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978-1-107-07052-3 - Magic in Western Culture: From Antiquity to the Enlightenment

Brian P. Copenhaver

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MAGIC IN WESTERN CULTURE

The story of the beliefs and practices called ‘magic’ starts in ancient Iran, Greece, and Rome, before entering its crucial Christian phase in the Middle Ages. Centering on the Renaissance and Marsilio Ficino – whose work on magic was the most influential account written in pre-modern times – this groundbreaking book treats magic as a classical tradition with foundations that were distinctly philosophical. Besides Ficino, the pre-modern story of magic also features Plotinus, Iamblichus, Proclus, Aquinas, Agrippa, Pomponazzi, Porta, Bruno, Campanella, Descartes, Boyle, Leibniz, and Newton, to name only a few of the prominent thinkers discussed. Because pictures play a key role in the story of magic, the book is richly illustrated.

Brian P. Copenhaver is Distinguished Professor and Udvar-Hazy Chair of Philosophy and History at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and past president of the *Journal of the History of Philosophy*; he is also a member of the council of the Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento in Italy. He serves or has served on the boards of *Rinascimento*, *Renaissance Quarterly*, *Annals of Science*, the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, *Early Science and Medicine*, the *International Archives of the History of Ideas*, and the *I Tatti Renaissance Library*. The most recent of his eleven books is *Peter of Spain's Summaries of Logic* (2014, with Calvin Normore and Terry Parsons).

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ENLIGHTENMENT

BRIAN P. COPENHAVER

University of California, Los Angeles



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32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

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www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107070523

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First published 2015

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
 Copenhaver, Brian P.

Magic in Western culture : from antiquity to the Enlightenment / Brian P. Copenhaver.
 pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-07052-3 (hardback)

1. Magic – History. 2. Ficino, Marsilio, 1433–1499. I. Title.

BF1589.C83 2015

133.4'309-dc23 2014043085

ISBN 978-1-107-07052-3 Hardback

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A MJBA,
IL MAGO MIGLIORE,
DA BPC,
UN APPRENDISTA

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PREFACE

RESEARCH FOR THIS BOOK STARTED IN 1967, WHEN I CHOSE SYMPHORIEN Champier as the subject of my dissertation, which eventually became Copenhaver (1978a): see the bibliography. Over the next forty years or so, I continued to read and write about the ‘occultist tradition’ mentioned in the title of that book, while changing my views about it. The results can be seen in Copenhaver (1978b), (1984), (1986), (1987a), (1987b), (1988), (1990), (1991), (1992a), (1992b), (1992c), (1993), (1994), (1998), (2000a), (2000b), (2006), (2007c), (2009a), (2010a) and (2010b). All of this has been re-examined, corrected, revised, synthesized, and reorganized to form the core of this book, augmented by completely new material and up-to-date documentation. Because of their narrower content and specialized form, the studies preliminary to this book could not, one by one, sustain its larger claims, which address this question: why did European intellectuals – philosophers especially – repudiate magic in the Enlightenment, after having previously accepted it for more than two millennia?

Mega biblion, mega kakon: an even bigger nuisance, however, would have come from my original plan to include Giovanni Pico’s Kabbalah and make the story more complete – though much too long. For now, see Copenhaver (1977), (1980), (1999), (2002a), (2002b), (2007a), (2007a), (2007b), (2011) and (2012). Preparing a companion volume – *Magic and the Dignity of Man: Pico’s Oration in Cultural Memory* – constantly reminds me that Pico and Kabbalah, whose place in the current book is small, deserve much larger attention.

Meanwhile, I hope that this book has some virtues of its defects – its scope especially. Since I begin with rumors of a murder in ancient Greece and end with a real murder in today’s India, my story can only be selective and episodic, but macro-stories need telling as much as

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micro-stories. On the topics discussed, I have tried to be responsive to current scholarship, though not always at the same depth, relying on secondary literature more for some topics than for most: on J. G. Frazer's career, for example, I have not gone far beyond Ackerman's excellent book; likewise for Hanegraaff on Lazzarelli, Perrone Compagni on Pomponazzi, Sturlese on Bruno's *De umbris*, Kahn on the French Rosicrucians, and Newman and Principe on alchemy in England. Also, having read some of the primary texts long before the best current editions were available, I have not always adapted my citations to the new versions: this is true for Bacon and Boyle, for example.

Translations from Greek, Latin, and vernacular languages are mine unless otherwise indicated. Many of the images used in this book are taken from other books, most of them published long ago. Otherwise, for images that require permissions, I am grateful to the British Museum; British Library; Bibliothèque National de France; Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford; Warburg Institute; J. Paul Getty Museum; Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana; Biblioteca dell'Accademia dei Lincei; Mary Evans Picture Library; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague; University of Oslo Library; Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana, Siena; Museo Nazionale Romano, Terme; Oesterreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna; Art Institute of Chicago; Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

To friends, critics, and colleagues a great many debts have been compounding for decades, but two are paramount: to Kathleen Copenhaver, my beloved wife, and to Michael Allen, my beloved friend and psychopomp. Crucial inspiration, support, advice, and criticism have come from Joseph Almog, Susanne Beiweis, John Carriero, Gregory Copenhaver, Rebecca Copenhaver, Dan Garber, Tony Grafton, Jim Hankins, Moshe Idel, Jill Kraye, Fabrizio Lelli, Ed Mahoney, John Monfasani, Calvin Normore, Ingrid Rowland, Charles Schmitt, Nancy Siraisi, Perkin Walker, Bob Westman, and Frances Yates. Sabbatical leaves from UCLA and grants from the American Council of Learned Societies, the American Philosophical Society, the Council for International Exchange of Scholars (Fulbright), the Getty Research Institute, and the Guggenheim Foundation have supported my research.