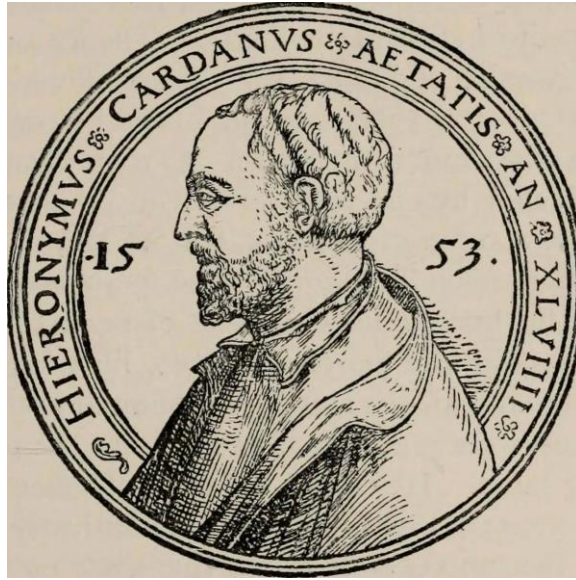


A Translation into English of Gerolamo Cardano's "Dialogue between Girolamo Cardano and His Father Fazio"

By Joseph Diaz



Preface

Ever since I first read Cardano's 'De Vita Propria Liber,' I have been a devoted follower of his. His life is one that I found to be respectable and honorable, if at times it was full of anguish and suffering. It's this human side he showed, however, that drew me ever closer to him. Anyone who has read my 9th almanac will understand my appreciation of this man and the great influence he has had on my life. In this current writing, I set out to bring praise and honor to the great Gerolamo once again.

Cardano always had one primary goal in life that influenced him tremendously, to be remembered throughout time. He says in chapter 9 of his Vita, "Vowing to perpetuate my name, I made a plan for this purpose as soon as I was able to orient myself. For I understood, without any doubt, that life is twofold: the material existence common to the beasts and the plants, and that existence which is peculiar to a man eager for glory and high endeavor," and furthermore said, "After a few years I was inspired by a dream to a hope of attaining this second way of life—the way of fame. Only I did not clearly see how, except in so far as I was helped, as it were, by a miracle to the understanding of the Latin tongue. But in truth I was recalled by my sane reasoning from any great aspiration toward such fame, perceiving that nothing was emptier than that hope, not to mention my simple resolve." As one can see from such quotes, he was very rational in his approach to achieving fame. He understood himself very well, knowing he had a simple resolve but was greatly intrigued by this peculiar second way of life. Cardano further says of fame, "Yet I am a truthful man; I am mindful of benefits conferred, attached to my own people, a lover of justice, and a contemner of money. Zeal for undying fame has captured my devotion, and rendered me wont to despise mediocrity, to say nothing of petty concerns." Cardano, much later in the autobiography, mentioned how this attempt at fame panned out for him later in life; saying, "As for my descendants, I know how fraught with uncertainty this hope for fame may be, and I realize how little we may foresee its consequences. Therefore, I have lived my life as best I might; and in some hope of the future, I have scorned the present. If I must excuse my present manner of life let me say that I now continue to exist as well as I can. For this course seems but honorable; and even if any hope I have for fame should fail me, my ambition is worthy of praise, inasmuch as longing for renown is but natural." So yes, it seems even Cardano knew that this attempt at fame and everlasting remembrance was uncertain and somewhat futile, yet he attempted it anyway. It reminds me of what Leonardo da Vinci once said regarding fame and remembrance, "What is fair in men doesn't last. Old age creeps up on you. Nothing's more fleeting than the years of a man's life, but there is time enough for those who know how to use it. What's the point of passing the Earth unnoticed? A man who does not become famous is no more than wood smoke on the wind of foam upon the sea, but I intend to leave a memory of myself in the minds of others."

This is what I love about Cardano so much and why I dedicated much of my time and efforts to this great man; it's because of his honesty and forthrightness in his manner of speech about his life. He speaks to me as a polymathic 16th century Renaissance philosopher, who is telling his story to me almost as if to impart me with everlasting knowledge of himself so that his spirit and vigor may forever live on through me. I love him for his attempt to achieve fame through tremendous erudition and scholarship. He was a man of extraordinary intellectual

interest yet was average in capacity. He sought the way of fame through studying the great arts and understanding all components of nature, and the cumulation of his vast interest and assiduous study were those great encyclopedic tracts titled: *De Subtilitate* (“On Subtlety”, 1550), and its twin book *De rerum varietate* (“On the Variety of Things”, 1557). It was these tracts that contained all human knowledge at the time they were written, and even if they may not be remembered by common folk today, may we praise Cardano for his efforts in writing such amazing works.

I share Cardano’s great interest in study and understanding the world as it is and share the devotion to achieving everlasting fame through study as well. I have said this before, but I think it necessary to reiterate it again as it’s the core motivation in my life; that is, I want to be renowned in this world for my intellect. I wish to do what Cardano- and in some sense Aristotle and Grotius did, that is to be eclectic and synthesize human knowledge, so that it may be easier to understand for those who pursue that same study. I want to make knowledge on all areas of human endeavor easier to understand for those who wish to understand it. This task is something that in the 21st century may seem impossible considering the sheer vast amount of knowledge that we have accumulated since the age of Cardano, but I think the attempt, as Cardano did, is worthy of praise and admiration, for it is but natural.

I am a lover of knowledge, a philomath so to say, and I think that learning and improving the mind is the most important thing that a human being can do, for Cardano himself once said, “Of all the things which the indigent human race is allowed, nothing is more pleasing, nothing more important, than the knowledge of the truth.” In that sense, one should pursue life in a way that allows him to know as many true things as possible and restrain oneself from things that are superstitious or without investigative ability. As Cardano also said, “Life is short, Art long, Experience not easily obtained, Judgement difficult, and therefore it is necessary, that a Student not only exercise himself in considering several Figures, but also that he diligently read the writings of others who have treated rationally of this Science, and make it his business to find out the true natural causes of things by experiments, but above all to be a passionate lover of truth.” We must strive to become great by first understanding the natural world and the influence it has on us, as well as our interactions with the inhabitants of the natural world- our fellow man and countless other organisms.

I find myself at the present in a situation not unlike Cardano’s during the late 1520s early 1530s. I am destitute of time and resources to pursue this kind of life I have set forth, and it is my greatest anguish in life at the present. It brings me to tears knowing that life is short and time shorter, and yet knowledge is eternal and ever growing. Perhaps Cardano was right when he said, “... for most people life is short, desire is long, calamity is swift, fortune is deceptive, and death is difficult.” Through studying the lives of many great men, ever abounding in glory and wisdom- although, being mortal, not far from error and misfortune- I have found that life is perpetually uncaring and unrelenting, even for those few men who achieved the pinnacle of intellectual development; it was the great Chrysippus who aptly said “Every life is painful and laborious.” Yet, despite all the suffering that I feel at the present and have experienced throughout my life, I am happy and hopeful for the future of myself and humanity. As a human being, my species evolved over many hundreds of thousands of years to become accustomed to

the ruthlessness of the world, and with all the past centuries of knowledge at my fingertips given the time I was born in, I am more grateful than ever to live in the age that I do.

I have failed plenty in my life, I suffer from an inconstancy of purpose not unlike Fazio Cardano- father of Gerolamo- which makes me unable to stick with a particular interest for more than a few months. I am sporadic in what I study and what I pursue; the only consistent thing about me is that I am a lover of truth, knowledge, and wisdom, and that I ultimately want to leave humanity with a body of knowledge that they may extract some benefit from. I am a man of average intellectual ability, yet far above average in intellectual interest and have a tremendous zeal to study all things and help all people understand such things. I do this all knowing full well that it may be blasted by obscurity like Cardano, yet I deem it important enough to dedicate my life to. I live my life like that of a philosopher king, or more specifically a 16th century Renaissance philosopher. To make this concept of the philosopher king more tangible, I am in agreement with Averroes' opinion of it; "Averroes's description of the characteristics of a philosopher-king are similar to those given by Al-Farabi; they include love of knowledge, good memory, love of learning, love of truth, dislike for sensual pleasures, dislike for amassing wealth, magnanimity, courage, steadfastness, eloquence and the ability to *light quickly on the middle term.*"

I share with Cardano and Averroes a contempt of money, as I don't think the amassment of wealth serves you any purpose other than to give you a false sense of achievement, not unlike how masturbation gives you false queues of fitness in the biological sense. Money is something I am bereft of completely at the moment, as I much prefer to spend my time studying and learning about the world rather than procuring a livelihood. Cardano himself was oblivious to earthly affairs and, like me, put his labor in other areas; he himself once said, "I was poor, yet not greedy for gain; nor did I strive after the vain and ostentatious grandeur of outward show. My body was a weak thing, and my affairs tottered upon foundations undermined by frauds. I spent money lavishly for books, and wasted much substance in moving so often, whether from city to city, or from one residence to another. The time I trifled away at Gallarate was profitless; in nineteen months I scarcely earned twenty-five crowns toward the rent of my house. In a turn of ill-luck at dicing, I put to pawn my wife's jewelry and some of the furniture. And though it is confounding to admit that I was capable of squandering our very substance, it is more surprising that in my destitution I did not take to begging; stranger still, that I never even seriously considered that my course was an insult to my ancestors, to a decent standard of manhood, and to the honors which I had achieved, and by virtue of which I was later to become prosperous. I went my reckless way serenely." Perhaps it is on account of my current age (20 years old) that I do not care for such things, but I would suspect that it has more to do with my natural inclination towards the want of things. Like Cardano I have a simple resolve and a distaste for acquiring wealth. I don't see the utility in taking time away to earn a living when I could spend that time acquiring knowledge and truth. It seems like we human beings have always had to work to survive, but imagine the hardship and pain I feel at not being able to put all my efforts and labor into the one thing I love, above all, knowledge and truth. Fazio was no different as J. G. Waters tells us in his spectacular biography of Cardano, saying: "...Fazio seems to have been as great a despiser of wealth as his son proved to be afterwards. His virtue, such as it was, must have been the outcome of one of those hard cold natures, with wants few and trifling, and none of those tastes which cry out daily

for some new toy, only to be procured by money." Indeed, as Juvenile once said "We have lost the desire to live for the sake of staying alive." I affirm that life is too ephemeral, too important, to not live making the most of what you can with what fortune has given you. As Cardano mentions, "My third observation is more important than the others; for just as it makes for happiness to be what you can, when you cannot become what you would, so it makes for a more abundant happiness to be desirous of that which is best among all those things we long for. It is necessary, then, that we should recognize what we have at our command, and make the most expedient selection of such faculties as are best for our purposes-choosing two or three from the number which are of a kind to claim our ardent affection and desire, so that we may possess them with the least possible disadvantage both for the purposes for which they were set apart and for other purposes as well." In this quote here, Cardan essentially tells us to make the most of what we have and to pursue that which we deem to be the most pertinent for our desires and end goals. And, in the course of my life thus far, I found that my natural inclinations and interest are in those things that are eternal and ever-present in our world, the matters of fact, knowledge, and truth.

Without question this is something that any rational person would deem the ultimate and praiseworthy good, as Cardano says "Truths of themselves are to be desired, for Science itself is a certain good, now the expectation of future good very much delights us, and on the contrary, when future evils are foreseen, we may either avoid them, mitigate them, or at least bear them more contentedly." A truly learned person would probably counter this by saying I am too young and inexperienced to truly understand the magnitude of contemplating wealth and financial stability just for the sake of acquiring knowledge; to quote the great Cicero- "Rashness comes on to youth as Prudence does old men." I know full well that what I do is unwise and even detrimental to my very existence itself, but allow me to attempt to counter this concern through reason.

What is there to fear from lack of wealth, or even money for that matter? I may say here the true benefits of wealth are of three kinds: 1) the ability to do what you please assuming you have amassed enough so that it may last you a lifetime, 2) the ability to sustain your own existence as well as the ability to support others assuming you wish to have children, and lastly 3) the 'moral superiority' one feels for having more of a good thing in comparison to others.

I say on the first one, that it is something that itself requires too much time and effort to acquire, and that you have to sacrifice your ability to do other things you may be interested in. Recall the quote from Juvenile about sacrificing your life- what you want to do and pursue merely for the sake of living; I do affirm here that if you wish to be rich you can be, but in order to do so you have to make it your life- a life that I find, as you may already know, to be extremely shallow and debased. Think to what the great Voltaire said, "Don't think money does everything or you are going to end up doing everything for money." I certainly don't want to live merely to make a living, I want to have the time available to me to support myself and study what I will at the same time, but being young, I place more emphasis on my time rather than on money; as Cardano inscribed on the walls of his house "TEMPVS POSSESSIO MEA, that is, TIME IS MY ESTATE."

All we have in this life is our time and our decisions, and what we do with it will determine whether we live a life of security and obscurity, or of insecurity but eternity. Recall

what the incomparable sage Francis Bacon once said, “A man young in years may be old in hours if he hath lost no time,” or perhaps recall the motto of the most learned Hugo Grotius: *Ruit hora*, that is, Time is running away. Again, perhaps it is true that I am too young, not knowing true struggle or privation of any sense, nor do I have any commitment to anyone beside myself, nor a family to look after. I know not what it is to experience the true depths of despair that penury may await me, but if experience be the greatest teacher, then I welcome the good as well as the bad equally.

I always lived in accordance with a mathematical law that shows itself to be true in human affairs. That is, wherever one lacks in a particular aspect of their life, they make up for it proportionally in another: this is essentially the rule of algebra, that one side cannot be unbalanced from the other. As Pico della Mirandola noted, taking inspiration from the Pythagoreans, “Through numbers is the way to the investigation and understanding of all knowledge;” it is through the study of numbers that we may use them to guide our own lives and seek the existence we most fervently wish for. So yes, my dear reader, I say here that time is more valuable than money itself, that is, if you use your time wisely and study that which you wish to become great in, and never forget what the great Cardano said on the matter of time in relation to study: “It is the part of a serious man to make haste to accomplish what he would. And to this end a vast amount of reading is necessary; when I am devouring a mighty volume in three days of steady reading, some suggestion as to the contents is necessary, by indicating for omission parts very trite or of little use, or by placing a dagger to mark obscure passages which may then await an occasion for investigation.”

I don’t necessarily fear the hardships that come from a lack of money, or poverty for that matter; homelessness, starvation, and even death itself do not cause me anxiety. The only negative from true destitution was aptly described by Cardano, saying: “If someone does not have the means to raise his children, to look for wisdom or to practice justice, he will certainly be unhappy, not because he is poor, but because he cannot practice the works of happiness.” Machiavelli also says a telling quote on this matter of living a scholarly blessed but financially cursed life, he said “When evening comes, I go back home, and go to my study. On the threshold, I take off my work clothes, covered in mud and filth, and I put on the clothes an ambassador would wear. Decently dressed, I enter the ancient courts of rulers who have long since died. There, I am warmly welcomed, and I feed on the only food I find nourishing and was born to savor. I am not ashamed to talk to them and ask them to explain their actions and they, out of kindness, answer me. Four hours go by without my feeling any anxiety. I forget every worry. I am no longer afraid of poverty or frightened of death. I live entirely through them.” Francis Bacon too on this matter said, “The images of men's wits and knowledge remain in books, exempted from the worry of time and capable of perpetual renovation.” In books, there is no fear of the aforementioned problems that result from no money. So, I hope I have made a good enough case against the accumulation of wealth for wealth's sake. One should strive to pursue the things they wish to rather than sacrifice those things they enjoy merely to acquire wealth, while at the same time squandering time; Cardano said of time- “The wasting of time is an abomination,” and how right he was.

To give the reader more assurance on this matter however, suppose I am to fail at this endeavor of mine and ultimately put on the backburner my desire to study and understand things

for the sake of making a living, what am I to do then? I would say this: recall what Eginetal us to say- “He who passes a large stone from the bladder suffers less, by contrast with his preceding pains, than he who passes a small gravel, and he is less likely, therefore, to perish;” that is to say that he who has already suffered great will be less likely to perish by a proportionally smaller anguish in the future. Indeed, Cardano was correct when he said that pain and anguish is relative to what you have already experienced in the past. If I have to make a living and forgo my time and desire- focusing on what I truly love- than I will suffer through, and may the attempt to maintain everlasting devotion to study, truth, and wisdom be praised by those who know of it, and may it also give me the strength and experience I require when another hardship comes my way.

As for the second one, it is indeed a necessity. You cannot acquire the fundamental components of life, that is: food, water, shelter, and clothing- without money. Cardano stressed the importance of living a simple life free of material desires- as the stoics did- and a resolve to maintain oneself rather than seek ostentatious grandeur. If you can maintain a simple life, save what you get, and make the right investments you will surely prosper. To reiterate my first point and to avoid any potential confusion, I say here that one must work in order to subsist, not to forgo all of it for the sake of study- what I want to make clear is that one should not sacrifice their life doing what they enjoy merely to live, nor do I think one should make a living simply to acquire wealth. There has to be a balance, as all things should be, between your work and your life. Your devotion to either one of these will determine the kind of life you live and how fulfilled you are, however, you cannot survive without both- as Cardano says, “... for there is nothing, as the wise men say, which may not in some manner be unified,” both of these things must be unified and cared for if you wish to live a life of scholarship as well as stability. In essence, I say that you should not strive to achieve wealth for the sake of stability, you can achieve financial stability without having to squander your precious time solely focusing on the procurement of money. As Christopher Columbus once said, “Riches don’t make a man rich, they only make him busier,” and how right he was, for the more money you have the more time you must devote to managing it and growing it, this is useless, I think.

As for my last counterpoint regarding wealth, the sheer stupidity one must have to think themselves morally superior than others simply because they have more wealth than someone else is incalculable. Firstly, viewing wealth as a good thing is subjective- the phrase ‘more money more problems’ would attest to that. I understand the inclination to think that way however; human beings tend to be prideful of the things they put great effort in, and when their success is dependent on how hard they work, they think themselves superior to others and their wealth is proof of that: it’s the same regarding grades in school or a career promotion. You work harder than others and get what your actions merit, however, despite all that is said, that is not a reason or justification to treat others poorly. Human beings developed as a social species with an innate sense of care for one another; when we see one of our kind suffering, we tend to empathize and care for their well-being, this is where our objective morality comes from. When a member of the group acts poorly towards others they are ostracized by the entire group and must face the consequences. To reiterate, working harder than others does not make you better than them morally, you should want to work hard to inspire others through your example, not to

feel superior to them- doing so only shows how shallow your personality truly is and it should be avoided at all costs.

I know I have rambled long enough concerning my own thoughts rather than the actual topic at hand, but I did so to make an impression upon the reader and to make them think hopefully. As Cardano said at the start of his 4th chapter in his autobiography- “If Suetonius by any chance could have noticed the method of this chapter, he might have added something to the advantage of his reader,” and that is what I wanted to do, present something that my reader may find beneficial in their own life. With the ramblings out of the way, allow me to explain what I am doing in this work if it may not already be self-evident. I am translating a work written by Gerolamo Cardano originally titled “*Dialogus Hieronymi Cardani et Facii Cardani ipsius patris,*” or translated into English *Dialogue between Girolamo Cardano and His Father Fazio*. This work first came to my awareness when I read Stanford’s Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on Cardano. I was interested in it because I wanted to see what an interaction between Cardano and his father, Fazio, would be like. Fazio himself being a very learned man and well-read in the areas of philosophy, jurisprudence, and mathematics. Cardano said of his father, “This might rather be considered in the manner of prophecy for one who was then about to set out upon his life’s labors, than as applying to my father himself, who, beyond the law-which, I understand, he practiced with extraordinary brilliance-had mastered only the elements of mathematics; he was in no wise given to original thinking, nor had he availed himself of the resources of the Greek language. This situation came about, in his case, more because of his many-sided interests, and his inconstancy of purpose, than because he was not naturally gifted, or because of sloth or faulty judgment; for he was subject to none of these defects. However, because my will was firmly set to my purpose on account of the reasons which I have already advanced, together with other motives, I was not moved by my father’s advices, especially since I saw that he, although he had met with practically no reverses, had succeeded but indifferently,” and furthermore Cardano said of him “I had observed that my father’s habit of relinquishing one aim in life for another had been a mighty obstacle to his success.” Cardano also tells us of the final days of his father, and how much he loved him; he says of the situation, “For the residue of his days (and he lived on well-nigh four more years) his life was a sad one, as if he would fain let it be known to the world how much he loved me. Moreover, when by the working of fate I returned home while he lay sick, he besought, he commanded, nay he even forced me, all unwilling, to depart thence, what though he knew his last hour was nigh, for the reason that the plague was in the city, and he was fain that I should put myself beyond danger from the same. Even now my tears rise when I think of his goodwill towards me. But, my father, I will do all the justice I can to thy merit and to thy paternal care; and, as long as these pages may be read, so long shall thy name and thy virtues be celebrated. He was a man not to be corrupted by any offering whatsoever, and indeed a saint. But I myself was left after his death involved in many lawsuits, having nothing clearly secured except one small house.” It seems Fazio cared for his son and Gerolamo loved his father dearly, even if they showed no affection outwardly. It is known that Fazio put Gerolamo through much hardship, making him, in all his feebleness, carry around his large books. Cardano talks of this in the 4th chapter of his autobiography, saying, “My bad luck had by no means deserted me, but had simply changed my misfortunes without removing them. Having rented a house, my father took me, my mother, and my aunt home with him; and, thereupon I was ordered to accompany him daily in spite of my tender age and frail little body; I was pushed from a very tranquil existence

into a round of tiring and constant exertions.” And moreover, Cardano mentions a similar situation when he was a little older, saying “My luck had not yet changed, for again my father, stubbornly insistent, had me accompany him as his page. I shall not say that he acted with severity; this seemed to have been done rather because it was divinely intended, than because of any fault of my father, as the reader may believe from events which ensued.” Fazio was tough on his son, but did what he thought was best for him, it reminds me of my own situation with my father. Gerolamo wrote after his father's death, “The father died honorably and of old age, but long before that genius had left him,” indeed, it seems even in old age Fazio retained his tremendous intellect. Fazio met his end on the 28th of August 1524, and is buried in the church of St. Mark's. His tombstone bares the inscription dictated by Gerolamo: “THE DEATH OF FAZIO CARDANO WAS THAT WHICH I LIVED, DEATH GAVE LIFE TO HIMSELF, THE MIND REMAINS ETERNAL, THE GLORY SAFE, HE DIED AT THE AGE OF 80 HIERONYM CARDANUS PHYSICIAN, RELATIVES AND DESCEDANTS.”

I guess what drew me to Fazio so much was his similarity to me in the sense of how we approach our intellectual interest. We simply cannot stick with one thing- we, like the ocean itself, are in constant flux always seeking something new and investigating how the previous things we have learned all connect. I also find it interesting that Gerolamo noticed how much of an impediment an inconstancy of purpose is. I know firsthand how troubling it is to the mind to be doing one thing but thinking about something else entirely. In my case, I squandered two years of my life studying to earn an associates degree in accounting just to realize at the end of it that I was as ignorant as when I began. It all had to do with me not practicing my trade so to speak, and as a result I lost out on learning it as well as I could, all because I wanted to study other things that I thought were more interesting. It reminds me of a similar situation Cardano was in, he recalls the story as such, “It was in the summer of the year 1543, a time when it was my custom to go every day to the house of Antonio Vicomercato, a gentleman of the city, and to play chess with him from morning till night. As we were wont to play for one real, or even three or four, on each game, I, seeing that I was generally the winner, would as a rule carry away with me a gold piece after each day's play, sometimes more and sometimes less. In the case of Vicomercato it was a pleasure and nothing else to spend money in this wise; but in my own there was an element of conflict as well; and in this manner I lost my self-respect so completely that, for two years and more, *I took no thought of practicing my art, nor considered that I was wasting all my substance—save what I made by play—that my good name and my studies as well would suffer shipwreck.* But on a certain day towards the end of August, a new humour seized Vicomercato (either advisedly on account of the constant loss he suffered, or perhaps because he thought his decision would be for my benefit), a determination from which he was to be moved neither by arguments, nor adjurations, nor abuse. He forced me to swear that I would never again visit his house for the sake of gaming, and I, on my part, swore by all the gods as he wished. That day's play was our last, and thenceforth I gave myself up entirely to my studies.” So, it seems that chess was Cardano's distraction, whereas mine were other academic subjects. To avoid any further inconstancy in matters of academic interest, I found that following the advice of Leonardo da Vinci was extremely helpful in this regard. Da Vinci said, “Just as food eaten without appetite is tedious nourishment, so too is study without zeal, for it harms the memory by not assimilating what it takes in,” and moreover: “Whatever you do in life, if you want to be

creative and intelligent, and develop your brain, you must do everything with the awareness that everything, in some way, connects to everything else.” I love the second quote in particular because it reminds me of what Cardano said: that everything may be, in some manner, unified.

It’s also important to remember that ‘learning never exhausted the mind,’ as Da Vinci also said, but to get to the point, I studied more assiduously and with much more zeal, while at the same time consistently calling to the forefront of my mind what I have just read and attempting in any way possible to connect it to something of relation. This means that it takes me longer to get through what I’m learning but I ultimately learn it better. The increase and time means I am less likely to forget it while at the same time preventing me from rushing ahead and confusing myself with new facts. I had not given my mind time to assimilate what it took in, and I suffered because of that, but no longer does this anguish trouble me.

To get back to the translation itself, I want to make something very clear- I am not fluent in Latin, I can read it with some difficulty but cannot understand it at all- therefore, I used ChatGPT to get the best translation I could while at the same time comparing that with Google translate and Edge translate. I should also make clear that, when translating anything from one language to another, there is a clear tradeoff between *fidelity* (faithfulness) and *felicity* (transparency). Fidelity has to do with how accurate the translation is from the source text, that is to say, how faithful and exact the translation is from one language to another. Felicity has to do with how clear the translation appears to a native speaker, considering proper syntax, grammar, and idiom. What I have attempted to do is take the tremendous inaccuracies that most translation tools suffer from and smooth them out by making the sentences and paragraphs more accessible and easier to understand- the so-called felicity component.

I should also mention this, I own every single biographical work ever written on Cardano apart from the one by Fierz written in 1977, and I also own every work that has been translated to English that Cardan wrote (so if there's anyone who understands Cardan’s idiosyncratic writing style, it's me). This includes: De Vita Propria Liber, Ars Magna, The Book of Games and Chance, In Praise of Nero, and De Subtilitate. That's it, out of his entire opera omnia (10,300 pages and over 200 full length works), we only have 5 full works translated into modern English, of which only 2 are well known: De Vita and Ars Magna. I think this is sad and unforgivable, to languish and forget this great man, Cardan. May his life forever influence me, and may I forever influence the world he once inhabited through emulation of him.

Translation

DIALOGUE OF HIERONYMUS CARDAN AND FACIUS CARDAN, HIS OWN FATHER

Hieronymus: Oh, how unjust is the fate of mortals! I have been robbed of a gift as useful as it is honorable: the ability to practice medicine and to publish books. Forced by circumstances at my age to come to Rome to live among doctors, whose ancestors even Galen himself could not withstand, I have no income, and have been left alone by my descendants. I am afflicted with poor health and can barely rely on the faithfulness of my domestic staff and friends. I am as good as blind. Who will welcome me with open arms like they did Oedipus when he was wandering around with nothing but rags on his back? But he is much less miserable than I am, who has left behind many offspring, kings and who has suffered only the misfortunes that he brought upon himself and not those inflicted upon him by others or by chance. Who among mortals is more miserable than I? What shall I do?

Facius: Why do you wail foolishly?

H: Alas, because I am also tormented by demons.

F: I am not a demon, but a friend, and the best friend of your friends. Your father was once, and still is, poor (as you know), having long ago shed his corporeal shell. I am Fazio Cardan.

H: Oh, how well it goes with you! Have pity on your only son and help him if you can, either with your advice or with your presence, for the time is opportune.

F: You are not as miserable as you claim; you are making yourself miserable.

H: I will not recount all the things that I believed to be private to myself (for, just as in the past, I see you only in my dreams), but the greatest misfortune is that I cannot stay here or leave safely, honestly, or conveniently.

F: You remembered that dream at an opportune time, for you have just noticed that the moon has reached its zenith. Yesterday, as you read in Blessed's book, the lunar intellect occupies the ultimate rank among all the completely separate substances, having retreated the farthest from the first substance (although it knows itself perfectly), yet it understands itself less clearly and obtusely than it understands others or itself through others. However, since our intellect departs further from the First than the lunar, it does not understand itself by itself, but by other things, while it is recognizing those things. Therefore, it is even less able to understand others, since it cannot understand itself by itself or through others. It cannot understand them by themselves either, as it is unable to grasp the material beings completely separate from matter. Therefore, it only understands them through analogy, proportion, or similarity, and that too only in common aspects, such as being entities, substances, or acts, or as they are negated, that is, as being devoid of matter and incapable of being perceived by the senses. Therefore, such things are known, for example by deduction from the senses and by imagining them. For those things that adhere closely to a place (such as the body and its actions in animals) are precisely known by the senses, but those things that adhere to bodies in divine intellects are not known by their magnitude (nor possibly by motion) and will never be known in the future. How much less will the substances of the orbs be understood? Therefore, since they are neither understood by themselves, since they are separated, nor through their bodies, which cannot be known by our intellect because of their lack of magnitude and substance, it is necessary for our intellect to understand them only through some similarity and through common things or things that they lack. However, the nature of our intellect itself, which can only understand itself through other things (like the lunar intellect), is such that it is left to understand them only through some similarity and through common things or things that they lack. But the lunar intellect can understand itself on its own. And because it is connected to others like itself at first, it understands them less than itself (although the closer they are to the first, the more intelligently they are related to us). But that which the lunar intellect understands about them, though less in comparison to what is understood, and more obscure, and what the lunar intellect understands absolutely, more clearly and perfectly in comparison to itself: simply, however, what the lunar intellect understands about other intellects is greater, nobler, clearer, and more perfect than what it understands about itself. Just as a guest at a banquet eats more and better than if he were to eat everything at home: but he cannot eat everything that is in the banquet. He can eat everything he has at home. Did you not read all this clearly except as an example? Yes, indeed. Therefore, this is the day before the Nones of April in the year 1574, which should be considered your first and almost a birthday. You see how you have ascended from the individual to the supreme in the lunar sphere. Therefore, rejoice that you have obtained the interpretation of the dream, and that the time has come.

H: About what should I rejoice?

F: Make it so that you understand what a special gift God has rewarded you with. For it is thus: What could be so hard or bitter to endure, or what could come in the future that you would not only bear willingly but gladly, seeing how much care was taken for it? And when many other things also bear witness to this, even that dream which you call fateful, although it is so dire and dreadful. Of letters fallen to the ground, one stood upright by the feet of the desk, while the other

was covered in dust while it was being written, so that it could not be hidden naturally or even written. That long thunderstorm approaching the house. And at the end of the third day when you were detained, there was a loud noise in the hallway, first in the prison, and then immediately in the window it illuminated. Soon the creaking sound of clattering iron shook, with Rudolf Silvestrius the physician present at these last two events.

H: All these things are true, but what good are they? In fact, they cause me great anxiety, and, as the poet says, 'Your fierce words do not frighten me, Jupiter, but your punishments do.' For this is the third thing that troubles me more than the loss of the ability to make a profit or publish books, namely, the day I was detained (which never happened before) and at various times in the same place I fell into two empty marketplaces, where there were so many ropes, dogs, and shouts (that although I was both ignorant and strong, I admired and feared them, and even heard the blows that struck me unwillingly). The other thing was what I recited last. So shaken by these two things, I have always feared being detained by them, and the first time, as now, I lay bound in the market like one awaiting death, and openly gave other penalties. Therefore, to return to the matter at hand, what bothers me is that I have never been able to find a likely cause for these prodigies, nor have I heard anyone who could explain it to me. For I have consulted many, hoping that if anyone could come up with a solution, I would be relieved of this anxious care. Although I was not ignorant that this account would be shameful to me, since I would either be thought a boaster or be considered light and superstitious, the magnitude of the danger and the fear of greater dangers and the multitude of troubles that beset me caused me to put everything aside for the sake of my safety and that of mine. Therefore, if you have anything, Father, explain it to me in this great sorrow, for you have saved your son. For with God's help, even if I encounter many and great difficulties, I will be able to overcome them. But to make it easier for you to do this, know that such prodigies often happen to us in two ways: some as warnings of future events, others as reminders of imminent dangers, and they show us the way to escape. Therefore, I think it is better to interpret them in this way, since if I were completely overthrown, it would not be because I was too secretive about this, partly because of my own ignorance and partly because of the rare or malicious advice of others. Please speak freely, but I would like to remind you of two things: first, that those who think nothing greater can happen to them than what they already believe are not thinking big enough, for they believe that these things that they do not think can happen later are empty trifles, but then you will know that they are true and of great significance, and that all those dreams and shadows are real. This is also made clearer when I recall the past in the light of day. Therefore, why do you torture yourself, as if you were suffering? Do you not have the easy task of having wax or stone figures with which children like to play? Do you lack these things? For what stable, great, or long-lasting thing can you have in this life, even simply, much less when compared to others? Therefore, you will join the unhappy crowd of those who wander aimlessly, who suffer in vain, who have so many labors and cares that are useless and of no use for happiness. What is there in this world that is stable, safe, long-lasting, and that time does not wear away? What is there that the more you progress, the better it becomes? Wealth grows by itself, but in old age it brings pleasure to others, and to you who cannot enjoy it, it brings sorrow. So, what is the first thing in which you rightly torment yourself? The second is that I will explain the whole story at once, and show the end of each, and

the reasons for the worthy souls, without which we cannot speak correctly and perfectly about the way of proceeding or the interpretation of the future, nor can we be in agreement, without which all help will be in vain. Therefore, let us begin with wealth: how many cities were stripped of it without fault in the past and now, in all wars? In our time, in Pannonia and Cyprus, and remember Meliboeus in Virgil. After seeing several of my kingdoms, will I marvel at the impious soldiers who have these well-cultivated fields? See the discord, citizens have led the miserable ones. But, you have lost nothing due to any fault, and all these things are of no importance. I am not complaining about what has been taken away, but that there is no provision for expenses and the possibility of repairing what has been taken away.

F: If your sons are good, it will be enough: but if they are inept, not many more than you yourself could suffice for that time.

H: I set aside this concern, but my honor pains me, and the fact that I am prohibited from publishing books. What am I to do when I see so many inferior to myself running off with the prize?

F: Do you think you are dying? Or do you hope that after you die there will be no lack of either unskilled or learned men to carry on your work?

H: I don't know

F: Why, then, do you not calculate whether you have gained or lost by this bargain? For the nail holds that which is last of all the wise: Solon used to say that the life of man extends to seventy years; for at that age Socrates and Thales died, and Hippias alone is said to have exceeded it, either that he might live more miserably or that he might console himself for so many miseries as he had endured in his old age. For he died both deprived of all his property and, besides, in exile and condemned to death. All the others died before, Aristotle, Galen, Hesiod, or Avicenna, Theophrastus, Pythagoras, Virgil, Horace. Life is short, but it is long enough if it is well-spent. Do not prescribe for yourself any greater number of years than the stars have allotted to you. The hand cannot promise: nor can physiognomy, nor can the manner of living. As for injuries, if they happen by chance, do not be vexed, for you would regard them as having come from the gods; but when they are inflicted by men, as if the gods could not restrain them, or as if disease did not produce them, which has either taken something away from you or rendered you useless, then you should be vexed. The Cyrenaics used to say that pleasure and pain are both alike in the soul and in the body, which is true; but pleasure is greater in the body, and sorrow in the soul, because the mind is accustomed to extend itself infinitely and to expand beyond its own limits. And whatever fears may present themselves, the memory of past things will overcome them, and will augment the sadness to an immense degree. He grieves at the shortness of his own life, and fashions not only the lives but also the deeds and the decrees of others into immortality. He proposes injuries, insults, suspicions; he forgets favors, benefits, proofs of love; he makes an elephant out of a fly, as they say. Therefore this is not a proper evil. It is a great thing if, when you lose all these things by death or disease, you do not also lose your peace of mind; nor,

however, would you prefer to be dead rather than to be in this state. You say (so that nothing may be lacking) that that condition would be a common one? Why, then, do you not prefer that? Why do you complain that you live? Would you prefer to live and not to suffer, or would you not complain justly about those who are dead? Do you wish, then, to complain more unjustly now that you are alive? Therefore, return to the concept of Palingenesis, and say this: Three and a half years have already passed since what I had hoped for as the end of my common life. What has passed is safe, what is expected is not in despair nor can it be. Three descendants remain, many friends and powerful allies, a great name, knowledge of many things; 131 published books, 121 to be published, secrets more than four times the patrimony you were born with. What fools count among their misfortunes, namely having lived 72 years, I count among my chief gifts, for if you have endured adversity, you have already overcome it; if you have already possessed good things, they are safe and enjoyable in memory. But what is most important and what you should trust in remains: Providence, an unchanging order, an eye comprehending all things. Kingdoms will fall more easily than that Wisdom may be deceived, and Love does not wish for the best or lack a mode of satisfying just prayers. There remain three things (for the rest belongs to God, for it is too much for them to know what He knows): an increase of your inheritance, the duty of teaching, and the publication of books. But concerning the inheritance, it is more important that your children learn to gain than that you yourself gain; that they wish to preserve it, rather than that you increase it. The duty of teaching belongs partly to the publication of books for the sake of glory, partly for the sake of exercising one's faculties. Therefore, when both ends can be attained with less effort, you do not need both. If you can accomplish only one, many other things will take its place; and both will impede what might be better. Concerning the glory of books, let us say what Zeno said: "I sailed with a fair wind when I suffered shipwreck." All would have been lost if any part had not been devoutly written; some were so carelessly composed, and were full of errors and faults. What about your children? Did you not lose them through negligence and indulgence? Are they not now safe? Formerly, a certain destruction threatened them. You would have wished for a life still like that, if those things had not happened to you; there could have been nothing better for you.

H: Cares wear people out: it could happen that I suddenly fall due to those I have taken on

F: What is worse from being detained until now? You have never been sick: you see without any obvious weakness that you are not suffering from weakness of the stomach or skull, or difficulty urinating, or working while sleepless, nor do you have any swelling or hardness in your abdomen.

H: I am afraid that this confinement becomes a reward for abstinence: is it not a perpetual sentence on my life?

F: There were three kings who were particularly burdened by worries: Mithridates, who was defeated several times; Maffiniffa, who saw the dangers of being a king before experiencing kingship himself in his youth; and Iotarus, who was first suspected, then deprived of his kingdom and finally reduced to servitude. Maffiniffa lived to be one percent of a year old; Mithridates

could not find a way to die; and it was not easy to count the years of Iotarus. There are no less striking examples among women: Terentia saw the divorce of Cicero, the death of her only daughter, and the proscription of her son. However, she lived to see the next century. Pomponia Græcina persevered in mourning for forty years after the death of her daughter Julia Drusilla, and even though she was accused heavily, she reached old age. I think the reason for this is that someone who does not succumb to sorrow gains more benefit from the contempt of dishonest pleasures than from the losses of sadness, especially since fear of one's own death drives a man away from any sound advice, while contempt can alleviate it, and security can be obtained instead of revenge on others. So, having understood these things, I come to their interpretation. The first is certainly the worst, but it could have appeared accidental. For example, if you were to add an image to a seal: a drugstore was on the way, what use would a cow be to a man? If it had been a bull, it would have been more suitable. Nothing in common, everything accidental and with reason and frequency. And do not fear that the bull in your horoscope may come true. For the second detention cannot be attributed to the cow so that the third could follow. No chains, no injury, no torture, no death intended. If it could signify death, it was only of vices, so that you may be compelled to cast them off as if tied to them in the future. But this should be considered more as a fable or an ancient supplication. Another thing has more weight: the frequent blows in the trial to be held at Bologna. As for the windows in Rome, it was shown by the squeaky sound of the closed ones, which was unusual, that they should not be opened at all. But it was predicted that he would leave that city and choose a new homeland, which is glorious and indicates a future journey. There is no danger from the second detention, for this prodigy occurred not at the beginning, but after the release or shortly before. The outcome also corresponds to the escape of birds from a closed window. Therefore, they will be revealed by their works, and they will be corrected and much better than if these things had not happened; otherwise, they would fall.

H: Therefore, they should be hated not for what they have harmed but for what they wanted to harm.

F: Therefore, those who are so wicked that they can attain happiness only by not living peacefully and not hoping for anything better than death, are to be held in hatred not for what they have done, but for what they have wanted to do. But for you, there are many arguments for pleasure. However, why are you angry? It is a false assumption that some men have been good: you are mistaken, all of them, Aristides, Socrates, Plato, Nascia, and Cato the Younger, were punished by a certain stimulus (among many things that come to mind: anger, envy, ambition, avarice, and burning passions) of virtue; the rest were good only by foolishness and incompetence; the truly good are just, virtuous, and owed everything to divine grace alone, which they owe far more than anything that might be owed to themselves. But for you, since you have already laid almost all the foundations that lead to success, care must be taken in comparing money, and in the education of your descendants. From these, a third will arise spontaneously. Indeed, many occasions will owe the highest joy.

H: Thank you, Father, who, despite my very heavy afflictions, taught me many aids, the memory of my own death, the image of rebirth: a transition to the opposite or stripping away, and bodily torture.

F: So live well.

H: Are you leaving so soon?

F: I will return to you someday.

H: That will be most pleasing to me. But where is my son?

F: He is here, present. He is well, and farewell to you.

END