

*From Dust to Man to Son of God: the  
Juxtaposition of the Philosophies of Giovanni Pico  
Della Mirandola and John Calvin Regarding the  
State of Man*

by Rene Garofalo

The concept of ‘original sin’ has tortured humanity for centuries. The state of humanity is pondered and debated. At stake, is not the worldly body of man, but the nature of his immortal soul. Individuals through time question what they may do, or if they can do, anything to ensure immortality. In light of this greater debate, are ideas expressed in fifteenth century Italian humanist Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola’s *Oratorio* and sixteenth century Protestant reformer John Calvin’s view on the state of humanity born under the taint of original sin. Initially, the interest in comparing these humanist and religious concepts came from historian Peter Burke’s book, *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy*. Burke opined that it would be interesting to consider the vastly different concepts on the ‘state of man’ in Pico’s *Oratorio* and Pope Innocent III’s twelfth century treatise, *On the Misery of the Human Condition*. However, putting Pico and Calvin together presented a more appealing dynamic, particularly with the added component of predestination. The ultimate goal is to show that these two seemingly diametrically opposed positions are more similar than they rudimentarily appear.

In the Christian faith, the book of Genesis in the Bible, tells a story of the creation of the world and humanity, as well as the fall of man from God’s grace. The first chapter states that “God created man in His image . . .”<sup>1</sup> Chapter Two provides a somewhat different version, “The Lord God also made man of the dust of the ground, and breathed in his face the breath of

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:27 Geneva Bible, printed 1560.

life and the man was a loving soul.”<sup>2</sup> The innocence of the first humans is violated by an entity, which arrives in the guise of a serpent:

Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field . . . he said to woman, Yea, hath God indeed said, ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent we shall eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, but the fruit of the tree, which is in the middle of the garden, God hath said, ye shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest ye die. Then the serpent said to the woman, ye shall not die at all, But God knows that when ye shall eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. Genesis 3:1-6.<sup>3</sup>

The humans ate, their eyes opened, and left the Lord a dilemma, “Behold, the man has become one of us, to know good and evil . . . therefore God sent him forth from the garden of Eden to till the earth from whence he was taken.”<sup>4</sup>

To provide further context on Western religious ideas surrounding the state of humanity the treatise written by the twelfth century pope, Innocent III, is helpful. He wrote:

Man was formed of dust, slime, and ashes: what is more vile, of the filthiest seed. He was conceived from the itch of the flesh, in the heat of passion and the stench of lust, and worse yet, with the stain of sin. He was born to toil, dread, and trouble; and more wretched still, was born only to die . . . mortal life is but a living death.<sup>5</sup>

In this interpretation, there is nothing of the likeness of God remaining in man. Further, the Holy Father stated, “as soon as we are born we start ceasing to be and we can show no sign of virtue but are consumed in our own iniquity.”<sup>6</sup> Roger Trigg states that “God cannot be held responsible for sin if it is the inevitable result of man’s freedom,” thus man must take responsibility for choosing to do that which God forbade.<sup>7</sup> Many Christian faiths believe in the concept of ‘original sin,’ which is the idea that all humans lost their innocence in the face of Adam and Eve’s disobedience.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Genesis 2:7 Geneva Version.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 3: 1-6 Geneva Version.

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 3: 22-23 Geneva Version.

<sup>5</sup> Lothario de Segni, Pope Innocent III, “On the Misery of the Human Condition,” circa 1200, [www.ubalt.edu](http://www.ubalt.edu) (accessed 10/13/2013).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Roger Trigg, “Sin and Freedom,” *Religious Studies*, 20 (June 1984): 192.

<sup>8</sup> Denis R. Janz, ed., “Council of Trent,” *A Reformation Reader* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 406.

However, what Innocent III fails to consider is the idea that with the sacrifice of Christ came the possibility of redemption. Humanity once again had agency. Renaissance humanism found another way of looking at humanity, in the words of ancient philosophers. Petrarch wrote, "I believe that a noble soul can find rest in no other place than in God, in whom is our end, in itself and its own secret cares . . ." <sup>9</sup> "there is no brighter possession, than to have dominion over one's soul." <sup>9</sup> Sophocles stated, "The world is full of wonderful things, But none more so than man."<sup>10</sup> Ovid declared, "And, though all other animals are prone, and fix their gaze upon the earth, he gave to man an uplifted face and bade him stand erect and turn his eyes to heaven."<sup>11</sup> Paul Oskar Kristeller provides the idea that in the *Studia Humanitatis* of the humanists lay the way to creating a glorious creature.<sup>12</sup> To the humanists, studying texts of ancient scholars broadens the minds of men. It motivates reason and encourages deeper searching and learning, thereby heightening the glory of humanity. Cicero's ideas contribute to man being a "special beneficiary of the immortal gods."<sup>13</sup> Also, let us remember God created man in his own likeness and bestowed upon him "dominion" over the creatures and earth.

The humanists do not ignore the potential of the human soul. Willard Gaylin says that in the medieval theory of Augustine there is a "dualism- a clear separation of mind and body. Only in the soul were we in God's image." <sup>14</sup> Therefore, where he separates into body and soul, another fragment of the argument becomes clearer. In the beginning, God created one entity, in his likeness. However, after the fall, the body dies and returns to dust. The soul is the element that separates man from beast. The soul holds humanity's sentient capabilities. The soul lives forever. Pico and Calvin both imply this. Before talking specifically about the works of Pico and Calvin, it makes sense to get a sense of their personal stories and influences.

Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola is born in the middle of the fifteenth century, in 1463, a younger son of a feudal lord in northern Italy. At the age

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<sup>9</sup> Robert E. Proctor, "The *Studia Humanitatis*: Contemporary Scholarship and Renaissance Ideals," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 43 (Winter 1990): 815.

<sup>10</sup> Sophocles, "Antigone," in Willard Gaylin's "In Defense of the Dignity of Being Human," *The Hastings Center Report*, 14, (August 1984): 18.

<sup>11</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, in Willard Gaylin's "In Defense of the Dignity of Being Human," *The Hastings Center Report*, 14, (August 1984): 21.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Oskar Kristeller, "The Philosophy of Man in the Italian Renaissance."

<sup>13</sup> Trinkaus, 344.

<sup>14</sup> Gaylin, 18.

of fourteen, he goes to *Bologna* to study cannon law and continues these studies in Padua until 1482. On a visit to Florence, Pico meets humanist Marsilio Ficino and under his direction studies Platonic philosophy. He also learns Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic. During his years in Florence, he compiled 900 Theses; it was his desire to dispute them publicly in Rome. The theses came to the attention of Pope Innocent VIII, after which he suspended the disputation and set up an inquiry. Thirteen of the theses are questionable, others labeled heretical. Pico offers a formal Apologia. The Pope condemns the entire theses in 1487. Pico flees to Paris, where authorities arrest and temporarily jail him. Eventually freed, he returns to Florence, under the auspices of Lorenzo de Medici, where he lives and continues to write for the remainder of his short life. In 1493, Pope Alexander VI absolves him in the case of his theses. He dies in 1494 at the young age of 31.<sup>15</sup>

In the sixteenth century, during the Reformation, reformer John Calvin holds the view that God had originally endowed man with amazing gifts, but the fall of Adam left man utterly corrupt, and due to original sin, incapable of changing his state. Further, Calvin holds that God has predetermined before even creating humanity which would be damned and which would gain eternal life. Education and contemplation can teach humanity to understand natural evil, but will not determine the ultimate plight of his soul. According to theologian, Francois Wendel, there is little known about the early life of John Calvin. Apparently, Calvin did not believe that his personal life of any importance, other than in how he was “an instrument of the Divine Will.”<sup>16</sup> He is born, Jean Cauvin in Noyes, France in the year 1509. One of six children, his family has connections to the ruling family of the town. His father was a town registrar. Calvin goes to study in Paris at fourteen, his father steering him towards theology. He studies the writings of Luther and Melanchthon. In later life, he comes under the influence of Guillaume Farel, the leader of the Genevan Reformation and Martin Bucer, the leader of the evangelical church in Strasbourg. Earning his Master of Arts in Theology between 1528 and 1529, he studies law in Orleans. Eventually he develops friendships with several French humanists. While studying in Bourges his father became gravely ill and dies. Calvin returns to Paris and begins studying Literature. He translates a famous

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<sup>15</sup> William G. Craven, *Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola: Symbol of His Age, Modern Interpretations of a Renaissance Philosopher* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1981), 2. All information for this biography was taken from this source.

<sup>16</sup> Francois Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, translated by Philip Mairet (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1963), 15.

volume of Seneca. Calvin's exposure to humanism is through his avid "knowledge of classical antiquity- St. Augustine and Erasmus."<sup>17</sup> He is considered "one of the best Latinists of the sixteenth century."<sup>18</sup> The date of his conversion is controversial, "Calvin states only 'it was sudden.'"<sup>19</sup> Deeply affected by his conversion, he no longer finds comfort in simple humanism; it seems to place man above God. However, humanism continues to influence him, because Francois Wendel provides an anonymous quote that Calvin is often accused of "fighting humanism with humanism."<sup>20</sup> By 1535, the Protestants face harsh persecution and Calvin journeys to Basel for safety. His first version of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is published that same year.<sup>21</sup> He spends 1536 to 1564, with a brief respite, exiled to Geneva. In Geneva, he creates a setting melding religious and community life together under the auspices of the community leaders. Geneva becomes a haven for Protestants across Europe. Calvin establishes the Geneva Academy in 1559.<sup>22</sup> He dies in 1564.

In the case of Giovanni Pico, Marsilio Ficino, the head of the Florentine Academy and Pico's teacher, is an enormous influence. Other influences on Ficino are the works of Aristotle and Augustine. Of great concern to these philosophers was the potential of man. Ficino expounded on the subject:

The human soul is directed both toward God and toward the body . . . Hence, it participated in both time and eternity" his theory of "universal hierarchy in which the human soul occupies a privileged, central place: God, the Angelic Mind, the Rational Mind, Quality, and Body. Due to its central position, soul is able to mediate between the upper and lower half of reality . . . This soul is the greatest of all miracles in nature. All other things beneath God are always one single being, but the soul is all things together . . .<sup>23</sup>

Pico, as we shall see later, will take these ideas even further.

Through history, there are records of struggles between humanism and religion. William Schweiker notes, "Religion and humanism are often at odds and sometimes violently."<sup>24</sup> He states that religion and humanism have

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 31. All information for this biography comes from Wendel.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>21</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Introduction to Volume I, John Bailie, ed. (Louisville: Westminster Press, MCMXL), xxxi.

<sup>22</sup> Janz, 246.

<sup>23</sup> Kristeller, 100.

<sup>24</sup> William Schweiker, "Humanizing Religion," *The Journal of Religion*, 89, (2009): 215.

struggled “over knowledge and perception . . . and power and agency.”<sup>25</sup> These struggles, posits Schweiker, have to do with whether humans are most important, in and of themselves, or if it is the relationship between the human and divine, which is ultimately the most important.<sup>26</sup> Ultimately, he believes it comes down to agency; is it God or man, who shapes humanity’s reality?<sup>27</sup>

Charles Trinkhaus opines it “was essential that the emerging culture of the laity [during the Renaissance] find a *modus vivendi* that did not stand in contradiction to the Catholic Church.”<sup>28</sup> Ficino found it in Platonic theology:

It has three necessary characteristics- it sought a synthesis of Christianity and pagan thought between pagan moral and religious anticipations of Christianity and the teachings of the Church, with an emphasis on the universality of truth; clear recognition of the value of beauty alongside truth and goodness; through use of the allegorical mode of interpretation it was possible to deal with classical themes in such a way as to maintain historical value, classical form and content, yet at the same time place the themes in a Christian-Platonic philosophical context. It melded Aristotelian viewpoints with Augustinian strategy and values. Ficino’s ideas (and Pico’s) although limited to the period of humanist influence in the papacy and reduced to lay status by lack of Counter-Reformation interest remained influential.<sup>29</sup>

In the fifteenth century, when Italian humanist Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola wrote the *Oratorio*, fellow humanists and some church officials alike concluded that he was proposing the idea that man, with his God-given free will and malleable nature, through educating his mind could rise to the very heights of heaven, even to become his own god. His most famous work is by far, the *Oratorio* composed in 1486. According to William G. Craven, because the disputation was banned, it was never heard.<sup>30</sup> After his death, his nephew Gianfrancesco published it with the title, *On the Dignity of Man*. It is because of this title that modern humanists extolled Pico as the champion of human dignity. The most read and discussed part of *Oratorio*, is the first portion, but there are three parts in its entirety. In the beginning, Pico addressed his audience as “Most venerable fathers,” he spoke of the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 225-6.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 226

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 227

<sup>28</sup> Charles Trinkhaus, *The Scope of Renaissance Humanism*, (Ann Harbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1883), 28.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>30</sup> Craven, 21.

Roman god Mercury calling man a 'great wonder,' and stated that while pondering this premise he speculated what makes man "so worthy of all wonder . . ." <sup>31</sup> When the

highest Father, God the master-builder . . . the Artisan made man, and told him, We have given to thee, Adam, no fixed seat, no form of thy very own, no gift peculiarly thine, that thou mayest feel as thine own, has as thine own, possess as thine own the seat, the form, the gifts which thou thyself shalt desire . . . In conformity with thy free judgment, in whose hands I have placed thee, thou are confined by no bounds; and thou wilt fix limits of nature for thyself. I have placed thee at the center of the world... <sup>32</sup>

Pico goes on to say that, God has given man everything he needs to make his own intellectual choices- whether to be a brute or divine. Using an analogy about a gardener, depending on what seeds he cultivates, he may "be a plant, a brute, a heavenly animal, or an angel and son of God," but it is not so simple. <sup>33</sup> For each of these beings has a corresponding human element, depending on what man chooses to cultivate - vegetable seeds equal plant (non-thinking), seeds of sensation equal brute (giving into the passions), seeds of rational mind equal heavenly animal (sound judgment), the intellect equals an angel and son of God (understanding or acquired knowledge). <sup>34</sup> If none of these are pleasing, "if one takes himself up into the center of his own unity, then, made one spirit with God . . . will stand ahead of all things." <sup>35</sup> Pico determined that humanity's ability to determine his own direction is what made him so worthy. Historiographically, many modern humanists believe that Pico was saying that man has the free will to become a heavenly creature, even a god. The work of Pico, states Craven, has "come to be seen as the perfect expression of enthusiasm for man." <sup>36</sup> Additionally, opines Craven, "there is a general agreement among historians that in the *Oratorio* there is a revolutionary doctrine of man . . . a new assertion of human dignity and liberty in relation to the world and God." <sup>37</sup>

However, Ernst Cassirer, in an article for the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, writes that Pico "maintains the position that our thinking and conceiving, in so far as it is directed toward the Divine, can never be an

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<sup>31</sup> Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, translated by Charles Glenn Wallis, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1965), 3.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Craven, 21.

<sup>37</sup> Craven, 22.

adequate expression, but only an image and a metaphor.”<sup>38</sup> He clarifies that Pico meant, that the ultimate divine nature that can be reached by man is not what he is at his creation, but “an achievement for him to work out: *it is to be brought about* by man himself.”<sup>39</sup> Kristeller, points out that it is assumed that Pico gives humanity “unlimited freedom” even to deny grace and predestination, but he cautions that the conversation Pico related in the *Oratorio* happened between God and man previous to his fall from grace. This detail has significant ramifications. Craven says that Pico’s lines about man’s freedom of choice over his own nature are meant to be a “rhetorical argument for the educational effectiveness of philosophy and theology.”<sup>40</sup> Pico had prepared a speech for students, meant to push their motivation.

Pico, in the *Oratorio* is encouraging the intellect, not making a statement of radical belief. Later in the *Oratorio*, he creates new analogies for the seeds that man may sow, for the philosophizer he states, “if you come upon a pure contemplator, ignorant of the body, banished to the innermost places of the mind, he is not earthly, not a heavenly animal, he more superbly is a divinity clothed with human flesh.”<sup>41</sup> He describes the different levels of angels and encourages man to “compete with angels in dignity and glory,” for “the seraph burns with the fire of charity; the cherub shines with the radiance of intelligence; the throne stands in steadfastness of judgment.”<sup>42</sup> If one looks at other works of Pico, it is visible that he believes in man’s potential to save himself from drudgery. This, however, does not equate man with God himself. In Chapter Seven of *Heptaplus*, Pico wrote, “all of us, to whom the power is given to become sons of God through the grace whose giver is Christ, can be raised to an honor above that of the angels.”<sup>43</sup> At the end of *Heptaplus*, Pico equates the head of man and the highest part of the world with the fountain of knowledge, the heart and sky with motion, life, and heat, and the genitals and earth (below the moon) with generation and corruption.<sup>44</sup> Calvin takes a similar position in his writing.

Regarding the Genesis verses of man’s creation in God’s image, Calvin wrote in Book I- that the “proper seat of [God’s image] is in the

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<sup>38</sup> Ernst Cassirer, “Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola: A Study in the History of Renaissance Ideas,” *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, Part I, 3 (April 1942): 139.

<sup>39</sup> Ernst Cassirer, “Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola: A Study in the History of Renaissance Ideas,” *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, Part II, 3, (June 1942): 321.

<sup>40</sup> Craven, 45.

<sup>41</sup> Pico, *Dignity*, 6.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>43</sup> Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola, *Heptaplus*, translated by Douglas Carmichael (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1965), 116.

<sup>44</sup> Pico, *Heptaplus*, 173.



soul.”<sup>45</sup> In Chapter 9.1 of the *Institutes* he wrote that “There is not one of us, indeed, who does not wish to seem throughout his life to aspire and strive after heavenly immortality. For it is a shame for us to be no better than brute beasts . . .”<sup>46</sup> This is similar to Pico’s analogy about man choosing the seed of which he will grow and choosing a brute animal. In Book 2:12, Calvin stated, “We see among all mankind that reason is proper to our nature: it distinguishes us from brute beasts . . . we ought to ascribe to what is left in us to God’s kindness . . . some men excel in keenness, others are superior in judgment, still others have a readier wit to learn this or that art.”<sup>47</sup> Calvin cautioned man that, “For with the greatest truth Augustine teaches that as the free gifts were withdrawn from man after the fall, so the natural ones remaining were corrupted.”<sup>48</sup> Calvin does not deny that God had left man with amazing gifts of comprehension, but he reminded us that because of original sin that they are tainted. He also clarified that he believed the man who “has advanced farthest in knowledge of himself” is the one who feels most the degradation of “poverty, nakedness, and disgrace,” that is man’s natural state.<sup>49</sup> Any blissful existence for humanity was lost in the fall. What ability remains to learn and gain knowledge are gifts of God and man should never forget that blessing. Humanity attains nothing alone; his gifts come from God. Calvin also declared on the subject of free will, two things. First, using II Corinthians 3:17, “now where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom,” meaning that whatever will man has can only be exercised by the help of the Holy Spirit. Second, any man enslaved by sin, cannot be truly free.<sup>50</sup> Accordingly, this is because “the soundness of reason is gravely wounded by sin, and the will has been very much enslaved by evil desires.”<sup>51</sup> A question for Calvin is what hope has man to go forward.

Charles Trinkhaus clarifies the matter in *The Scope of Renaissance Humanism*. He points out that Calvin set forth the following, “for man, being taught that he has nothing good left in his possession, and being surrounded on every side with the most miserable necessity, should, nevertheless, be instructed to aspire to the good of which he is destitute, and to the liberty of which he is deprived; and he should be roused from the indolence with more earnestness than if he were supposed to be of great strength.”<sup>52</sup> For

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<sup>45</sup> Calvin, 186.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 712.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 276.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>52</sup> Trinkhaus, 249. This is quoted from the Latin version of the *Institutes*, I, xv, 4 col.

Calvin, man must act the part, it is in the striving to be, and that man may gain insight and flourish. This is what Pico is urging his audience in the *Oratorio* as well. He said:

Let a certain holy ambition invade the mind, so that we may not be content with mean things but may aspire to the highest things and strive with all our forces to attain them: for if we will to we can. Let us spurn earthly things; let us struggle toward the heavenly . . . hence, if dedicated to an active life we undertake the care of the lower with the right weighing of them, we shall be made steadfast in the fixed firmness of the thrones.<sup>53</sup>

Pico employed metaphors when writing, as did Calvin. Both men taught in metaphor. Calvin “did not consistently hold to a literal interpretation of the Scripture . . . He considered it demeaning to God to take the tales and superstitions of the Bible at their face value.”<sup>54</sup> Both have humanist orientation and each utilizes it in his writing. Both hold that humanity had been given enormous potential by God before the fall and they each talk of the degradation of that potential afterwards. They referred to man being a microcosm. Man, in Calvin’s view, before the fall was “by nature a self-sufficient being morally.”<sup>55</sup> For Pico, man was a microcosm because he was “a self-sufficient and self-determining creature, as created initially by God.”<sup>56</sup> The major divergence in their concepts of the doctrine of man is that Pico concentrated his efforts on “the light of natural philosophy, that lastly we may perfect it with the knowledge of divine things.”<sup>57</sup> Calvin concentrated on the way to divine knowledge being only through the Holy Scripture. Calvin is, at times contradictory, because he referred to many classical theorists and philosophers in his writing. Calvin is also vastly more complicated when the idea of predestination is added. In his *Theological Treatises*, Calvin writes:

Before the first man was created, God in his eternal counsel had determined what he willed to be done with the whole human race. In the hidden counsel of God it was determined that Adam should fall from the unimpaired condition of his nature, and by his defection should involve all his posterity in sentence of eternal death. Upon this same decree depends the distinction between elect and reprobate: as he adopted some for himself in salvation, he destined others for eternal ruin. While the reprobates are the vessels of the just wrath of God, and the elect vessels of his compassion,

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<sup>53</sup> Pico, *Dignity*, 7.

<sup>54</sup> Trinkaus, 67.

<sup>55</sup> Roy W. Battenhouse, “The Doctrine of Man in Calvin and in Renaissance Platonism,” *The Journal of the History Ideas*, 9, (1984): 455.

<sup>56</sup> Pico, *Dignity*, 4-5.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

the ground of the distinction is to be in the pure will of God alone. Which is the supreme rite of justice.<sup>58</sup>

Once humanity falls, God has ultimate control. This changes the efficacy of man's self-determination in regards to his eternal life. This is a major point of divergence. Pico offers a more hopeful situation in implying that man learns to conceive of eternity by striving toward an enlightened mind. In the *Oratorio*, Pico poses:

A ladder [Jacob's ladder] stretching from the lowness of earth to the heights of heaven and divided by the succession of many steps with the Lord sitting at the top: angels, contemplating, climb, by turns, up and down the steps. But if we who are in pursuit of an angelic life must try to this same thing, I ask, who can touch the ladder of the Lord with dirty feet or unwashed hands? . . . to not be hurled back from the ladder as profane and unclean, let us wash these hands and feet in moral philosophy as in living water.<sup>59</sup>

Calvin emphasizes Scripture, but he does not forbid the reading of classical works or philosophers, in fact, he utilizes them frequently in his writings. According to Margaret R. Miles in "Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body in Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion," Calvin's "literary method 'heightens' the original condition of the human being as the good creation of God and its 'miserable condition' as fallen."<sup>60</sup> She quotes Calvin's *Institutes* thus, "And though the primary seat of the divine image was in the mind and the heart, or in the soul and its powers, there was no part even of the body in which some rays of glory did not shine . . ."<sup>61</sup> Calvin's major emphasis in his writings, states Miles, is the 'glory of God.'<sup>62</sup> Pico shows a religious aptitude in his writing, "Natural philosophy will calm the strifes and discords of opinion, which shake the unquiet soul up and down, and mangle her . . . Theology herself will show the way to that peace and be our companion and guide . . ."<sup>63</sup> Even what appear to be huge differences between them, have commonalities. They head to the same destination, using different methods.

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<sup>58</sup> Vincent Brummer, "Calvin, Bernard, and the Freedom of the Will," *Religious Studies*, 30 (1994): 437.

<sup>59</sup> Pico, *Dignity*, 9; and Genesis 28: 12-13.

<sup>60</sup> Margaret R. Miles, "Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*," *The Harvard Theological Review*, 74, 3 (July 1981).

<sup>61</sup> Miles, 308; and Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.3-4.

<sup>62</sup> Miles, 303.

<sup>63</sup> Pico, *Dignity*, 11.

Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola and John Calvin were majorly influenced by humanism. Both were influenced by Catholicism, for one could not live in Europe in their times and not be. Both wrote about the state of man and his immortality. Pico and Calvin believed that humanity had great potential to ascend their limitations before the fall. The intention here is not to imply that their views or goals were identical. The purpose is to initiate a dialogue about two specific pieces of work, which many historians see at opposite ends of the same spectrum, but if studied closer are in a similar vein. Lastly, it does a disservice to Giovanni Pico's work to misrepresent his intent.