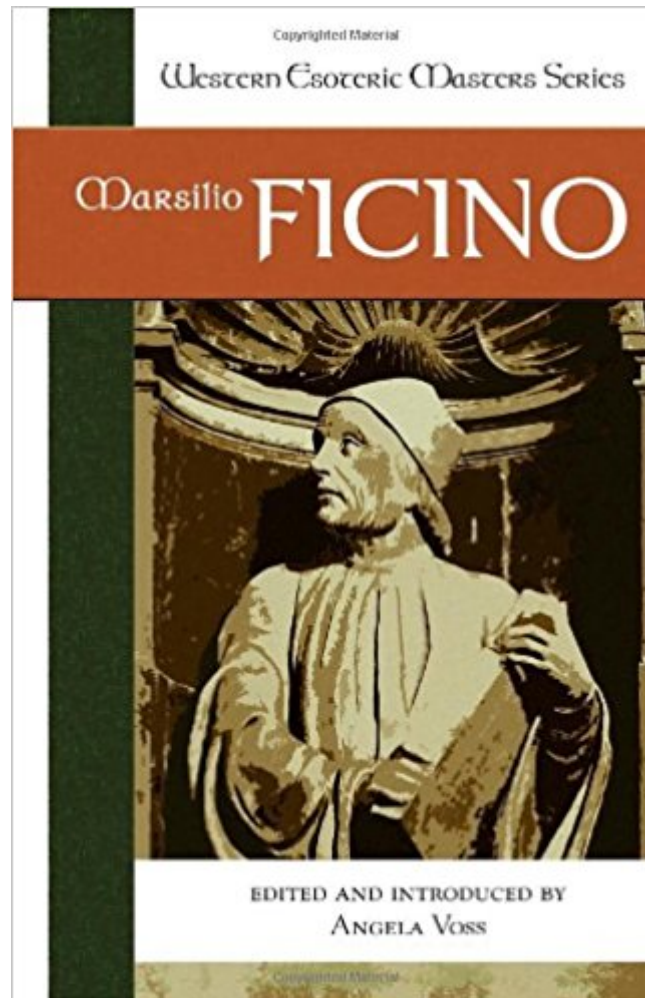




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# Marsilio Ficino (Western Esoteric Masters)



## Synopsis

Marsilio Ficino was one of the most influential humanist philosophers of the early Italian Renaissance. Though an ordained priest, he was also a practicing astrologer and magician whose daunting life's work was to reconcile religious faith with philosophical reason • which included integrating pagan magical practice with Christianity. In a lengthy introduction, editor Angela Voss puts Ficino's achievement in context as a complete re-visioning of traditional astrological practice and the beginning of a humanistic and psychological approach that prefigured contemporary holistic approaches to astrology as therapy.

## Book Information

Series: Western Esoteric Masters

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: North Atlantic Books (December 19, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1556435606

ISBN-13: 978-1556435607

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.7 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 8 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #277,782 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #44 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Modern Renaissance #46 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Occult & Paranormal > Hermetism & Rosicrucianism #69 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe > Italy

## Customer Reviews

Angela Voss has a PhD from City University, London, where her work was on Ficino's astrological music therapy. Voss is a lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Kent, Canterbury, where she convenes a Masters program in the Cultural Study of Cosmology and Divination.

Marsilio Ficino is perhaps one of the most overlooked figures of the Italian Renaissance. I have long been interested in the relationship between Platonism and Christianity and just completed my MA dissertation on the topic. While I focused more on the early influence of Neoplatonism on Augustine of Hippo it was Ficino's work that first highlighted the importance of the relating Greek philosophy

and the Christian religion. This volume focuses more on Ficino's astrological thought and contains his fascinating Book of the Sun which is a must read for anyone who wants to learn of the analogy of the sun and God. Ficino had to tread a fine line between the Church's suspicious attitude towards astrology and Platonism and his own passion for the topics, the passages that Voss chose offer a good insight into this dilemma. I completed a module with Dr. Voss at the University of Exeter and she is an expert on Ficinian astrology. A great read and a great introduction to this great man who deserves far more attention.

There is a very good biographical introduction to Marsilio Ficino, his world, and contemporaries in this book. Anyone who studies the Renaissance, the history of Italy, and is even seeking some background into later European history absolutely needs to become familiar with and attempt to understand Ficino and his influences. It is a reasonably well balanced portrayal of Ficino's beliefs and his impact through his translations of Plato, the Neoplatonists, Hermes, etc. Obviously, it is Ficino as the older scholar who sets the ground for Pico's later syncretism which influences concepts of human dignity beyond their immediate sphere of influence in Italy and then later the Northern humanists. Great book!

The introduction to this book is very well written and shows a thoughtful understanding of Ficino's life work. This is a beautiful and inspiring book!

A good, useful translation and the preface by Angela Voss extremely informative and enlightening!!!

This was not an easy read, though the introduction was good. You would have to be really into Ficino to enjoy it

This volume in the Western Esoteric Masters series is devoted to Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), the Florentine philosopher who played a central role in resurrecting the Hermetic and Neo-Platonic traditions during the Renaissance. Ficino's single most important contribution was translating the Hermetic corpus from Greek to Latin. For some reason, this volume

only deals with Ficino's astrological speculations. That is not a problem, however, since his astrology touched on related esoteric subjects such as ritual magic and macrocosms-microcosm correlations. The book comes with a lengthy introduction. Ficino's views on astrology are often difficult to pin down, no doubt because of the intellectual climate of his day. On

the one hand, Florence was an important center of Renaissance humanism. On the other hand, the Inquisition and the orthodoxy-mongering of the Church were still very much alive and kicking. Ficino, who was an ordained priest, had to tread carefully when discussing

“pagan astrology and magic. He also came under fire when the aristocratic regime of the Florentine city-state (who had patronized Ficino’s circle) was overthrown by the revolutionary friar Savonarola, who despised astrologers. (The puritan friar also banished all homosexuals from Florence. Some suspect that Ficino was gay, but this is never explicitly discussed in this collection.) In short, Ficino had to treat the Western esoteric tradition, well, esoterically! Both Ficino and his disciple Pico della Mirandola often had to condemn

“the astrologers, all the while expositing on the salubrious effects of ancient astrology...Ficino denied that events were “caused by stars or planetary alignments, although they could be “indicated by them. In the same way, Roman augurs could predict events by observing the flight of birds, not because the birds caused future events, but because they in some mysterious fashion indicated them. The virgin birth of Christ was indicated by the constellation of Virgo, which according to Ficino is depicted as a woman with a child in India and Egypt, but obviously the constellation didn’t “cause the virgin birth (a unique event, while the sun enters Virgo every year). The Star of Bethlehem was a comet which showed the Magi the way to Christ’s birthplace, but in no way caused the event. Pure determinism is also rejected by Ficino, since it collides with the Christian insistence on free will, but (perhaps) also because it’s incompatible with his own orientation towards magic. Ficino wanted to control the stellar and planetary influences by magical means. In one of his letters, Ficino suggests that the stars are really “within us, something Angela Voss (the author of the lengthy introduction) interprets as a psychological theory of the kind later developed by Jung, Hillman and the New Age. I’m less sure if this is the case as Voss may be projecting modern conceptions onto the Renaissance sage. Ficino’s stated worldview could be seen as a combination of Hermetism, Neo-Platonism and Christianity. There are several intermediary levels between God and the physical world. The most important is the world-soul, which contains imprints of the Platonic Ideas and in turn imparts these onto physical matter. The Ideas seem to be associated with the planets of astrology. Thus, solar energies “create things such as gold, myrrh, yellow honey, the lion or blond humans. These correspondences can be used in magic, but Ficino is at pains to point out that the solar energies aren’t really drawn down by the magician, but exist naturally in the substances used. More controversially, the magician can work with daemons, but

once again Ficino emphasizes that these daemons are really drawn to solar energies by their own intrinsic nature, not by the magician. The exact nature of Ficinian magic is difficult to gauge from the texts, but evidently include *imagines* (idols?) which the cosmic energies are expected to energize. When challenged to these points by hostile critics, Ficino retreated by suggesting that he was simply describing the ideas of Plotinus, not supporting them. This was a double bluff, it seems, since ritual magic is usually associated with Iamblichus, not the lofty Plotinus. In *The Book of the Sun*, Ficino suggests that God influences the world through a spiritual sun, which in turn manifests as a physical sun on our level of existence. He comes close to arguing that the sun is divine *in the* pagan position but hides behind the claim that he is speaking “analogically” and “anagogically”. It’s hard for a modern reader to know whether Ficino really was trying to reconcile Christianity with esotericism, or whether he was a full-blooded pagan in Christian vestments. The texts themselves are sometimes hard to read, as well, and I admit that I only skimmed the lengthy expositions on what exact mineral or plant corresponds with what particular planet. Still, if you are seriously interested in Ficino, or the magical aspects of Western esotericism in general, this could be an interesting read. I therefore give it four stars, despite the fact that *Western Esoteric Masters Series: Marsilio Ficino* wasn’t entirely my cup of sun-drenched herb tea.

This book is a superb and portable volume of some of Ficino’s main writings. It has various epistles, a good selection from *De vita coelitus comparanda*, and the entire *Book of the Sun*. Reasonably priced and highly readable, it is good for scholar and amateur alike, with a concise introduction by Angela Voss that itself is worth the price of the book. If you are interested in the course of human thought in European civilization, do yourself a favor. Buy this book.

FOR ANY ONE WHO IS PRIVILEGED TO KNOW OF FICINO, PLEASE REMEMBER THAT HE WAS A REN-MAN, PHYSICIAN; WHEN OUR MEDICAL DOCTORS BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND THE 7 BODIES-THEN, HEALING WILL BEGIN.

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