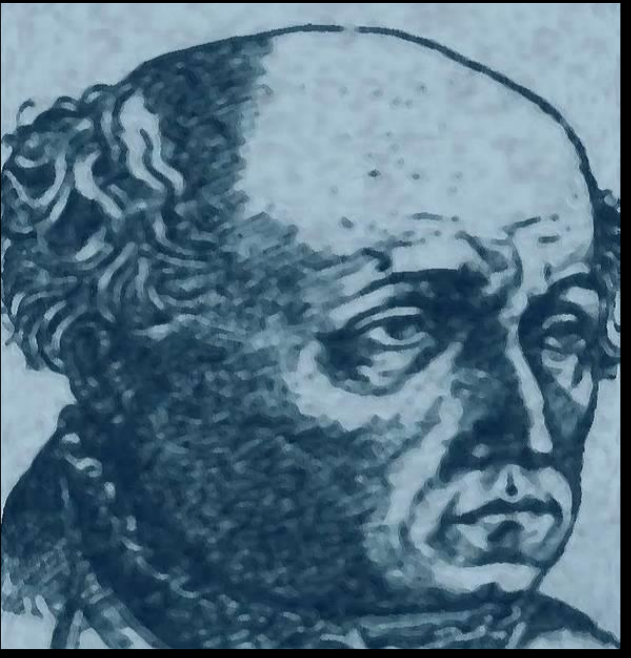


Paracelsus and the Biblical Foundations of Magic: Natural, Celestial, and Demonic Astronomy

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PARACELUSUS'S IMPORTANCE



Theophrastus Bombast von Hohenheim, called Paracelsus (1493/4-1541), is most famous for his revolutionary ideas in medical pharmaceuticals and pathology. Most alchemists sought to turn base metals into gold, but Paracelsus utilized chemical procedures to forge new and controversial medicines, such as distilled mercury to treat syphilis. The chemical approach to medicine was innovative at the time, and his thousands of followers advanced his pathology, new medical treatments (including revolutionary concepts re. toxicology and homeopathy), and *spagyric* (i.e. magical and alchemical) cosmos. The latter—a blend of philosophy, religion, and magic—was nearly as famous as his medicine.

PROJECT: TYPES OF MAGIC IN THE *ASTRONOMIA MAGNA* (1537/38)

Of Paracelsus's two dozen volumes of medical, philosophical, and theological texts in the sixteenth century, his most famous was the *Astronomia Magna* (Great Astronomy). Paracelsus's focus here was magic, which he discussed in terms of the types of natural, “celestial” (or Christian), and demonic *astronomy*. Following Renaissance Neoplatonists, e.g., Marsilio Ficino (1433-99), he believed that magic was a good and Christian art, and cited the example of the magi—seeking Christ via astrology—as evidence of the virtuous and Biblical roots of magic. Thus, this Swiss-German iconoclastic voice within early modern natural philosophy, medicine, and spiritualism broke with medieval theories of magic via his synthesis of theology and magic. Although incorporating the mostly extra-Biblical concepts of the *tria prima* (salt, sulphur, and mercury), elemental matrices, and microcosm-macrocosm analogy, Paracelsus's spagyric world (or magico-alchemical cosmos) also featured a concept developed in his extensive theological writings, namely, that the universe consists of two overlapping cosmologies, the natural and the divine, the former a mortal creation by God the Father, and the latter an eternal creation by God the Son. In this context Paracelsus countered the types of natural magic—e.g., the necromancy and astrology created by God the Father—with its more potent “celestial” analogues, created by the Son. For Paracelsus, demonic magic was merely the employment of natural magic (i.e. magic in the Father's creation) by demons, permitted by God.

PARACELUSUS'S NATURAL MAGIC

In the *Astronomia Magna*, Paracelsus synthesized the entirety of his natural philosophy and theology, and devoted Book I (of the four books) to the explication of natural astronomy, that is, natural magic. Besides outlining the creation and contents of the universe (macrocosm) and man (microcosm), he discussed how magic functions and outlined its types. Via the “light of nature,” the stars rain down all knowledge into the world. The human spirit, which also consists of the stars, acts as a magnet for the “natural light of nature.”—Regarding magic, human beings born with a talent in a type of “astronomy” (e.g., nigromancy, astrology, or palm reading) receive from the stars knowledge about their magical art. Paracelsus enumerates the many types of magic and magical practitioners adept in the natural world created by the Father.

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

PARACELUSUS, 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 Hieronymous Feyerabend, 1571.

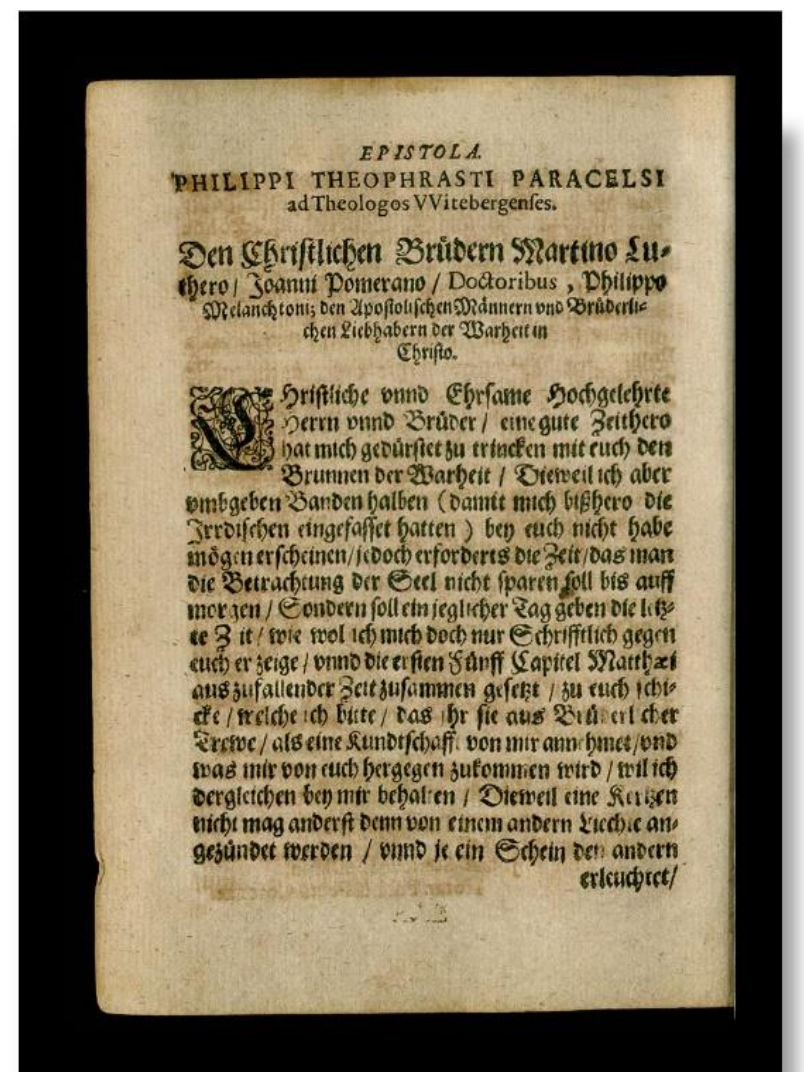
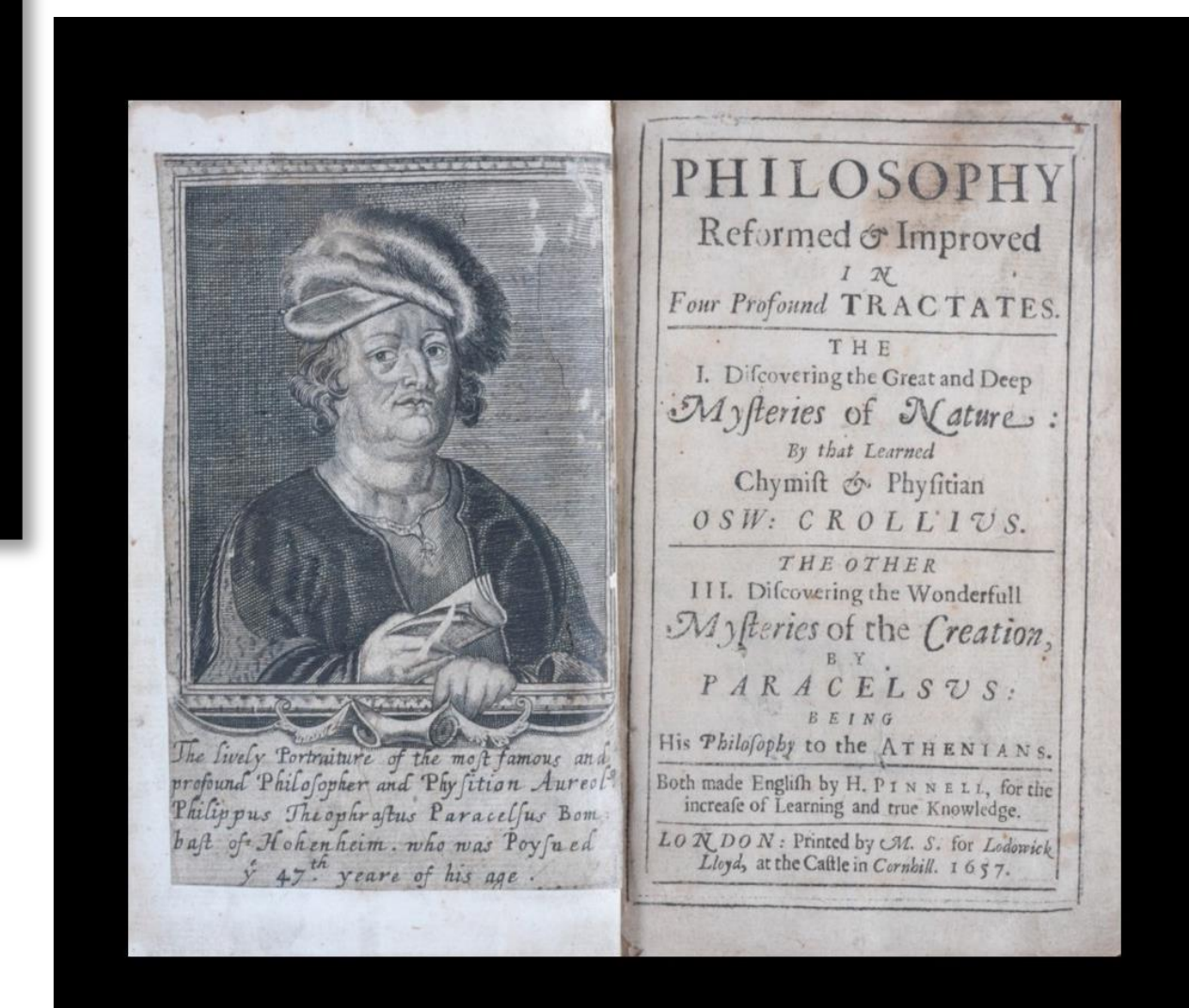
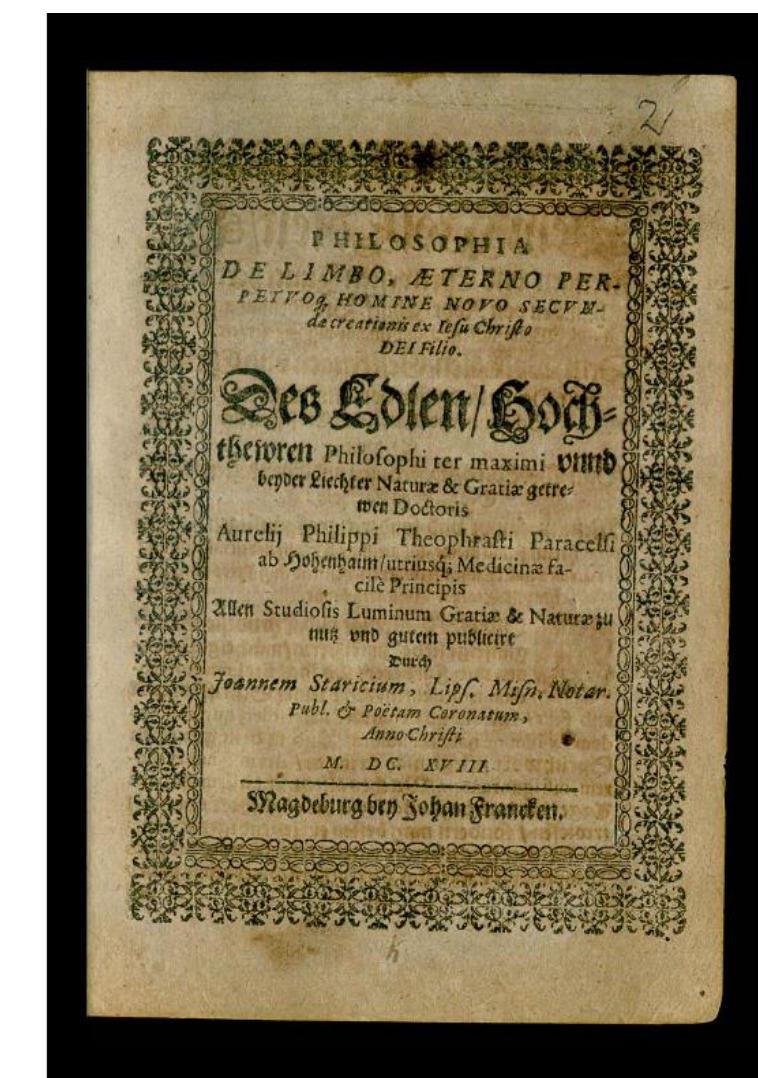


CELESTIAL MAGIC IN THE *ASTRONOMIA MAGNA*, BOOK II

1. There are two creations, the creation by God the Father (outlined in Genesis), and the creation by God the Son.
2. The first creation is temporary and will be destroyed irrevocably in the final conflagration. This includes the elemental (bodily) and sidereal (spiritual) components of the human being. The second creation by Christ, however, is eternal.
3. God the Father created Adam from the “dust of the earth,” the “*limus*” of Genesis 2:7. God the Son created the “eternal *limbus*,” and fashioned all resurrection bodies from this eternal and invisible matter that will never die.
4. Christians receive their resurrection bodies upon baptism, and nourish these bodies—while on earth!—with the Lord's Supper, which contains the eternal limbus. Christians can develop miraculous powers—like walking through walls and raising the dead, as Christ did—because of their participation as celestial adepts (Christian magicians) in Christ's new creation. Such Christians are powerful alchemists and the “born again” are truly miraculous new creations!
5. While natural magic is available to all humans via the light of nature rained down by the stars, “celestial magic” is available exclusively to Christians utilizing the “celestial stars” created by Christ, and they can perform the same types of miracles that Jesus did. There exists a celestial analogy for every natural astronomy. For example, “natural chiromancy” has its more powerful analogy in “celestial chiromancy.”

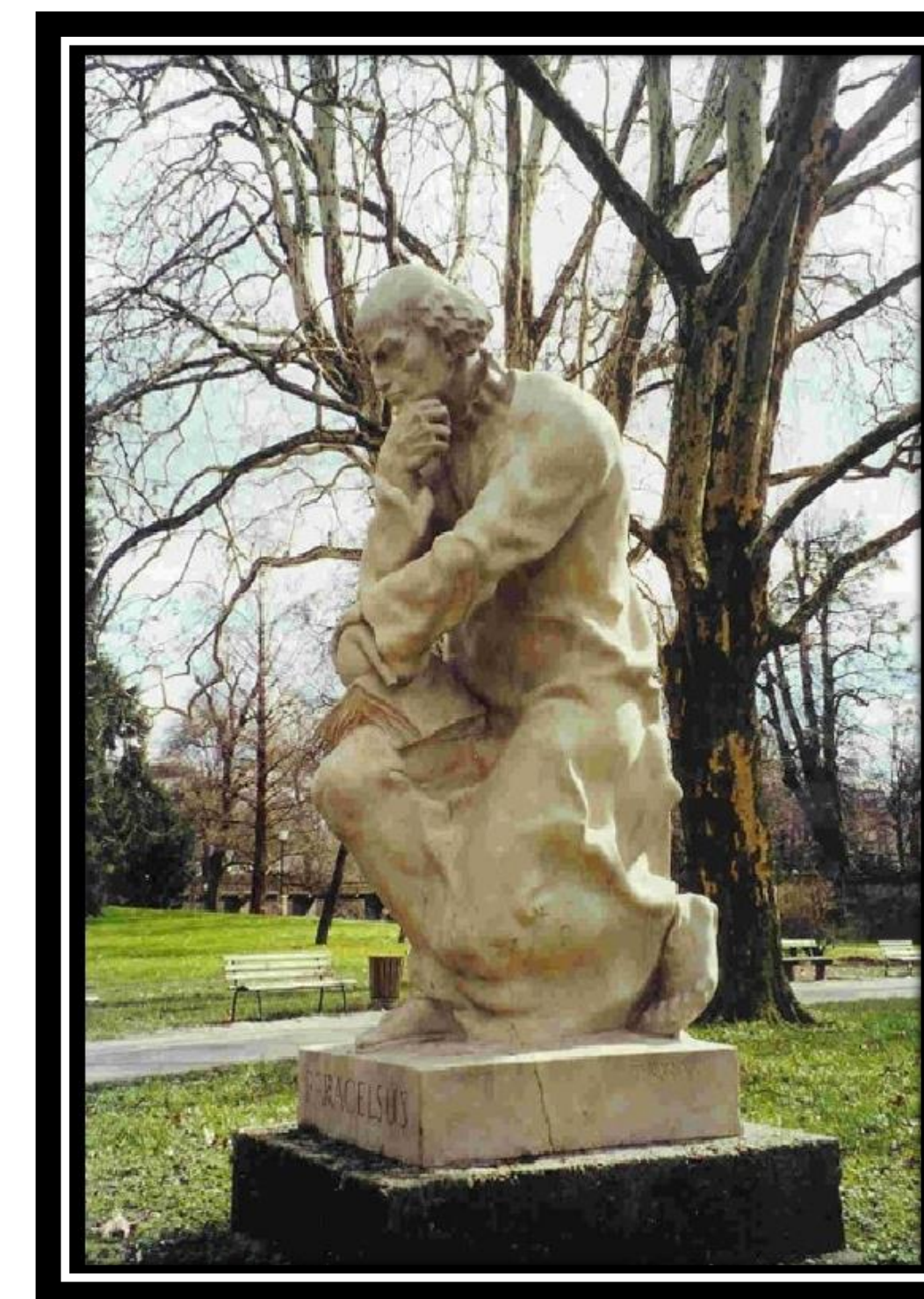
DEMONIC MAGIC

Paracelsus devotes Book IV of the *Astronomia Magna* to “infernal magic,” by which he means simply how demons practice natural magic. Demons are able to practice all the types of astronomy available to natural magicians (but not celestial magicians), such as reading signatures, stars, or palms to achieve great or prophetic knowledge, or utilizing gems for great power (e.g., telepathic communication over long distances), or even creating storms. However, they can not utilize natural astronomy whenever they wish, but only when God permits.



Above: Printed pages from a few of the many Paracelsian books housed in the Neville Collection at the Chemical Heritage Foundation, Philadelphia.

CONCLUSION: A PROGRESSIVE NEW MAGIC



Breaking from medieval traditions of magic, Paracelsus proffered a vision of magic that was Bible-based and progressive. Per Paracelsus, magic is not considered to be something nefarious or “black,” but rather God-ordained and an important aspect of life, especially Christian life. Thus, magic is to be condoned rather than condemned. Science, religion, and magic are truly synthesized.