3 Natural Philosophy  
and Theology

CARDANO ATTEMPTS to conceive of the world as a unified whole. In accordance with the idea of unity of the terrestrial and the celestial, of the physical and the spiritual world he believes in a single vital principle: the “World-soul.” At the same time he is greatly impressed by the profusion of phenomena that he perceives in the world and that he wishes to include in his extensive knowledge. It seems to him that a single principle cannot account for the wealth of diverse forms of which he is continually aware. Instead, many principles must exist. Clearly, the old dialectic of “the one and the many” is very much part of his thinking. Anyone studying Cardano’s philosophy of nature ought to read *De Natura* first, as Cardano himself advises in the list of his works, *De libris propriis*. Closely related to *De Natura* is *De Uno*. Both works were probably written around 1560, but *De Natura* was not printed until the publication of Spon’s edition of the *Opera*.

*De Uno*¹ is a brief exposition of Cardano’s concept of unity. It shows that this idea is fundamental to his philosophy, hence the inclusion of this text among his writings on logic. *De Natura*² is not very extensive either,
but it still fills fifteen double-column pages in folio, the equivalent of about sixty pages of modern typography. In *De Natura* Cardano discusses in great detail Aristotle's concept of nature and juxtaposes it to his own opinions. I would like to leave open the question of whether he already differed with Aristotle when he wrote *De Subtilitate* in about 1550, or whether he only became decidedly antiaristotelian around 1560, as is evidenced by *De Natura*. One can certainly view *De Natura* as an introduction to *De Subtilitate*, as indeed Cardano himself conceived it.

Anyone expecting to find a clear and organized train of thought in these writings will be disappointed. One of the reasons for this is Cardano's way of presenting his ideas as they come to him. He begins with considerations and reflections which seem plausible to him or which were considered plausible at the time he was writing. In the course of further reflection he often realizes that he must correct his initial statements, or that other hypotheses are more in accordance with his ideas. However, he does not retract what he said previously, but instead continues the argument from his new position. He apparently wants to describe the actual progression of his thinking rather than present a train of thought after it has been rationalized. Today, of course, ideas are presented in rationalized form. Only after reaching the end of one's deliberations does one realize the entire course one's argument ought to have taken in order to have smoothly arrived at the insight which was achieved. It is this logical path which is presented to the reader. But Cardano does not write like this; even his philosophical writings are, as it were, biographical in nature.

Often one gets the impression that Cardano pursues several distinct but correlated lines of thought at once. Since all is unity all shall be grasped at once. This unity