

Classical Views of Nature

Plato vs. Aristotle

Platonic View of Natural World

1. 2 realms: phenomenal and noumenal
2. Material phenomenal world is less “real” than the immaterial noumenal world
3. Duality of human nature
4. The Great Chain of Being

Aristotelian View of the Natural World

1. Contra Plato: No Universals, No separate world of forms
2. Inextricable link between matter and form
3. Matter provides the potentialities that are actualized by the form



Raphael, The School of Athens (1509-11)



Detail of Plato and Aristotle. Raphael, The School of Athens (1509-11)

Medieval and Early Modern Images of Lady Nature Or, How Nature Lost Her Clothes

Nature surrounded by planets and stars; historiated initial 'Q' from the opening of Aristotle's *Physics*, Book 3 (ca. 1270).

London, British Library Harley MS 3487, f. 16v

<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/illmanus/harلمانucoll/n/011hrl000003487u00016v00.html>





Nature forging a baby from the *Roman de la Rose* (ca. 1270s). British Library, Harley 4425, f. 140 r (Bruges, c.1490-c.1500).

Nature at her forge. Roman de la Rose
(France, Paris, ca. 1340).

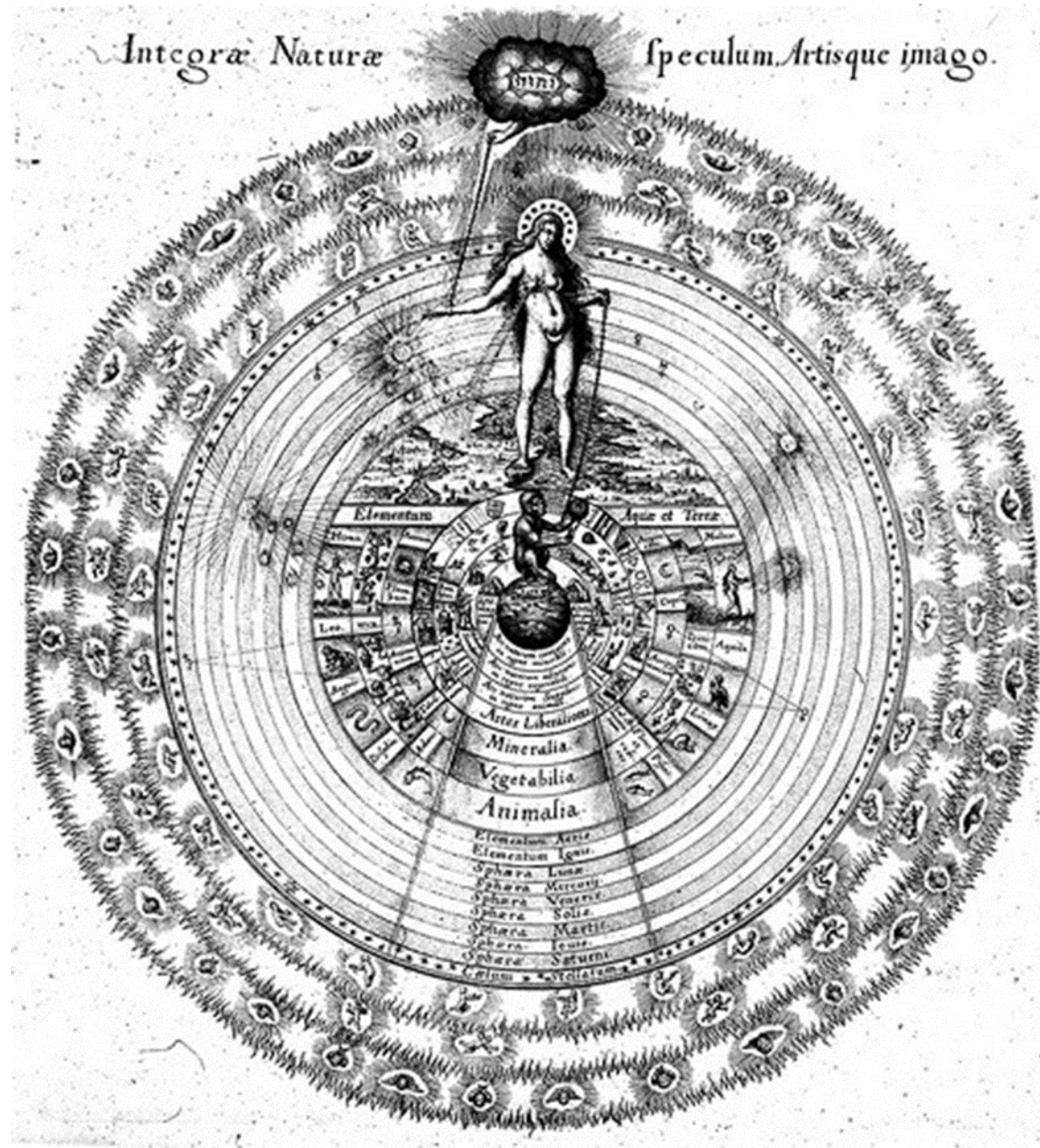
New York, Morgan Library, MS M.503 fol.
106r



Crowned Nature at her forge, from *Romance of the Rose*. University of Chicago Library, Ms. 1380



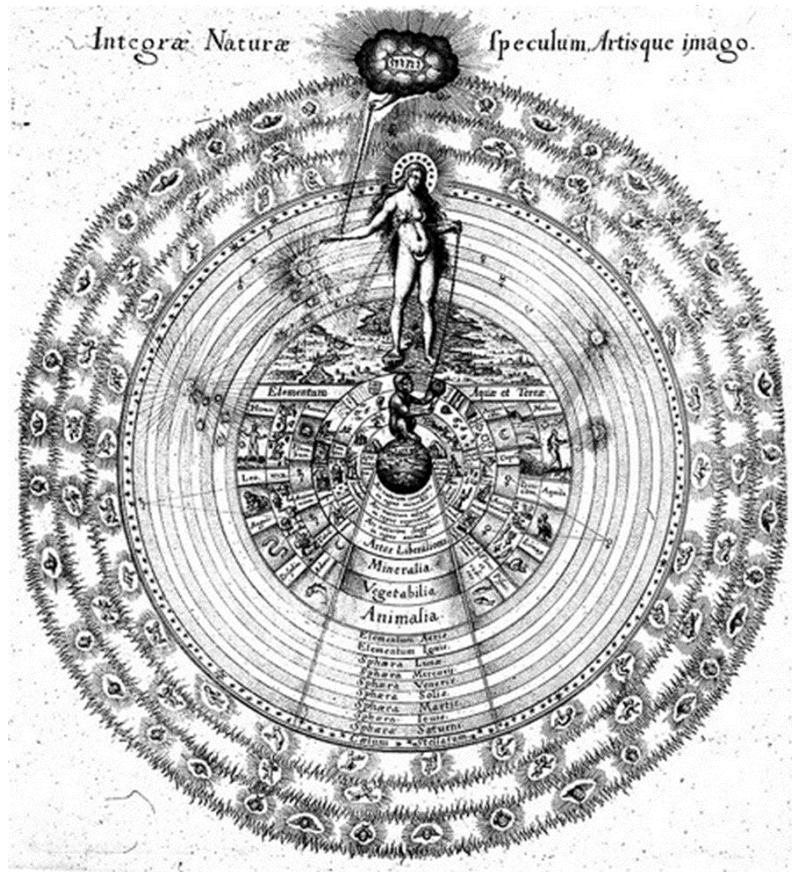
Early Modern Images of Nature



The Mirror of All Nature and the Image of Art

(Frontispiece of Robert Fludd's *Utriusque cosmic maioris scilicet et minoris metaphysica atque technical historia*, Oppenheim: 1617-1619.)

The Mirror of All Nature and the Image of Art



Wayne Shumaker provides a detailed description in his *Occult Sciences in the Renaissance*:

“ ...The outer three circles, which contain symbols that represent cherubim, seraphim, and archangels, surround the sphere of the fixed stars, the sphere of the planets, and two additional spheres of fire and air. At the top, God’s hand holds a chain which descends to the figure of a nude virgin, Nature, pictured with starry hair in order to prevent identification as a pagan goddess. From her left hand, in turn, the chain descends to an ape, a symbol for Art; along the chain God’s powers and effects are transmitted. Nature guides the primum mobile and turns the fixed stars (the draftsman has found no pictorial equivalents of these functions); also, influences from the fixed stars pass through her hands to generate material substances, and the planets act as marculi, or “little hammers”, to produce earthly metals. Although pictured on one of her breasts, the sun is Nature’s heart, and her belly is filled with the moon’s body (corpore lunari repletur). The life and vitality of elemental creatures are born from her breast, which also feeds (lactat) the creatures constantly. The earth under Nature’s right foot stands for sulphur, the water under her left foot for mercury; the joining of these through her body symbolizes their union in whatever is generated or grows. The ape, Art, is “born from man’s talents” and helps Nature by means of secrets learned from diligent observation of her ways. The seven innermost circles represent animals, vegetables, minerals, the “more liberal arts”, “Art Supplementing Nature in the Animal Kingdom”, “Art Helping Nature in the Vegetable Kingdom”, and “Art Correcting Nature in the Mineral Kingdom”. The animals shown are, on the right, the fish, the snail, the eagle, and woman; on the left, the dolphin, the snake, the lion, and man. In the same order, the vegetables are flowers and roots, wheat; trees, grapes. The minerals are sal ammoniac, orpiment (Mercurial), copper (Venereal), and silver (Lunar); talc (if taleum is a mistake for talcum, glossed by Ruland as a “transparent, brilliant material – again Lunar), antimony, (Jovial), lead (Saturnian), gold (Solar). The more liberal arts are fortification, painting, perspective, geometry, music, arithmetic; motion, time, cosmography, astrology, geomancy. (The usual list included grammar, dialectic, rhetoric, arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy). The arts which supplement or otherwise assist or correct nature are the following: in the animal kingdom, medicine, egg production, bee-culture, sericulture; in the vegetable kingdom, tilling and tree-grafting; in the mineral kingdom, distillation by means of retorts and distillation by means of cucurbits (gourd shaped vessels).”

Detail from *The Mirror of All Nature and the Image of Art*. A nude Nature linked to God the creator and then to art (the monkey) who copies her.



Medieval Theories of the Universe and the Human Body

The Four Elements and the Four Bodily Humors

The Four Elements

1. Air
2. Water
3. Fire
4. Earth

Theory of 4 natural humors that make up the human body:

1. blood (hot and moist--air)
2. phlegm (cold and moist--water)
3. choler or yellow bile (hot and dry--fire)
4. melancholy or black bile (cold and dry--earth)

Zodiac in relation to the elements

Bartholomeus Anglicus, *Le Livre des propriétés des choses*

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale

http://www.bnf.fr/enluminures/images/jpeg/i4_0049.jpg



The human bodily humors related to the elements.

Bartholomeus Anglicus, *Le Livre des propriétés des choses*

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale

http://www.bnf.fr/enluminures/images/jpeg/i4_0057.jpg



The human body

Bartholomeus Anglicus, Le Livre des
propriétés des choses

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale



Cy commence le v. liure q. ple. du corps de hoie
et de ses parties desquelles la sainte
estompeure fait mention. Finier chapitre.

Body and soul.

Bartholomeus Anglicus, Le Livre des
propriétés des choses

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale



Zodiac Man

London, Wellcome Library

