Heavenly Journeys: Marsilio Ficino and Girolamo Cardano on *Scipio's Dream*

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ABSTRACT

The report of a dream about a disembodied soul in Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* (*Dream of Scipio*) is a narration of a heavenly journey that reflects a belief in the existence of a perfect harmonic world beyond the world of the senses. During the Renaissance it was used by many scholars to understand the transitory nature of earthly life and to find peace of mind. By comparing Marsilio Ficino's interpretation of *Scipio's Dream* with the one of Girolamo Cardano I will argue in this article that their fictional reports of heavenly journeys led to entirely different interpretations of the meaning of life. While Ficino, in his interpretation, focused on perfect cosmic harmony that he used as a model for a utopian view of a peaceful society, Cardano took the cacophony of his everyday life as point of departure, using the dream as a model that justifies one's self-interest.* **

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The report of a dream about a disembodied soul in Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* (*Dream of Scipio*), presented in the sixth book of his *Republic* but known in the Renaissance through Macrobius' *Commentariorum in somnium Scipionis* (*Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*), is a narration of a heavenly journey that reflects a belief in the existence of a perfect harmonic world beyond the world of the senses. The influence of this story, and especially of its portrayal of the music of the spheres, was great and long-lasting, despite competing with the Aristotelian concept of a silent cosmos. The *Dream of Scipio* narrates a dream dreamt by the Roman general Scipio Aemilianus. In his dream, Scipio ascends to the sphere of the stars from which he looks down at the earth and, while there, speaks with his dead grandfather, who foretells his grandson's future victory over Carthage, but also helps him understand the transitory nature of earthly power. The two discuss a number of metaphysical subjects, including the nature of the cosmos as a source of inspiration for the meaning of life.

Macrobius, a Roman scholar, wrote a lengthy commentary on Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* in c. 400 AD.[1] Macrobius' commentary contains an exploration of the nature of the music of the spheres as well as an exploration of the nature of dreams. He divided dreams into different types, distinguishing between non-predictive dreams that result from one's waking concerns and

1 Macrobius 1973.

predictive dreams that have a prophetic function.[2] Non-predictive dreams can take the form of *phantasma* or *visum* (apparition), where the dreamer sees spirits; or they can take the form of *insomnium* (nightmare), where the dream is associated with something that irritates someone during the day. Predictive dreams take the forms of *visio*, a prophetic dream that comes true; *oraculum* where a guide reveals the future and gives advice; or *somnium*, an enigmatic dream requiring interpretation that hides its true meaning in complex concepts such as the music of the spheres. In the *Dream of Scipio* we find a mixture of all these elements.

Macrobius' commentary became the foundation of much of the music theory and dream theory of the medieval era and Renaissance. His explanations of the music of the spheres and of the different kinds of dreams give us a point of departure from which to interpret enigmatic dreams and strange dream-like happenings in Renaissance versions of the *Dream of Scipio.* By comparing Marsilio Ficino's (1433–1499)[3] interpretation of *Scipio's Dream* with the one of Girolamo Cardano (1501–1576)[4] I will argue in this article that their fictional reports of heavenly journeys led to entirely different interpretations of the meaning of life. Ficino envisioned planetary music as perfect harmony and he used it as a model for a utopian view of a peaceful society. In this view, one has to transcend one's self-interest in order to create harmonic and peaceful relationships between all people on earth. But Cardano focused in his interpretation on the cacophony of his everyday life, using the dream as a model that justifies one's self-interest. In this view, to find peace of mind one must focus on oneself by securing one's property as well as the future of one's offspring.

MACROBIUS' COMMENTARY ON THE DREAM OF SCIPIO

Upon his arrival in Africa, the Roman general Scipio Aemilianus is visited by his dead grandfather, Scipio Africanus in the *Dream of Scipio*. He finds himself looking down on the earth "from a lofty perch dazzling and glorious, set among the radiant stars."[5] His future is foretold by his grandfather, and a great deal of emphasis is placed upon the loyal service of Roman soldiers, who will, as a reward after death, "have a distinct place marked off in the heavens where they may enjoy a blessed existence forever".[6]

2 Macrobius' dream theory is based on the Greek dream-theory of Artemidorus from the second century AD. Macrobius 1973, pp. 87–92.

3 M. Ficino, „Marsilius Ficinus Reverendissimo in Christo Patri et Domino Suo D. IOanni Cardinali Aragonio Ferdinandi Regis serenissimi filio suppiciter se commendat" („Marsilio Ficino humbly commend himself to his father and lord in Christ, His Eminence Giovanni, Cardinal of Aragon, son of His Serene Highness, King Ferdinand") Ficino 1962, pp. 816–820; Ficino 1975, pp. 23–30.

4 G. Cardano. „Dialogus Hieronymi Cardani et Facii Cardani ipsius patris" ("Dialogue between Girolamo Cardano and Fazio Car_ dano, his own father") (ca. 1574) Cardano 1966, pp. 637–640. English translation of the „Dialogus" Fierz 1983, pp. 158–166.

5 Macrobius 1973, p. 70.

6 Macrobius, 1973, p. 71.

In the dream, Scipio's grandfather makes his grandson aware that Rome is a very small part of the earth, which is in turn dwarfed by the stars.

The workings of the universe including the revolutions of the celestial spheres are described in Pythagorean terms, such as the doctrine of the music of the spheres, which were an accepted part of the cosmological picture of Plato, Cicero and Macrobius (*fig.* 1). This cosmological picture advocates the idea that the cosmos, in particular the speeds of the planetary revolutions, is ordered by the same numerical proportions that produce musical harmonies in earthly music. In his *Commentary on the* Dream of Scipio Macrobius took Scipio's amazement about the wonderful sound of the spheres as a point of departure for his view of the meaning of life, which is described in the following dialogue between Scipio and his grandfather: "I stood dumbfounded at these sights, and when I recovered my senses I inquired: "What is this great and pleasing sound that fills my ears?" "That," replied my grandfather

> is a concord of tones separated by unequal but nevertheless carefully proportioned intervals, caused by the rapid motion of the spheres themselves. The high and low tones blended together produce different harmonies. Of course such swift motions could not be accomplished in silence and, as nature requires, the spheres at one extreme produce the low tones and at the other extreme the high tones. ... The eight spheres, two of which move at the same speed, produce seven different tones, this number being, one might almost say, the key to the universe.[7]

According to Scipio's grandfather, the concentric-ringed cosmos is filled with a harmonious sound produced by the planets moving in their orbits through space. In Macrobius' *Commentary,* the planets are arranged as follows: Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. Cicero differed from Plato in the order in which he arranged the spheres: Plato believed that the Sun was next to the Moon, followed by Venus, Mercury and the three outer planets, whereas Cicero placed Mercury, then Venus, between the Moon and the Sun, followed by the same three outer spheres as in Plato's order. Macrobius called Plato's order "Egyptian", Cicero's "Chaldean".[8] Given that Cicero's statement about planetary music is not fully consistent, Macrobius had to defend the idea that the eight spheres, including the star-bearing sphere, could be paired with the seven sounds of a musical scale, by arguing that Mercury and Venus produced identical sounds because they move at the same speed.[9] In his interpretation, the planets produced a single-octave scale: the Moon producing the lowest tone of the cosmic scale.

When Plato, Cicero and Macrobius looked to the heavens, they observed not only the Sun, Moon, stars and planets,

7 Macrobius 1973, pp.73–74.
8 Macrobius 1973, p. 162.
9 Macrobius 1973, p. 198.

Figure 1. An illustration from a 15th-century Italian manuscript of Macrobius's commentary on Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* (*Dream of Scipio*). It shows the sleeper, Scipio, and the subject of his cosmological dream: the music of the spheres.[10]

10 Macrobius, unknown scribe, *Comentum Macrobii Ambrosii in somnium Scipionis* (Italy, 1469). MS Typ 7, Houghton Library, Harvard University. The order of the planets in this illustration is the Chaldean order (Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the star-bearing sphere).

but a perfect harmonious cosmos, that they could use to formulate a view of the good life. They all believed that fathoming the workings of the universe had deep implications for the meaning of life; an understanding of cosmology was therefore seen as a point of departure for human ethics, that is, for a view of harmonious life. Moreover, they argued that if one could answer the question of how the world worked, one obtained the key to the universe, that is, the key to the secret meaning of life. According to Plato, Cicero and Macrobius, there were two ways of obtaining this key: "Gifted men imitating this harmony on stringed instruments and in singing, have gained for themselves a return to this region, as have those who have devoted their exceptional abilities to a search for divine truths."[11] By making or listening to music or by practicing philosophy, theology or dream interpretation, a talented human being could transcend the limitations of knowledge acquisition based on sense and reason. Moreover, the *Dream of Scipio* argues that the ears of ordinary mortals are filled with celestial sound, but they are unable to hear it, just as the inhabitants of the zone of the great cataract of the Nile have become deaf to its deafening sound.[12] Yet, one could reactivate the memory of celestial music by imitating it in earthly musical practices and through contemplation. Even though he was not very interested in the precise scholarly description of the planetary spheres, it became one of the ruling passions of Marsilio Ficino to find the meaning of life by following in the footsteps of Plato, Cicero and Macrobius, and to share it with his fellow human beings.

FICINO ON THE ART OF LIVING PEACEFULLY WITH OTHER PEOPLE

Marsilio Ficino was an Italian philosopher, translator, and commentator, who started the Renaissance revival of Plato and Platonism.[13] He owned a copy of Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* from a very early point in his studies.[14] Macrobius' *Commentary* was a rich source of inspiration for him on dreams, on numbers and proportions, on cosmology and on the meaning of life. Moreover, the *Commentary* was an important source of inspiration to reflect on the principle of the immortality of the soul, because it had a strong adherence to a Platonic philosophy of life based on the concept of detachment, and to the music of the spheres that cannot be heard by human ears, but is the key to the universe.[15]

The way in which Ficino utilized the Platonic thought of the *Dream of Scipio* in his letter to the son of King Ferdinand can best be interpreted in the context of his efforts as a Platonic peacemaker and healer, envisioning his Academy as

11 Macrobius 1973, p. 74. Macrobius is following here Timaeus 47c–d. Plato 1952, p. 158.

12 Macrobius 1973, p. 199.

13 On Ficino, see Celenza 2017 and J.G. Snyder (no date). „Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499)". *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. https://iep.utm.edu/ficino/ [accessed on 15.09.2020].

14 For Ficino's reception of Cicero, see Rees 2013.

15 Prins 2014, pp. 25–213.

a breeding place for new ideas about the health and harmony of individuals as well as society.[16] During his life, Ficino sought to combine the pursuit of medicine for the body, music for the spirit, and theology for the soul.[17] As a famous doctor, musician, Platonic theologian, and ordained priest, that is, as a member of the intellectual and religious establishment, Ficino was entitled to prescribe medicines for holistic healing to the world leaders of his time.

The immortality of the soul was, for Ficino, a central organizing principle. This is reflected in the advice that he gives in the letter to the son of King Ferdinand that centred on the nature and destiny of the soul. Ficino's Platonic views on the nature of the soul led to a holistic vision of the physical and spiritual health of individuals as well as societies. In Ficino's Christian-Platonist view, the loving and contemplative mind attempts to return to its eternal state in its true home by making a spiritual ascent through the spheres, that is, through different levels of ultimate reality.[18] The heavenly journey or ascent from the physical to the spiritual, from earthly shadow to divine Form, and from the temporal to the eternal is the keystone of Ficino's philosophy of life. By describing a series of mental stages, which in the letter to the son of King Ferdinand are represented as a journey through the celestial spheres, the king is confronted with a way to heal and restore his own soul that will also be beneficial for the souls of all his subjects. Hoping to change the king's leadership in a positive way, Ficino uses the letter to remind the king that every soul has an innate desire to return to its divine origin, a longing to transcend the imperfections and distractions of being incarnate in a perishable body and to regain the wonderful bliss in its true home.[19]

The encounter between Scipio and his grandfather in the *Dream of Scipio*, as narrated in the sixth book of letters, letter thirteen, is used as a model for an encounter between Ficino and the spirit of the late King Alfonso of Naples, addressing his still living grandson Giovanni, Cardinal of Aragon, with a message for his father King Ferdinand, Alfonso's son.[20] To underline the truth of the message in his letter, so that his advice to the king on conduct would be acted upon, Ficino reported that during a journey through the celestial spheres his soul met King Alfonso, who uttered a prophecy from heaven, in the language of angels. When Ficino's soul came back on earth, he translated this message which, in heaven, he had understood with the "eyes and ears of the mind alone" into a language understandable to "the ears and eyes of the body as well."[21] Having listened to King Alfonso up in the heavenly spheres, Ficino passed on to his son King Ferdinand, who was still on earth, the task of the "restoration of

16 McClure 1991, p. 142.

17 M. Ficino. „Medicina corpus, musica spiritum, theologia animum", liber 1 (to Francesco Musano). Ficino, Opera Omnia 1 (Basel, 1576, rept. Turin 1962), p. 609; Ficino 1975, pp. 39–40.

18 Ficino 1962, p. 820; Ficino, 1975, p. 30.

19 Ficino, 1962, p. 820; Ficino, 1975, p. 30.

20 Ficino 1962, pp. 816–820; Ficino 1975, pp. 23–30.

21 Ficino 1962, p. 816; Ficino 1975, p. 23.

peace which has been disturbed for so long by hostile fate".[22] Ficino's rhetorical strategy is to put words into the mouth of the king's dead grandfather Alfonso, since Alfonso's words were more influential than his own. He did this to influence Alfonso's grandson Giovanni in such a way that he would make his father Ferdinand realize that, if he wishes to see peace restored , he has to let go of his earthly ambitions, a part of the insignificant everyday world, and concentrate on what can be perceived with "the ears of the mind alone".

To a modern reader, the instructions given in the letter somehow resemble the ones given during a hypnotherapy session. In order to enter the dream world of *Scipio's dream* Ferdinand is enchanted by the following words: "Now, Ferdinand, leaving behind the senses, turn your mind back onto itself through the full circle of self-examination. Leaving the body and turning your mind to itself, you will at once see that it is an incorporeal sphere."[23] By imagining being transported to the heavenly spheres, the human mind makes contact with the deepest layers of the soul, where "the God of gods pulsates with light" in divine forms.[24] By "contemplating and loving rightly", the mind is able to leave the prison of the body, remember its divine origin and put the value of perishable mortal things in the perspective of the eternal immortal soul.[25]

Ficino's interpretation of *Scipio's dream* is focused on formulating a perspective in which human beings are bound together by cosmic powers, such as love, sympathy, and harmony. For Ficino, cosmic love, sympathy and harmony linked all things in the universe together; they flowed first from God into all existing things, which consequently shared essential properties and powers, even though they might be very different in their earthly manifestations.[26] It is for this reason that *spiritus* (spirit), as a mediator between the intelligible realm and the realm of the senses, as well as a mediator between the human soul and body, got a central role in Ficino's philosophy. Ficino defines the concept as follows: "Spirit is defined by doctors as a vapor of blood – pure, subtle, hot, and clear. After being generated by the heat of the heart out of the more subtle blood, it flies to the brain; and there the soul uses it continually for the exercise of the interior as well as the exterior senses."[27] This blurring of the interior and the exterior eyes and ears, that is, of the metaphysical and the physical realm, in which the immaterial soul can use "spirit as the bond between mind and body" to influence the physical world is the focus of Ficino's interpretation of the *Dream of Scipio*.[28]

22 Ficino 1962, p. 817; Ficino 1975, p. 24.
23 Ficino 1962, p. 817; Ficino 1975, p. 25.
24 Ficino 1962, p. 817; Ficino 1975, p. 25.
25 Ficino 1962, p. 817; Ficino 1975, p. 25.
26 Ficino 1962, p. 817-818; Ficino 1975, p. 26.
27 M. Ficino (1989). *Three Books on Life* 1.2, pp. 11–15. Ed. and tr. C.V. Kaske and J.R. Clark. Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, in conjunction with the Renaissance Society of America, p. 110.
28 Ficino 1962, p. 818; Ficino 1975, p. 26.

If someone "contemplates rightly" he leaves the normal one-dimensional sense experience of the world behind and opens his interior ears and eyes that are connected to his imagination. In the imaginary world of the dream, the deepest truths reveal themselves. The imagination is the realm of the imaginative, of the most truthful divine forms. Anamnesis is a special kind of imagining, that is, a recalling to mind of "the wonderful bliss in our true home", of the place where the immortal soul dwelt before its incarnation and to which it will return after life on earth.[29] Rediscovering that innate knowledge from within is an act of will, during which one has to open his spirit for the influx of "particular rays" by which "the universe is open and clear to each individual".[30]

In his letter, Ficino addresses King Ferdinand under the pretext of addressing humanity, to warn him that his leadership is based on nothing more than the earthly ambition to get more power and expand his territory:

> O blind men! You, who are under the gross air, think that you see heaven and the stars from earth, just as fish think similarly under the swirling waters of the ocean. How your ridiculous opinion deceives you! For fish on the seabed do not see heaven, but water; not the pure light of the heavenly bodies, but faint, dark images of them in the muddy water. The same happens to you, wretched men, under the gross air; and yet you marvel at the heavenly bodies which you have already turned into earth.[31]

As a remedy, Ficino invites King Ferdinand to think of the earth from the perspective of the heavenly spheres, where human souls "may enjoy a blessed existence forever". He advises him to be "content with the territories you have", because, if he does so, fate will give him many more and greater gifts, "far beyond any won by force."[32] He explains that men you pursue with violence will certainly flee from you, but those you treat with kindness will willingly follow and serve you. Moreover, that "it will be easy for you to move everyone wherever you wish if you yourself are never moved."[33] For Ficino, ruling with supreme intelligence means never entering into a struggle with deceitful fortune. Just like in the *Dream of Scipio,* the perfect harmonious operations of the planetary spheres are presented here by Ficino as a guide to a better life, not only for the King but also for his subjects. Ultimately, a monarchy should imitate the Kingdom of Heaven, in which every part is in its proper place. From his place in heaven, King Alfonso paraphrases this key passage from the dream as follows:

> What shall I say of the innumerable host of stars unknown to you. What of the wonderful variety and order

29 Ficino 1962, p. 820; Ficino 1975, p. 30.
30 Ficino 1962, p. 818; Ficino 1975, p. 27.
31 Ficino 1962, p. 818; Ficino 1975, p. 27.
32 Ficino 1962, p. 819; Ficino 1975, p. 29.
33 Ficino 1962, p. 819; Ficino 1975, p. 29.

> of their movements unrecognised by you? What of the ineffable sweetness of that harmony reflected by the diverse movement of the spheres and by the harmonious balance of all the celestial bodies?[34]

Ficino believed that the body of the universe, animated by the world spirit, pulsated just like a "celestial cithara" in harmonious proportion, its low tones produced by the slower motion of certain planets, the higher notes being produced by faster planetary motion.[35] From his reading of Macrobius' *Commentary* Ficino must have known that these higher and lower tones were believed to form a musical scale, but he did not go into the details of the cosmic scale in this letter, nor did he do so in his *Timaeus* commentary, where he defined the music of the spheres as a dynamic multiplicity of celestial sounds, that is, as a kind of polyphony. Accordingly, he saw an ideal society as a polyphonic structure in which each individual voluntarily sang his own tone in the symphony of mankind.

Ficino clearly considered himself as one of the "gifted men imitating this harmony [of the spheres] on stringed instruments and who in singing, have gained for themselves a return to this region [of the true home of the soul]" described by Cicero and Macrobius.[36] Having advised Ferdinand to go beyond his private interests and to devote himself to the restoration of peace and harmony on earth, in the concluding paragraph of the letter, Ficino made a playful musical reference to the King's reward in the hereafter:

> I [Ficino] would most willingly sing to you now, my son [King Ferdinand], with the angelic voice of the Thrones, of the wonderful sweetness with which we are filled in our true home; but I fear that in comparison with such great sweetness here the whole of life on earth would afterwards seem not only most bitter to you, but the very source of bitterness.[37]

By keeping the secret of the universe unrevealed, Ficino uses the ineffable character of the music of the spheres to convince Ferdinand of the reality of the harmonious metaphysical world he portrayed in his letter, which is inaudible for "the ears of the body" but will be audible in the hereafter. Living a detached life full of faith, hope and love will ultimately guarantee a musical paradise in the hereafter. In sharp contrast with his predecessor, Girolamo Cardano used the *Dream of Scipio* to argue against a philosophy of life based on the concept of detachment and promises for a blessed life in the hereafter. In his variation of *Scipio's Dream* he focused on coping with his troubled mind in the here and now that was caused by the political and religious establishment of his day.

34 Ficino 1962, p. 818; Ficino 1975, p. 27.
35 Prins 2014, pp. 100–114.
36 Macrobius 1973, p. 74.
37 Ficino 1962, p. 820, Ficino 1975, p. 30.

CARDANO ON THE ART OF LIVING PEACEFULLY WITH ONESELF

Girolamo Cardano (1501–1576) was an Italian physician, mathematician, music theorist, and astrologer who gave the first clinical description of typhus fever and whose book *Ars magna* (*The Great Art*, 1545) is a cornerstone in the history of algebra.[38] Cardano's favourite son, having experienced serious marital problems, poisoned his wife and was executed in 1560. Cardano never recovered from this tragic loss. From 1562 he was a professor in Bologna, but in 1570 he was suddenly arrested on the accusation of heresy. After several months in prison he was released and given a pension to practice medicine, but he lost his position and the right to publish books. Before his death he completed his autobiography, *De propria vita* (*The Book of My Life*, published posthumously in 1643). In Chapter 37 of Cardano's *The Book of My Life* he reported a dream on a journey through the celestial spheres, which is loosely modelled after the *Dream of Scipio*.[39] In this dream Cardano experienced his soul being separated from his body and flew to the sphere of the Moon. In the sphere of the Moon, he heard the voice of his father Fazio, who argued that he had been sent by God to protect his son.[40] His father then added that the soul of his son would stay there for seven thousand years, then go up, sphere by sphere, to the city of God. Fully in line with the tradition of the harmony of the spheres, Cardano interpreted these celestial spheres as corresponding to different academic disciplines such as grammar and mathematics that he had to master during his life.[41] In his own interpretation, the dream represented his soul's long voyage toward God, but he wrote a far more interesting variation of the *Dream of Scipio*. In order to appreciate the differences between Cardano's second version of the *Dream of Scipio* and Ficino's version, let us first examine his ideas regarding the art of living well.

Earlier in his career, Cardano had written a treatise titled *De consolatione* (*On Consolation*, 1542), in which he dealt with one's own death and grief over the death of one's loved ones, that is, the major concerns of almost all human beings.[42] Moreover, the book deals with illness, poverty, exile, and imprisonment: misfortune with which Cardano had personal experience. In contrast with Ficino, Cardano underlined the importance of his own subjective experience in the treatise, which continued to be a foundation of his later moral thought. But, as Mcclure has pointed out, in his early work, Cardano's leading consolation for the fear of death still was the belief in the immortality of the soul.[43]

In *De utilitate ex adversis capienda* (*On Gaining Advantage from Misfortunes*, 1561), a guide on the art of living and dying well, Cardano critically reacted to the tradition

38 Giglioni 2019.

39 Cardano 1966, pp. 29a–b; Cardano 2002, pp. 158–159.

40 On Cardano's relationship with his father, see Giglioni 2010, pp. 463–472; Maggi 2010.

41 Grafton 1999, p. 156.

42 McClure 1991, pp. 161–164.

43 McClure 1991, p. 162.

to which Ficino belonged that centred on the philosophical and religious concept of detachment, and focused on the reward for a good life on earth in the hereafter. In the treatise he described a way of coping with a troubled mind that was neglected by the religious and intellectual establishment of his time. As an alternative to Ficino's lofty ideals for a better world, Cardano argued for a more down to earth response to human problems. Aware that theologians and philosophers were still seen as the proper authorities on moral thought in his time, he disproved this view in the following way:

> Many would object that the Theologians would better be able to teach and persuade in these matters. But that is completely false. For they, like the Philosophers, are engaged only in those things that seem paradoxical: for instance, where they teach that poverty ought to be embraced, we teach that it ought to be fled. They praise sickness, disgrace, and calamities, we, on the other hand, recommend that those things be avoided if possible, or, if not, we teach how they can be borne more easily or how by counterbalancing evils with goods, they may be made lesser and tolerable. Thus, whereas our whole enterprise is built around things and acts, the Theologians only dispute changing or handling things minimally. Whence it happens that their arguments differ more amongst themselves than night from day.[44]

Even though Ficino's theory of detachment, as presented in his version on the *Dream of Scipio*, was also a strategy for handling misfortune and for counterbalancing the evils in the here and now with the goods in the hereafter, it is fundamentally different from Cardano's secular view of how one should respond to adversity and disaster. He argued here that misfortune should not be considered as an opportunity for spiritual growth, that is, as a blessing in disguise, but that it must be remedied as the worldly misery it truly is. Beyond being a harsh critique of oppressive religious and philosophical theories about detachment and ascesis, Cardano's argument is a rebuke of abstract intellectualizing in the field of the philosophy of life.

In the dialogue between Cardano and his father who died long ago, the *Dialogus Hieronymi Cardani et Facii Cardani ipsius patris* (ca. 1574), the question of what you can gain in this life that is lasting and significant, especially if you compare it to that other life in the hereafter, is the driving force behind his interpretation of the *Dream of Scipio*. Rather than calling on the inaudible and elusive music of the spheres to formulate a metaphysical answer to the question, Cardano uses the concept of noise to formulate a secular alternative.[45] Furthermore, his interpretation of the dream is a mixture of the form of a *somnium*, the form used by his predecessors Cicero, Macrobius and Ficino, and an *insomnium*, a nightmare in which the dreamer sees spirits, and in which the dream is associated with

44 Cardano 1966, p. 16. Tr. McClure 1991, pp. 162–163.

45 On Cardano's musical thought, see Prins 2017a; Prins 2020.

"some condition or circumstance that irritates a man during the day and consequently disturbs him when he falls asleep".[46] The true meaning of his complex variation of *The Dream of Scipio* is focused on remedying the deafening mental noise one can experience during one's life on earth.

Cardano dreamt and recorded the dream at a time when he was still worried that the Inquisition might prosecute him again. These worries tormented him at night as a result of which his tranquility of mind was seriously disturbed. In contrast with Ficino's letter, which was addressed to someone else, the dream dialogue between Cardano and his father is addressed to himself. In the 'Dialogue between Girolamo Cardano and Fazio Cardano, his own father, Cardano heard the voice of his father again. Having lamented his precarious situation in Rome and having uttered his disturbed and depressive feelings, his father accuses him of "lamenting loud and foolishly".[47] He then explains that Cardano has entered the heaven of the Moon, whose spirit "holds the lowest place among those substances which are completely incorporeal."[48] Since the human intellect is still further removed from God than the spirit of the Moon, a human being cannot really know himself, but can only perceive himself by perceiving other things. The human intellect is bound to matter and, as a result of this, "anything that is completely separated from matter remains inaccessible to him."[49] Girolamo's Father, Fazio, concludes his epistemological digression by pointing out that "Of such [purely intellectual] things we can gain knowledge only by analogy, by interpreting similarities, and this only in a most general way."[50] To demonstrate how, he gives Cardano the following message from heaven as a point of departure to come to terms with his own existence:

> Fazio: Today is the fourth of April 1574, and you shall regard this day as your first, so to speak, new birthday. You understand now how you will – starting from the spheres of the moon – ascend through sphere after sphere until you reach the highest one. Rejoice that your dream is becoming reality and that the time is now.
> Girolamo: What shall I be happy about?
> Fazio: About the knowledge that God has endowed you with a special gift. What hardship or acrimony could you have suffered, what might still happen to you that you would not voluntarily, even gladly, take upon yourself. Can you not see how God is taking care of you? This is indicated, among many other things, by that dream which you think so full of forboding, so gloomy and frightening ... Finally, [God's presence in your life] is also indicated by that clap of thunder which threatened the house for so long, and by that frightful uproar

46 Macrobius 1973, p. 89. On Cardano's dream theory, see Fierz 1983, pp. 125–155.

47 Cardano 1966, p. 637; Fierz 1983, p. 159.

48 Cardano 1966, p. 637; Fierz 1983, p. 159.

49 Cardano 1966, p. 637; Fierz 1983, p. 159.

50 Cardano 1966, p. 637; Fierz 1983, p. 159.

> at the end of the third day when you had been incarcerated. It sounded first at the prison gate, then at the window through which sunlight still fell. The window-bars were so shaken that they clattered[51]

Here the voice of the father represents the wisdom Cardano had lost during his depression. Interestingly, the message is also quite similar to the intellectual and religious theories Cardano criticized in his *De utilitate ex adversis capienda* that we discussed above. In sharp contrast with the mild and soothing approach taken by the grandfather in Cicero's, Macrobius', and Ficino's versions of the *Dream of Scipio*, the spirit of Cardano's father gives his son a genuine wake-up call, by confronting him both with his blindness and with his mental stressor. Moreover, the message from heaven presented here in the dialogue is not associated with the ineffable sweet music of the spheres, but with deafening earthly noise. Indeed, the type of audible sound presented in this passage is closer to the images of cosmic noise given in Aristotle's *On the Heavens* 2.9, where he presented his rejection of the Platonic view of a sonorous universe as follows:

> Sound has a destructive effect (e.g. stones may be split by thunder), and a noise of the unimaginable loudness which we must attribute to bodies of the size of the sun, moon and stars would long ago have crushed and shattered everything on earth. ... These results clear up another point, namely that the theory that music is produced by their [i.e., planetary] movements, because the sounds they make are harmonious, although ingeniously and brilliantly formulated by its authors, does not contain the truth.[52]

The imaginary noise of the cosmos described here by Aristotle is in his view as absurd as the music of the spheres, because both types of cosmic sound are based on the wrong view that sound in the heavens is caused by friction. While Ficino used the planetary symphony as a model for the harmonious motions in the soul, and as a model for a peaceful society, Cardano does not theorize about harmonizing the motions of the soul in terms of bringing them in line with planetary motions.[53] Instead, he sees the frightful noises in his dream as a point of departure from which to formulate a philosophy of living peacefully with oneself and with ones demons.

Cardano continues to narrate his dream, in which he also "encountered two single women, tradeswomen most likely, who were creating a mighty uproar with ropes and dogs. ... The blows struck by the second one resounded most disagreeably in my direction" on the day of his arrest.[54] The auditory memories of his arrest have induced in him a constant fear of being arrested again, a fear that was far more unbearable for him than the loss of his professorship

51 Cardano 1966, p. 637–638; Fierz 1983, p. 160.

52 Aristotle 1971, pp. 190–193.

53 Plato 1952, p. 158. Macrobius 1973, p. 74.

54 Cardano 1966, p. 638; Fierz 1983, p. 161.

and the fact that he could not publish anymore.

But over the course of the dialogue Cardano gains insight into the cause of his depression: behind his grief and fear lies a great anxiety for the future. The fear of death that has taken hold of him is the unconscious stressor of his nightmares manifesting itself in unpleasant noises. In the dialogue, the father then interprets his son's angst and, in bringing it to his awareness, helps his son cope with his troubled mind. Fazio comforts his son Girolamo about his upcoming death by pointing out all his achievements and by exhorting him to liberate himself from all his woes, because death is only a transitional stage in the perspective of the immortality of the soul.

At the end of the dialogue, his father urges Girolamo to let go of his earthly troubles, and to spend the remainder of his life devoting himself to practical tasks, particularly the care of his possessions and, last but not least, his grandchildren: "since the basic requirements for your ascent toward the supreme state have already been fulfilled, you must now first take care of your financial affairs, and then of the education of your grandchildren. From this, everything else will take its due course. You will yet experience great joy."[55] Thus, fully in line with the *Dream of Scipio*, the dialogue leads away from fear and anxiety, by way of contemplating death and the perspective of the life of the immortal soul in the hereafter, back to life on earth.

55 Cardano 1966, p. 637, transl. Fierz 1983, p. 166.

CONCLUSION

The two variations presented in this essay complement each other in a meaningful way: Cardano's dialogue illustrates how misuse of power by a member of the political, religious or intellectual establishment can lead to a miserable life for an individual, that is, that Ficino gave sound advice to King Ferdinand. Ficino's letter is clearly written from the perspective of someone belonging to the religious and political establishment himself, while Cardano's dialogue presents the voice of someone who is excluded from it. Taken together, they demonstrate that different positions in life lead to entirely different views on the art of living well. While Ficino envisioned a utopian society on earth that imitated the heavenly kingdom, Cardano realized how distant normal life was from such a view, and how dissonant his life was made by the leaders of his day. Accordingly, he came to the conclusion that you should not "put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save" nor delude oneself with heavenly views of a better world but protect your own interests.[56]

Even though Fazio's advice to his son Girolamo to take care of his financial affairs is very far away from Alfonso's advice to his son Ferdinand to focus on peaceful leadership, both recommendations are based on a similar moment of detachment, in which the dreamer can abandon his earthly perspective on life and is able to put his future life in the perspective of eternity. This moment of

56 Psalm 146:3–7.

detachment is a moment of active imagination, in which alternatives for war, in Ficino's variation, and for depression and anxiety, in Cardano's variation, are presented to the protagonist by influential father figures.

In Ficino's as well as Cardano's variation on *The Dream of Scipio* an important function is attributed to the realms of inaudible heavenly music or of silence, that is, the function of muffling audible earthly noise, that both correspond to the unconscious, symbolized by the figure of the father, in relation to the ego of the son.[57] In the course of the dream, the mediator, be it Alfonso or Fazio, confronted his son with his own weakness, but at the same time he offered him a perspective for a better life: in the first case, peace among all people on earth, and in the second, peace of mind.

With his rejection of abstract intellectualizing about the music of the spheres, in his variation of *The Dream of Scipio* Cardano broke with the belief that one could reactivate the memory of celestial music through imitation in earthly musical practices and through contemplation. As an alternative, he introduced the concept of silencing the memory of disturbing earthly sound that worked equally well as an incentive to finding a key to the art of living peacefully with oneself and others.

57 Cardano's dream theory became a source of inspiration for Carl Gustav Jung. Prins 2017b, pp. 391–413.

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