exists in the universe.

Of these components, ghosts are only the sidereal body (spirit), angels and fallen angels (demons) are only pure immortal spirits lacking both elemental and sidereal bodies, and the elemental creatures—like humans—are a microcosm of the greater universe; they possess both tangible body and the invisible sidereal component—These elementals just lack the soul (and thus immortality).

TITLE PAGE FROM THE 1571 EDITION OF THE *ASTRONOMIA MAGNA*

PARACELSUS, Philippus von Hohenheim, known as (1493-1541). *Astronomia Magna: oder die gantze Philosophia sagax der grossen und kleinen Welt.* Edited by Michael Toxites. Frankfurt: Martin Lechler for Hieronymus Feyerabend, 1571.



ELEMENTAL CREATURES (E.G., NYMPHS, VULCANS, AND PYGMIES), THEIR ONTOLOGIES, AND HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO BELIEVE IN THEM

Paracelsus also addresses the “elemental creatures” (e.g., nymphs, vulcans, and pygmies), who are soulless spirits born and living in each of the elemental matrices, that is, the regions of earth, water, air, and fire. They share two components with humans: the body (elemental component) and spirit (sidereal component), but lack the soul possessed by humans. Concerning the soulless spirits, Andrew Weeks has observed, “In reconfirming the existence of legendary giants and elemental spirits, [Hohenheim] conflated faith and credulity by arguing that those who refuse to believe in such creatures by the same token refuse to believe in Christ To doubt the unseen creatures of nature is therefore like denying a Christ whose works and omnipresent powers are also unseen.” Actually, Paracelsus's discussion of the elementals is an unrelenting sermon on Christian morality, and he treats the elementals as “wonderworks” of God. Furthermore, Paracelsus exclaims, the Church has wrongfully tied these “natural” creatures to the nefarious. See Andrew Weeks, *Paracelsus: Speculative Theory and the Crisis of the Early Reformation* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 166.

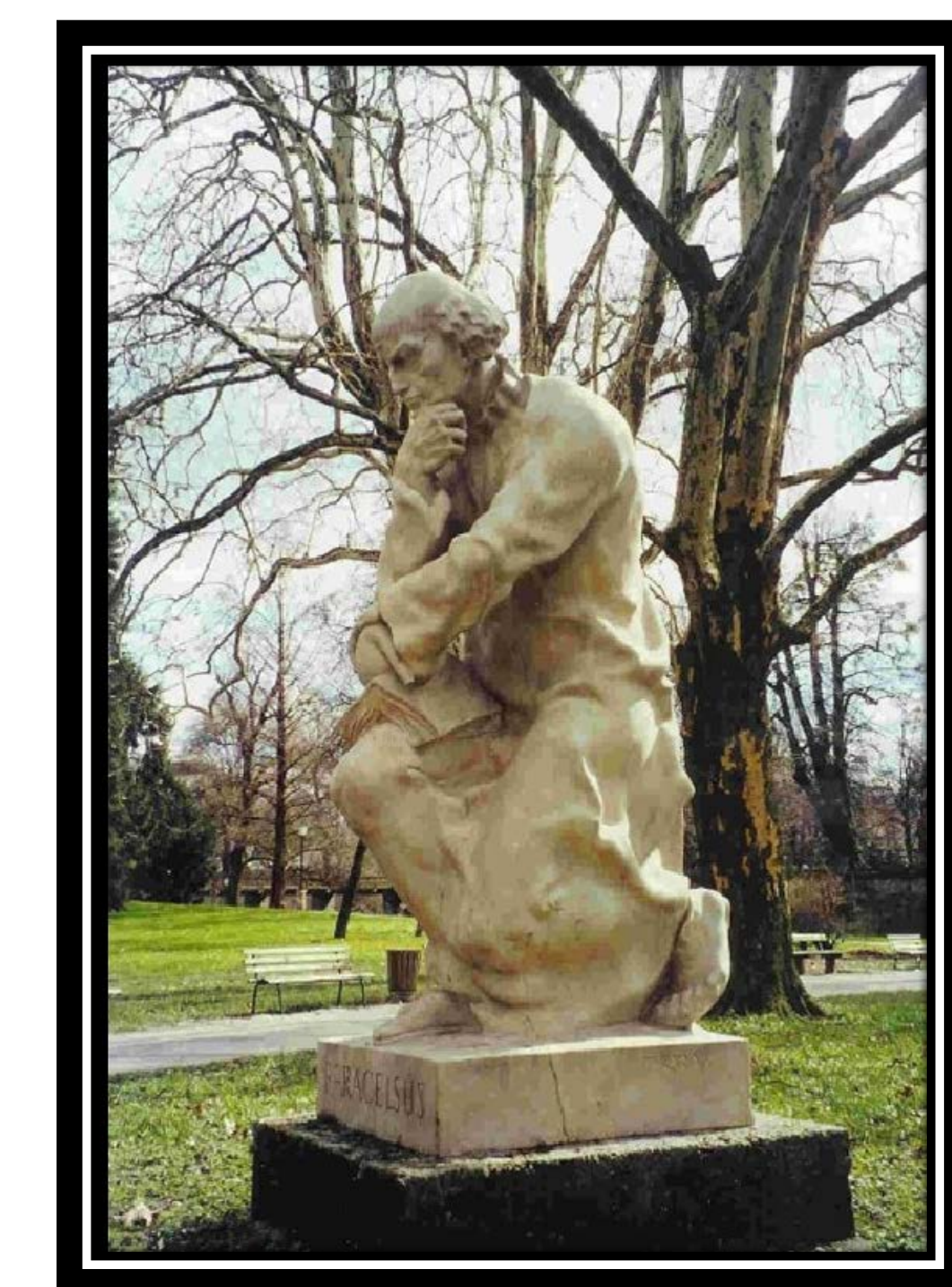
ANGELS AND DEMONS

Angelic beings are much different, whether good or nefarious. Paracelsus writes that angels and demons do not carry the very image (*biltnus*) of God. Per his exegesis of Genesis 2:7, only the Adamic soul—and definitely not the angelic spirit—is composed of the very breath of God. In capacity and immortality, the angelic spirit and human soul are similar, and both are subject to judgment. Thus, concerning anthropology, the angelic spirit and human soul function as parallels, but angels do not seem to possess a parallel corporeality. Indeed, Paracelsus favors referring to angels as “pure spirits,” as “spirits without bodies;” they were created by the Word alone and, unlike humans, not fashioned out of matter.



Some angels remained loyal, thus forever in the hand of God and filled with the Holy Spirit, and others fell and suffered, tossed into Tartarus (2 Peter 2:4). The infernal beings were not created as demons, but rather as angels. They lost their angelic state because they did not fear God, but instead fell into pride and disobedience. Black magic does not exist, for demons can only engage in natural magic (e.g., making storms), and only with God's permission.

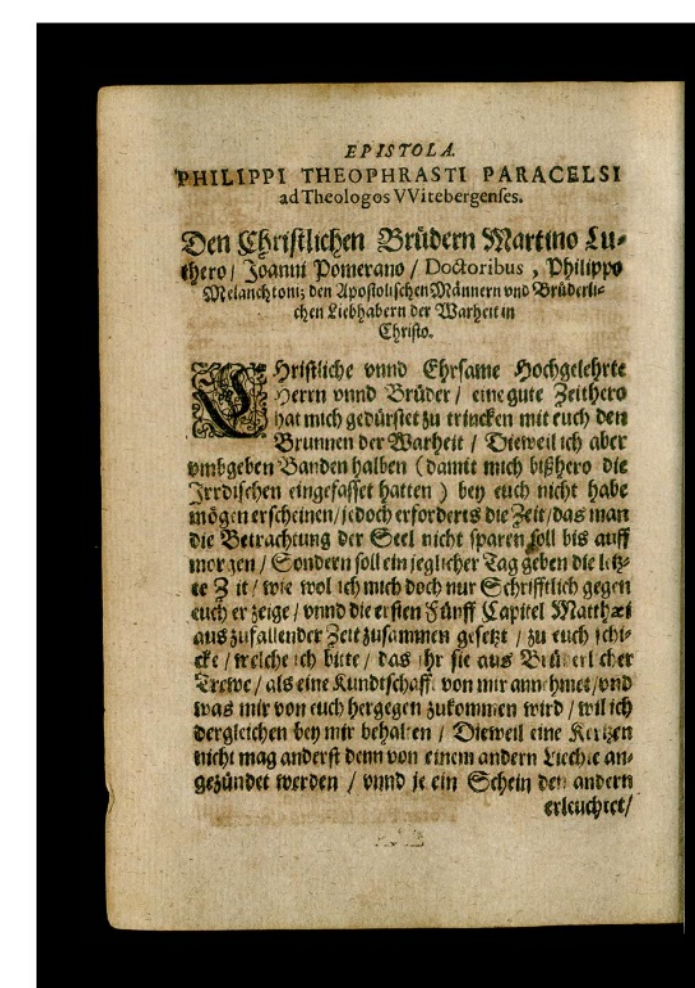
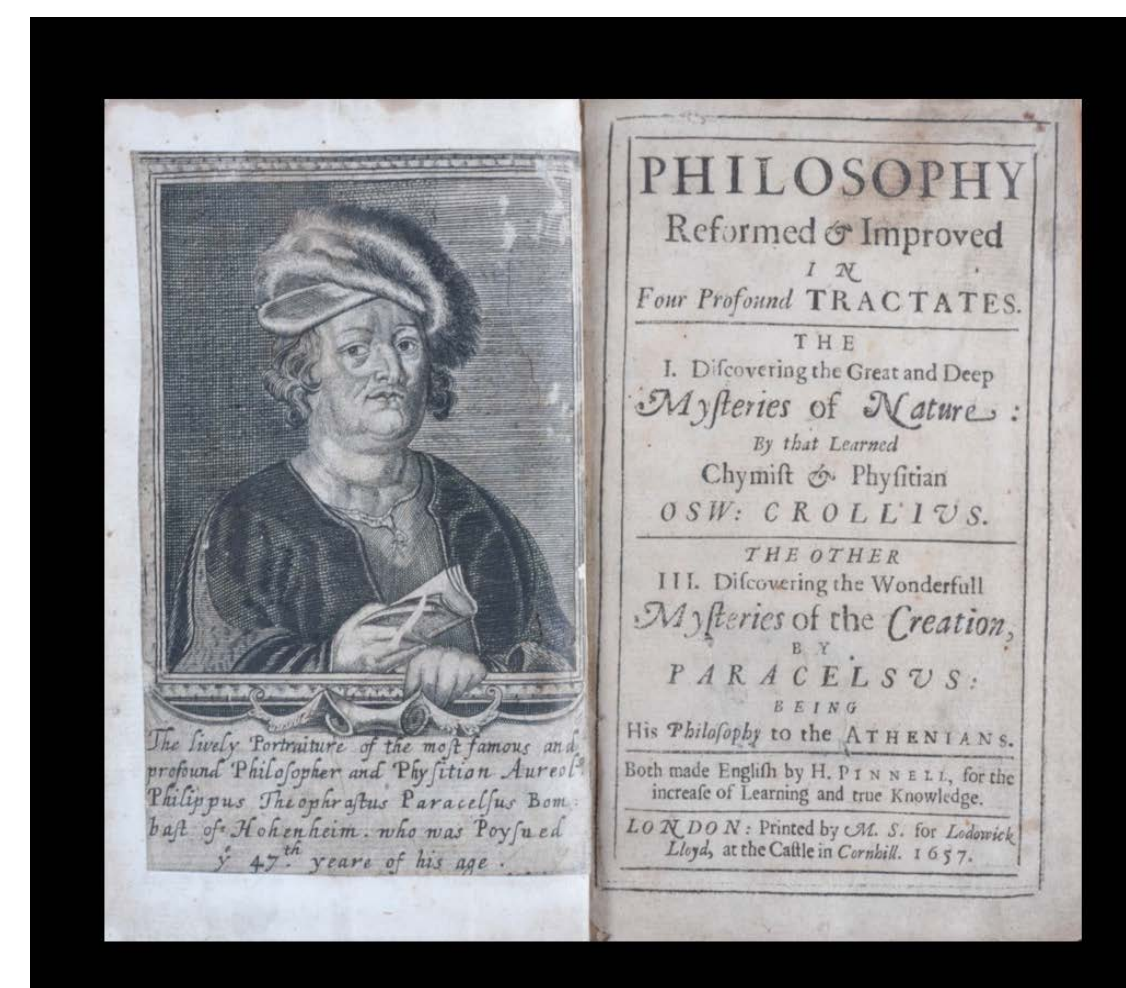
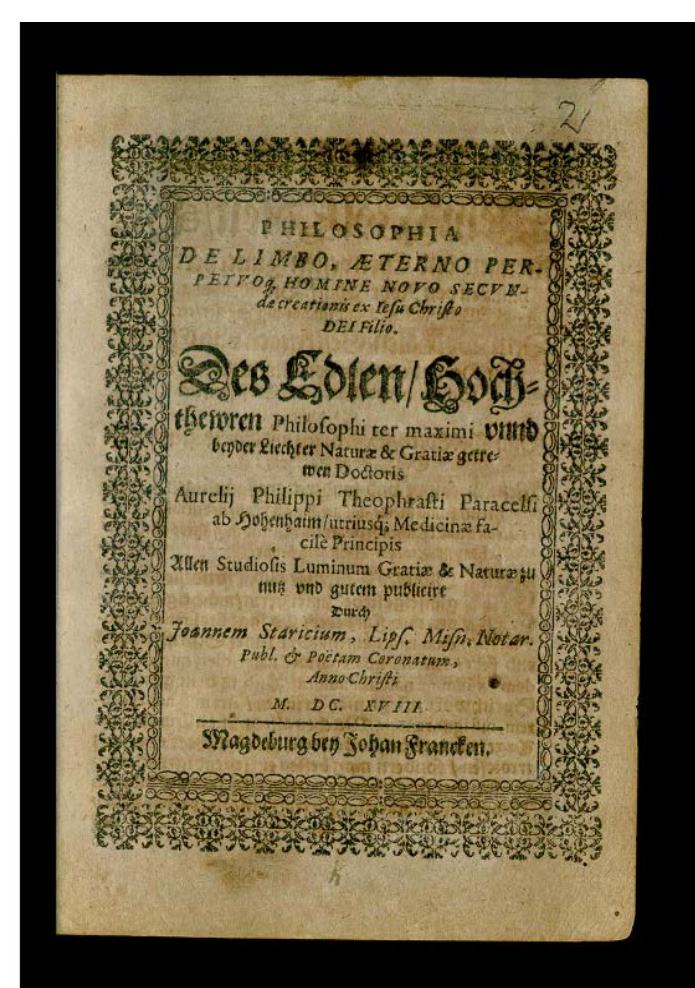
CONCLUSION



The topic of such soulless creatures as spooks, angels, and nymphs accentuates Paracelsus's anthropology and is incomprehensible without an understanding of it. In Paracelsus's thought, many topics usually treated in the context of the dark arts (e.g., ghosts and nymphs) become mere natural topics treated in the domain of natural philosophy. The topic further elucidates Renaissance beliefs in spiritual and fantastical creatures and their prevalence in Early Modern science, religion, and *esoterica*.

GHOSTS

Paracelsus explains ghosts ontologically via a synopsis of his division of the human being: they are not the souls of the dead, but merely the sidereal component of the dead left hovering briefly on earth (i.e. spirits/sidereal bodies). He adds that an “astronomer”—meaning a practitioner in the powers of the stars (“light of nature”)—can perceive and employ a ghost for various tasks. Such an artisan can see the sidereal bodies of the dead, but charlatans abound who falsely believe and teach that they perceive and communicate with the *souls* of the dead. Finally, Paracelsus evokes ghosts in order to launch one of his characteristic rants against heathen “superstition,” whether in its nefarious or “Popish” forms—Necromancy does not exist in the manner thought by the witches and priests!



Printed pages from a few of the Paracelsian books housed in the Neville Collection (Philadelphia).