

Systematic Theology: Iamblichus' Reception of Plotinian Psychology

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ABSTRACT

The following inquiry seeks to demonstrate that Iamblichus' account of theurgy, rather than an example of a theological critique emerging from outside of the Platonic school, represents a development of the tradition as mediated through Plotinus. In order to support such a reading, it will demonstrate that a prevalent scholarly treatment that opposes the two thinkers in terms of the tension between faith and reason or, more recently, between knowing and becoming, fails to account for the problem of perspective that emerges in an examination of the divided life of the soul. The fact that the soul manifests a double life requires both thinkers to make contradictory claims. If concrete, doctrinal positions are dogmatically affirmed in interpreting their thought, then the truth of the whole is obscured and unresolvable tensions remain in their individual systems and in relation to each other. Thus, the following paper will argue that Plotinus' account is in general concord with Iamblichus' and shares fundamental doctrines concerning the soul, the cosmos, salvation and theurgy. Furthermore, it will also show that Iamblichus' critique of Plotinus is in the spirit of a Platonic dialogue and is meant to serve a pedagogical function and give form to a more subtle critique of an impulse in the Platonic tradition that blends the two lives of the soul. Through this critique, Iamblichus seeks to refine Plotinus' thought and the tradition more generally, by giving form to a scientific theology in which theoretical oppositions between theology and philosophy are reconciled, thereby forming the intellectual foundation for a full account of theurgy.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The early 20th century scholarly notion that the thought of Iamblichus and Plotinus can be understood as a fundamental opposition between reason and ritual, asserted most famously by E.R.Dodds¹, has largely been abandoned in contemporary scholarship.² Such an opposition has been shown to rely on a self-justifying and anachronistic interpretive framework that downplays the role of religious ritual in Plotinus' thought, while subsuming with labels of occultism and irrationality the philosophical rigour of Iamblichus'. This framework is inadequate in accounting for both the internal consistency of both thinkers' works, as well the interrelation of their philosophical systems.

However, while the opposition between the two thinkers in this form has largely been rejected, some contemporary scholars nonetheless reaffirm it in slightly different iterations. For example, they seek to preserve the ground of experience in Iamblichus' thought, while placing the problems of the metaphysical tradition on Plotinus.³ In such an account, Iamblichus is no longer understood as irrational and superstitious but, rather, Plotinus is charged with subsuming the sensible life of the soul within an abstract and lifeless metaphysics.⁴ This problematic reading merely emphasizes a different side of the

¹ Dodds writes, in *The Greeks and the Irrational*: "Plotinus was a man who... 'raised himself by a strong intellectual and moral effort above the fog-ridden atmosphere which surrounded him'... But with his death the fog began to close in again, and later Neoplatonism is in many respects a retrogression to the spineless syncretism from which he had tried to escape" (286).

² Knipe writes in his survey of scholarship on theurgy in the late 20th century, that such studies dealt a "fatal blow" to the interpretation of theurgy as "an escapist fall into the sub-rational realm of the 'occult'" ("Neoplatonist Approaches," 170). Smith argues that "the differences between Plotinus and Iamblichus were semantic, not substantive" ("The Pagan Neoplatonists' Response to Christianity," 9). Shaw writes that contemporary scholars have corrected a "facile and once-fashionable distinction that praised Plotinus as the last Hellenic rationalist before Iamblichus corrupted the Platonic school with ritual worship" (*Theurgy and the Soul*, 94). For Addey, such an opposition emerges, initially, from a Christian polemic by thinkers such as Eusebius, and a modern failure to account for the poetic elements of the writings of Iamblichus and Porphyry (*Divination and Theurgy in Neoplatonism*). Cf. Shaw, "Eros and Arithmos: Pythagorean Theurgy in Iamblichus and Plotinus;" Smith, "Iamblichus' Views on the Relationship of Philosophy to Religion in *De Mysteriis*," and Tanaseanu-Döbler, *Theurgy in Late Antiquity: The Invention of a Ritual Tradition*.

³ Cf. Hankey, on Bergson in particular, in "One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism in France: A Brief Philosophical History."

⁴ Tanaseanu-Döbler writes: "It [the modern scholarly account of theurgy] postulates a purely intellectual Plotinus, whose philosophy is combined by a wavering and psychologically complicated Porphyry with the *Chaldean Oracles* and Theurgy, which then gain increasing importance in the thought of later Neoplatonists" (*Theurgy in Late Antiquity*, 9).

same interpretive framework and re-affirms the false division between knowledge of being and experience of becoming.

Such interpretations emerge first from a tension in the Platonic tradition itself. Throughout its history, Platonic exegesis has been characterized by two dominating orientations⁵, a division evident most immediately regarding the nature of the soul. Plato's account of the divided life of the embodied soul that emerges in the *Timaeus* leads to a fundamentally paradoxical opposition between the intelligible life of the soul and its material existence and, by extension, to broader, related oppositions between the intelligible and sensible, being and becoming, unity and multiplicity and so on. Since both aspects of the soul are true, depending on which aspect is emphasized, very different and often opposing philosophical systems can emerge.

This is exemplified in the debate concerning the problem of evil. Some interpreters argue for a sensible origin of evil through the accounts of the *Phaedo* (65a ff), *Theaetetus* (176a) and *Timaeus* (52d4-53b5) while others, appealing to dialogues such as the *Phaedrus* (246c), place blame on the soul on account of its first descent. If the former is emphasized and the sensible world is made the cause of evil, then the soul's problematic relation to evil is a matter of its orientation to the sensible world. It is the role of philosophy, in this case, to work towards the conversion of a primarily divine soul's attention to that which is higher — to 'release' the higher, intelligible life of the soul from the bonds of its material body and order the sensible world in such a way that it does not inhibit this release. If, on the other hand, evil emerges from a perverse impulse in the soul itself, then there is a priority placed on the practical, ethical habituation of the soul that seeks to ameliorate this fundamental flaw and bring it into the divine pattern of a fundamentally good cosmos. The elevation of the former leads to an emphasis on *θεωρία*, while the latter prioritizes virtuous *πρᾶξις* and ethical habituation. Such an opposition is often used to characterize the thought of Plotinus and Iamblichus respectively, with Plotinus playing the role of the intellectual mystic who overemphasizes the place of the

⁵ Narbonne, *Doctrinal Evolution*, 83. Festugière also examines this double tendency in the broader Greco-Roman tradition in *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*; see "Le Dieu cosmique," x-xiii; 92-94 and "Les doctrines de l'âme," 63-96.

intellect in the salvation of the soul, and Iamblichus the priest, who rejects philosophy to seek salvation in an extra-rational relationship to the gods through a divine cosmos.

However, it is necessary to simultaneously maintain both ‘sides’ of this division in order to understand the philosophical systems of Plotinus and Iamblichus on their own terms, as well as their relation to each other. The fact that this simultaneous tension characterizes the life of the encosmic soul, and that the soul is nonetheless a single, existent thing, points to an underlying unity⁶ of life by and through which the composite is sustained. It is by a sort of “double vision”⁷, through which both this unity and the paradox of the embodied soul and the broader cosmic procession can be thought, that the internal tensions of each thinker’s philosophical account can be overcome. In order to examine the whole life of the soul and, by extension, understand contradictory assertions in the thought of both philosophers, one must “express simultaneously both the immanence and the transcendence which constitute the relationship between the higher and the lower orders of being.”⁸

With this in mind, the following Thesis intends to demonstrate that central features of Plotinus’ and Iamblichus’ thought are in much closer agreement than often held.⁹ Both affirm the divinity of the cosmos, the impoverished state of the descended soul and the graciousness of the divine in its salvation; both maintain the paradox of the embodied soul outlined in the *Timaeus*. The apparent opposition between the two thinkers, then, will be shown to be primarily the result of a difference of emphasis which emerges from both this ontological tension in the soul and the problem of perspective in examining such a tension, as well as certain practical, historical problems present in the

⁶ Plato, *Timaeus* 37d4: “Now it was the Living Thing’s nature to be eternal, but it isn’t possible to bestow eternity fully upon anything that is begotten (ἡ μὲν οὖν τοῦ ζῴου φύσις ἐτύγγαθεν οὐσα αἰώνιος, καὶ τοῦτο μὲν δὴ τῷ γεννητῷ παντελῶς προσάπτειν οὐκ ἦν δυνατόν).” Plotinus also writes: “It is in virtue of unity that beings are beings (πάντα τὰ ὄντα τῷ ἐνὶ ἐστὶν ὄντα)” (*Enneads* VI.9.1, 1).

⁷ Narbonne, “A Doctrinal Evolution,” 84.

⁸ Steel, *The Changing Self*, 31.

⁹ This will be examined more fully in the subsequent inquiry. By way of general introduction, however, the notion of a ‘desacralised’ cosmos is made problematic by accounts such as that of Narbonne (“A Doctrinal Evolution,” 45-64) and Corrigan, (*Plotinus’ Theory of Matter-Evil and the Question of Substance*). Furthermore, Plotinus’ thought has been shown to have a developed theurgical element (see Mazur, *Unio Magica II*; and Shaw, “Eros and Arithmos”). In terms of their doctrines of the soul specifically, there has been a great deal of recent scholarly work concerning the two thinkers’ understandings of ratios and mathematical being that demonstrates a similar doctrine of the soul in fundamental ways.

Platonic school itself. In such a reading, the appearance of a strict division between sensible creation and the intellect of the soul in Plotinus' account is partially a result of the way in which he is forced to deal with an influential Gnostic element in the Platonic school and partially due to ambiguity in his ontology; Iamblichus, on the other hand, far from bringing an 'irrational' religious element to bear in the Platonic tradition, actually seeks to provide a more systematic, rational treatment of key elements of Plato's thought and, therefore, represents both the continuity of the philosophical tradition, as well as an important moment in its development.

Such a reading must not only deal with the internal contradictions which emerge from this underlying opposition in the object of inquiry, however, but also must contend with the words of Iamblichus himself. He is critical of Plotinus throughout *De Anima*¹⁰ for overemphasizing the intellectual aspect of the composite soul¹¹ and thereby failing to fully accept its truly intermediate character as presented in the *Timaeus*; *De Mysteriis* seems to be a religious critique of Greek philosophers, a reading which serves to affirm the division between Plotinus and Iamblichus as one between religion and reason.

To deal with this problem, I shall argue that Iamblichus' work is written in the spirit of a Platonic dialogue and, as a result, that the argument is present through its form as well as its content. In such a reading, Iamblichus' critique of both philosophy in general and of Plotinus specifically, must be viewed as a self-conscious polemic in which problematic impulses in the tradition are addressed, in part, by poetic means. *De Mysteriis* and, to a lesser degree, *De Anima*, rather than serving as examples of a religious critique from outside of the tradition, are intentional distortions of the positions of Plotinus and Porphyry meant to serve as pedagogical correctives from *within* it. Iamblichus' critique of Plotinus' psychology seeks, ultimately, to refine an underlying inconsistency in the tradition that fails to treat of both aspects of the embodied soul equally and therein falls short of a science of theology. Far from descending into irrationality, Iamblichus is actually seeking to clarify ambiguities in Plotinus' thought,

¹⁰ All translations from this work are my own. However, I have received guidance from the Finamore and Dillon translations.

¹¹ He writes that Plotinus and Amelius, for example, "... on occasion define the individual soul as being no different from the universal, but as being one with it (ένίστε γάρ ουχ ώς άλλην την μεριστήν ψυχίν παρὰ την όλην, μίαν δε αὐτήν πρὸς ἐκείνην εἶναι ἀφοπίζονται)" (*De Anima* [372], 9).

reconcile theoretical divisions in the Platonic tradition and clarify ontological divisions in the soul itself through the formation of an ἐπιστημονική θεολόγια. In this movement, an impulse that seeks to reconcile philosophy and religion in theurgic πράξεις is revealed; reason is contained within ritual and is manifested in particular, theurgic acts.

As a result of this interpretation, Iamblichus can no longer be understood as the expositor of an irrational mysticism whose thought undermines the “Hellenic rationalism”¹² of Plotinus, but rather as a thinker who is working within the received tradition to refine Plotinus’ doctrine and incarnate Plato’s thought in such a way that it is appropriate to the divided life of the embodied soul. As Gregory Shaw writes: “Iamblichus’ theurgical Platonism... should be seen as a development of Plotinianism, as a ‘fleshing out’ of Plotinus’ vision.”¹³ By emphasizing the role of material rituals and the full descent of the soul into generation, Iamblichus’ thought serves to ground the abstractions of Plotinian psychology in a philosophical πράξεις that seeks to reconcile a fundamental opposition present throughout the Hellenic philosophical tradition and make reason manifest in the created world as ritual.¹⁴

¹² Dodds, “The Parmenides of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic ‘One,’” 26.

¹³ Shaw, “Eros and Arithmos,” 123.

¹⁴ Hankey writes that “the primary work of Hellenistic philosophy is the quietude or salvation of the human individual... The Neoplatonists discover that this requires the reconciliation of philosophy and religion” (“Knowing as we are known,” 12).

CHAPTER 2: PLOTINUS' PSYCHOLOGY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Plotinus begins his treatise “On the Descent of the Soul into Bodies”¹⁵, by examining the problematic nature of the soul’s experience of the sensible world. He writes:

Often have I woken up out of the body to myself and have entered into myself [and] I have seen a beauty wonderfully great and felt assurance that then most of all I belonged to the better part... Then after that rest in the divine, I am perplexed by my descent from Intellect to discursive reasoning.¹⁶

At different times, he describes the soul’s experience of embodiment as an evil and its descent from Intellect as the result of a perverse will towards otherness.¹⁷ In other places, however, Plotinus speaks more positively about the soul’s descent, writing that the soul was given by the “goodness of the Craftsman, so that this All might be completed” and so that “all the very same kinds of living things which were in the intelligible world should also exist in the world perceived by the senses.”¹⁸ He also finds a similar tension in the thought of Plato who, at one time, writes that the soul is fettered and buried by the body¹⁹, that the intelligible world is a release and an ascent from the cave²⁰ and speaks with contempt (ἀτιμᾶω) of the whole world of sense (αἰσθητός) while, at another time, outlines a positive view of the sensible world and presents the descent of the soul as good and necessary and the means of bringing about the completion of the whole cosmic

¹⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.8. All translations of the *Enneads* follow the Armstrong translation with my own emendations when necessary.

¹⁶ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.8.1, 1-8: “Πολλάκις ἐγειρόμενος εἰς ἑμαυτὸν ἐκ τοῦ σώματος καὶ γινόμενος τῶν μὲν ἄλλων ἔξω, ἑμαυτοῦ δὲ εἴσω, θαυμαστόν ἤλικον ὄρων κάλλος, καὶ τῆς κρείττονος μοίρας πιστεύσας τότε μάλιστα εἶναι ... μετὰ ταύτην τὴν ἐν τῷ θείῳ στάσιν εἰς λογισμὸν ἐκ νοῦ καταβάς ἀπορῶ.”

¹⁷ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.8.

¹⁸ The full excerpt reads: “καὶ ἐν τούτοις ἅπασιν μεμψάμενος τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἄφιξιν πρὸς σῶμα, ἐν Τιμαίῳ περὶ τοῦδε τοῦ παντός λέγων τὸν τε κόσμον ἐπαινεῖ καὶ θεὸν λέγει εἶναι εὐδαιμόνα τὴν τε ψυχὴν παρὰ ἀγαθοῦ τοῦ δημιουργοῦ πρὸς τὸ ἔννοον τόδε τὸ πᾶν εἶναι δεδόσθαι, ἐπειδὴ ἔννοον μὲν αὐτὸ ἔδει εἶναι, ἄνευ δὲ ψυχῆς οὐχ οἷόν τε ἦν τοῦτο γενέσθαι. ἢ τε οὖν ψυχὴ ἢ τοῦ παντός τούτου χάριν εἰς αὐτὸ παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπέμφθη, ἢ τε ἐκάστου ἡμῶν, πρὸς τὸ τέλειον αὐτὸ εἶναι· ἐπειδὴ ἔδει, ὅσα ἐν νοητῷ κόσμῳ, τὰ αὐτὰ ταῦτα γένη ζώων καὶ ἐν τῷ αἰσθητῷ ὑπάρχειν (Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.8, 1, 41-48).”

¹⁹ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.8.2, 30.

²⁰ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.8.2, 35.

procession.²¹ This inconsistent, even contradictory, presentation of the sensible world and the soul's descent serves to illustrate the philosophical dilemma that Plotinus was forced to address: both notions are simultaneously true and, therefore, the goodness of both the intelligible and sensible and, by extension, the paradoxical unity of opposition that defines the human soul, must be affirmed.

Such a reading of Plotinus contradicts the manner in which he is often characterized by contemporary scholars. While most observe the presence of two conflicting orientations in his thought, many find that the positive affirmation of the sensible in his system eventually gives way to a prioritization of the immaterial²² over and against the material. Statements which assert the good of the sensible cosmos in Plotinus' writings — statements which are less plentiful than those to the contrary — are then understood as either a disingenuous 'nod' to Plato, or as the result of an unresolved philosophical contradiction within the thought of Plotinus himself. This position is supported in various ways, with some scholars understanding it as a result of Plotinus being influenced, even if unconsciously²³, by the dualism of the Platonic Gnostics²⁴, and others attributing it to an evolutionary development in his thought as he matured.²⁵ Intrinsically, however, scholarly treatments that fail to balance this paradox in Plotinus' thought serve to affirm an influential interpretive framework which has its roots in Dodds; namely, that the fundamental opposition between the life of intellect and the embodied life of the soul can only be reconciled through the subsumption of one 'side' of the tension into the other; the tension at the heart of psychic life cannot be thought, even initially, as a paradox.

²¹ Plato, *Timaeus*, 34b8.

²² Cf. Blumenthal, *Plotinus' psychology: his doctrines of the embodied soul*; Clarke, *Iamblichus: De mysteriis. A manifesto of the miraculous*; Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*; Feichtinger, "Mediatorem Ergo Quaerunt;" Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*; Tuominen, *The Ancient Commentators on Plato and Aristotle*.

²³ Shaw writes: "[t]he doctrine of the undescended soul... threatened to desacralise and demonize the cosmos. The consequence, clearly, was not foreseen by Plotinus, who would have opposed it" (*Theurgy and the Soul*, 11).

²⁴ Cf. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 10-12; Smith, *Map is not territory: studies in the history of religions*.

²⁵ For a summary of this scholarly debate, see Corrigan's *Reading Plotinus: A Practical Introduction to Neoplatonism*.

This interpretive framework has many consequences for Plotinus' soteriology, cosmology, psychology and doctrine of evil and also, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, for notions of theurgy in the philosophical systems of later Neoplatonists. Its strict affirmation of the division between material and immaterial also serves as the model for the formation of other oppositions in Plotinus' thought — for example, between reason and irrationality, the mind and the body, being and becoming. If such strict exegetical boundaries are maintained in interpreting his philosophy, then generation and, by extension, the body, are necessarily understood as evils that must be controlled by higher, intellectual principles in the cosmos and the soul. If the intellectual part of the soul has priority in the *way* that such scholars argue, then the salvation of the soul occurs through a turning within to the intellectual 'part' of the soul and a flight from the evil of sensation²⁶; the created order becomes a mere image of higher realities and the salvation of the thinking soul is, ultimately, realized in giving order to the confusion of the sensible cosmos through intellect alone. In such a mode of interpretation, the created and material become purely negative principles which are unable to bring about any positive effect for the soul. Thus, Hans Feichtinger writes: "Plotinus does not deny an influence of the body on the particular soul; what he does reject is that there can be any positive effect (mediated) from the material, sensible world that would help the soul's spiritual ascent to union with the incorporeal realm."²⁷ Such a mode of interpretation undermines the possibility for the soul to receive divine help in and through created nature, and places Plotinus against the increasingly prevalent religious and theurgic thinkers that followed him, thereby reaffirming a popular 20th century division between religious and philosophical thought.

In contrast to the above reading, recent scholarship has undermined such divisions in Plotinus' thought and the Neoplatonic tradition more generally which, in turn, allows for a more nuanced understanding of the relation between the soul's experience of the

²⁶ Plotinus writes, for example, that "in approaching the One, we can only rely on moral and spiritual efforts without help from exterior means" (*Enneads* IV.4.28, 40). See also *Enneads* I.6.1.8, 21-9, 34; VI 9.9. 3, 16-22.

²⁷ Feichtinger, "Mediatorem Ergo Quaerunt," 7.

embodied life and the life of intellect.²⁸ Such an approach seeks to work from within and treat the Neoplatonic tradition as a unified whole, continually placing the words of Plotinus within the context of the broader philosophical history and thereby taking seriously the way in which Neoplatonic thinkers themselves understood the tradition. By working within this interpretive context, it is possible to measure contradictory claims against a broader philosophical movement and thereby avoid collapsing opposing assertions within one side of the tension between the intelligible and sensible. In this way, such a mode of interpretation seeks to balance a bias towards classification through bifurcation — an impulse which, by its very activity, can distort and exaggerate the purely theoretical elements of Plotinian thought — and re-establish in philosophical practice the balance between being and becoming which is evident through the dual perspectives present in Platonic thought and which emerges from the paradox of the embodied soul itself.

Building on this scholarly work, the following chapter will attempt to show that the apparent priority of Intellect in Plotinus' thought is either purposely overstated by Plotinus or misunderstood by subsequent interpreters, and that Plotinus maintains a far more balanced position between the sensible and intelligible, with respect to both the soul and cosmos, than is often held. Furthermore, it will argue that the tendency of Plotinus to emphasize the role of the intellect of the soul in the purification and salvation of the composite is partially due to the way in which he must oppose influential Gnostic thinkers who were active during the time he taught, and partially the result of inadequately developed elements of his own thought, elements which are taken up later in the more systematic approach of Iamblichus. Thus, an examination of the soul in Plotinus' thought and its relation to evil, placed within the intellectual and historical context in which Plotinus was writing, reveals a more positive view of sensible nature and a more balanced and, as we shall see in later chapters, Iamblichean account of the descended soul than is often attributed to him.

²⁸ See, in particular, Addey, *Divination and Theurgy in Neoplatonism*; Tanaseanu-Döbler, *Theurgy in Late Antiquity*.

Gnostic doctrine was very influential in the Platonic school during Plotinus' life²⁹ and, while close to certain prominent Gnostics, Plotinus was opposed to many of their doctrines, even writing a treatise against them.³⁰ Of particular concern to Plotinus was the Gnostic understanding of evil³¹ as a sort of deficiency.³² Plotinus writes that they “consider evil as nothing other than a falling short in wisdom, and a lesser good, continually diminishing.”³³ Such a position is problematic because it results in a strict division between divine Intellect and all of its mediate productions which, in turn, results in ontologically inferior principles being identified with evil, as well as ontologically superior principles, ultimately, being made responsible for the emergence of evil. The strictness of this division forced the Gnostics to posit the existence of an evil Demiurge³⁴ to allow for the possibility of any relation between the sensible and intelligible realities.³⁵ Plutarch, for example, gave an account of an evil soul that preceded the World Soul³⁶, while Numenius, who attended the lectures of Plotinus, understood the *Timaeus* as representing a second, descended Demiurge whose longing for a return from its fallen

²⁹ Although the term 'Gnostic' is used broadly and has had many iterations, a group known as the Sethian Gnostics were contemporaries of Plotinus and showed a familiarity with Neoplatonic positions and with the Platonic corpus. Numenius is another well-known thinker, specifically mentioned by Iamblichus, who supported certain Gnostic interpretations. For the Gnostic philosophical context surrounding Plotinus particularly, see Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, 98-99. For a general, historical account of Gnosticism, see Turner and Majercik, *Gnosticism and Later Platonism*, and Smith, *Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichus*. Concerning Sethian Gnosticism in particular, see Turner, “The Setting of the Platonizing Sethian Treatises in Middle Platonism.”

³⁰ Plotinus, *Enneads* II.9.

³¹ Narbonne, “A Doctrinal Evolution,” 83: “Platonic exegesis has always been tugged around between two dominating orientations. Some interpreters want defect and evil to have a sensible origin in the receptacle or in corporeal reality (this is the teaching of *Phaedo* 65a ff, *Theaetetus* 176a, *Timaeus* 52d4-53b5, *Statesman* 273b4-c2 and *Republic* X, 611d7-612a5); the second view traces evil back to the presence of an evil world-soul (*Laws* 896e5-6) and conceives the descent of souls into the sensible as the result of a fault associated with them (*Phaedrus* 246c; 248c).”

³² Much of the debate centered around how to interpret a key passage of the *Timaeus* (*Timaeus* 39e7-9: “ἥπερ οὖν νοῦς ἐνούσας ἰδέας τῷ ὃ ἔστιν ζῶον, οἷαί τε ἔνεισι καὶ ὄσαι, καθορᾷ, τοιαύτας καὶ τοσαύτας διανοήθη δεῖν καὶ τόδε σχεῖν”), which the Gnostics understood as representing a division between Intellect and its production. According to Plotinus, the Gnostics came to such an interpretation by either misunderstanding (“οὐ συνέντες,” *Enneads* II.9.6, 19) or willfully falsifying (“καταψεύδομαι,” *Enneads* II.9.6, 25) Platonic doctrine.

³³ Plotinus, *Enneads* II.9.13, 27-29: “τό τε κακὸν μὴ νομίζεῖν ἄλλο τι ἢ τὸ ἐνδεέστερον εἰς φρόνησιν καὶ ἔλλατον ἀγαθὸν καὶ ἀεὶ πρὸς τὸ μικρότερον.”

³⁴ See O'Meara, “Gnosticism and the Making of the World in Plotinus,” *Enneads* II.9.6.

³⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads* II.9.10, 31-33. See also Corrigan, *Plotinus' Theory*, 99; Borodai, “Plotinus's Critique of Gnosticism.”

³⁶ Plutarch, *On the Generation of the Soul*, 1014b-c.

state results in evil.³⁷ Plotinus therefore writes that the Gnostics “...blame the soul for its association with the body and censure the director of this universe and identify its maker (δημιουργὸν) with the soul, and attribute to this universal soul the same affectations [as particular souls].”³⁸

By failing to account for ontological differences within Soul itself, or the ‘degrees’ of its descent from Intellect, the Gnostics therefore take the discursivity proper to the individual soul to be true of higher beings and hold an impious and unlawful (ἄθεμις)³⁹ understanding of both the nature of the gods and the soul. On the one hand, they blend distinct hypostases of Soul by failing to distinguish universal soul from particular souls, while on the other hand, they divide the soul from its divine source by positing an account in which evil is anything which falls short of wisdom. This results in a two-fold error that corrupts their understanding of both the essences in themselves, as well as the interrelation between different essences in the broader procession.

Plotinus opposes the Gnostics by first affirming the fundamental goodness of the sensible world: “despising the universe and the gods in it and other noble things is certainly not becoming good... for the beauties here exist because of the first beauties. If, then, these here do not exist, neither do those; so these are beautiful in their order after those.”⁴⁰ Thus, for Plotinus, creation is a visible model of the intelligible reality.⁴¹ This connection is also an affirmation of the relation between the Producer and that which it

³⁷ Numenius seems to have based such a reading on Plato’s *Laws* (896e5-6). On Numenius’ place in this context, see Dillon, “Plotinus at Work on Platonism,” especially 195.

³⁸ *Enneads* II.9.6, 57-65: “ἐν γε οἷς ἐναντιοῦσθαι θέλουσι γενέσεις καὶ φθορὰς εἰσάγοντες παντελεῖς καὶ μεμφόμενοι τῷδε τῷ παντί καὶ τὴν πρὸς τὸ σῶμα κοινωνίαν τῆ ψυχῆ αἰτιώμενοι καὶ τὸν διοικοῦντα τόδε τὸ πᾶν ψέγοντες καὶ εἰς ταῦτὸν ἄγοντες τὸν δημιουργὸν τῆ ψυχῆ καὶ τὰ αὐτὰ πάθη διδόντες, ἅπερ καὶ τοῖς ἐν μέρει.”

³⁹ Plotinus, *Enneads* II.9.2, 10. The religious tone of this charge is clear, with Plotinus writing later that this impiety also led the Gnostic thinkers to hubristically set themselves up next to God. Plotinus writes: “Ἐπειτα σεμνὸν δεῖ εἰς μέτρον μετὰ οὐκ ἀγροικίας, ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον ἰόντα ἐφ’ ὅσον ἡ φύσις δύναται ἡμῶν, ἀνίεναί, τοῖς δ’ ἄλλοις νομίζειν εἶναι χῶραν παρὰ τῷ θεῷ καὶ μὴ αὐτὸν μόνον μετ’ ἐκείνον τάξαντα ὡς περ ὀνειράσι πετέσθαι ἀποστεροῦντα ἑαυτὸν καὶ ὅσον ἐστὶ δυνατὸν ψυχῆ ἀνθρώπου θεῷ γενέσθαι· δύναται δὲ εἰς ὅσον νοῦς ἄγει” (*Enneads* II.9.9, 48). See also Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 63; Feichtinger, “Mediatorem Ergo Quaerunt,” 6.

⁴⁰ Plotinus, *Enneads* II.9.17, 25-35: “καὶ γὰρ διὰ τὰ πρῶτα ταῦτα. Εἰ οὖν μὴ ταῦτα, οὐδὲ ἐκεῖνα· μετ’ ἐκεῖνα τοῖσιν ταῦτα καλὰ. Ἄλλ’ ὅταν λέγωσι καταφρονεῖν τοῦ τῆδε κάλλους, καλῶς ἂν ποιοῖεν τοῦ ἐν παισὶ καὶ γυναιξὶ καταφρονούντες, ὡς μὴ εἰς ἀκολασίαν ἤττᾰσθαι.”

⁴¹ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.8.

produces. Therefore, Plotinus writes elsewhere that “Making, for it [Nature], means being what it is, and its making power is coextensive with what it is.”⁴²

As a result of this fundamental relation, Plotinus opposes the Gnostic notion of evil as deficiency, positing instead the notion that evil is “absolute deficiency.”⁴³ While the Gnostic doctrine of evil effectively blends all ontological levels by making them share equally in evil insofar as they are deficient at all, Plotinus’ distinction allows for the possibility of degrees of descent from the highest good, meaning that there are various levels of ontological separation from the highest to the lowest. This also means that each distinct essence, in addition to its place in the whole procession of essences, has a perfection which is determined in its own self-relation. Plotinus therefore continues to state that a thing “which is only slightly deficient in good is not evil, for it can still be perfect on the level of its own nature.”⁴⁴ Thus, for Plotinus there is a relation between the Maker and the made that is not measured simply by the degree to which it is separated from its source, but also judged according to the thing itself.

However, it is in the very blending of essences and prioritization of the intelligible over the sensible that scholars see commonalities between Plotinus and the Gnostics. Shaw, for example, while recognizing Plotinus’ explicit opposition to the Gnostic position and desire to affirm the divinity of Nature, nonetheless argues that Gnostic thought was influential in the formation of Plotinus’ doctrine of the undescended soul and that his identification of matter with evil leads to a desacralised⁴⁵ cosmos similar to the Gnostic account. In short, such a reading posits that, while Plotinus explicitly argued against the Gnostics, he nonetheless succumbed to key points of their doctrine.

In order to examine this understanding of Plotinus, we are presented with the difficulty that Plotinus himself faced; namely, how to both preserve the gods, and by extension the enmattered soul, from blame for the emergence of evil, while maintaining the divinity of the cosmos and its role as a sensible image of intelligible realities. The

⁴² Plotinus, *Enneads* III.8.3, 13-18: “τὸ οὖν εἶναι αὐτῆ ὅ ἐστι τοῦτο ἐστὶ τὸ ποιεῖν αὐτῆ καὶ ὅσον ἐστὶ τοῦτο ἐστὶ τὸ ποιοῦν.”

⁴³ Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.8, 5, 5-6.

⁴⁴ Plotinus *Enneads*, I.8, 5, 6-8.

⁴⁵ Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 11.

problems are, first, if the descent of the soul into generation is a good and yet results in the experience of evil, where is blame for this suffering to be placed? Secondly, how is pure Intellect (νοῦς καθαρός) present in and to generated things in such a way that it is not bound by matter? If the experience of matter results in evil, then the purity of Intellect would not remain if it came into contact with it while, on the other hand, if Intellect is not present in the sensible cosmos, then by what means is the soul able to think at all? Furthermore, this problem cannot be accounted for by simply adding an intermediary between the soul and Intellect (a position held by the Gnostics), since the soul would receive its principle of thinking from another, intermediary principle (λόγος)⁴⁶ and thereby be deprived of νοῦς.⁴⁷ In other words, the soul would only have an “image of thinking but not thinking [itself] (εἰδωλον λόγου, ἀλλ’ οὐ λόγον).” The soul must somehow have access to νοῦς in a way that neither binds nor corrupts νοῦς with the stain of generation. In order to clarify Plotinus’ thought in this regard, it is necessary to examine two central aspects of his teaching: the ontological divisions of Soul and the nature of its relation to evil.

2.3 ONTOLOGICAL DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN SOULS

Plotinus defines the ontological ‘levels’ of the hypostasis of Soul according to the inherent activities of each and their relation to Intellect. The All-Soul (παντὸς ψυχῆ), understood as hypostasis, is the mediator between the Intellectual and cosmic ranks of Being. It is the principle of animation in the cosmos which gives birth to the lower forms of soul. Within All-Soul are secondary divisions that are distinguished according to the degree to which they descend from Intellect: World Souls govern the planets, and particular souls enter into and govern sub-lunary bodies. For Plotinus, not every kind of provident (πρόνους) care for an inferior (χείρων) being denies the being exercising it of its ability to remain (μένειν) transcendent.⁴⁸ Therefore, All-Soul is able to administer the cosmos from ‘outside’ of the sensible world and not experience it as a hindrance. It is in

⁴⁶ Plotinus, *Enneads* II.9.1, 64.

⁴⁷ Plotinus, *Enneads* II.9.1, 60.

⁴⁸ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.8.2, 26.

this way able to maintain an immediate vision of pure Intellect (νόος καθαρός). Although both World-Souls and particular souls retain some possession of Intellect after their descent, they possess it in different ways and to greater and lesser degrees according to their cosmic forms. For example, although World Souls descend into bodies (the heavenly spheres), they maintain a nearer relation to Intellect (through the All-Soul) and therefore form their bodies from the outside (ἔξωθεν).⁴⁹ Their bodily perfection is demonstrated by their spherical form, a visible image of their higher unity. Since a World Soul contains its body, instead of being contained by it, it is free with respect to its generated form.⁵⁰

Thus, the degree to which a soul descends also determines its relation to its body and to sensible matter more generally. Its nearness to the hypostases of Intellect also determines the manifestation of its powers. All-Soul is closest to Intellect and, therefore, assumes its body in a way that does not impede its proper activities. Plotinus writes:

But it is better to say [that the soul of the All has made the world] because it was more closely dependent on the beings above it: the beings which incline that way have greater power. For they keep themselves in a place of safety, and so make with the greatest ease; for it is a mark of greater power not to be affected in what it makes; and power comes from abiding above.⁵¹

All Soul's more immediate relation to Intellect, unimpeded by its body, results in division through overabundance in which it is not separated from its own powers, a fact manifest in the ease with which it creates. It remains (μένειν) above, placid and unmoving, and is unaffected by its material form since it gathers its body around it. As its powers are immediately present to it and free from their cosmic body by virtue of its unimpeded relation to Intellect, it therefore experiences a stable relation to its cosmic form.

⁴⁹ Plotinus, *Enneads* V.1.10, 23: The Demiurge wrapped (περιβάλλω) the soul around the body from the outside (“διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἐτι ἔξωθεν φησιν ἐπὶ τοῦ παντός τὴν ψυχὴν περιέβαλεν ἐνδεικνύμενος τῆς ψυχῆς τὸ ἐν τῷ νοητῷ μένον”).

⁵⁰ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.3.6, 1-15.

⁵¹ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.3.6, 20-29: βέλτιον δὲ λέγειν τῷ ἐξηρητῆσθαι μᾶλλον τῶν ἄνω· τῶν γὰρ ἐκεῖ νενευκότων ἢ δύναμις μείζων. ζῶζουσαι γὰρ αὐτάς ἐπ’ ἀσφαλοῦς ἐκ τοῦ ῥάστου ποιοῦσι· δυνάμεως γὰρ μείζονος μὴ πάσχειν ἐν οἷς ποιεῖ· ἢ δὲ δύναμις ἐκ τοῦ ἄνω μένειν. Μένουσα οὖν ἐν αὐτῇ ποιεῖ προσιόντων, αἱ δὲ αὐταὶ προσῆλθον. ἀπέστησαν οὖν εἰς βάθος· ἢ πολλὰ αὐτῶν καθελκυσθὲν συνεφειλκύσατο καὶ αὐτάς ταῖς γνώμαις εἰς τὸ κάτω εἶναι.

The particular soul, by contrast, is characterized by a divided activity as it deserts the higher life, is drawn into its body, and finally overcome by it; its powers are too deeply descended into generation. Plotinus writes:

The Soul of the All ... abiding in itself makes, and the things which it makes come to it, but particular souls themselves go to the things. So they have departed to the depths; or rather, a great part of them has been dragged down and has dragged them with it by their disposition to the lower existence.⁵²

Individual souls enter into pre-formed bodies and descend into generation more fully. This alienation from the higher realities and entry into bodies also results in a corresponding weakening of the particular soul's powers. Thus, the body of the lower soul hinders (ἐμποδέω) the soul's thoughts (νοῦς) and fills it with pleasure (ἡδονή), desire (ἐπίθυμος) and grief (λύπη).⁵³ As a result, the particular soul is typified by a frenetic activity that results in an inconsistent relationship to its original, forming principle.

Furthermore, the reason that there is such a distinction between the activities of the various souls ultimately stems from the relation each has to the intellectual hypostasis and the direction that each soul 'looks' (εἶδεν). Plotinus writes: "Again, the reason may be that the one [the creative All-Soul] looks (εἶδον) towards the universal Intellectual-Principle, while the others are more occupied with that which is within themselves, that which is already of the sphere of part."⁵⁴ Thus, the difference between the ranks of soul has to do with the object of its attention — whether it is turned in on itself and the images of Intellect present within it, or looking to the model of universal Intellect itself. While higher souls maintain a direct relationship with what is above, the particular soul's

⁵² The full excerpt reads: "βέλτιον δὲ λέγειν τῷ ἐξηρητῆσθαι μᾶλλον τῶν ἄνω· τῶν γὰρ ἐκεῖ νενευκότων ἡ δύναμις μείζων. ζήζουσαι γὰρ αὐτὰς ἐπ' ἀσφαλοῦς ἐκ τοῦ ῥάστου ποιούσι· δυνάμεως γὰρ μείζονος μὴ πάσχειν ἐν οἷς ποιεῖ· ἡ δὲ δύναμις ἐκ τοῦ ἄνω μένειν. μένουσα οὖν ἐν αὐτῇ ποιεῖ προσιόντων, αἱ δὲ αὐταὶ προσῆλθον. Ἀπέστησαν οὖν εἰς βάθος· ἢ πολὺ αὐτῶν καθελκυσθέν συνεφειλκύσατο καὶ αὐτὰς ταῖς γνώμας εἰς τὸ κάτω εἶναι. τὸ γὰρ δευτέρας καὶ τρίτας τῷ ἐγγύθεν καὶ τῷ πορρώτερον ὑπονοητέον εἰρηῆσθαι, ὡσπερ καὶ παρ' ἡμῖν οὐχ ὁμοίως πάσαις ψυχαῖς ὑπάρχει τὸ πρὸς τὰ ἐκεῖ, ἀλλ' οἱ μὲν ἐνοῖντο ἄν, οἱ δὲ βάλλοιεν ἄν ἐγγὺς ἐφιεμένοι, οἷς δὲ ἦττον ἄν ἔχοι τοῦτο, καθὸ ταῖς δυνάμεσιν οὐ ταῖς αὐταῖς ἐνεργοῦσιν, ἀλλ' οἱ μὲν τῇ πρώτῃ, οἱ δὲ τῇ μετ' ἐκείνην, οἱ δὲ τῇ τρίτῃ, ἀπάντων τὰς πάσας ἐχόντων (Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.3.6, 20-30)."

⁵³ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.8.2, 43-46.

⁵⁴ Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV.3.6, 7-8: "ἔστι δὲ καὶ τὴν μὲν πρὸς τὸν ὅλον νοῦν ἰδεῖν, τὰς δὲ μᾶλλον πρὸς τοὺς αὐτῶν τοὺς ἐν μέρει."

impulse towards otherness results in a sort of narcissism that emerges through its excessive concern for its body.

2.4 PRIMARY EVIL

But what is the first cause of this turning away of the soul from its originating principle? It would seem, given the lower soul's more radical descent and its turning within from the proper object of its attention — a turning that is identified with suffering — that the emergence of evil in the world is due to its perverse will. Plotinus writes, for example, that “the beginning of evil for them [i.e. souls] was audacity and coming to birth and the first otherness and the wishing to belong to themselves”⁵⁵ However, although he admits that there is some part of the soul's will involved in its embodiment⁵⁶, Plotinus is not willing to account for the emergence of evil as a result this boldness (τόλμα).⁵⁷ He instead refers to this inconsistency and the division of the soul's powers as a sort of weakness (ἀσθενής)⁵⁸ that divides the soul's intellectual attention and makes the soul liable to corruption. The blame for the fall of the soul lies instead with matter. Plotinus writes:

⁵⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads* V.1.1, 3-5: “ἀρχὴ μὲν οὖν αὐταῖς τοῦ κακοῦ ἡ τόλμα καὶ ἡ γένεσις καὶ ἡ πρώτη ἐτερότης καὶ τὸ βουληθῆναι δὲ ἑαυτῶν εἶναι.”

⁵⁶ Plotinus, *Enneads* I.8.5, 26-30: “Evils are prior to us, and those that take hold on men do so with their good will (οὐ θετέον ἡμᾶς ἀρχὴν κακῶν εἶναι κακοῦ παρ’ αὐτῶν ὄντας, ἀλλὰ πρὸ ἡμῶν ταῦτα).” But Plotinus also speaks of the willingness and unwillingness of the descent with respect to soul (*Enneads*, IV.8.5, 9).

⁵⁷ There is a great deal of scholarship relating to the question of first otherness in Plotinus concerning, in particular, where responsibility lies for the impulse to otherness. In “Is Tolma the Cause of First Otherness for Plotinus”, Deepa Majumdar presents the two sides of the debate and demonstrates that the interpretation rests on whether emphasis is placed on the effluence of the One or the *tolma* of soul. Thus, the question seems again to emerge from the 'perspective' from which one approaches it. In particular, the distinction between first otherness and the perverse desire for otherness in the individual soul is an important one. For example, Plotinus writes: “for the descent of the human soul has not been due to the same causes [as that of All-soul]” (*Enneads* IV.8.3). Thus, there is a primary boldness and a secondary otherness that have different characteristics. See also Torchia and Smith, “Plotinus, Tolma, and the Descent of Being: An Exposition and Analysis;” and Rist, “Plotinus on Matter and Evil.”

⁵⁸ Plotinus, *Enneads* I.8.14. Concerning this notion of ‘weakness,’ see Narbonne, “A Doctrinal Evolution,” 84.

So matter spreads itself out under soul and is illumined, and cannot grasp the source from which its light comes: that source cannot endure matter though it is there, because its evil makes it unable to see. Matter darkens the illumination, the light from that source, by mixture with itself, and weakens it by itself offering it the opportunity of generation and the reason for coming to matter; for it would not have come to what is not present. This is the fall of soul, to come in this way to matter and to become weak, because its powers do not come into action ... So matter is the cause of the soul's weakness and the cause of evil: it is then itself evil before soul and is primary evil.⁵⁹

The descent of the soul is actually the result of an absence in matter — its non-being (μη ὄν) — which draws the soul's attention towards it. This 'non-being' is not a self-complete (παντελής) non-being, but an image (εἰκόν) of non-being that is something still more non-existent (μᾶλλον μη ὄν).⁶⁰ Thus, matter hinders the soul's powers (δυνάμεις) from becoming enacted (ἐνέργεια) by drawing them into an image of non-existence — an indeterminate nothingness.

Furthermore, Plotinus' assertion that matter is an evil that is *prior* (πρότερος) to the soul is also key to his doctrine. Normally, priority in appearance results in a corresponding ontological priority insofar as there is an unfolding of powers from greater to lesser.⁶¹ Sensible matter is unique in this regard; it is ontologically lower than soul and yet prior in existence, representing an “inversion between the order of appearance and the order of being”⁶² in Plotinus' thought. This means that, for Plotinus, matter emerges ‘outside’ of the chain of causality as a sort of “by-product” of the emanative process.⁶³

⁵⁹ Plotinus, *Enneads* I.8.14, 35-45: “ἀσθενὲς πεποίηκε τὴν γένεσιν αὐτὴ παρασχοῦσα καὶ τὴν αἰτίαν τοῦ εἰς αὐτὴν ἐλθεῖν· οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἦλθε τῷ μὴ παρόντι. καὶ τοῦτό ἐστι πτῶμα τῆς ψυχῆς τὸ οὕτως ἐλθεῖν εἰς ὕλην καὶ ἀσθενεῖν, ὅτι πᾶσαι αἱ δυνάμεις οὐ πάρεσιν εἰς ἐνέργειαν κωλυούσης ὕλης παρεῖναι τῷ τὸν τόπον ὄν κατέχει αὐτὴ καταλαβεῖν καὶ οἷον συσπειραθῆναι ποιῆσαι ἐκείνην, ὃ δ' ἔλαβεν οἷον κλέψασα ποιῆσαι κακὸν εἶναι, ἕως ἂν δυνηθῆ ἀναδραμεῖν. ὕλη τοίνυν καὶ ἀσθενείας ψυχῆς αἰτία καὶ κακίας αἰτία. πρότερον ἄρα κακὴ αὐτὴ καὶ πρῶτον κακόν.”

⁶⁰ Plotinus, *Enneads* I.8.3, 8-11.

⁶¹ For an examination of this distinction, see Gerson, “Plotinus's metaphysics: emanation or creation?”

⁶² Narbonne, “A Doctrinal Evolution,” 87.

⁶³ Narbonne argues that the notion of matter existing prior to the embodiment of the soul is essential to a proper understanding of Plotinus' account. Evil, rather than the result of the descent, emerges from the “halt in progression” of the Intellect in the emanative process, a sort of by-product of the ceasing of its outflowing activity. Furthermore, Narbonne argues that this inversion leads Plotinus to assert a different sort of emanative process in which form and matter are the result of two different processes and, so, “perhaps matter and form do not have the same origin.” If this is so, then the Intellect, far from causing matter, actually provides limit to matter's evil through the separate emanation of form. In this way, according to Narbonne, Plotinus releases both the soul and the Demiurge from responsibility for the existence of matter and, by extension, the emergence of evil (“A Doctrinal Evolution,” 88).

This priority in appearance and birth from outside of the ontological chain serves to free the soul from responsibility for the emergence of primary evil (against the Gnostics), and thereby preserves the purity of the gods.

Thus, matter is the primary cause of the soul's descent and therefore responsible for its experience of evil. The relation of the soul to matter, then, given the culpability of matter in its descent, is described by Plotinus as an illumination (ἐλλάμψεσθαι). He writes, "If the inclination is an illumination to what is below it is not a sin; what is illuminated is responsible, for if it did not exist the soul would have nowhere to illuminate. The soul is said to go down or decline in the sense that the thing which receives the light from it lives with it."⁶⁴ Therefore, primary evil does not emerge from a perverse desire of the soul, but rather from a negative element in matter – a non-being (μὴ ὄντῳ)⁶⁵ which demands to be filled by what is higher. If matter did not need to be illuminated, there would be no descent.⁶⁶

2.5 THE SOUL'S EXPERIENCE OF EVIL

Although Plotinus relieves the soul and, by extension, the higher classes, from responsibility for the emergence of primary evil, preserving the divinity of the created

⁶⁴ Plotinus, *Enneads* I.1.12, 25-29: "ἀλλ' εἰ ἡ νεῦσις ἔλλαμψις πρὸς τὸ κάτω, οὐχ ἁμαρτία, ὥσπερ οὐδ' ἡ σκιά, ἀλλ' αἴτιον τὸ ἐλλάμπόμενον· εἰ γὰρ μὴ εἶη, οὐκ ἔχει ὅπῃ ἐλλάμψει. καταβαίνειν οὖν καὶ νεύειν λέγεται τῷ συνεζήκῃν αὐτῇ τὸ ἐλλάμφθῆν παρ' αὐτῆς." See also, Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 64.

⁶⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads* I.8.3.7.

⁶⁶ For Wildberg, this division is evinced through imagery of the Dionysian *σπαραγμός* present in the *Enneads* ("Dionysus in the Mirror of Philosophy"). In Plotinus, as well as the broader tradition, the *σπαραγμός* came to be understood as representative of the two-sided nature of the human soul; man's Titanic heritage is blended, through the *σπαραγμός*, with the divine nature of Dionysus. According to Wildberg, Plotinus was particularly interested in the myth because it served as a means of representing soul's troubling proximity to evil. In his interpretation of the myth, Plotinus shifts its emphasis from the crime of the Titans to the mirror that distracts the infant Dionysus. Plotinus writes: "The heavenly bodies are gods because they do not depart ever from those intelligible gods... They look towards intellect since their soul never looks elsewhere than there. But the souls of men see their images as if in the mirror of Dionysus and come to be on that level with a leap from above, but these too are not cut off from their own principle, and from intellect" (*Enneads* IV.3.27, 11.24-12.3). Thus, Wildberg writes, "Plotinus' suggestion is that our not yet embodied souls see themselves in matter as if in a mirror. Seduced by the delightful possibilities of the phenomenal world and the part they might play in it, the souls "jump down" without deliberation. Gazing into the mirror of matter, spontaneous and innocent desire makes our souls embark on the migration to this world; as soon as our disembodied selves behold their image, they are already 'here' while still 'there'" ("Dionysus in the Mirror of Philosophy," 229).

cosmos as a result, it is still necessary for him to account for the soul's experience of evil. In other words, even if the soul is not the cause of its suffering, how can it be that a divine creation that has some retention of its higher life still experiences evil? This problem involves the way in which the descended soul is able to maintain a relation to Intellect in generation. As already outlined in his division of the hypostasis of Soul, it is possible for higher forms of soul to come into contact with matter without being overcome by it. While the descended soul is, in one sense, cut off from Intellect (νόος καθαρός) and manifests powers that demonstrate this loss of unity, there is also a perpetually active, noetic element in the particular soul which remains above generation: "the secession is not of the soul entire; something of it holds its ground, that in it which recoils from separate existence."⁶⁷ Plotinus writes:

Our soul then also is a divine thing and of a nature different [from the things of sense], like the All-soul's nature; and our soul is complete when it has intellect; and intellect is of two kinds, the one which reasons and the one which makes it possible to reason. Now this reasoning part of the soul, which needs no bodily instrument for reasoning, but preserves its activity in purity in order that it may be able to engage in pure reasoning, one could without mistake place, as separate and unmixed with body, in the primary intelligible realm ... For this is how it is by itself and outside and immaterial, when it is alone and retains nothing from the nature of the body. This is the reason why Plato says of the universe also that the craftsman wrapped the soul round it 'from outside', indicating the part of the soul which remains in the intelligible.⁶⁸

The descended soul, therefore, is an intermediate being, at once above and below, attached to the highest principle and yet reaching down into generation.⁶⁹ Although not enjoying the unhindered relation that the All-Soul possesses, the descended soul maintains a vision (ὄρασθαι)⁷⁰ of its original unity even after its descent. In the same way,

⁶⁷ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.1.1, 10: "οὐ γὰρ ὅλη ἀπέστη, ἀλλ' ἔστι τι αὐτῆς οὐκ ἐληλυθός, ὃ οὐ πέφυκε μερίζεσθαι."

⁶⁸ Plotinus, *Enneads* V.1.10, 11-24: "ἔστι τοίνυν καὶ ἡ ἡμετέρα ψυχὴ θεῖον τι καὶ φύσεως ἄλλης, ὁποῖα πᾶσα ἡ ψυχῆς φύσις· τελεία δὲ ἡ νοῦν ἔχουσα· νοῦς δὲ ὁ μὲν λογίζομενος, ὁ δὲ λογίζεσθαι παρέχων. τὸ δὲ λογίζομενον τοῦτο τῆς ψυχῆς οὐδενὸς πρὸς τὸ λογίζεσθαι δεόμενον σωματικοῦ ὄργανου, τὴν δὲ ἐνέργειαν ἑαυτοῦ ἐν καθαρῷ ἔχον, ἵνα καὶ λογίζεσθαι καθαρῶς οἶόν τε ἦ, χωριστὸν καὶ οὐ κεκραμένον σώματι ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ νοητῷ τις τιθέμενος οὐκ ἂν σφάλλοιο. οὐ γὰρ τόπον ζητητέον οὗ ἰδρύσομεν, ἀλλ' ἔξω τόπου παντὸς ποιητέον. οὕτω γὰρ τὸ καθ' αὐτὸ καὶ τὸ ἔξω καὶ τὸ ἄυλον, ὅταν μόνον ἢ οὐδὲν ἔχον παρὰ τῆς σώματος φύσεως. διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἔτι <ἔξωθεν> φησιν ἐπὶ τοῦ παντὸς τὴν ψυχὴν περιέβαλεν ἐνδεικνύμενος τῆς ψυχῆς τὸ ἐν τῷ νοητῷ μένον."

⁶⁹ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.1.1, 5.

⁷⁰ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.1.1, 15.

Intellect is also two-sided, both one and many⁷¹, transcendent insofar as universal Intellect (πᾶν νοῦς) exists in the realm of thought as a universal whole (πᾶν ὅλος)⁷², and immanent insofar as the intellectual powers (νοερός δύναμις) are contained in individual intellects (νόων τῶν καθέκαστα).⁷³ Plotinus writes: “The bodies are separate, and the ideal form which enters them is correspondingly sundered while, still, it is present as one whole in each of its severed parts, since amid that multiplicity in which complete individuality has entailed complete partition, there is a permanent identity.”⁷⁴ Thus, there is a ‘meeting’ in the embodied soul in which the intellectual capacity of the soul is actualized by the divided presence of Intellect in the created order.

For Plotinus then, it is in the activity of thinking itself that there is an identity of the lower intellect with pure Intellect, the former which reasons (λογίζεσθαι) and the latter which makes it possible to reason.⁷⁵ Though the intellectual ‘part’ is divisible in thought by being present in many souls, it is also present in these parts as a whole — present insofar as Intellect is a unity, absent insofar as the lower intellect is an identity rather than a possession. Plotinus writes:

But we shall not say that it [pure Intellect] belongs to soul, but we shall say that it is our intellect (ἡμέτερος νοῦς), being different from the reasoning part (συνάριθμος) and having gone up high, but all the same ours... it is ours and not ours; for this reason we use it and do not use it — but we always use discursive reason (διάνοια) — and it is ours when we use it, but not ours when we do not use it. But what is this ‘using’? Is it when we become and speak like it? No, in accord with it.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.9.3,10.

⁷² Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.8.3, 9.

⁷³ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.8.3, 10.

⁷⁴ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.2.1: “ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ τῷ νοητῷ ἡ ἀληθινή οὐσία· νοῦς τὸ ἄριστον αὐτοῦ· ψυχῆ δὲ κάκει· ἐκεῖθεν γὰρ καὶ ἐνταῦθα. κάκεινος ὁ κόσμος ψυχᾶς ἄνευ σωμάτων ἔχει, οὗτος δὲ τὰς ἐν σώμασι γινομένας καὶ μερισθείσας τοῖς σώμασιν. ἔκει δὲ ὁμοῦ μὲν νοῦς πᾶς καὶ οὐ διακεκριμένον οὐδὲ μεμερισμένον, ὁμοῦ δὲ πᾶσαι ψυχῆ ἐν αἰῶνι τῷ κόσμῳ, οὐκ ἐν διαστάσει τοπικῇ. νοῦς μὲν οὖν αἰεὶ ἀδιάκριτος καὶ οὐ μεριστός, ψυχὴ δὲ ἐκεῖ ἀδιάκριτος καὶ ἀμεριστός· ἔχει δὲ φύσιν μερίζεσθαι. καὶ γὰρ ὁ μερισμὸς ἀπὸ τῆς τῶ ἀποστῆναι καὶ ἐν σώματι γενέσθαι. μεριστῆ οὖν εἰκότως περὶ τὰ σώματα λέγεται εἶναι, ὅτι οὕτως ἀφίσταται καὶ μεμερίσται. πῶς οὖν καὶ <ἀμέριστος>.” See Dillon, “The Concept of Two Intellects: A Footnote to the History of Platonism.” Emillion, in *Plotinus on Intellect*, argues that this relates to two different activities in Plotinus, one “internal” and one “external.”

⁷⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads* V.1.10, 14-15.

⁷⁶ Plotinus, *Enneads* V.3.3, 23: “ἀλλ’ οὐ ψυχῆς μὲν φήσομεν, ἡμέτερον δὲ νοῦν φήσομεν, ἄλλον μὲν ὄντα τοῦ διανοουμένου καὶ ἐπάνω βεβηκότα, ὅμως δὲ ἡμέτερον, καὶ εἰ μὴ συναριθμοῦμεν τοῖς μέρεσι τῆς ψυχῆς. ἡ ἡμέτερον καὶ οὐκ ἡμέτερον· διὸ καὶ προσχρώμεθα αὐτῷ καὶ οὐ προσχρώμεθα - διανοία δὲ αἰεὶ - καὶ

The simultaneous immanence and transcendence of Intellect allows it to be both free from the corruption of matter and present to the encosmic soul, providing a link between the descended soul and its higher life.

This understanding has several implications in respect to evil, the soul and its salvation. First, since the soul's descent from Intellect is only partial, so too is its experience of evil. Its suffering is the suffering of its image (εικόν), meaning its descended life or its fallen activities in generation. Evil is present for the individual soul⁷⁷ insofar as the soul still identifies itself with the activities it projects into generation. In the case of soul, if its activities are in accord with Intellect, it comes to be intellectual. In this way, the tension between the two parts of the soul — our experience of suffering and its incorporeal attributes — is a problem of consciousness. The soul can suffer, even while having a capacity for this noetic activity, because intellect is not actually present as a fixed 'part' of the soul in generation. The soul is not *conscious* of its higher life — our gaze does not remain fixed on the One,⁷⁸ we are "... continuously intuitive but we are not unbrokenly aware."⁷⁹ Thus, its intellect is always active and always connected to pure Intellect, but we are not always conscious of it due to the projection of its lower powers into generation and the soul's concern for the body. It is therefore active with respect to its relation to Intellect, but not fully actual with relation to the whole, composite soul. In this way, Intellect is not bound in generation, and the soul, while always having intellect, is not perpetually in accord with it.

Thus, the soul's descended life is mixed, resulting in the retention of its higher life, but an inconsistent knowledge of its presence. It lives an "amphibious (ἀμφίβιος)"⁸⁰ existence in generation — a dual constitution that results also in a corresponding division of its activities. It is in the dual psychic activity which emerges from the fundamental tension in the structure of the soul itself that the essence of the soul is revealed to and for itself. In projecting its powers, it comes to know the power by which it projects its

ἡμέτερον μὲν χρωμένων, οὐ προοχρωμένων δὲ οὐχ ἡμέτερον. τό δὴ προοχρησθαι τί ἐστίν· ἄρα αὐτοὺς ἐκεῖνο γινομένους, καὶ φθεγγομένους ὡς ἐκεῖνος· ἢ κατ' ἐκεῖνον· οὐ γὰρ νοῦς ἡμεῖς."

⁷⁷ Finamore, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul*, 93.

⁷⁸ Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.9.8.

⁷⁹ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.3.30, 13-15: "ἄλλο γὰρ ἡ νόησις, καὶ ἄλλο ἡ τῆς νοήσεως ἀντίληψις, καὶ νοοῦμεν μὲν αἰεὶ, ἀντιλαμβάνομεθα δὲ οὐκ αἰεὶ."

⁸⁰ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.8.4, 33.

activities — the higher activity that is always active: “the soul itself would not have known the powers it had if they had not come out and been revealed.”⁸¹ The soul goes out from itself and, in this motion, reflects the unity of the power that is present in it and by which this *προβάλλειν* is possible at all. Emilsson writes:

We see here that double activity applies all over in Plotinus’ universe. We find an internal activity (*energeia tēs ousias*) and an external activity (*energeia ek tēs ousias*) ‘in each and every thing,’ he says. Thus, every distinct stage in the ontology, and it seems every natural substance, has an internal activity accompanied by an external one (cf. also IV.3.7, 17) ... Plotinus does not merely say that *in* each thing there is an internal activity, he goes on to say that this activity constitutes each thing, and ... that it ‘completes the Being’. By this he means that it constitutes the full essence of each thing. So the internal activity of each thing defines it.⁸²

For Plotinus, this is precisely the truth of the soul’s identity in generation. It is defined by neither the part nor the composite nor any ‘stable’ essence which constitutes its embodied existence, but rather by simultaneous and opposing activities that result in the manifestation of two distinct lives. Its identity is one of absolute relation.⁸³

In this understanding, the problem with a certain characterization of Plotinus emerges. The intellect of the soul is not ‘above’ in the sense of being divided from the composite, nor is its intellectual capacity the defining aspect of the soul. Instead, the soul is defined by dual activities, the one which is given from outside and the other which emerges in its self-relation. The unification of these two activities — their identity with each other — leads to their ‘being’ present at all. Thus, when Plotinus writes that the soul is always thinking, he means this not in an ontological sense, but in a logical one. The soul is perpetually intellectual because of the nature of the divine goodness, not because the soul ‘possesses’ Intellect in itself. In this way, Plotinus is affirming the goodness of the divine, rather than the ability of soul to realize its salvation purely through its own capacity.

⁸¹ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.8.5, 33-34: “τὴν τε ψυχὴν αὐτὴν ἔλαθεν ἂν ἂ εἶχεν οὐχ ἐκφανέντα οὐδὲ πρόοδον λαβόντα.”

⁸² Emilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect*, 3.

⁸³ See Blumenthal, *Plotinus' Psychology* and Aquila, “On Plotinus and the 'Togetherness' of Consciousness.”

2.6 THE SOUL'S SELF-RELATION IN GENERATION

With this interpretive framework established, we are able to return to Plotinus' account of the evil of matter. While such an account, for obvious reasons, leads scholars to find a negative view of sensible nature in Plotinus' thought, it is always necessary to maintain the two perspectives which run throughout his psychology and cosmology. Although the mingling with matter results in pain and is therefore an evil at the level of the soul, this mingling is also a good for both the sensible creation and the soul. While it is obvious how this is beneficial for creation, since the Soul gives order, or form, to the chaos of generated things in its descent, so too is the descending soul informed by sensible creation. Plotinus writes:

Since this nature is twofold, partly intelligible and partly perceptible, it is better for the soul to be in the intelligible, but all the same, since it has this kind of nature, it is necessarily bound to be able to participate in the perceptible ... and, having a common boundary with the perceptible nature, gives something to it of what it has in itself and *receives something from it in return*, if it does not only use its safe part in governing the universe, but with greater eagerness plunges into the interior and does not stay whole with whole; especially as it is possible for it to emerge again having acquired the whole story of what it saw and experiences here and learnt what it is like to be There... For the experience of evil is a clearer knowledge of the Good for those whose power is too weak to know evil with clear intellectual certainty before experiencing it ... but it must, acting outwards from itself and unable to remain on its own, by the necessity and law of nature arrive at soul; for this is its goal, and it must hand over what comes after to soul and run up again itself — so is the activity of soul.⁸⁴

The descent of the soul is ultimately good for both the broader reconciliation of the cosmos and the self-constitution of the soul. Rather than simply remaining above and 'safely' governing the universe, the soul's projection of its lower activities into

⁸⁴ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.8.7, 1- 25: “διττῆς δὲ φύσεως ταύτης οὔσης, νοητῆς, τῆς δὲ αἰσθητῆς, ἄμεινον μὲν ψυχῇ ἐν τῷ νοητῷ εἶναι, ἀνάγκη γε μὴν ἔχειν καὶ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ μεταλαμβάνειν τοιαύτην φύσιν ἔχουσα ... ἀντιλαμβάνειν δὲ καὶ παρ' αὐτοῦ, εἰ μὴ μετὰ τοῦ αὐτῆς ἀσφαλοῦς διακοσμοῖ, προθυμία δὲ πλείονι εἰς τὸ εἶσω δύοιτο μὴ μείνασα ὅλη μεθ' ὅλης, ἄλλως τε καὶ δυνατὸν αὐτῇ πάλιν ἐξαναδύναναι, ἱστορίαν ὧν ἐνταῦθα εἶδέ τε καὶ ἔπαθε προσλαβούση καὶ μαθούση, οἷον ἄρα ἐστὶν ἐκεῖ εἶναι ... γνῶσις γὰρ ἐναργεστέρα τάγαθοῦ ἢ τοῦ κακοῦ πείρα οἷς ἡ δύναμις ἀσθενεστέρα, ἢ ὥστε ἐπιστήμη τὸ κακὸν πρὸ πείρας γνῶναι. ὥσπερ δὲ ἡ νοερά διέξοδος κατάβασίς ἐστὶν εἰς ἔσχατον τὸ χεῖρον — οὐ γὰρ ἐνὶ εἰς τὸ ἐπέκεινα ἀναβῆναι, ἀλλ' ἀνάγκη ἐνεργήσασαν ἐξ ἑαυτῆς καὶ μὴ δυνηθεῖσαν μείναι ἐφ' ἑαυτῆς φύσεως δὲ ἀνάγκη καὶ νόμῳ μέχρι ψυχῆς ἐλθεῖν· τέλος γὰρ αὐτῆ τοῦτο· ταύτη δὲ τὸ ἐφεξῆς παραδοῦναι αὐτὴν πάλιν ἀναδραμοῦσαν — οὕτως καὶ ψυχῆς ἐνέργεια.”

generation brings about a clearer knowledge of the Good by making its higher nature evident to it. This self-constituting activity of soul is an imitation of Intellect and as such reveals the demiurgic capacities of the soul to itself. Thus, the means of the soul's ascent and salvation is also, in this sense, written by necessity in the structure of the soul itself, a necessity which is, in part, brought about in and through sensible things. The descent is both an evil, insofar as it is painful, as well as a good through which the soul becomes truly demiurgic and self-constituting.

2.7 THEURGICAL ELEMENTS IN THE *ENNEADS*

It is in this context that the possibility emerges in Plotinus' thought for an account of theurgy. First, by identifying matter with primary evil and preserving both the soul and the gods from blame for its emergence, and then affirming the fundamental connection between intelligible and sensible realities, Plotinus is able to both preserve the divinity of sensible creation and its intelligible source, thereby providing the soul with an immediate relation to the divine in nature. Secondly, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, Plotinus' psychology is much more closely in accord with Iamblichus' than often held. The notion that the being of the soul is *both* determined by its self-relation and relation to the whole, *and* the truly mixed character of the soul that emerges as a result, is at the heart of Iamblichus' thought. Furthermore, Plotinus' assertion that Intellect is present only to the soul when it is active allows for the separation and immanence of higher essences, a two-sided presence that requires a median term in both natures and by which it can be activated. This distinction, taken together with the mixed constitution of the soul, provides the means of the soul's self-constitution in accordance with its noetic model, bringing Intellect to birth in generated things, as well as the soul to birth in Intellect and serving to undermine the Gnostic position that binds Intellect in nature.

In addition to these broad similarities, there is also an important connection concerning the self-relation of the composite soul in itself that is central to later accounts of theurgy. While, for Plotinus, the soul's identity emerges through its internal activities

and the projection of its powers, there is also a middle term in the soul itself which allows for its self-relation. Plotinus points to this when he writes that:

... one part of our soul is always directed to the intelligible realities, one to the things of this world, and one is in the middle between these; for since the soul is one nature in many powers, sometimes the whole of it is carried along with the best of itself and of real being, sometimes the worst part is dragged down and drags the middle with it.⁸⁵

This middle element is, in this way, the ‘weight’ of the soul, drawing the entire composite towards either generation or a higher life.

Plotinus develops this notion more fully in *Treatise IV* when he undertakes a sustained meditation on memory (μνήμη)⁸⁶ and the way in which it is present to, and can persist in the soul. Because of the constantly changing nature of the body, there must be a kind of standing ground (ἔδρα) in the composite so that the impressions do not flow away (παραρρεῖν). The soul is a composite and the impressions (τύπωσις) received through sense perception are experienced in common and preserved as impressions in wax. Since memories are without magnitude, however, there is no pushing (ὠθισμός) of the impression in this way. While all impressions that come through the body reach as far as the soul, some belong to the soul alone.⁸⁷ Since the soul is present for both types of impressions as the ground by which an impression is preserved, and since such stability in flux is necessary for the soul to remain a conscious unity, there is a distinction between material and immaterial impressions that requires an intermediate element through which they can inform each other. Carlos Steel writes: “Between the higher part which is always in the Intellect and the lower which orders the body, a sort of mixed form is necessary. By this ‘middle part’ is meant the level of our normal consciousness which, with discursive reason, combines intelligible insights with the data of sense perception.”⁸⁸ In the midst of the dual activities of the soul, this middle term is revealed, a ‘level of normal

⁸⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads* II.9.2, 4-6: “ψυχῆς δὲ ἡμῶν τὸ μὲν ἀεὶ πρὸς ἐκείνοις, τὸ δὲ πρὸς ταῦτα ἔχειν, τὸ δ’ ἐν μέσῳ τούτων· φύσεως γὰρ οὐσης μίας ἐν δυνάμεσι πλείοσιν ὅτε μὲν τὴν πᾶσαν συμφέρεσθαι τῷ ἀρίστῳ αὐτῆς καὶ τοῦ ὄντος, ὅτε δὲ τὸ χεῖρον αὐτῆς καθελκυσθὲν συνεφελκύσασθαι τὸ μέσον.”

⁸⁶ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV. 25-26.

⁸⁷ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV. 26, 45.

⁸⁸ Steel, *Changing Self*, 35.

consciousness' that serves to unify the sensory data of the lower soul and the intelligible reality of the higher.⁸⁹

This notion of a middle term in the soul is of interest in a discussion on theurgy because it shares elements in common with doctrines concerning the ὄχημα-πνεῦμα in the soteriologies of later Neoplatonic thinkers⁹⁰, a concept that is central for the possibility and preservation of an immaterial body and, therefore, for the efficacy of theurgical practice.⁹¹ In later thinkers⁹², the ὄχημα serves as a middle term that unites both the lower and higher functions of the soul which, through acts of ritual purification, could be 'lightened' of the weight of generation, allowing for the unification of its powers and bringing about a return to its divine origin.⁹³ For Plotinus as well, ascent is realized by bringing the lower soul into accord with the higher and is therefore necessary to bring about the fitness of the soul required in order to receive the Intelligible.⁹⁴ Furthermore, while Plotinus never uses the term ὄχημα-πνεῦμα explicitly, he does use the term πνεῦμα when describing how the soul gathers up an increasingly material body as it descends.⁹⁵ Jay Bregman notes, for example, that for Plotinus the πνεῦμα "makes union with the body possible, and, in the condition of union with body it becomes the faculty of imagination (φαντασία), which functions as a connecting link between the spiritual realm and the coarser realm of sense."⁹⁶ In this way, Plotinus' account of the self-relation of the soul in which both the higher and lower pull at a middle term that is the 'weight' of the whole soul shares important features with later theurgical doctrines.

⁸⁹ The higher imagination also seems to serve a similar mediating function. Although the Intellect is the power by which the essential unity of the composite soul is maintained, the imagination, like memory, serves as the middle term for the soul's self-relation in generation. Plotinus writes that "the imaging faculty is between the impression of nature and intellect" (*Enneads* IV.4.13, 13-15). See also Warren, "Imagination in Plotinus;" Moore, "Theory of imagination in Plotinus."

⁹⁰ Miller details the way in which thought on the ὄχημα is transmitted through Synesius to the Christian world (*Dreams in Late Antiquity: Studies in the Imagination of a Culture*).

⁹¹ This will be treated more fully in Chapter 3.

⁹² Porphyry first used the term, and it became increasingly important in the thought of Iamblichus and Proclus.

⁹³ Finamore, *Iamblichus*, 12.

⁹⁴ Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.4.11, 3-4: "One must understand the [degree of] presence as something depending on the fitness of the recipient (ἢ τὸ παρὸν ἐπιτηδεύειν τοῦ δεξομένου (παρ)εῖναι νομιστέον, καὶ εἶναι μὲν πανταχοῦ τοῦ ὄντος τὸ ὄν οὐκ ἀπολειπόμενον ἑαυτοῦ, παρεῖναι δὲ αὐτῷ τὸ δυνάμενον παρεῖναι)." Also, see Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 89.

⁹⁵ For an account of the ὄχημα in Plotinus' thought, see Finamore, *Iamblichus*, 4; Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 318.

⁹⁶ Bregman, *Synesius of Cyrene, philosopher-bishop*.

In addition to these similarities, recent scholarship has gone even further in arguing for the presence of a theurgical element in Plotinus' thought.⁹⁷ Zeke Mazur, for example, finds that the exercises of ascent and descent prevalent throughout the *Enneads*⁹⁸ demonstrate the development of an 'inner ritual' and ritual *πρᾶξις*.⁹⁹ Plotinus' placing of evil in matter, rather than in cosmic bodies, also allows for the divine to be present through a correspondence, or trace, in divine symbols in nature, which serve to draw the soul to a higher vision.¹⁰⁰ Mazur writes: "Plotinus... frequently describes a "trace" (*ichnos*) or "image" (*eikon*) of the One within the individual soul. The trace... enables union through the inherent attraction of an image to its original."¹⁰¹ Thus, divine symbols in nature facilitate movement towards the higher intelligible realm through an "inherent attraction" to that which they imitate, an account that shares much in common with Iamblichus' own presentation of theurgy.¹⁰²

2.8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Here we can make a few tentative conclusions. First, Plotinus outlines ontological distinctions within the soul in order to correct the Gnostic account that blends the hypostases of Soul and asserts that the body is not a primary evil, but rather a secondary sort of suffering for the soul. This opposition to the Gnostics leads to Plotinus' apparent prioritization of the intelligible by requiring him to emphasize one side of this tension —

⁹⁷ In *Unio Magica II*, Mazur argues that the generally accepted distinction between rational and theurgical in Plotinus must be radically altered. Although dismissing the place of a lower, 'horizontal' form of theurgy, Mazur argues that an internalized, 'vertical' form of ritual *πρᾶξις* is precisely what Plotinus intended in order to account for the movement of the soul towards the One. He argues that there is a dynamic participation of the whole in its emanation from the One, a "hierarchical cascade of influence" (33), which lends itself to the attraction of the higher gods through an interior theurgic ritual meant to draw on the inherent attraction between the symbol and its original in the "trace" of the higher in the lower. For scholarship on the theurgical elements present in Plotinus' thought, see Smith, *Porphry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition*; Lowry, *The Logical Principles*, 20-21; Addey, *Divination and Theurgy in Neoplatonism*; Mazur, *Unio Magica II*.

⁹⁸ See Mazur, *Unio Magica II*; *Enneads* III.8.11.24.

⁹⁹ Plotinus, *Enneads* III.7.32.

¹⁰⁰ Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.9.11, 26-34: "ταῦτα μὲν οὖν μιμήματα· καὶ τοῖς οὖν σοφοῖς τῶν προφητῶν αἰνίττεται, ὅπως θεὸς ἐκεῖνος ὁρᾶται· σοφὸς δὲ ἱερεὺς τὸ αἴνιγμα συνιεὶς ἀληθινὴν ἂν ποιοῖτο ἐκεῖ γενόμενος τοῦ ἀδύτου τὴν θέαν. καὶ μὴ γενόμενος δὲ τὸ ἄδύτον τοῦτο ἀόρατόν τι χρῆμα νομίσας καὶ πηγὴν καὶ ἀρχὴν, εἰδήσει ὡς ἀρχὴ ἀρχὴν ὁρᾷ καὶ συγγίνεται καὶ τῷ ὁμοίῳ τὸ ὅμοιον."

¹⁰¹ Mazur, *Unio Magica II*, 48.

¹⁰² Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [184], 2-7. Indeed, in a recent article Shaw argues that Iamblichus was giving a more systematic form to a theurgical element already present in Plotinus (*Eros*, 123).

the evil of sensation — in order to preserve the gods from blame. Furthermore, thinking the Plotinian soul as a stable identity of existent ‘parts’ is inadequate to his system as a whole. The $\nu\omicron\delta\zeta$ of the soul is not ‘above’ the composite soul in the strict sense that is often portrayed but this psychic division — rather than representative of the absolute division and opposition between the intelligible and sensible present in Gnostic doctrine — is instead a logical separation that emerges from a problem of consciousness and the two-sided character of the soul itself. The dyadic soul is not only self-forming in its internal relation because the lower is strictly conformed to the noetic, but the higher also receives from the lower and is shaped by it. The identity of the soul is not in the ‘rest’ of its intelligible life, since this is not actually part of its being, but in its activity. In this sense, it is purely a ‘being through participation’.

Thus, Plotinus’ thought is obscured by failing to take into account the dynamic identity through relation that characterizes his cosmology and psychology while, on the other hand, maintaining this dynamic notion of the soul and the sensible world allows for the possibility of theurgy. As we have seen, for Plotinus there is a sensible $\epsilon\iota\kappa\acute{o}\nu$ for every existent intelligible life. The contradiction present in the structure of the soul itself is a microcosm of this cosmic reality. In the same way that the sensible cosmos is a reflection of an intelligible world, so too is the internal constitution of the soul an image of the self-relation of the whole of Being. The intelligible and sensible are simultaneously co-present with each other and there is more than one reality present in a single existent thing. Just as the soul is reconciled to its true self through its projection outside of itself, the cosmos is reconciled to Intellect in and through the descent of souls into generation. Thus, ritual activities complete a philosophical need and, through the power of the divine symbols in nature, serve as the means for the ascent of the soul.

However, Plotinus’ doctrine is also ambiguous at points. Aspects of Iamblichus’ psychology and account of theurgy are present in Plotinus’ thought but, as we shall see, they are not developed in an adequately systematic fashion, resulting in problematic misinterpretations by some that follow. Although the body is necessary for the restitution of the cosmos, it is also presented more frequently as an evil for the particular soul, resulting in an overly pessimistic view of sensible creation. Therefore, while there are

important similarities between the systems of Iamblichus and Plotinus, there is also room for a more subtle criticism of Plotinus, one which is taken up by Iamblichus and developed in subsequent chapters; namely, that Plotinus' ontology lacks adequate systematic rigour.

CHAPTER 3: IAMBlichUS' PSYCHOLOGY IN *DE ANIMA*

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Much of the opposition that scholars find between Plotinus and Iamblichus emerges in two ways. Firstly, such a reading is supported by the early 20th century opposition between faith and reason noted in the previous chapter which, characterizing Plotinus as 'intellectual' and Iamblichus 'religious', forms an exegetical framework that reads into each philosopher's work the very characterizations by which it operates. For example, Plotinus' emphasis on Intellect betrays a theoretical priority of the intelligible that serves to demonize the cosmos and thereby negates contradictory statements in his work that support the sensible world, while the religious tone and emphasis on theurgic ritual in Iamblichus' thought betrays a dogmatic and irrational zealot who prioritizes theological doctrine over the clear truth of reason. Even if such characterizations are recognized as exaggerations, they nonetheless hold sway as somehow representative of subtle differences in each man's thought. Secondly, and more problematically for those seeking to reconcile them, such an opposition is often based on Iamblichus' own words. For instance, at the outset of his *Commentary on De Anima*, Iamblichus is critical of Plotinus for failing to properly distinguish the ontological ranks and for overemphasizing the inherent powers of the soul, even identifying him with Numenius, a figure with whom Plotinus himself disputed concerning this very issue. This criticism continues to appear throughout the *De Anima* in various forms.¹⁰³ By opposing a tendency in Plotinus' thought that emphasizes the intellectual aspect of the composite soul and fails to give an appropriate treatment of its irrational lives, Iamblichus seems to affirm the very tension that many scholars see between the two thinkers.

Such a reading of the relationship between the two thinkers is strange given the care Plotinus takes to oppose similar problems present in Gnostic thought. Like Iamblichus, he is critical of Numenius for blending the hypostasis of Soul, and of the

¹⁰³ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [365], 1; [365], 15; [369], 25; [372], 21; [375], 6; [377], 10; [379], 10; [381], 20; [385], 11; [457], 5.

“unlawful” (ἄθεμις)¹⁰⁴ Gnostics more generally for desacralizing the sensible cosmos and corrupting the relationship between higher and lower essences. Furthermore, Iamblichus has familiarity with the thought of Plotinus through Porphyry¹⁰⁵, meaning that he either misunderstood or misrepresented his position. Building on a growing trend in recent scholarship¹⁰⁶, the following chapter will argue that Iamblichus’ critique of Plotinus, particularly in *De Mysteriis*, is written in the spirit of a Platonic dialogue and, for this reason, must also be read as a poetic treatment of philosophical problems in which the argument is present through the form of the work as well as the content.¹⁰⁷ Such a reading points to a secondary and parallel argument which emerges through the form of the work itself, in which Iamblichus’ treatment of Plotinus’ thought is, at least in part, an exaggeration meant to serve a larger purpose in the Neoplatonic tradition as a whole.¹⁰⁸

While such a reading of *De Mysteriis* will be examined in the subsequent chapter, the present chapter will argue that Iamblichus’ doctrinal criticisms in *De Anima* serve this pedagogical function and, by exploiting ambiguities present in Plotinus’ thought, give form to a secondary impulse that seeks systematic precision in the examination of the soul. In *De Mysteriis*, Iamblichus seeks to give form to a “scientific theology (τῆς

¹⁰⁴ Plotinus, *Enneads* II.9.2, 10.

¹⁰⁵ For a scholarly treatment of their relationship, see Clarke, Dillon and Hershbell, *De Mysteriis*, xxi-xxii.

¹⁰⁶ Steel understands Iamblichus as expressing in a system what Plotinus understood as a “single, global intuition” (Steel, *Changing Self*, 63). Dillon also shares this reading, arguing that Iamblichus shares the doctrine of the undescended soul with Plotinus (Dillon, *De Anima*, 15). See also Smith, *Porphyry's Place*; Lowry, *The Logical Principles*, 20-21; Mazur, *Unio Magica II*; Tuominen, *The Ancient Commentators*, 179-191; and Addey, *Divination and Theurgy in Neoplatonism*.

¹⁰⁷ Addey argues that the divisions posited between Middle Platonic thinkers are far too sharply drawn, and that the form of the *De Mysteriis* is both an example of the question/answer form of Platonic exegesis, as well as a dialogue in the Platonic model (*Divination and Theurgy in Neoplatonism*, 128). Such a reading is also supported by the mythical ‘setting’ of the *De Mysteriis*. Abamon is a priest speaking to an initiate. His authority is based in a ‘pre-historical’ account, given by the gods, and preserved through the various ancient religions, similar to the way in which Plato uses Egypt as a poetic device in his dialogues. Dillon also argues that in *De Mysteriis*, Iamblichus actually invents gods in order to fill out his system, pointing to the poetic licence that he takes in order to provide a systematic treatment of the whole (Dillon, *Iamblichus*, xxxiii – xxxv; and xxxviii-xlviii). Finally, Feichtinger argues that the figure of Pythagoras in Iamblichus’ thought serves as a poetic image of the philosophical/religious community (“Mediatorem Ergo Quaerunt”).

¹⁰⁸ Addey, for example, has shown that much of the opposition between Porphyry (who Iamblichus nearly always groups Plotinus with in his criticisms) and Iamblichus has emerged from reliance on the polemical writings of Christian authors by scholars. See, in particular, her examination of Eusebius’ account (*Divination and Theurgy in Neoplatonism*, 108).

ἐπιστημονικῆς θεολογίας)¹⁰⁹; in *De Anima*, Iamblichus provides the psychology on which such a system is grounded.

3.2 THE SOUL AS ESSENCE

The psychology of Iamblichus' *De Anima* serves a two-fold function. It is meant to both limit the place of the soul in the broader ontology, as well as oppose a problematic impulse that overstates the place of intellect in the composite soul. This impulse emerges first through misuse of the concept, initially formulated in Anaxagoras and re-applied in Neoplatonic thought, of the 'all in the all'.¹¹⁰ Iamblichus is critical of the way in which this principle is used to support an account of the homogeneity of Being, arguing that it results in a blending of distinctions concerning the soul's relation to other essences that distorts the activities and powers proper to the soul. That the soul transcends the corporeal does not mean that it belongs with first principles.¹¹¹ For Iamblichus, the soul must be properly situated in the broader procession of essences; it is first defined by limit.¹¹²

As a result, Iamblichus makes two important distinctions concerning the soul. The first is that it is a distinct type of being which must be distinguished from Intellect and cannot coincide with the Intellect in thinking. Such an understanding of the soul, however, provides no determinate knowledge concerning the nature of the soul in itself. The second doctrinal function of Iamblichus' psychology, therefore, is to affirm the intermediate nature of the soul and, given an impulse in the tradition that gives priority to its higher attributes, reaffirm the double existence of the composite.

¹⁰⁹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [14], 1-3.

¹¹⁰ Anaxagoras (fr. 11-12). It is first clearly formed in Porphyry and carried on in the later tradition: "πάντα μὲν πᾶσιν, ἀλλὰ οικείως τῇ ἐκάστου οὐσίᾳ" (Porphyry, *Sententiae*, X).

¹¹¹ Steel, *Changing Self*, 27: "One may not emphasize the transcendence of the soul so strongly with respect to the body that all differences between it and the higher levels of being tend to disappear." Proclus raises the same problem in his discussion of the term νοητόν. Although the soul can be called νοητόν insofar as it is above sensible things, it is not Intellect proper or the object of the act of thinking. Furthermore, the divine may also be called intelligible, not in the sense that it is knowable, but insofar as it is the object of desire for Intellect. In the proper sense, it is not 'intelligible'; thus, "we must be careful with words" (Proclus, *Platonic Theology*, I.26).

¹¹² Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [22], 9: "τῷ θείῳ πέρατι ἀφορίζεται."

3.3 PHILOSOPHICAL HISTORY IN *DE ANIMA*

Iamblichus begins *De Anima* by undertaking a survey of philosophical thought on the soul (reminiscent of Aristotle's history in Book 1 of the *Metaphysics*) by looking first at positions which concern the soul's essence. After dismissing certain inadequate conceptions¹¹³, Iamblichus examines the notion of the soul as mathematical being (μαθηματική οὐσία), looking first at the Pythagorean definition of the soul as 'limit of extension' and 'extension itself'. While examining this Pythagorean doctrine, Iamblichus interjects his own position¹¹⁴, one which he finds in accord with that present in Plato: "One might, however, employing a purer definition, define it [the soul] most perfectly as the cause, or rather the unity, prior to these two."¹¹⁵

The placement of Iamblichus' (and Plato's) position in the midst of an examination of Pythagorean doctrine illustrates both a philosophical and methodological tenet of his thought. First, by asserting the presence of an underlying unity that serves as the epistemological ground of the concept of 'extension', he is pointing to the general problem of the composite soul: for a soul to exist there must be both a unity of being, as well as ontological differentiation. However, by tying his position to Pythagoras', and Pythagoras', in turn, to Plato's, Iamblichus is implicitly demonstrating a parallel movement in the form of the examination itself. His philosophical history here is not simply a sequence of events but, rather, is guided by a theoretical progression that leads to Plato. In this movement, the tradition itself is an emanation from a given whole. Its disparate elements are bound together by a common thread that leads to a primal unity.¹¹⁶ Indeed, the fact that Iamblichus is examining the problems of the *Timaeus* within a

¹¹³ In particular, he is critical of the categories that Aristotle uses to think about the soul (Iamblichus, *De Anima* [363], 15-25).

¹¹⁴ As Dillon notes (Dillon, *De Anima*, 81), "ἐν αἰτία δὲ..." is a characteristic way for Iamblichus to present his own views.

¹¹⁵ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [364], 5-6: "ἐν αἰτία δὲ ἦτοι ἐνώσει τούτων ἄλλος ἂν τις καθαρότερον αὐτὴν προστήσαι το τελεώτατα."

¹¹⁶ This notion emerges more fully in his *De Mysteriis*; the wisdom of the ancients and the theorizing of the philosophers all emerge from the gods themselves. He writes, for example: "... knowledge is united at the outset with its own cause (συνήνωταί τε ἐξ ἀρχῆς πρὸς τὴν οἰχείαν αἰτίαν)" (Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [8], 1).

commentary on Aristotle¹¹⁷ demonstrates a desire to reconcile the tradition more generally.¹¹⁸

Iamblichus continues to examine the way in which the contraries of unity and division are manifest in the particular soul by considering the definition of the soul as a mathematical attunement (ἁρμονία). After rejecting the notion that the soul is simply the harmony of the body¹¹⁹, or that which brings symmetry to things which differ in any way, he puts forward his own position that this attunement is related to the soul as a mean (μεσότης) and a conjunction (σύνδεσις) in beings (οὐσίαι) and lives (ζωαί) and the generation (γένεσις) of all things.¹²⁰ By asserting that the essence of the soul is a mean in generation, Iamblichus is affirming the fundamentally median character of the embodied soul.

This finally leads to a consideration of the soul's essence as an incorporeal substance and a key point of contention concerning the homogeneity of the soul itself — a position Iamblichus attributes to Numenius and, with qualification, to Plotinus and his students. Iamblichus writes:

There are those who contend that all of this substance is homogenous and is one and the same so that the whole is present in any part of it; they place even in the particular soul the intelligible world, gods and demons, the Good and all the classes which are superior to the soul; and they assert that all is in all in like manner though in each in a way appropriate to its essence ... According to this opinion, the soul is in no way different from the Intellect, the gods and the higher classes, at least when its total substance is considered.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Dillon notes that Iamblichus' account in the section on mathematics only makes sense at all if "we recognize that we are dealing with a mathematicizing interpretation of the Paradigm of the *Timaeus*" (Dillon, *De Anima*, 85). Also, for a more detailed account of how Iamblichus blends Aristotle's thought with the *Timaeus* in his *De Anima*, see Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle*, 296, 329.

¹¹⁸ Indeed, Iamblichus even seems to alter Aristotle's doctrine in many places in order to bring his thought in line with key elements of Platonic doctrine (Dillon, *De Anima*, 85). See also Tuominen, *The Ancient Commentators*, 10. In this desire for conciliation, Iamblichus is also at one with Porphyry; see Addey, *Theurgy and Divination in Neoplatonism*.

¹¹⁹ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [364], 15 – [365], 4. Plotinus also rejects this position (*Enneads* IV.7).

¹²⁰ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [365], 1: "τὴν δ' ὡς μὲν ἐν οὐσίαις καὶ ζωαῖς καὶ γενέσει πάντων μεσότητα καὶ σύνδεσιν ὁ Τιμαῖος αὐτῇ ἀνατίθησι." Dillon notes that this interpretation of Plato is a strange one and points to several discrepancies in the way Iamblichus presents the accounts of Plato and Plotinus (Dillon, *De Anima*, 86, 87).

¹²¹ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [365], 8-12; 17-19: "εἰσὶ δὴ τινες, οἱ πᾶσαν τὴν τοιαύτην οὐσίαν ὁμοιομερῆ καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν καὶ μίαν ἀποφαίνονται, ὡς καὶ ἐν ὄψοῦν αὐτῆς μέρει εἶναι τὰ ὅλα· οἱ τινες καὶ ἐν τῇ μεριστῇ

For Iamblichus, in order to avoid powers being attributed to the soul that do not properly belong to it, the soul must be limited both on account of its proximity to generation and with respect to the entire hierarchy of essences. If the soul is homogenous in this way,¹²² so that in each of the parts the whole is present, then it does not differ essentially from the higher ontological classes.¹²³ It is therefore necessary to maintain ontological distinctions between essences. Steel writes: “It is not a question here of whether the soul is ‘uniform’ in itself, but rather whether the incorporeal reality of which the soul constitutes a part is entirely homogenous or ontologically differentiated.”¹²⁴ Homogeneity in this respect would mean that all types of essences would be in the soul *insofar* as they are *ἄσώματα*¹²⁵, a notion that results in a failure to distinguish between the soul and higher essences.

It is also in this context that Iamblichus is critical of a position which asserts that the soul is an attunement that is present through the *λόγοι*.¹²⁶ The notion of the soul as a transmitter of higher *λόγοι* that bestow *ἁρμονία* on the physical cosmos and the body is problematic for Iamblichus because the placement of the *λόγοι* in the soul serves to emphasize the soul’s intellectual attributes over the irrational life of the composite. Such an account confuses the way in which the soul is intermediate. It is intermediate not insofar as it is an *intellectual* mediator between incorporeal and corporeal lives, but insofar as it is a true unity of these opposing elements, a composite of divine and

ψυχῆ τὸν νοητὸν κόσμον καὶ θεοὺς καὶ δαίμονας καὶ τὰγαθὸν καὶ πάντα τὰ πρεσβύτερα ἐν αὐτῇ ἐνιδρύουσι καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν ὡσαύτως πάντα εἶναι ἀποφαινόνται, οἰκείως μέντοι κατὰ τὴν αὐτῶν οὐσίαν ἐν ἐκάστοις ... κατὰ δὴ ταύτην νοῦ καὶ θεῶν καὶ τῶν κρειττόνων γενῶν οὐδὲν ἢ ψυχῆ διενήνοχε κατὰ γε τὴν ὅλην οὐσίαν.”

¹²² Much of the interpretation of Iamblichus’ criticism concerning the homogeneity of the soul hinges on what the phrase ‘τὴν τοιαύτην οὐσίαν’ refers to. Festugière (*La Révélation.*, iii, 184, nn.1 and 2) places excessive interpretive weight on this phrase, understanding it as referring to the soul as hypostasis, or the total soul that contains all souls. For Festugière, Iamblichus understands the principle as relating to ‘the soul as hypostasis’, or is in agreement with Plotinus’ notion of total soul. If this were to be the case, then Plotinus’ distinction between the All-Soul and particular souls is sufficient to deal with the problem raised by Iamblichus. However, this is not how Iamblichus understands the principle and subsequent interpretation has shown Festugière’s translation to be problematic and to have led to difficulties in interpretation (Steel, *Changing Self*, 25, ff.10).

¹²³ See Dillon’s examination of Iamblichus’ critique of Plotinus in this regard (Dillon, *De Anima*, 90).

¹²⁴ Steel, *Changing Self*, 25.

¹²⁵ Steel notes that one could argue that there is still a distinction possible insofar as the way in which the totality is present can be distinct. However, he argues that this notion was understood and used by Iamblichus, and therefore it is unlikely that he is misapplying it (*Changing Self*, 25-26).

¹²⁶ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [365], 2.

encosmic natures. For Iamblichus, the soul's harmony is given as an attunement that is interwoven with the entirety of Being — a conjunction between the encosmic soul and the intelligible pattern. It is not present by virtue of the intellectual nature of the soul alone.

Thus, Iamblichus is critical of Plotinus' account of the incorporeal essence of the soul. While Plotinus clearly distinguishes the three hypostases of the soul when it is considered in its pure essence¹²⁷, these distinctions are unclear "...when its total substance is considered."¹²⁸ This ambiguity results in the intellect of the soul being given, even if only implicitly, a higher ontological status than what properly belongs to it when considered as a composite soul.¹²⁹ For Iamblichus, both aspects of the composite soul must be affirmed in order to avoid blending hypostases in the way thinkers such as Numenius do.

However, Iamblichus' characterization of Plotinus' thought here reveals a more subtle criticism of his ontology. Rather than fully identifying Plotinus with this doctrine, he writes that Plotinus lacks consistency (οὐ παντη δὲ ὁμολουμένως) and that his students, Amelius and Porphyry, are unstable (ἄστατος) and of two minds (ἐνδοιάζει), in contrast to Numenius, who "unambiguously" (ἀναμφισβήτητος) asserts such a doctrine. Dillon comments, concerning Iamblichus' critique, that we must "reckon with the probability that Iamblichus is being more than a little polemical here."¹³⁰ He is critical of Plotinus, not because he shares Numenius' position that blends ontological realities in the soul, but because, due to its ambiguity, it can be taken as such. In his polemical treatment of Plotinus' thought, Iamblichus is pointing to the need for a more systematic psychology, thereby laying the foundation for a stricter account of the hierarchy of essences and the activities and powers of the particular, embodied soul.

¹²⁷ See Plotinus' opposition to the Gnostics in Chapter 1 of the present paper.

¹²⁸ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [365], 8-12. 17-19: "... διενήνοχε κατά γε τὴν ὅλην οὐσίαν." There are many examples of Plotinus at least implying that the soul, considered in its pure essence, has the whole present within. He writes, for example, that each particular soul is an image of the One and an intelligible world in itself (*Enneads* IV.7.10, 35). See also *Enneads* V.1.10; V.1.11.

¹²⁹ Resting on such an account, for example, Porphyry writes that the philosopher's salvation is "alone, through himself, to God alone" (*De Abstentia*, II.49,1).

¹³⁰ Dillon, *De Anima*, 91.

3.4 SOUL AS LIMIT

Iamblichus begins an examination of the soul's place in the ontology and the activities that properly belong to it with the account of the *Timaeus* and an interpretation of the image of the mixing bowl.¹³¹ While other Platonists, such as Porphyry, understand the myth as representative of an individual soul's composition¹³² and thereby interiorize the entire procession within the individual soul itself, for Iamblichus, the mixing bowl represents the whole ontological procession and the degree to which each essence (οὐσία) participates in the Good. Steel explains: "The similarity between gods, demons and heroes is that they all partake of the essential Good via the invisible gods. Their difference is their proximity to that good."¹³³ Iamblichus' account therefore serves to affirm the soul's limits with respect to the whole and the 'otherness' of Intellect, as well as the gracious activity of the divine, insofar as the determination of rank is given from outside of the soul, rather than determined in itself or as a result of its descent. Souls are first measured and limited according to the Whole and only then determined according to their particular essence.

Here it is necessary to note the importance of such an approach in Iamblichus' thought. If each essence is defined according to its relation to the whole, then an understanding of the soul in itself only emerges in correlation with the entire hierarchy. Souls cannot be considered separately since each is defined first with respect to absolute Being. He therefore outlines the position which he will try to "base [the] whole treatise on"¹³⁴ and which he understands as emerging from the opinions of Aristotle, Pythagoras, Plato and the ancients¹³⁵: the soul is a distinct level of being that must be separated (χωρίζειν) into its own ὑπόστασις, not simply from Intellect, but also "from all the superior classes of being."¹³⁶ Its essence has a particular definition that acknowledges this

¹³¹ Plato, *Timaeus*, 41d.

¹³² Proclus, *Commentary on the Timaeus*, 3.245.19-246.2; 247.16-25. This understanding is different from that of Porphyry, who understood the mixing bowl as representing the way that the soul in itself was formed. See Finamore, *Iamblichus* (11-19) for a detailed account of both Iamblichus and Porphyry's readings of the myth.

¹³³ Steel, *Changing Self*, 46.

¹³⁴ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [366], 9.

¹³⁵ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [366], 10.

¹³⁶ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [366], 1: "κρεττόνων γενῶν ὅλων."

limited place.¹³⁷ Iamblichus' system is therefore grounded on the notion that the soul is defined by the principle of "divine limit."¹³⁸

3.5 THE SOUL'S POWERS AND ACTIVITIES

Having established the soul as a limit, it is necessary for Iamblichus to examine the life of the particular soul. Since he adheres to the Neoplatonic doctrine that activities reveal substance, it is through a consideration of the powers and activities of the soul that a clearer knowledge of its existence emerges. This is based on the understanding that while stable essences are ontologically prior, their activities are logically prior according to the mode of the knower. In other words, although the unity of a substance precedes its activities, for the embodied intellect thinking about its substance, a consideration of activities leads to knowledge concerning the stable essence itself. This is not to say, however, that the soul is *identical* with its acts (something Iamblichus is careful to oppose), but rather that affirmative knowledge about the soul's essence emerges through a consideration of the soul's activities (ἐνέργειαι) and powers (δυνάμεις).

Iamblichus begins his examination of the powers of the soul by returning to Plato. He writes: "Plato does not think that the powers exist in the soul as separate from it, but says that they are naturally conjoined with the soul and coexist with it in a single form because of the incomposite essence of the soul."¹³⁹ According to Iamblichus, Plato holds that the soul is simple in its essence, and that this simplicity remains even after embodiment. Because the essence of the soul is simple, the powers that are proper to it are present as a whole to the entirety of its incomposite essence. However, the question at

¹³⁷ Iamblichus writes that the soul is "... either the middle term of indivisible and divisible things and of corporeal in incorporeal beings, or the totality of the universal reason principles, or that which, after the ideas, is at the service of the work of creation, or that life which has life of itself, which proceeds from the Intelligible realm, or again the procession of the classes of real Being as a whole to an inferior substance (... τὸ μέσον τῶν μεριστῶν καὶ ἀμεριστῶν τῶν τε σωματικῶν καὶ ἀσωμάτων γενῶν, ἢ τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν καθόλου λόγων, ἢ τὴν μετὰ τὰς ιδέας ὑπηρεσίαν τῆς δημιουργίας, ἢ ζωὴν παρ' ἑαυτῆς ἔχουσαν τὸ ζῆν τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ νοητοῦ προελθοῦσαν, ἢ τὴν αὐτῶν γενῶν ὅλου τοῦ ὄντως ὄντος πρόοδον εἰς ὑποδεστέραν οὐσίαν)" (*De Anima* [366], 3-6).

¹³⁸ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [22], 9: "ἡ δὲ τῷ θεῷ πέρατι ἀφορίζεται."

¹³⁹ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [367], 7-10: "Πλάτων μὲν οὖν οὐχ ὡς ἑτέρας τὰς δυνάμεις ἐν ἑτέρᾳ τῇ ψυχῇ ἐνεῖναι ἡγεῖται, συμφύτους δ' αὐτὰς καὶ κατὰ μίαν ιδέαν συνυφαστικέναι λέγει διὰ τὴν ἀσύνθετον οὐσίαν τῆς ψυχῆς."

issue here is how this unity of essence is to be understood given the fact that it manifests two distinct lives in generation. He opposes views — such as those of the Materialists and Later Peripatetics — that fail to acknowledge the double life of the descended soul and assert, instead, that it has a single life and that the powers are present to the soul by “being shared in or being mingled with the whole living being.”¹⁴⁰ Amelius, for example, holds that soul is one in both essence and number, thereby making the soul universal and applying definition only through its ‘relation’ to the various cosmic bodies. For Iamblichus, while the essence of the soul is simple, it is also necessary to distinguish between the divided lives it exhibits in generation in order to account for both its unity and division.

Iamblichus continues, therefore, to examine the double existence of the soul and the corresponding manifestation of its activities. He writes: “the soul lives a double life, one in itself and one in conjunction with the body, [and] they [δυνάμεις] are present in the soul in one way but in the common animal in another.”¹⁴¹ The soul’s divided existence means that not all of the soul’s powers and activities are present to both parts of the embodied soul. There are some proper only to its higher life, while others are shared by the composite. Iamblichus continues:

It plainly follows that according to Plato none of the motions of the composite living being is proper to the soul itself. And so, just as life for him was double — the one separated from the body and the other in common with it — so also some activities will be proper to the soul and others will be experienced also by what possesses it [i.e. the body].¹⁴²

In the soul’s relation to, and administration of, the body, it exercises the powers of the body as their cause, but relates to it in “encompassing the body as an instrument or vehicle”; it therefore “possesses movements proper to itself.”¹⁴³ Thus, the acts of the soul are not necessarily present to both of its aspects, insofar as the soul’s higher essence is

¹⁴⁰ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [368], 8: “ὁ ἐν τῷ μετέχουσθαι ἢ ἐν τῷ κεκράσθαι τῷ ὅλῳ ζῳῷ.”

¹⁴¹ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [368], 2-5: “ἡ ψυχὴ διττὴν ζωὴν ζῆ, καθ’ αὐτὴν τε καὶ μετὰ τοῦ σώματος, ἄλλως μὲν πάρεσι τῇ ψυχῇ, ἄλλως δὲ τῷ κοινῷ ζῳῷ.”

¹⁴² Iamblichus, *De Anima* [371], 3-6: “φανερὸν δὴ καὶ τοῦτο γέγονεν, ὡς οὐδὲν ὑπάρχει κατὰ Πλάτωνα τῶν τοῦ συνθέτου ζῳῦ κινήσεων ἴδιον αὐτῆς τῆς ψυχῆς. οὐκοῦν ὡσπερ ζωὴ κατ’ αὐτὸν ἦν διττὴ, ἢ μὲν χωριστὴ τοῦ σώματος, ἢ δὲ κοινὴ μετ’ αὐτοῦ, οὕτω καὶ ἐνεργήματα τὰ μὲν ἴδια ἔσται τῆς ψυχῆς, τὰ δὲ κοινὰ καὶ τοῦ ἔχοντος.”

¹⁴³ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [371], 16-18: “ὡς ὄργανον ἢ ὄχημα τὸ σῶμα περιέχουσα, ἔχει δὲ καὶ καθ’ αὐτὴν οἰκειὰς κινήσεις.”

‘outside’ of the body and can have movements proper to it alone. Its higher activities, such as those “of divine possession, of immaterial intellection and ... those by which we are joined to the gods”¹⁴⁴ are attributed to this higher part, while the corporeal powers of sensation (αἴσθησις) and imagination are present to the composite.

However, the composite soul’s unity cannot be accounted for through its higher life alone since, if this activity is the “principle of [its] coherence and unity”, then the “individual activities of animals will proceed from the most perfect type of activity.”¹⁴⁵ Iamblichus rejects this position because it represents an emphasis of the rational life of the soul over the life of the composite. He also repeats his criticism of Plotinus here for exaggerating the intellectual attributes of the soul, stating that Plotinus thinks that “reason is one, intellection absolutely identical, right actions and the virtues the same in the case of both the individual and the universal souls.”¹⁴⁶ For Iamblichus, it is necessary to reaffirm the dyadic character of the soul to avoid prioritizing its intellectual activities.

The identification of Plotinus with this position, however, is “a gross simplification.”¹⁴⁷ Iamblichus seems to be aware of this fact, since he writes that Plotinus is “presumably” of this opinion, and that “on occasion” Plotinus holds this doctrine. His purposeful misrepresentation of Plotinus here is meant to reveal a more fundamental doctrinal ambiguity in Plotinus’ thought concerning the fate of the irrational powers, or ὄχημα, upon the dissolution of the composite soul. This becomes clear when Iamblichus writes shortly after that “Plotinus removes from the soul the irrational powers: those of perception, imagination, memory and discursive reasoning. He includes only pure reason in the pure essence of the soul, on the grounds that it has a power bound up with the very nature of the soul’s essence,”¹⁴⁸ and then, following this criticism, asserts his own

¹⁴⁴ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [371], 20: “... οἷα δὴ εἰσιν αἱ τῶν ἐνθουσιασμῶν καὶ τῶν ἀύλων νοήσεων καὶ συλλήβδην ἐκείνων, καθ’ ὅς τοις θεοῖς συναπτόμεθα.”

¹⁴⁵ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [318], 15-22: “... τέλος καὶ συνοχή καὶ ἔνωσις καὶ μόνιμος αἰτία τῶν κινήσεων ἐστὶν ἡ ἐνέργεια καὶ ταύτην ἐν ἑαυτῇ συνείληφεν ἡ κατ’ Ἀριστοτέλην ἀκίνητος ἐντελεχεια τῆς ψυχῆς, ἔσται ἀπὸ τῆς τελειοτάτης ἐνεργείας προϊούσα [ἀπο τῆς ψυχῆς ἢ ἐν τοῖς καθ’ ἕκαστα τῶν ζῴων ἔργοις ἀπεργασία.”

¹⁴⁶ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [372], 5-9: “... εἰς τέ ἐστιν ὁ λόγος καὶ ἡ αὐτὴ πάντως διανόησις καὶ τὰ κατοπθώματα ἴσα καὶ αἱ αὐταὶ ἀπεταὶ τῶν τε μεριστῶν καὶ τῶν ὄλων.”

¹⁴⁷ Dillon, *De Anima*, 124.

¹⁴⁸ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [369], 16-19: “Πλωτῖνος αὐτῆς ἀφαιρεῖ τὰς ἀλόγους δυνάμεις, τὰς αἰσθήσεις, τὰς φαντασίας, τὰς μνήμας, τοὺς λογισμούς· μόνον δὲ τὸν καθαρὸν λογισμὸν εἰς τὴν καθαρὰν οὐσίαν αὐτῆς ἀνατείνει, ὡς ἔχοντα συμφυῆ δύναμιν πρὸς αὐτὴν τὴν τῆς οὐσίας ιδέαν.”

doctrine: “One might perhaps propose not unpersuasively the rather novel theory that these powers continue to exist in the universe and do not perish.”¹⁴⁹ It is therefore necessary here to examine the development and role of the ὄχημα in the Middle-Neoplatonic context in which Iamblichus was writing.

3.6 THE ὈΧΗΜΑ-ΠΝΕΥΜΑ

While the notion of the ὄχημα has its roots in Plato’s account of the demiurgic sowing in the *Timaeus*, in which it serves as the vehicle on which the soul is mounted in its descent¹⁵⁰, later Neoplatonists synthesized it with the Aristotelian concept of the πνεῦμα. This brought together the function it serves in Aristotle’s thought with the concept of the vehicle from the *Timaeus*.¹⁵¹ Thus, for later Platonists, the ὄχημα-πνεῦμα serves as the vehicle both for the soul’s descent and its re-ascent, and is representative of the projection of the soul’s lower, irrational powers, such as sense perception and imagination, by which the soul both receives impressions from generation and becomes enmeshed with it.

When Iamblichus is critical of Plotinus for removing the irrational powers from the soul¹⁵², he is referring to this notion of the ὄχημα-πνεῦμα. He writes that “Porphry and Plotinus and their followers maintain that the soul projects its own powers to each part of the universe and that the lives, howsoever they have been projected, are dissolved and cease to exist.”¹⁵³ In Porphyry’s account, the ὄχημα-πνεῦμα is formed after the rational soul and is composed of the starry ether of the gods, meaning that it is gathered

¹⁴⁹ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [370], 9.

¹⁵⁰ Plato, *Timaeus*, 41e1-2. There is also an important passage in the *Phaedo* (113d4-6) taken up by later Neoplatonists as an example of preservation of the vehicle after death: “Those who seemed to have lived in a middle course travel to Acheron, ascend onto their vehicles (ὄχημα), and arrive at the lake on them (καὶ οἱ μὲν ἄν δόξωσι μέσως βεβιωκέναι, πορευθέντες ἐπὶ τὸν Ἀχέροντα, ἀναβάντες ἅ δὴ αὐτοῖς ὀχήματά ἐστιν, ἐπὶ τούτων ἀφικνοῦνται εἰς τὴν λίμνην, καὶ ἐκεῖ οἰκοῦσίν τε καὶ καθαίρομενοι τῶν τε ἀδικημάτων διδόντες δίκας ἀπολύονται, εἴ τις τι ἠδίκηκεν, τῶν τε εὐεργεσιῶν).”

¹⁵¹ For a history of the development of the ὄχημα, see Finamore, *Iamblichus*, 2.

¹⁵² Iamblichus, *De Anima* [369], 15 - [370], 10.

¹⁵³ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [370], 5-8: “Οἱ δὲ Πορφύριον καὶ Πλωτῖνον ἐκάστῳ μέρει τοῦ παντὸς τὰς οικείας δυνάμεις προβάλλεσθαι ὑπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀποφαίνονται, καὶ ἀφείσθαι μὲν καὶ μηκέτι εἶναι τὰς ζωὰς τὰς ὁπωσοῦν προβληθείσας.”

up as a mixture by the soul in its descent.¹⁵⁴ The vehicle is, in this sense, a mere vestment of the rational soul that is cast off in the soul's re-ascent, meaning that the discarded, ethereal elements are somehow 'reabsorbed' into the cosmos. Proclus confirms that Porphyry holds that the ὄχημα is broken into its elements and dissolved into the spheres from which it obtained its composition, with the implication that their "individuality no longer remains."¹⁵⁵

Iamblichus' thought concerning the nature and formation of the ὄχημα-πνεῦμα differs greatly from Porphyry's.¹⁵⁶ For Iamblichus, the demiurgic sowing in the *Timaeus* is double. The first 'sowing' represents the formation of the rational soul by the Demiurge, while the second represents the irrational and ethereal vehicle (ὄχημα) being sown amongst its leader god.¹⁵⁷ The ethereal vehicle is created by the Demiurge with the rational soul and shaped by the lives and powers of the visible gods in its descent¹⁵⁸ which "enter the vehicle and promote the rational activities of the soul."¹⁵⁹ Iamblichus writes:

When the soul comes into each part of the cosmos, it accepts certain lives and powers, some of which it projects itself and others it receives from the cosmos. In each part of the universe, there are appropriate bodies, some it receives from the cosmos and other organic bodies it makes in accordance with its own λόγος. These powers, lives and bodies it puts aside whenever it changes to another allotment. From this, it is clear that all these are acquired for the soul and that the soul has them as different from its own essence.¹⁶⁰

Thus, in its descent, the soul is altered and both receives "certain acquired lives"¹⁶¹ and projects (προβάλλω)¹⁶² lives from itself. In this way, the soul is "self-constituted and not created by subtraction from others in order that it not require dissolution back into another."¹⁶³ Thus, the ὄχημα does not dissolve after the soul is released from the body but

¹⁵⁴ Proclus, *In Timaeus.*, III. Porphyry also represents the ὄχημα-πνεῦμα with the term περιβλημα, a term that Finamore (*Iamblichus*, 12) shows that Iamblichus never uses and which has obvious implications for the way in which it is understood.

¹⁵⁵ Proclus, *Timaeus*, III, 21.

¹⁵⁶ See Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 51.

¹⁵⁷ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [377], 10-15.

¹⁵⁸ Iamblichus, *In Timaeus*, fr.84. See also, Finamore, *Iamblichus*, 11.

¹⁵⁹ Finamore, *Iamblichus*, 14.

¹⁶⁰ Iamblichus, quoted in Simplicius' *in Aristotle's Categories*, trans. by Festugière, 196.

¹⁶¹ Finamore, *Iamblichus*, 13.

¹⁶² See Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [68].

¹⁶³ Proclus, *In Timaeus.*, III, 267, 20-22.

is preserved; “the acts of soul which are ascending and being freed from generation divest themselves of bodies for the future.”¹⁶⁴ The soul is a composite by definition and, as such, must also retain this lower element. All of its powers must remain.

3.7 THE DESCENDED SOUL

The preservation of the lower lives of the soul is of central importance for an account of the incorporeal body and, as we shall see, a complete account of theurgy. Iamblichus writes that “there has been much controversy within the Platonic school”¹⁶⁵ concerning this question, with one school, represented by Plotinus and Porphyry, failing to adequately maintain the appropriate division between the soul’s lives and thereby blending the irrational into the rational, and another, represented by Numenius, positing too strict a division between the rational and irrational lives of the soul and thereby missing the soul’s underlying unity. While the higher essence of the soul must be separated from generation in one sense, there must also be an account of the unity of the soul — the difference between its two lives and the unity of the composite soul must be simultaneously affirmed in order to form a complete psychological doctrine.

Iamblichus’ insistence on making both aspects of the particular soul a necessary part of its definition results in the radical affirmation of the truly intermediate character of the particular soul. Since a perverse act can never arise from a perfect substance and, since the acts of the particular soul reveal temporality and division, Iamblichus therefore asserts that the entire human soul must be descended.¹⁶⁶ Priscianus’ outline of Iamblichus’ views offers insight into his position. He writes:

...the particular soul embraces both characteristics *equally*, both permanency and change, so that also in this way its intermediate position

¹⁶⁴ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [374], 1-7: “καὶ τὰ μὲν τῶν ἀνιουσῶν καὶ ἀπολυομένων τῆς γενέσεως ἀφίεσθαι τὸ λοιπὸν τῶν σωμάτων.

¹⁶⁵ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [374], 18.

¹⁶⁶ Pseudo-Simplicius, *In De Anima*, 89.33-90.25: “But if, as Iamblichus thinks, a distorted and imperfect activity cannot proceed from an impassible and perfect substance, the soul would be affected somehow in its essence (εἰ δέ, ὡς τῷ Ἰαμβλίχῳ δοκεῖ, οὐκ ἂν ἐξ ἀπαθοῦς καὶ τελείας οὐσίας διστραμμένη καὶ ἀτελεῆς προῖοι ἐνέργεια, εἴη ἂν παθαινομένη πῶς καὶ κατ’ οὐσίαν).” These translations are my own, but have been guided by John Dillon’s *De Anima*.

is again preserved; for higher beings are stable, mortal ones are completely changeable. The particular soul, however, which as middle is divided and multiplied together with the mundane beings, does not only remain permanent, but also changes because it lives through so many divisible lives. And not only its habits, but also changes in its substance ... change is inherent in its essence.¹⁶⁷

Thus, the acts of the embodied soul have a multiform expression. The composite soul projects its irrational, lower lives which cause it to become entwined, through them, in the body; its ὄχημα becomes bound in generation in its descent. Furthermore, the rational soul does not remain unchanged in the mingling of the ὄχημα-πνεῦμα in generation; the substance of the soul itself descends. On the other hand, the division between the two lives of the soul means that the higher life of the soul is also not entirely bound by this mixing.

Thus, the importance of maintaining the integrity of *both* aspects of the embodied soul emerges. Overemphasizing the unity of the soul (ie. its intellectual attributes and essence), such as Iamblichus criticizes Plotinus for, raises the soul above its intermediate place, while an emphasis on its division (such as he charges Numenius with), cuts it off from its higher life. To know the soul's substance and, by extension, consider the appropriate means of its salvation, both of its lives must be simultaneously affirmed.

All of this serves to outline the truly intermediate nature of the soul's life in all aspects of its embodied existence. As Pseudo-Simplicius writes:

... it is a mean not only between the divisible and indivisible, or what remains and what proceeds, or the intellective and the irrational, but also between the ungenerated and the generated. It is ungenerated in accordance with its permanent, intellectual, and indivisible aspect, while it is generated in accordance with its procession, divisibility, and association with the irrational. It possesses neither its ungenerated aspect purely, as an intellectual entity does, since it is not indivisible or permanent, nor its

¹⁶⁷ Priscianus, *Metaphrasis*, 31.27-32.19: “Ἀμφω ἄρα κατὰ τὸν Ἰάμβλιχον ἡ μερική ψυχή ἐξ ἴσου συνείληφε, καὶ τὸ μόνιμον καὶ τὸ μεταβαλλόμενον, ἵνα καὶ ταύτη ἡ μεσότης σώζεται. τὰ μὲν γὰρ κρείττω μόνιμα μόνως, τὰ δὲ θνητὰ πάντα μεταβλητὰ. ἡ δὲ μερική ψυχή, ὡς μέση πᾶσι τοῖς περικοσμίσις γένεσι συμμεριζομένη τε καὶ συμπληθουμένη, οὐ μόνον μένει ἀλλὰ καὶ μεταβάλλει τοσαύτας διαζῶσα μεριστὰς ζωάς. καὶ οὐ κατὰ τὰς ἕξεις μόνως ἀλλὰ καὶ κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν μεταβάλλεται πη.”

generated aspect as the lowest entities do, since these never completely exist.¹⁶⁸

The composite simultaneously shares in both aspects of its dual nature; it is never destroyed completely insofar as it is ungenerated, and never fully actual, insofar as it is generated. It is never fully rational or irrational. However, it is also simultaneously *both* of these. The soul has two essences.¹⁶⁹

By affirming the dual existence of the soul in such a complete way, Iamblichus provides the foundation in the structure of the soul itself for theurgy to be effective and necessary. Like Socrates' account of love in the *Symposium*, its poverty is also a capacity to receive. Pseudo-Simplicius continues:

The generated aspect of it, however, also never proceeds without the stable and ungenerated, while the ungenerated aspect of it is sometimes removed from all association with generation in the life separated from body. Therefore the soul is both immortal and permanent, always having its immortality and permanency inferior to the intellectual life ... But it does not preserve its permanence pure. For because of its declension outside, as a whole it simultaneously both remains and proceeds, and it has neither completely without the other. Whence, its immortality is at that time filled with mortality in its whole self, and it does not remain immortal only. Its ungeneratedness somehow happens to come to be, and its indivisibility is divided.¹⁷⁰

In its activities in generation, the soul simultaneously remains and proceeds, sharing in both permanence and change. Furthermore, since the soul is a unity of these two simultaneous activities, it is the 'whole' that proceeds and remains, thereby admitting

¹⁶⁸ Pseudo-Simplicius, *In De Anima*, 89.33-50.25: “ὡς καὶ ταῦτα εἶναι μέση οὐ τῶν μεριστῶν μόνον καὶ ἀμεριστῶν οὐδὲ τῶν μενόντων καὶ προεληλυθότων οὐδὲ τῶν νοερῶν καὶ ἀλόγων, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ἀγενήτων καὶ γενητῶν, κατὰ μὲν τὸ μόνιμον ἑαυτῆς καὶ νοερὸν καὶ ἀμεριστὸν ἀγέντος οὕσα. κατὰ δὲ τὴν πρόοδον καὶ τὸ μεριστὸν καὶ τὴν πρὸς τὸ ἄλογον κοινωνίαν γινομένη, οὐδὲ τὸ ἀγένητον εἰλικρινὲς ἔχουσα, οἷον τὸ νοερὸν, ἐπειδὴ οὐδὲ τὸ ἀμεριστὸν ἢ τὸ μόνιμον, οὐδὲ τὸ γενητὸν τοῖς ἐσχάτοις ὁμοίον, τοῖς ὅλως ποτὲ μὴ οὔσιν.”

¹⁶⁹ See Dillon, *De Anima*, 108.

¹⁷⁰ Pseudo-Simplicius, *In De Anima*, 89.50-90.25: “ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν γενητὸν αὐτῆς καὶ προῖον οὐδέποτε ἄνευ τοῦ μόνιμου καὶ ἀγενήτου, τὸ δὲ ἀγένητον αὐτῆς ποτε πάσης ἀπαλλάσσεται τῆς πρὸς γένεσιν κοινωνίας ἐν τῇ χωριστῇ ἀπὸ σωμάτων ζωῇ. διὸ καὶ ἀθάνατος ἢ ψυχὴ καὶ μόνιμος, αἰεὶ μὲν τῆς νοερᾶς ζωῆς ὑφειμένην ἔχουσα τὴν ἀθανασίαν καὶ μονιμότητα, καὶ πρὸς ἑαυτὴν δὲ ἢ ἡμετέρα διαθοπούμενη... οὐ μὴν καθαρὸν τὸ ἑαυτῆς σώζουσα μόνιμον. διὰ γὰρ τὴν ἐξω ῥοπήν ὁμοῦ ὅλη καὶ μένει καὶ πρόεισι, καὶ οὐδέτερον ἔχει παντελῶς οὐδὲ ἀπηλλαγμένον τοῦ λοιποῦ. ὅθεν καὶ τὸ ἀθάνατον αὐτῆς τότε ἀναπίμπλαται τοῦ θνητοῦ κατὰ πᾶν ἑαυτό, καὶ οὐ μένει μόνον ἀθάνατον, καὶ τὸ ἀγένητον γινόμενόν πως τυγχάνει οὐκ ὄν, ὡς καὶ τὸ ἀμεριστὸν αὐτῆς μεριζόμενον, οὐκέτι τῇ οὐσίᾳ οὕσα ἐνέργεια, καθ' ὅσον αὐτῇ θέμις.”

these opposing qualities to all parts; the soul simultaneously abides (μένειν) and changes (μεταβάλλειν).¹⁷¹

Thus, the *whole* soul is immortal and permanent. In this simultaneous procession and reversion, the soul becomes form for itself.¹⁷² Because the soul is ceaseless activity, the simultaneous procession and reversion of its activity means that its remaining is never lost; its becoming is part of its being. Furthermore, it finds its principle of replenishment *within* itself.¹⁷³ By virtue of this self-negation and self-othering activity, the soul is completely emptied and realizes its nothingness, and yet becomes conscious of a persistence of life within by which it possesses reality. Through the abandonment of itself, and in coming to know its nothingness, the soul finds its essential unity within. It can change entirely without losing its self. Thus, the soul's procession out of itself is a self-alienation and reversion in which its underlying unity becomes manifest, not in spite of its change, but precisely as the nexus of these opposing activities. It is a “dynamic identity.”¹⁷⁴

3.8 SALVATION

It is precisely by virtue of its mixed constitution that the soul is able to share in both that which is ontologically lower and that which is higher, therein playing a central role in the reconciliation of the broader cosmic procession. Thus, Iamblichus writes that souls are sent to earth “for the completion of the universe so that there will be just as many living things in the cosmos as there are in the intelligible realm.”¹⁷⁵ Its divided life allows it to take a body without being entirely overcome by it, thereby facilitating the return of the created cosmos and serving as a “demonstration of divine life” so that the gods might “show themselves through the pure and immaculate lives of souls.”¹⁷⁶ Such an account implicitly points to and affirms two essential themes which unify Iamblichus’

¹⁷¹ Pseudo-Simplicius, *In De Anima*, 6.10.

¹⁷² Pseudo-Simplicius, *In De Anima*, 90.25.

¹⁷³ Pseudo-Simplicius, *In De Anima*, 89.33-90.25.

¹⁷⁴ Steel, *Changing Self*, 66.

¹⁷⁵ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [379], 1-3.

¹⁷⁶ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [379], 5-6.

thought: the graciousness of the divine and the need for the purification of the soul in order to conform to such goodness. Thus, Crystal Addey writes: “the process by which the divine permeates the lower order is divine sympathy, but this divine sympathy is brought about first by divine love.”¹⁷⁷

As Iamblichus’ account in *De Anima* moves to eschatological questions, the language changes, giving rise to a more general opposition between the position of “most Platonists (οἱ πλεῖστοι τῶν Πλατωνικῶν)” and the opinions of “the ancient authorities (οἱ ἀρχαιότεροι).” This shift, in one way, provides an even clearer example of the purpose of Iamblichus’ polemic against Plotinus. He is now part of a larger group of Platonists which must be corrected by the ancients; the Platonic school must be converted by the ancient wisdom of theology. Nonetheless, the underlying theme of the critique remains the same. Iamblichus writes:

Plotinus... and most Platonists, consider the most perfect purification to be a divestment of the passions and ... a disassociation from thought involved with matter, a being filled with Intellect and Being, and an assimilation of the thinking subject with the object of its thought.¹⁷⁸

In this way, Iamblichus repeats his criticism of doctrines that fail to preserve the irrational and material life of the soul: the Platonists “hover around (τὰς αἰπέσεις ἐλίσσονται)”¹⁷⁹ an excessively rational explanation; they misunderstand (again, against the ancients) the place of the body in the salvation of the whole.¹⁸⁰ Thus, he reiterates that “most Pythagoreans and Platonists” attribute this purification to the “agency” (τὸ μετὰ τοῦτο διελόμεθα)¹⁸¹ of the individual souls themselves (ὕπ’ αὐτῶν τῶν μεριστῶν ψυχῶν).

This opposition is central to *De Mysteriis* — a work in which Iamblichus himself takes on the role of priest to bring about such a conversion — and points to a methodological framework that he outlines explicitly in *De Mysteriis*: there are different

¹⁷⁷ Addey, *Divination and Theurgy in Neoplatonism*, 29.

¹⁷⁸ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [385], 10-15: “Πλωτῖνος δὲ καὶ οἱ πλεῖστοι τῶν Πλατωνικῶν ἀπόθεσις τῶν παθῶν καὶ τῶν μορθωτικῶν διαγνώσεων... καὶ τῶν ἐνύλων διανοήσεων ἀπόστασιν, πλήρωσιν τε ἀπὸ νοῦ καὶ τοῦ ὄντος, ἀφομοίωσιν τε τοῦ κατανοουμένου πρὸς τὸ κατανοοῦν τὴν τελεωτάτην κάθαρσιν ὑπολαμβάνουσιν.”

¹⁷⁹ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [455], 19.

¹⁸⁰ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [456].

¹⁸¹ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [455], 1.

ways of knowing that each have a mode proper to them.¹⁸² Although not mentioning the ancient authorities thus far in *De Anima*, Iamblichus now appeals to them at the point when a philosophical examination has been exhausted. For Iamblichus, purification is brought about through the “indivisible demiurgic causes (τῶν τε δημιουργικῶν αἰτιῶν τῶν ἀφανῶν).”¹⁸³ We seek not just an understanding of the soul, but its actual redemption. This redemption is given and beyond the powers of the soul in itself and, therefore, requires a different mode of relation, one which both reaches out and receives. The logic of the psychology present in *De Anima* must also be supplemented by the soteriology of *De Mysteriis* which seeks γνῶσις through ritual πρᾶξις. In this, Iamblichus is re-affirming an underlying methodology that is at the heart of his critique of Plotinus: a full treatment of the divided soul requires a scientific theology.

3.9 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The preceding chapters have highlighted the problems present in a common, often one-dimensional, understanding of the opposition between Iamblichus and Plotinus. For both thinkers, the soul is a divided unity, the salvation of which requires the purification of both lives. Each understands that the generated cosmos is a result of the divine goodness and, as such, cannot remain in opposition to the immaterial realm in the way that Gnostic thinkers conceptualize it. Furthermore, this divine life remains present in nature as a ‘trace’ or ‘symbol’ and facilitates the purification and ascent of the soul. Finally, the descent of the soul is, ultimately, a good meant to bring a perfect harmony between the natural and the intelligible.

Their psychologies also have much in common: the soul is a conjunction between opposing realities; it is simultaneously enmeshed in, and free from, generation; the means of its self-constitution are written in the structure of the soul itself. Furthermore, the standard division between Plotinus’ ‘man above’ and Iamblichus’ ‘fully descended soul’ is inadequate to reflect the complexities of their thought; Iamblichus has an account in

¹⁸² Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [7], 5-8.

¹⁸³ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [455], 4.

which the soul's higher essence communes with the composite by "conversion (*ἐπιστροφή*)"¹⁸⁴ and, in some sense, remains free from generation, while Plotinus' notion of the intellect of the soul is a logical, rather than ontological, truth. Indeed, the difference between the two is one of emphasis, rather than kind.

However, for Iamblichus, Plotinus' account is not wrong because he fails to distinguish the higher and lower activities of the soul, but because he overemphasizes the pure essence of the soul and, thereby, provides a one-sided, ambiguous account of the way in which both are present in the composite, a fact exemplified in his incomplete account of the *ῥχημα-πνεῦμα*. Thus, Michael Harrington writes: "The reincarnational path of the soul never emerges explicitly in Plotinus because he is simply not interested in developing his structure of the soul into a complete system."¹⁸⁵ The absence of a complete, systematic theology results in an inadequately formed soteriology and, therefore, fails to provide the means for the purification of the irrational lives of the soul *in generation*. For Iamblichus, there must be an account of salvation and purification that is suitable for all souls, or for the entire city: "if one does not grant some such mode of worship to cities and peoples not freed from the fated processes of generation and from a society dependent on the body, one will contrive to fail of both types of good, both the immaterial and material."¹⁸⁶

As we shall see in the subsequent chapter, it is through the material rites of theurgy, as the most immediate means of purification for the embodied soul, that a full account of the soul's return emerges, a return that is appropriate for the soul in its fully descended state and which accounts for both aspects of its intermediate existence. The divided activities of the embodied soul reveal its poverty; theurgy serves as the means, within generation, of unifying this psychic opposition through that which is given.

¹⁸⁴ Iamblichus, *De Anima* [373], 22.

¹⁸⁵ Harrington, *Human Mediation in Eriugena*, 7.

¹⁸⁶ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [220], 1.

CHAPTER 4: THEURGY AND ONTOLOGICAL DIVISION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In both form and content, Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis* brings the psychology of *De Anima* to its fullest expression by orienting the soul within the whole ontological hierarchy. While *De Anima* presents a philosophical account in which the soul is characterized by fundamental restlessness and division, *De Mysteriis* reveals the unity on which this ceaseless motion is grounded. This is first manifest through the literary structure of the work. It is written in the spirit of a Platonic dialogue, in which the form embodies the theoretical content, and narrated by a 'priest' in the Egyptian tradition, thereby drawing on the ancient wisdom of the Hermetic texts and Chaldean mysteries.¹⁸⁷ These associations form an image of a primal unity in history that, in its development, reveals a givenness that underlies all existence and provides the life by which the nothingness of the particular soul can be filled.

However, in its content, *De Mysteriis* is also a philosophical and theological treatment of the problem of the embodied soul. In order for this given unity to be received according to the mode of the particular soul, there must be a systematic treatment of both the whole procession, as well as each class of being. The ontology, while unified from one perspective, is also a chain of distinct essences that requires a systematic exposition of its parts. Iamblichus therefore writes: "We will provide, in an appropriate manner, explanations proper to each, dealing in a theological mode with theological questions and in theurgical terms with those concerning theurgy, while philosophical issues we will join with you in examining in philosophical terms."¹⁸⁸ There are various modes of knowledge that parallel the distinct natures of their objects, "on the

¹⁸⁷ See Tanaseanu-Döbler's exhaustive account of the ways in which Iamblichus draws upon these texts (*Theurgy in Late Antiquity*).

¹⁸⁸ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [7], 5-8: "τὸ δ' οἰκεῖον ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ἄποδώσομέν σοι προσηκόντως, καὶ τὰ μὲν θεολογικὰ θεολογικῶς, θεουργικῶς δὲ τὰ θεουργικὰ ἀποκρινοῦμεθα, φιλοσόφως δὲ τὰ φιλόσοφα μετὰ σοῦ συνεξετάσομεν."

basis of which both you and those like you can be led intellectually to the essence of true being.”¹⁸⁹

Such an approach serves to reinforce the notion upon which Iamblichus’ philosophical and theological account is based: the various sciences are both divided and unified, depending on the perspective from which the object is viewed. Insofar as there is opposition, it is the result of the soul’s own dividedness and temporality; insofar as there is unity, it is the result of the divine life. In this way, the guiding impulse of both *De Mysteriis* and *De Anima* is analogous: the tension present in the encosmic life of the soul requires an exposition that maintains both sides of this tension simultaneously; both philosophy and theology are required in order to come to know the truth.

At the heart of this dialectical movement between unity and division, however, *De Mysteriis* is fundamentally a soteriology and an account of how the fully descended soul is able to return to its full life and actuality. The theoretical movement between the divisible and indivisible, the parts and the whole, philosophy and theology, must be incarnated in such a way that there is an actual identity between the soul and its higher life according to its proper mode. For Iamblichus, it is theurgy that serves as both the means of the descended soul’s self-constitution, as well as its purification, salvation and, by extension, of the restitution of the whole cosmic procession. Its intermediate character, which partakes simultaneously in the division of generation and the unity of the divine, enables it to serve as a nexus that unifies both the purest and the most mundane elements or, more precisely, demonstrates that the mundane is simultaneously imbued with the life of God. It is by virtue of the immediate materiality of its rites that theurgy serves as the appropriate vehicle for the soul’s purification and ascent.

To give form to his theurgic system, it is necessary for Iamblichus to deal with problems similar to those which he faces in *De Anima*. An excessively intellectual notion of the soul results in an unfounded faith in the soul’s own intellectual activity. In this exaltation of the intellect of the soul, the lower forms of generation are cast aside, separating the soul from its most immediate relation to the divine in nature. Furthermore,

¹⁸⁹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [7], 10: “διὰ λόγων ὄντα γνωστὰ τούτην οὐδὲν ἀπολείμωμον εἰς τὴν τελέαν ἀπόδειξι.”

by using the soul as a measure — even in the most subtle of ways — some thinkers apply temporal categories to the nature of the gods and hold an unduly limited notion of theurgy. Rituals of material theurgy and their variety of forms and sometimes problematic instantiations, viewed within this one-sided interpretive schema, appear to be human acts that are an extension of the soul’s own powers. If such an error is maintained, theurgic acts are understood as merely relating to the lower projections of the soul and serve only to order the soul’s irrational powers in order to aid in the release of its ‘purer’, intellectual essence.

It is through Iamblichus’ critique of this position, presented through the priest Abamon’s corrections of the initiate Anebo, that the philosophical and theological heart of *De Mysteriis* is revealed. The tensions present must be reconciled through a correspondence — rather than a blending — between the soul and the divine, in which the parts maintain their distinction while participating in an underlying unity. The material rites are effective, not because they free the intellect from the body, but because there is a conversion of the soul that is suitable for each level of its development. Thus, theurgy and the soul interact through a form of “cooperative demiurgy”¹⁹⁰, with the gods giving themselves immediately in generation, while, through theurgic rites, the participating soul simultaneously becomes demiurgic and serves as a vehicle for the restitution of the entire cosmic procession. In this way, the soul is an incarnation of the whole procession, reversion and remaining of the divine itself, by which the whole is drawn back to its source¹⁹¹, and becomes not only the knower, or the potency that characterizes the descended soul’s thinking activities, but also that which is known — form, or actualized life.

4.2 THE FORM AND METHOD OF *DE MYSTERIIS*

In order to understand the way in which *De Mysteriis* reconciles and completes the oppositions developed in previous chapters, it is first necessary to provide an account

¹⁹⁰ MacIsaac, “The Nous of the Partial Soul,” 21-23.

¹⁹¹ Shaw writes: “For Iamblichus, the cosmos itself was the paradigmatic theurgy: the act of the gods continually extending themselves into mortal expression” (*Theurgy and the Soul*, 17).

of *how* the work must be read. Crystal Addey argues that Iamblichus' treatment of Porphyry's thought through the relationship of Abamon to Anebo is in the spirit of a Platonic dialogue and, as such, serves a pedagogical function. In such a reading, the criticisms raised by Abamon, rather than embodying a thinly veiled critique of Porphyry by Iamblichus, are actually part of a poetic examination of central themes of the argument and do not reflect a sincere criticism of Porphyry's thought in the way often held. John Dillon outlines certain literary elements that support this poetic reading of the dialogue; for example, moments when Iamblichus 'slips' out of character, his use of pseudonyms and the way that he invents gods in order to complete his theological system. This interpretation is also supported by the fact that Porphyry understood and used such a mode of teaching in his own thought. He writes that priests teach either discursively or symbolically¹⁹², understanding both as valid modes of thought. Furthermore, Addey argues that "an enigmatic mode of 'double vision' seems to underlie Porphyry's oracle collection"¹⁹³ which, in its allegorical interpretation of oracles, manifests a ritualistic approach that points to a philosophical *πρᾶξις* that is fundamentally theurgic and, thus, in accord with Iamblichus' thought. It is necessary to be cognizant of this underlying movement in order to avoid mischaracterizations, such as those leveled by scholars such as Dodds, which take the religious assertions of Abamon to correspond directly with the philosophical doctrine of Iamblichus.

4.2.1. METHODOLOGY

With this interpretive framework in mind, it is possible to proceed to the work itself. The initial chapter of *De Mysteriis* not only lays out the structure of the work, but also reveals the fundamental spirit which guides it. Iamblichus begins with an invocation to Hermes, the "god who presides over rational discourse, true knowledge about the gods and is one and the same always and everywhere."¹⁹⁴ As Dillon notes¹⁹⁵, Iamblichus is

¹⁹² Addey, *Divination and Theurgy in Neoplatonism*, 79.

¹⁹³ Addey, *Divination and Theurgy in Neoplatonism*, 80.

¹⁹⁴ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [2], 2: "Θεὸς ὁ τῶν λόγων ἡγεμὼν, Ἑρμῆς, πάλαι δέδοκται καλῶς ἅπασιν, τοῖς ἱερεῦσιν εἶναι κοινός· ὁ καὶ τῆς περὶ θεῶν ἀληθινῆς ἐπιστήμης προεσθηκῶς εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ αὐτὸς ἐν ὅλοις."

¹⁹⁵ Dillon, *De Mysteriis*, xxxi.

purposely ambiguous regarding *which* Hermes he is invoking in order to draw on associations to the Greek Hermes as the interpreter of the divine will to humanity, as well as Egyptian amalgams that are associated with writing, guardianship of wisdom, knowledge and science. Furthermore, Hermes is associated with the creative λόγος in the Stoic tradition.¹⁹⁶ Although it is perhaps unremarkable that Abamon invokes the God of speech (λόγος) at the outset of his letter to Anebo, this points to a central aspect of Iamblichus' thought. He appeals to the god that is ruler and general over discourse, but also, if we take into account the Stoic context of which he was certainly conscious,¹⁹⁷ the ruler of the creative λόγος, the forming activity of the cosmos and the means by which the soul is self-constituting.¹⁹⁸ Hermes presides over the discourse; the teachers are priests who have charge of the revelatory texts. In this, Iamblichus is asserting a hierarchy in which the given truth of theology is prior to the activity of philosophy.

Iamblichus continues by outlining the way in which the inquiry will proceed. He states that there will be matters for clarification (διάκρισις), the reasons why things are as they are, others that “draw one’s attention in both directions at once, since they contain an inherent contradiction”, and still others that “call for an exposition of our whole mystical system.”¹⁹⁹ The authorities used in such an endeavour are the sages (σοφοί) of Chaldea, the prophets (προφήται) of Egypt and the speculations (θεωρία) of the philosophers. Furthermore, each science will be used to examine the other: “if you put forward a philosophical question, we will settle this also for you by recourse to the ancient *stelae* of Hermes, to which Plato before us, and Pythagoras too, gave careful study in the establishment of their philosophy.”²⁰⁰ This statement, by grounding the thought of Plato and Pythagoras in revelation, reveals another guiding principle of the

¹⁹⁶ See Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*. Also Plutarch understands Isis to be the daughter of Hermes, writing “διὸ καὶ τὸ κοσμεῖσθαι τούτοις τοὺς ἀποθανόντας Ἰσιακοὺς σύμβολόνεστι τούτων τὸν λόγον εἶναι μετ’ αὐτῶν, καὶ τούτων ἔχοντας ἄλλο δὲ μηδὲν ἐκεῖ βαδίζειν” (*Moralia*, 352c).

¹⁹⁷ For more, see Dodds’ commentary on Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*, 200, 202f; Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy*; Kamesar, “The Logos Endiathetos and the Logos Prophorikos in Allegorical Interpretation;” and O’Brien, “The Middle Platonist Demiurge and Stoic Cosmobiology.”

¹⁹⁸ See MacIsaac, “The Nous of the Partial Soul.”

¹⁹⁹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [4], 4-9: “Τὰ μὲν οὖν ἐπιποθεῖ διάκρισιν τινα τῶν κακῶς συγκεχυμένων, τὰ δ’ ἐστὶ περὶ τὴν αἰτίαν δι’ ἣν ἕκαστά ἐστὶ τε οὕτως καὶ νοεῖται, τὰ δ’ ἐπ’ ἄμφω τὴν γνώμην ἔλκει, κατ’ ἐναντιώσιν τινα προβαλλόμενα· ἕνια δὲ καὶ τὴν ὅλην ἀπατεῖ παρ’ ἡμῶν μυσταγωγίαν.”

²⁰⁰ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [6], 1-3: “Φιλόσοφον δ’ εἶ τι προβάλλεις ἐρώτημα, διακρινοῦμέν σοι καὶ τοῦτο κατὰ τὰς Ἑρμοῦ παλαιᾶς στήλας, ἃς Πλάτων ἤδη πρόσθεν καὶ Πυθαγόρας διαναγνόντες φιλοσοφίαν συνεστήσαντο.”

examination. Although the sciences can be divided, they are ultimately unified through their identification with a single source; “knowledge is united from the outset with its own cause.”²⁰¹ The gods are not accessible to humans through a discursive mode of reasoning, but must rather be grasped with a uniform mode of cognition (γνώσις). The ceaseless motion of syllogistic reasoning (συλλογισμός)²⁰² must be unified by the higher, given life of the divine.

Abamon is therefore critical of Anebo for treating knowledge of the gods in the same way as knowledge of any other sort, warning him to avoid the inclination to one side of an argument over another. He writes: “Knowledge of the gods is of a quite different nature, and is far removed from all antithetical procedure... but from all eternity it coexisted in the soul in complete uniformity.”²⁰³ He continues:

So too let the human soul join itself to them in knowledge on the same terms, not employing conjecture or opinion or some form of syllogistic reasoning, all of which take their start from the plane of temporal reality, to pursue that essence which is beyond all these things, but rather connecting itself to the gods with pure and blameless reasoning (ταῖς δὲ καθαραῖς καὶ ἀμέμπτοις νοήσεσιν), which it has received from all eternity from those same gods.²⁰⁴

In this way, Iamblichus lays out the disparity between the unified object of knowledge and the divided cognition of the thinking soul. This leads Abamon to admonish Anebo that he not take the divisions of the classes as “exclusively characterizing either potencies or activities or essence... nor any one of these aspects alone”, but rather understand them as “extending throughout all of them.”²⁰⁵ The application of discursive thought to the divine results in artificial divisions. The inquiry must be concerning the whole of being

²⁰¹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [8], 1: “συνήνωταί τε ἐξ ἀρχῆς πρὸς τὴν οἰκείαν αἰτίαν.”

²⁰² Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [8].

²⁰³ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [10], 5-8: “ὥσπερ εἶωθε καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἐν ταῖς διαλέκτοις προτεινομένων· τὸ δὲ οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδαμῶς παραπλήσιον· ἐξήλλακται γὰρ αὐτῶν ἢ εἴδησις, ἀντιθέσεώς τε πάσης κεχώρισται, καὶ οὐκ ἐν τῷ συγγωρεῖσθαι νῦν ἢ ἐν τῷ γίνεσθαι ὑφέστηκεν, ἀλλ' ἦν ἐξ αἰδίου μονοειδῆς ἐπὶ τῇ ψυχῇ συνυπάρχουσα.”

²⁰⁴ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [9], 12 - [10], 2: “οὕτω καὶ ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη ψυχὴ κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ τῇ γνώσει πρὸς αὐτοὺς συναπτέσθω, εἰκασία μὲν ἢ δόξη ἢ συλλογισμῶ τινι, ἀρχομένοις ποτὲ ἀπὸ χρόνου, μηδαμῶς τὴν ὑπὲρ ταῦτα πάντα οὐσίαν μεταδιώκουσα, ταῖς δὲ καθαραῖς καὶ ἀμέμπτοις νοήσεσιν, αἷς εἴληφεν ἐξ αἰδίου παρὰ τῶν θεῶν, ταύταις αὐτοῖς συνηρ-τημένη.”

²⁰⁵ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [18], 3: “Ταύτην δὴ οὖν τὴν διαίρεσιν μὴ νομίσης ἰδίαν εἶναι δυνάμεων ἢ ἐνεργειῶν ἢ οὐσίας, μηδὲ χωρὶς διαλαβῶν ἐφ' ἐνόσ αὐτῶν ἐπισκόπει, κοινῇ δὲ κατὰ πάντων αὐτὴν διατείνας τούτων.”

rather than a part. In this respect, essences are prior to activities, “... for if activities and motions were constitutive of essences, then these would determine their specific differences. But if it is essences that generate activities, then it is they, as having prior distinct existence, which bestow their distinctness upon motions and activities and accidents.”²⁰⁶

It is important to note, however, that in the introduction Iamblichus is speaking as a prophet of Egypt, or from a theological position that seeks the unity of the whole and the stable ground from which philosophical activities may proceed. From the perspective of philosophy, however, it is necessary to maintain the distinction between the logical and ontological priority of the object of thought. Essences are prior to their activities in terms of existence, while logically anterior due to the limits of the encosmic soul. For the soul to know its object, it must also be divided for thought. Iamblichus therefore writes:

For if you take each of them [the superior classes] to be a unity, then the whole structure of scientific theology is thrown into confusion; but if... they form distinct genera, and there is no single essential definition common to all of them... this eliminates the possibility of there being any characteristic attributes of them as a whole [and] one is not going to discover what one is seeking. But if one were to apply an analogical principle of identity to the entities in question... then one might succeed in defining their specific characteristics.²⁰⁷

Thus, after the previous assertion that we are seeking to join the gods in a γνῶσις which comes through the theology of the priest, Iamblichus affirms the need for a philosophical examination of essences. Due to the discursive mode of the particular soul’s reasoning activity, a theological examination of the unity of essences would be formless, while a purely logical account would result in the projection of empty forms of syllogistic reasoning onto what is essentially uniform, thereby obscuring the divine’s true life. The

²⁰⁶ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [14], 1-3: “εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἦσαν αἱ ἐνέργειαι καὶ κινήσεις ὑποστατικαὶ τῶν οὐσιῶν, αὐταὶ καὶ τῆς διαφορότητος ἂν αὐτῶν ὑπῆρχον κύριαι, εἰ δ’ αἱ οὐσίαι γεννώσι τὰς ἐνεργείας, αὐταὶ πρότερον οὐσαὶ χωρισταὶ παρέχουσι καὶ ταῖς κινήσεσι καὶ ἐνεργείαις καὶ τοῖς παρεπομένοις τὸ δίστασθαι.”

²⁰⁷ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [14], 10-17: “εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἐν ἕκαστον ὑπολαμβάνεις, συγχεῖται πᾶσα τῆς ἐπιστημονικῆς θεολογίας ἡ διάταξις, εἰ δ’ ὥσπερ ἐστὶν ἐμπλησθῆναι, τοῖς γένεσιν ἀφώρισται, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς εἷς οὐσιώδης κοινός λόγος, ἀλλὰ τὰ πρότερον αὐτῶν ἀπὸ τῶν καταδεεστέρων ἐξήρηται, οὔτε οἷον τε κοινὰ αὐτῶν ἐξευρεῖν πέρατα· ἐάν τε καὶ ἦ δυνατόν, αὐτὸ δὲ τοῦτο τὰ ιδιώματα αὐτῶν ἀναιρεῖ· ταύτη μὲν οὖν οὐκ ἂν τις εὔροι τὸ ἐπιζητούμενον τὴν δ’ ἀνά τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον ταυτότητα ἐπὶ τῶν ἀναφερόντων ἀναλογιζόμενος, οἷον ἐπὶ τῶν πολλῶν ἐν τοῖς θεοῖς γενῶν, καὶ αὐθις ἐπὶ τῶν ἐν τοῖς δαίμοσι καὶ ἥρωσι, καὶ τὸ τελευταῖον ἐπὶ τῶν ψυχῶν, δύναται ἂν τις αὐτῶν ἀφορίζεσθαι τὴν ιδιότητα.”

underlying distinction that Iamblichus seeks to make is that the method of inquiry must be two-fold. When examining the relation of essences to their activities, it is necessary for each mode to correct the other.

4.3 THE INTERMEDIATE CLASSES

Having outlined the method of the work, Iamblichus begins *De Mysteriis* by “making a start” from the first principle in the soul. He writes that there is a “good that is beyond being and ... that which exists on the level of being.”²⁰⁸ Though souls lose an immediate possession of the Good, they are able to participate in it through the adjacent classes in the ontological procession. It is therefore necessary to examine the soul’s relation to other classes in the ontology.

Iamblichus proceeds by examining the two intermediate classes between soul and the Good — the class of heroes, which is immediately above soul in the hierarchy, and of daemons, which ‘follow in the train’ of their god and mediate between the gods and the heroic class. For Iamblichus, the proper activity of the daemons is to complete encosmic natures; they are the “generative and creative powers of the gods in the further extremity of their emanations and in the last stages of division.”²⁰⁹ Furthermore, the daemoniac class is “multiplied in unity, and undergoes mixture without contamination, and ... comprehends all the others inferior to it under the form of what is better.”²¹⁰ Heroes, on the other hand, though still receiving better elements ‘from on high’²¹¹, namely, “unity and purity and permanent stability, undivided identity and transcendence”²¹², are more closely associated with division. Thus, while still maintaining an undivided identity

²⁰⁸ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [15], 3: “Ἔστι δὴ οὖν τὰγαθὸν τό τε ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας καὶ τὸ κατ’ οὐσίαν ὑπάρχον.”

²⁰⁹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [67], 3-5: “λέγω τοίνυν δαίμονας μὲν κατὰ τὰς γεννητικὰς καὶ δημιουργικὰς τῶν θεῶν δυνάμεις ἐν τῇ πορρωτάτῳ τῆς προόδου ἀποτελεωτήσῃ καὶ τῶν ἐσχάτων διαμερισμῶν παράγεσθαι.”

²¹⁰ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [19], 10-13: “τίθεμαι δὴ οὖν τὸ μὲν δαιμόνιον θῦλον ἐν τῷ ἐνὶ πληθούμενον καὶ συμμιγνύμενον ἀμιγῶς, καὶ τὰλλα πάντα τὰ καταδεέστερα κατὰ τὴν τοῦ βελτίονος ἰδέαν προσειλοθός.”

²¹¹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [19].

²¹² Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [20], 1-2: “... καθαρότητα καὶ τὴν μόνιμον κατάστασιν, ταυτότητά τε ἀμέριστον καὶ ὑπεροχὴν τῶν ἄλλων.”

(ταὐτότης)²¹³, heroes are lower ontologically and have a more direct leadership over souls²¹⁴ and are distinguished, primarily, by a greater share of division and a closer relationship to generation

Iamblichus continues to examine the way in which the intermediate classes' particular attributes allow them to serve a mediating function. He writes that “they [daemons and heroes] serve to fill out the indivisible mutuality (ἀλληλουχία)²¹⁵ of the two extremes.”²¹⁶ Their visions are not distorted like those of souls, because they are able to partake in division without ‘contamination’. Both classes are able to mediate between different essences because they share in the attributes of the adjacent rank, thereby bringing about the communion of the primal and ultimate ranks by blending the attributes of each within their own natures. Furthermore, they are distinguished from the soul because they retain, to different degrees, the principle of unity in themselves and therefore an immediate self-relation between their parts.

Thus, the essences of both classes are distinguished according to their place in the order of being and the degree to which they possess unity in themselves. Both retain to different degrees “the fullness of communion between the primal and ultimate classes — [a] communion which operates equally in the modes of essence, of potency, and of act.”²¹⁷ Although they can be divided into parts for thought, all of these ‘parts’ participate equally in the Good. The internal tension present in particular souls is not present for the higher classes. They therefore serve to unite the gods with souls through a bond which is ‘indissoluble’ (ἀδιάλυτος)²¹⁸ and that results in a harmony in which all parts work together through participation and the receptivity engendered in the lower beings, and form in “...equal measure a progression from the superior to the lesser, and a re-ascent

²¹³ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [20-21].

²¹⁴ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [67], 5.

²¹⁵ This word has a distinctive role. It is used to describe the unity and reciprocity of the cosmos, but also has a historical usage in the tradition. See Dillon, *De Anima*, 25 f42.

²¹⁶ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [19], 7: “συμπληροῖ γὰρ καὶ ἐνταῦθα τῶν ἄκρων τὴν ἀλληλουχίαν ἀδιαίρετον.”

²¹⁷ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [20], 10-13: “καὶ ταύτην ὀλόκληρον συμφυομένην ὁμοίως μὲν ἐν τῷ ὑπάρχειν ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐν τῷ δύνασθαι τε καὶ ἐνεργεῖν.”

²¹⁸ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [17], 10.

from the inferior to the prior.”²¹⁹ Thus, these classes are intermediate beings between the first and last principles²²⁰ that bring about the communion of the whole by facilitating opposing motions of procession and return.

4.4 THE GODS AND THE SOUL

After outlining the nature and roles of the intermediate classes, Iamblichus continues to distinguish between the highest and the lowest ontological ranks — the gods and the soul. The gods are unity and permanent stability in oneself (ἰδρυμένον ἐν ἑαυτῷ), the cause of indivisible essences and every motion; they are unmixed and transcendent in essence, potency and activity.²²¹ Thus, the gods are fully unified in themselves and there is no sequential unfolding with respect to their activities. In addition, they have the measure (μέτρον) or cause (αἴτιον) of the universe running together (σύνδρομος) through their entirety (ὅλος).²²² They are the absolute causes of ἐνέργεια itself and, due to their immediate unity and self-relation, serve as the measure of the whole cosmic procession inasmuch as everything below them is separated by degrees from their essential life.

The soul, on the other hand, is characterized by the dividedness of its own self-relation and a passable nature which receives its actuality from without. Iamblichus writes that the soul has the quality of being descended into multiplicity, the ability to give itself to others, to receive into it from elsewhere its principle of limitation, and to participate in primordial motion.²²³ This disparity emerges from a fundamental division between the soul’s potency (δύναμις) and its activities (ἐνέργεια). While the gods serve as the measure (or actualization) of their own acts, the soul is that which is limited and participates in primary essences. It is not self-forming and cares for lower, divided beings, not through its own life, but by virtue of what is higher. It does not contain its own principle of measure as part of its essence. Instead, it is defined from without and

²¹⁹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [17], 12: “πρόοδόν τε ἀπο τῶν βελτιόνων ἐπὶ τὰ ἐλάττονα καὶ ἀναγωγὴν ἀπὸ τῶν ὑποδεεστέρων ἐπὶ τὰ πρότερα διαβιβάζει πως ἐξ ἴσου.”

²²⁰ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [16], 5-9.

²²¹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [18], 15.

²²² Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [22], 5.

²²³ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [19], 1-5.

maintains a relation to its forming principle through participation in a “partial and multiform intellect.”²²⁴ Due to its division and temporality, the soul exercises care (ἐπιμελής)²²⁵ over the inanimate realm, while the gods tend to the division present throughout the whole ontology without losing their unity.²²⁶ Furthermore, although there is inexhaustible activity present in the gods that brings about distinctions and even opposition within them, due to their immediate self-relation and a-temporality, this division is manifest as creativity.²²⁷ In the soul, however, such a tension results in an enmeshment in generation and loss of unity.

While the soul is limited in these respects, the gods nonetheless provide that which is appropriate for it according to its own nature. The soul, although secondary to the daemonic and heroic classes, receives partial powers from both classes, “while expanding with more abundant supplements from itself.”²²⁸ This ‘supplemental’ power becomes a creative power that is manifested as the soul’s capacity to project various forms of life, “while making use of the diverse lives and forms of each encosmic region.”²²⁹ The soul, in this sense, serves as the embodiment of the divine activity in generation. Its two-part nature, while on the one hand limiting, is also a radical freedom from another perspective. Iamblichus writes:

It joins with whatever it will, and withdraws from whatever it will, becoming like all things and, by difference, remaining separate from them. It selects principles akin both to things really existent and to those coming into being, allying itself to the gods’ harmonies of essences and of

²²⁴ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [22], 6: “νοῦ τε μετέχει μεριστοῦ καὶ πολυειδοῦς εἰς τὴν τοῦ ὅλου τε προστασίαν ἀναποβλέπωντος.”

²²⁵ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [22], 5.

²²⁶ The account here is in accord with Iamblichus’ position in the *De Anima*, insofar as the primary manifestation of the soul in terms of the broad, ontological perspective is as something passible and unable to give measure by means of that which is immediately present to it.

²²⁷ Iamblichus defends Aristotle’s notion of substance from the *Categories* and argues that there are contrarities at the heavenly level. The difference between this and the contrariety at the level of soul, however, is that at the heavenly level it occurs simultaneously and therefore results in creation, while in soul it is divided in time and is therefore disordered. Thus, one is a sort of balance that leads to creation, while at our level it leads to error and a loss of unity. See also Dillon, *The Concept of Two Intellects*, 177 and Dillon, *De Mysteriis*, 231, fn. 286.

²²⁸ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [68], 7: “προσθήκαις τε ἄλλαις περιττοτέπαις πλεονάζουσα ἀφ’ ἑαυτῆς.”

²²⁹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [68], 9: “καθ’ ἐκάστην τε χώπαιν τοῦ κόσμου ποικίλαις ζωαῖς καὶ ιδέαις χρωμένῃ.”

potentialities different from those by which daemons and heroes are linked to them.²³⁰

Thus, although the soul has a lesser degree of actuality than that which heroes and daemons possess, it has nonetheless been given by the gods the capacity to “go higher and [be] elevated to a greater rank, even to that of the angelic order.”²³¹ Through its ability to receive limit, the soul is also able to participate in the life of the gods and exercise a freedom and creative capacity that is beyond the classes above it. “Hence”, writes Iamblichus, “the soul seems to have in itself all kinds of being and activities, all kinds of principles, and forms in their entirety. Indeed, to tell the truth (ἐν αἰτίᾳ δὲ)²³², while the soul is always limited to a single, definite body, it is, in associating itself with the superior guiding principles, variously allied to different ones.”²³³ The soul, although nothing in itself, is capable of being everything through the gracious overflowing of the divine.

In this way, the movement of the argument up to this point serves to situate the psychology of the *De Anima* within the broader ontological procession. The soul is distinguished in relation to other essences which, on the whole, are distinguished according to the degree to which they possess unity, or measure, within themselves. However, while the soul is shown to be completely dependent on higher essences in this respect, its dependence is also demonstrated to be a capacity to transcend the classes above it. This theoretical movement therefore provides the psychological foundation for the subsequent account of theurgy by developing the three terms necessary for its efficacy: an account of the poverty of the soul in itself, the graciousness of the gods, and the two-sided character of sensible creation (here, the soul) between these two. Thus, the need to account for the way in which the embodied soul has access to the divine life in

²³⁰ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [69], 2-6: “συμφορομένη τε οἷς ἂν ἐθέλη, καὶ ἀφ’ ὧν ἂν βούληται ἀναχωροῦσα, ὁμοιομένη τοῖς πᾶσι καὶ δι’ ἑτερότητος ἀπ’ αὐτῶν διίσταμένη, λόγους τε προχειρίζουσα συγγενεῖς τοῖς οὐσι καὶ γιγνομένης, θεοῖς τε συνάπτουσα ἑαυτὴν κατ’ ἄλλας ἁρμονίας οὐσιῶν καὶ δυνάμεων ἢ καθ’ οἷας δαίμονές τε καὶ ἥρωες πρὸς αὐτοὺς συνεπλέκοντο.”

²³¹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [69], 10: “ἐπι μείζονά τε τάξιν τὴν ἀγγελικὴν ἀναγομένην.”

²³² Iamblichus uses the phrase “ἐν αἰτίᾳ δὲ” as a sign of added emphasis throughout *De Mysteriis*.

²³³ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [69], 10-16: “ὄθεν δὴ καὶ δοκεῖ παντοδαπὰς οὐσίας καὶ ἐνεργείας λόγους τε παντοῖους καὶ εἶδη τὰ ὅλα παρέχειν ἐν ἑαυτῇ ἢ ψυχῇ. τὸ δ’ εἰ χρὴ τάληθές εἰπεῖν, ὠρισται μὲν ἀεὶ καθ’ ἕν τι κοινοῦσα δ’ ἑαυτὴν τοῖς προηγουμένοις αἰτίοις ἄλλοτε ἄλλοις συντάττεται.”

generation emerges which first requires an examination of the relation of essences to their bodies.

4.5 RELATION TO BODIES: TOWARDS GENERATION

Iamblichus begins an examination of the relationship of different essences to their bodies by first addressing Anebo's problematic assertion that higher essences are, in some sense, determined by their bodies.²³⁴ For Iamblichus, such a notion is unworthily predicated (ἀναξίως ὑπόκειται) of the gods, since the divine classes are all absolute (ὑπάρχειν) and autonomous (ἀπόλυτος) in themselves.²³⁵ The gods are self-sufficient and receive nothing from their bodies but rather bestow a particular form (εἰδοποιεῖ) upon them.²³⁶ They engender measure from outside²³⁷, limit in the lower orders, and bring the unity of soul and body to its most perfect life. While individual souls are affected by their bodies and therefore suffer, the divine essences contain everything (πλήρωμα) within themselves²³⁸ and therefore determine their bodies.

However, in Abamon's correction of Anebo, a more fundamental problem emerges. By asserting that higher essences are determined by their bodies, Anebo is also undermining the possibility for the theurgical communion (θεουργικῆς κοινωνίας) of gods with men.²³⁹ If they are limited according to their bodily form, the gods' presence in nature would be impossible, since the divine could not descend entirely into nature without losing itself. Iamblichus therefore opposes Anebo as a "priest"²⁴⁰, stating that it is not true "that the gods are confined to certain parts of the cosmos, nor is the earthly realm devoid of them."²⁴¹ Like objects that have been warmed by the sun retain heat, so too does the divine πλήρωμα remain. The gods are not bound by bodies and are therefore able to be present in nature without being limited by it. Because they can relate to the

²³⁴ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [23], 10.

²³⁵ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [8], 7.

²³⁶ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [25], 3.

²³⁷ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [30-31].

²³⁸ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [29], 1.

²³⁹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [28], 5.

²⁴⁰ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [28], 9.

²⁴¹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [28], 10: "οὔτε γὰρ οἱ θεοὶ κρατοῦνται ἐν τισὶ τοῦ κόσμου μέρεσιν, οὔτε τὰ περὶ γῆν ἄμοιρα αὐτῶν καθέστηκεν."

body in this way, those invoking them also have immediate access to their power *in nature* and the possibility for a theurgical correspondence remains.

Thus, although the soul is also separated from the gods by virtue of its disordered mingling with matter and the projection of its lower, irrational lives, participants in the divine influences are able to make use of correspondences (οικείωσις) in nature. Sensible creation is both that which binds soul and that through which the soul participates in the divine. Earthly things possess their being in virtue of the totalities (πληρώματα) of the gods and whenever they come to be ready for participation in the divine, they find the gods pre-existing in it prior to their own proper essence.²⁴² By applying divided categories of thought onto the whole ontology, Anebo is projecting lower forms of intellect onto the higher classes, thereby separating the divine from nature absolutely and the soul from its own source of life. In order to preserve the presence of the divine in nature, there must be an account of a community of essences, rather than the formal imposition of absolute distinctions between essences which is based on their relation to their bodies. Abamon continues: “For if there is no ... community of essence, nor interweaving in either potency or act exercised by the ordering element upon the ordered, this latter lies within it... as a nothingness, without any ... form of assimilation being engendered by the presence of the gods.”²⁴³

However, Abamon also affirms the importance of the material aspect itself. In the exchange between Abamon and Anebo, Iamblichus is also responding to a broader tendency of some in the Platonic tradition to undermine the integrity of material realities. This problem is evident in Porphyry’s discussion on the divine names in his *Letter to Anebo*. In his *Letter*, Porphyry asks why Greek-speakers should perform ceremonies using barbaric names for the gods since it is the symbolic correspondence in the worshipper that is important.²⁴⁴ For Iamblichus, this notion betrays an underlying assertion in which the soul serves as a measure of the higher reality. The truth of the

²⁴² Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [29], 1-4.

²⁴³ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [32], 8: “εἰ γὰρ οὐδεὶς ἐστὶ λόγος οὐδὲ σχέσις συμμετρίας οὐδὲ οὐσίας τις κοινωνία οὐδὲ κατὰ δύναμιν ἢ τινα ἐνέργειαν συμπλοκὴ πρὸς τὸ διακοσμοῦν τοῦ διακοσμουμένου, ὡς τὸ μηδέν, ἵνα οὕτως εἶπω, κεῖται ἐν αὐτῷ οὔτε παρατάσεώς τινος κατὰ διάστασιν οὔτε τοπικῆς περιοχῆς οὔτε ἀποδιαλήψεως μεριστῆς οὔτε ἄλλης τοιαύτης ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τῶν θεῶν ἐμφυομένης παρισώσεως.”

²⁴⁴ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [257], 1-10.

name is unchanging and tied to the essence of the god itself; the Gods do not have a nationality nor use any human language.²⁴⁵ Porphyry's understanding thus betrays a problematic 'Greek' spirit that takes the power out of the names of the gods and prayers. Iamblichus writes:

... they [the divine names] are endlessly altered according to the inventiveness and illegality of the Hellenes. For the Hellenes are experimental by nature, and eagerly propelled in all directions, having no proper ballast in them; and they preserve nothing which they have received from anyone else, but even this they promptly abandon and change it all according to their unreliable linguistic innovation.²⁴⁶

In the most immediate sense, Iamblichus is critical of an excessive confidence in human reasoning. The ceaseless strivings of philosophy must also be grounded in the given truth of theology, or a religious γνῶσις. Faith in the reasoning activity of the soul is impiety — a perverse playfulness that obscures the source by which the soul possesses these powers, serving to bind one further in the false projections of the soul. Thus, for Iamblichus, such an understanding of the divine names is the result of an inversion of the proper relationship of the soul to the gods that places their higher activity within the soul and imposes the structure of the soul's thinking activity onto the ontological whole.

More importantly, however, he is also critical of the way in which this obscures the underlying givenness of the divine in nature. Thus, he writes:

[It is necessary to proceed] ... according to the truth which those who first laid down the laws of the sacred cult established, in this way do we preserve them - for even if any aspect of the rest of the sacred laws is proper to them, it is surely

²⁴⁵ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [257 – 258].

²⁴⁶ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [259], 5-10: “σχεδὸν γὰρ καὶ τοῦτο αἴτιον νυνὶ γέγονε τοῦ πάντα ἐξίτηλα καθεστηκέναι καὶ τὰ ὀνόματα καὶ τὰ τῶν εὐχῶν, διότι μεταβαλλόμενα αἰεὶ διὰ τὴν καινοτομίαν καὶ παρανομίαν τῶν Ἑλλήνων οὐδὲν παύεται. φύσει γὰρ Ἕλληνες εἰσι νεωτεροποιοὶ καὶ ἄπτοντες φέρονται πανταχῆ, οὐδὲν ἔχοντες ἔρμα ἐν ἑαυτοῖς· οὐδ’ ὅπερ ἂν δέξωνται παρὰ τινῶν διαφυλάττοντες, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦτο ὀξέως ἀφιέντες, πάντα κατὰ τὴν ἄστατον εὐρεσιλογίαν μεταπλάττουσι.” Butler writes: “Porphyry ... seeks an answer ... through an implicit theory of language that seems wholly formal or conceptual, insofar as it regards the names of deities as *translatable* in the same way as ordinary words expressing the same concepts in different languages. The names by which the Gods are known, along with virtually all the rest of their culturally specific iconic, mythic, and cultic manifestations, would thus be rendered merely contingent. ... Ontologically, Porphyry's approach also implies that the opposition of matter and form — in this case, multiple “words” and singular “meaning” — extends all the way from the lowest of beings to the Gods themselves. There is no room, in Porphyry's understanding, for anything really corresponding to what we think of as proper names, which have in principle a one-to-one relationship to their bearer, an understanding that we manifest on the level of practice by not translating proper names embedded in foreign-language texts” (“Offering to the Gods,” 8).

immutability. And it is necessary that the prayers of the ancients, like sacred places of sanctuary, are preserved ever the same and in the same manner, with nothing of alternative origin either removed from or added to them.²⁴⁷

Abamon is intent on preserving the material aspect of the divine in nature, precisely *because* its immediate truth is altered by the intellectual activity of the soul. The reality of the ‘symbol’ is not measured by the soul, but by the higher life of the divine. Edward Butler comments: “[In Porphyry’s account] language is simply a ‘veil originating from our affections, which we attribute to the divine’ while, for Iamblichus, language’s bond with the divine lies precisely in its materiality, in the particularity of names and texts — that is, in that very dimension of language which drops out in the Porphyrian analysis as simply ‘nonsignifying’.”²⁴⁸

Abamon’s preservation of the immediate, material aspect of prayer serves as the foundation for an account of theurgy. Since we are bound in bodies, the immediacy of the gods in nature must be encountered first through direct participation through the material. The good of sensible creation must be maintained. Butler writes: “the symbolic character of the divine similitude, which is intellectual and divine, has to be assumed in the names. And indeed, if it is unknowable to us, this very fact is its most sacred aspect: for it is too excellent to be divided into knowledge.” In failing to understand this, Anebo separates the most immediate relation of the embodied soul to its divine life. It is precisely in maintaining the sanctity of the material symbol that the soul is able to come into contact with the gods.

4.6 MANIFESTATIONS OF THE DIVINE

Having affirmed both the capacity of the soul to receive the divine life, as well as the possibility of this life being present immediately in nature, it is necessary to turn to an examination of the particular manifestations (ἐπιφανείζ) of the higher classes in

²⁴⁷ Iamblichus (*De Mysteriis* [259], 1-5): “καὶ ὡς τετυχήκασι τῆς περὶ αὐτοῦ ἀληθείας οἱ πρῶτοι καταστησάμενοι τοὺς νόμους τῆς ἱερᾶς· ἀγιστείας, οὕτως ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐμμένομεν· εἶπερ γὰρ τι τῶν ἄλλων τῶν ἱερο-πρεπῶς νομίμων, καὶ τὸ ἀμετάπτωτον αὐτοῖς συναρμόζει· καὶ δεῖ τὰ τῶν παλαιῶν εὐχῶν, ὥσπερ ἱερὰ ἄσυλα, τηρεῖσθαι κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ καὶ ὡσαύτως, μήτε ἀφαιροῦντάς τι ἅπ' αὐτῶν μήτε προστιθέντας τι αὐταῖς ἀλλαγῶθην.”

²⁴⁸ Butler, “Offering to the Gods,” 8-9.

generation. An examination of Abamon’s account of god-given dreams and foreknowledge in Book III reveals some of the difficulties involved. He first responds to a position held by Anebo (and one for which Iamblichus criticizes Porphyry elsewhere²⁴⁹) that divination in sleep is possible because in sleep the soul is liberated from the body. This rests on the notion that sleep is the state of soul in which it is most passable and free from generation. Although Iamblichus agrees that the soul manifests such a double life, he is unwilling to attribute the emergence of divine dreams to the soul being freed from generation, since this implies a relation between the intellectual part of the soul and the divine precisely *because* it is freed from the body. Instead, for Iamblichus, divination must refer to the gods as activities relate to their causes — as a manifestation that emerges, and is dependent on, a transcendent source. Anebo’s position degrades nature by implying that the divine activity is ‘purer’ if separated from matter, thereby forming an opposition between the material and immaterial.

Having established that manifestations are dependent on the divine alone, Abamon continues to examine divine possession²⁵⁰, outlining three forms which result in three different states in the soul. He writes: “For either the god possesses us, or we become wholly the god’s property, or we exercise our activity in common with him ... And sometimes there is a mere participation, sometimes a communion, and sometimes even a union.” Iamblichus continues:

For if they have subjected their entire life as a vehicle or instrument to the gods who inspire them, either they exchange their human life for the divine, or they direct their own life towards the god; they neither act according to sensation, nor are they awake in the manner of those who have their senses aroused... they are not even conscious of themselves, neither as they were before, nor in any other fashion, nor in general, do they turn their personal intelligence upon themselves, nor do they project any personal knowledge.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ See Dillon, *De Mysteriis*, 125, f. 162; Porphyry, *de Abstentia*, 4.9.7.

²⁵⁰ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [111-112]: “ὁ θεὸς ἡμᾶς ἔχει, ἢ ἡμεῖς ὅλοι τοῦ θεοῦ γιγνόμεθα, ἢ κοινὴν ποιούμεθα πρὸς αὐτὸν τὴν ἐνεργεῖαν ... καὶ ποτὲ μὲν μετουσία ψιλὴ γίνεται, ποτὲ δὲ καὶ χοινωνία, ἐνίοτε δὲ καὶ ἔνωσις τούτων τῶν ἐνθουσιᾶσεων).”

²⁵¹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [109], 15-20: “εἰ γὰρ τὴν ἑαυτῶν ζωὴν ὑποτεθείκασιν ὅλην ὡς ὄχημα ἢ ὄργανον τοῖς ἐπιπνέουσι θεοῖς, ἢ μεταλλάττουσιν ἀντὶ τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ζωῆς τὴν θεῖαν, ἢ καὶ ἐνεργοῦσι τὴν οἰκείαν ζωὴν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, οὔτε κατ’ αἴσθησιν ἐνεργοῦσιν οὔτε ἐργηγόρασιν οὕτως ὡς οἱ διεγερμένους

This manifestation is problematic, given the distinction Iamblichus makes previously, because in it there appears to be a separation of the higher part of the soul from the lower. Indeed, that this form of possession is possible at all seems to problematize his insistence of the *πλήρωμα* of the gods being present in nature, insofar as *ἔκστασις* points to a separation of the intellectual life from the sensible. However, Abamon distinguishes the form of divination according to the *source* of the dream. A soul enmeshed in matter will receive the confused visions of generation, while one that receives the divine life in a more unified fashion will accordingly receive a purer vision. Iamblichus states that in possession the human intellect (*διάνοια*) is not carried away if it is really possessed (*ἐνθουσιασμός*).²⁵² Thus, the *divine* form of possession is not pure and simple ecstasy (*ἔκστασις*), but an exaltation and transference (*ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τὸ κρεῖττον ἀναγωγή καὶ μετάστασις*) to what is superior; in fact, frenzy and ecstasy actually reveal a perversion towards what is inferior.²⁵³

In this way, Iamblichus makes a distinction between divine possession and human activities. Divine possession is an affirmation of the higher life of the soul by means of the power of the gods; it is not *ἔκστασις*, but an exaltation of the whole soul in which both its material and immaterial lives are taken up and purified. Furthermore, the power by which the soul realizes this exaltation is given. The soul has no active involvement at all, a fact made clear in that if the soul takes the initiative, the divination becomes turbulent and false, and the possession is no longer true or divine.²⁵⁴ Divine inspiration is not dependent on the activity of the soul, but is entirely dependent on its source.

4.7 THEURGY

Iamblichus begins Book V.20 by starting from “another beginning (*ἀρχή*)”²⁵⁵, a shift which marks the transition to an examination of the effectiveness of theurgy for the

ἔχοντες τὰς αἰσθήσεις ... ἀλλ' οὐδ' παρακολουθοῦσιν ἑαυτοῖς οὔτε ὡς πρότερον· οὔτε ἄλλως ὀπωσοῦν, οὐδ' ὄλως ἐπιστρέφουσιν εἰς ἑαυτοὺς τὴν οἰκείαν σύνεσιν, οὐδ' ἔστιν ἥντινα ἰδίαν γνῶσιν προβάλλουσιν.”

²⁵² Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [114], 10.

²⁵³ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [114], 15.

²⁵⁴ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [115], 10.

²⁵⁵ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [227], 1.

soul in generation. In order to outline the nature of theurgy, Iamblichus returns first to the fundamental opposition which characterizes the tension between creation and the divine. There are two parts to each particular being in the cosmos, namely, the body and the various incorporeal forces associated with bodies.²⁵⁶ The life of the embodied soul manifests this two sided nature, on the one hand participating in the intelligible life of the divine and, on the other, manifesting a lower existence in generation through the ὄχημα-πνεῦμα, which serves as the mediating body for the soul and into which the intelligible soul “slips (ἐπεισέρπει).”²⁵⁷ This higher aspect is the principle of the soul that is “superior to all nature and generation, by virtue of which we can unite ourselves to the gods and transcend the cosmic order, and partake in eternal life.”²⁵⁸ This is the soul’s principle (ἀρχός) of conversion (περιαγωγή), which allows for its detachment (ἀπόστασις), conversion to a new life free from generation, and union (συνάπτω) with true being (τὸ ὄν).²⁵⁹

The lower part of the embodied soul also shares in the divine presence through this principle. Iamblichus writes, “Before it gave itself to the body, the soul heard the divine harmony. And accordingly, even when it entered the body, such tunes as it hears which especially preserve the divine trace of harmony, to this it clings.”²⁶⁰ The higher part of the soul receives the divine life and diffuses it through the composite, not because it is able to reach towards this higher life by its own capacities, but rather because it is able to receive it according to a likeness that it finds in itself. Thus, it is not that the body and the soul interact with each other or with the divine, but that the inspiration of the gods is present to it from the beginning.²⁶¹ There is an identity that occurs between what is present in the soul through remembrance; conversion occurs through the sympathy of the higher in the lower.²⁶² As we have seen, the ὄχημα and rational soul were both created

²⁵⁶ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [228], 1.

²⁵⁷ Dillon notes the unusual use of this verb and a lack of clarity concerning whether its intent is active or passive.

²⁵⁸ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [270], 5-7: “ἀλλ’ ἔστι καὶ ἕτερα τῆς ψυχῆς ἀρχὴ κρείττων πάσης θύσεως καὶ γνώσεως, καθ’ ἣν καὶ θεοῖς ἐνοῦσθαι δυνάμεθα καὶ τῆς κοσμικῆς τάξεως ὑπερέχειν, αἰδίου τε ζωῆς καὶ τῶν ὑπερουρανίων θεῶν τῆς ἐνεργείας μετέχειν.”

²⁵⁹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [270], 1.

²⁶⁰ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [120], 5-10.

²⁶¹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [119], 10-13.

²⁶² Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [120], 5.

prior to the descent of the composite and both parts of the soul are preserved upon the dissolution of the material body. It is therefore the composite that experiences purification to realize its ascent.

Given the necessity that both aspects of the soul remain and are purified, theurgy must also have a blended character in order to be appropriate for the soul's unification. Iamblichus writes:

... theurgy presents a double aspect. On the one hand, it is performed by men, and as such observes our natural rank in the universe; but on the other, it controls divine symbols... it is in virtue of this distinction, then, that the art both naturally invokes the powers from the universe as superiors, inasmuch as the invoker is man, and yet on the other hand gives them orders, since it invests itself, by virtue of the ineffable symbols, with the hieratic role of the gods.²⁶³

Thus, theurgy operates on two levels. Insofar as it is material, the lower part of the human soul is purified through an immediate participation in its rites. However, insofar as this art is invested with the power of the gods through the divine symbols in nature, the higher part of the soul also embodies a higher authority and becomes a symbol itself, invested with the divine life. Butler comments that theurgy “appropriately invokes the powers from the totality as superiors insofar as the operator is a human, but on the other hand commands them, since through the ineffable symbols [*aporrêton symbolôn*] he is in a certain respect invested with the hieratic aspect of the Gods [*to hieratikon tôn theôn proschêma*].”²⁶⁴ The soul is simultaneously able to receive and act and thereby become both purified and demiurgic. In this way, its two divided aspects are unified.

The nature of theurgy is exemplified in the particular forms that it takes. Iamblichus describes two sorts which are beneficial for souls at two different degrees of purity — the immaterial for those who, through philosophy, have been freed from the

²⁶³ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [184], 1-10: “τῆς ὅλης θεωργίας διττόν ἐστι πρόσχημα, τὸ μὲν ὡς παρ’ ἀνθρώπων προσαγόμενον, ὅπερ δὴ τηρεῖ καὶ τὴν ἡμετέραν τάξιν ὡς ἔχει φύσεως ἐν τῷ παντί, τὸ δὲ κρατυνόμενον τοῖς θείοις συνθήμασι καὶ ἄνω μετέωρον δι’ αὐτῶν τοῖς κρείττοσι συναπτομένον, περιηγόμενόν τε ἐμμελῶς ἐπὶ τὴν ἐκείνων διακόσμησιν, ὃ δὴ δύναται εἰκότως καὶ τὸ τῶν θεῶν σχῆμα περιτίθεσθαι. κατὰ τὴν τοιαύτην οὖν διαφορὰν εἰκότως καὶ ὡς κρείττονας καλεῖ τὰς ἀπὸ τοῦ παντὸς δυνάμεις, καθόσον ἐστὶν ὁ καλῶν ἄνθρωπος, καὶ ἐπιτάττει αὐταῖς αὐθις, ἐπειδὴ περιβάλλεται πῶς διὰ τῶν ἀπορρήτων συμβόλων τὸ ἱερατικὸν τῶν θεῶν πρόσχημα.”

²⁶⁴ Butler, “Offering to the Gods,” 8.

most immediate grip of the body, and material sacrifices for those who live in cities²⁶⁵ and are fully descended into generation. Most immediately, this distinction between ‘types’ of theurgy points to the all encompassing role it plays in salvation and the way in which it is meant to be a true reconciliation of different modes of knowing and souls at all stages. While Iamblichus distinguishes between different forms of theurgic participation appropriate for each type of soul, it is clear that all embodied souls participate in theurgic rites to some degree.²⁶⁶

While pure souls are able to practice a pure, intellectual theurgy since they are free from generation, the majority must begin with that which is most immediate to them. It is through participating in what is akin itself (the body), through bodies, that a body is nourished and purified.²⁶⁷ Thus, the gods have provided from their abundance the means of ascent through material rites. Iamblichus states:

One must not... reject all matter, but only that which is alien to the gods, while selecting for use that which is akin to them, as being capable of harmonising with the construction of dwellings for the gods, the consecration of statues and indeed for the performance of sacrificial rites in general. For there is no other way in which the terrestrial realm or the men who dwell here could enjoy participation in the existence [of the gods].²⁶⁸

For the invoking soul, the object of theurgic acts is the purification of the soul and the body in order to receive a higher life.

The soul is not, however, meant to rest in the material. Insofar as theurgy is like the soul — a single activity that partakes in dual elements — it also serves as the hypercosmic connection which takes the soul outside of the necessity imposed by generation. It brings about the identity of the soul with the divine symbols as they are

²⁶⁵ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, [220], 1.

²⁶⁶ Iamblichus outlines a sort of ‘original sin’, in which all the sins of the previous lives also require expiation upon embodiment (*De Mysteriis* [186], 10-15). Furthermore, these rites are also true for the higher classes, as there is a pure and divine form of matter (*De Mysteriis*, 238-240).

²⁶⁷ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [221], 8.

²⁶⁸ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [234], 1-6: “οὐ γὰρ δὴ δεῖ δυσχεραίνειν πᾶσαν ὕλην, ἀλλὰ μόνην τὴν ἀλλοτριάν τῶν θεῶν, τὴν δὲ οἰκείαν πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἐκλέγεσθαι, ὡς συμφωνεῖν δυναμένην εἰς τε θεῶν οἰκοδομήσεις καὶ καθιδρύσεις ἀγαλμάτων καὶ δὴ καὶ εἰς τὰς τῶν θυσιῶν ἱερουργίας. οὐδὲ γὰρ ἂν ἄλλως τοῖς ἐπὶ γῆς τόποις ἢ τοῖς δεῦρο κατοικοῦσιν ἀνθρώποις μετουσία ἂν γένοιτο τῆς τῶν κρειττόνων λήψεως.”

present to it through a communion of friendship (φιλία).²⁶⁹ It is able to do this because the communion it brings about occurs simultaneously on two levels: on the divine level through identity and unity and concord²⁷⁰, meaning that the soul is transported through it, and in generation by bringing about the purification and therefore unity of the soul in itself. The motions of ritual are themselves in accord with the divine motions which serve as their models. There is a conjunction and coherence of distinct realities that meet: both the particular, material activities and the underlying intelligible unity.

Although sacrifice and other ritual forms are more closely identified with matter and are necessary for realizing the purification of the soul, it is ultimately prayer that underlies all theurgic acts. Iamblichus writes that “no sacred act can take place without the supplications contained in prayers.”²⁷¹ Prayer reinforces and brings to perfection the efficacy of the other rites and, through it, an “indissoluble hieratic communion is created with the gods.”²⁷² However, in order to give a full account of the role and nature of prayer, Abamon must first respond to Anebo’s charge that prayer leads to a false understanding of the gods insofar as it makes it seem as if the gods were subject to external force or passions. He answers that this is not the case, since invocations are for the sake of the participants: the illumination that comes about as a result of invocations is self-revelatory and self-willed.²⁷³ Thus, the efficacy of prayer is related to the state of the soul which utters it, so that the consciousness (συναίσθησις) of our own nothingness makes us naturally turn (παραβάλλω) to supplications.²⁷⁴

In this way, the psychology of the *De Anima* is thereby reconciled with the theology of the *De Mysteriis*. Philosophy is a preparatory activity that brings about the soul’s consciousness of its own emptiness and the corresponding realization of an underlying unity by which it persists. In prayer, the divine in us is aroused and strives primarily towards what is like to itself, joining itself to this essential perfection

²⁶⁹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [185], 1.

²⁷⁰ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [186], 1-2.

²⁷¹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [238], 13: “ἔργον τε οὐδὲν ἱερατικὸν ἄνευ τῶν ἐν ταῖς εὐχαῖς ἰκεταιῶν γίγνεται.”

²⁷² Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [237], 10: “καὶ τὴν κοινωνίαν ἀδιάλυτον ἐμπλέκει τὴν ἱερατικὴν πρὸς τοὺς θεοὺς.”

²⁷³ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [41], 10.

²⁷⁴ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [47], 13-14.

(αὐτοτελής).²⁷⁵ The rites (ἔργα) of theurgy are for the salvation for the soul. The gods do not ‘change’ based on prayers or sacrifices, but “from their first descent the divine sent down the souls for this purpose, that they should return again to it.”²⁷⁶ This is effective, not because the gods have corporeal senses, but because there is a pre-existing unity which is already present by virtue of the divine. In the act of supplication the soul is opened to the divine πλήρωμα which gradually brings to perfection the capacity of our faculties for contact with the gods.²⁷⁷ It renders us akin to the gods in act. Iamblichus therefore finishes this book on sacrifice and prayer with a final statement: “this all serves to reveal the total unity of spirit and action (σύμπνοια) that characterizes the procedure of theurgy, linking its parts to one another with a completely unbroken coherence, closer than that of any living thing.”²⁷⁸

4.8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this way, *De Mysteriis* and *De Anima* are brought together. In the soul’s activities, it comes to know itself as limit and nothingness. However, through the abundance of the divine, this emptiness is also the ability to receive and exchange one life for another. In this conversion, the soul becomes for itself what it was. In the activity of thinking, the soul comes to the same conclusion as that which it comes to in theurgic rites: the power by which it lives is given from above. Its salvation lies in more perfectly receiving the given life that is present to it immediately in generation.

However, while philosophy can lead to an awareness of the soul’s limit and dependence on that which is higher, theurgy is the reconciliation of this knowledge with a sensible πράξις that takes up both aspects of the divided soul. The lower activities and higher essence of the soul are reconciled in its particular, embodied state — not simply through the form-giving procession of the soul into matter, but because this activity is

²⁷⁵ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [46], 13.

²⁷⁶ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [272], 6: “ἀλλ’ ἀπὸ τῆς πρώτης καθόδου ἐπὶ τούτῳ κατέπεμψεν ὁ θεὸς τὰς ψυχάς, ἵνα πάλιν εἰς αὐτὸν ἐπανεέλθωσιν.”

²⁷⁷ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, [239-240].

²⁷⁸ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [240], 9-12: “διόπερ δὴ δι’ ὅλων φαίνεται τῆς ἱερατικῆς ἀναγωγῆς ἢ πᾶσα σύμπνοια καὶ συνέργεια πρὸς ἑαυτήν, ζώου παντὸς μᾶλλον συμφυῆ τὰ μόρια ἑαυτῆς παντάπασι κατὰ μίαν συνέχειαν συνάπτουσα.”

brought into accord with the perfect demiurgic activity of the gods. Due to its mixed character, theurgy is also appropriate for all souls. It serves as the means for the salvation of the entire πόλις, insofar as it is a πρᾶξις for souls at all stages. While union is the end that each soul seeks, Iamblichus pursues a systematic and ritualistic πρᾶξις that aids at all levels.²⁷⁹

Furthermore, theurgical πρᾶξις is not only for the purification of the individual soul, but a simultaneous κάθαρσις of the entire cosmos; the πόλις Iamblichus describes is also an image of the universal community of essences. The universe is a single living being (δεῖ δὴ νοεῖν ὡς ἓν ζῶόν ἐστι τὸ πᾶν)²⁸⁰, bound together by love in indivisible mutuality (ἀλληλουχία).²⁸¹ While the previous chapter shows the division of the soul to be an image and embodiment of the general division between the One and the many, *De Mysteriis* shows that the community of souls is also an image and embodiment of the whole procession of essences. The abstract opposition of unity and division is incarnated and present in the distinct souls at various degrees of purity; their reconciliation is shown to be the same.

Thus, created nature and the body itself is shown to be an integral part of the whole process of restoration. Trouillard writes: “The body that the soul animates and through which it is placed in the cosmos is not an extrinsic addition but *the circuit that it travels in order to be united with itself*.”²⁸² The soul serves not only as an analogy of this restoration in its own development, but also as the means for the return of the whole cosmic procession. In this exit into generation and return to the intelligible, Iamblichus writes, “the divine is literally united with itself.”²⁸³

²⁷⁹ Iamblichus first responds to the critique of Anebo that, since our ultimate goal is union with the one, all discussion concerning the middle classes and hieratic arts is pointless. Though Abamon affirms that union is indeed the highest aim, it is possible only to a very few.

²⁸⁰ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [195], 10 provides another affirmation of the doctrine of the *Timaeus* (30a-e).

²⁸¹ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [196], 9.

²⁸² Trouillard, *La Mystagogie de Proclus*, 251.

²⁸³ Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* [47], 8: “ἀτεχνῶς γὰρ τηνικαῦτα αὐτὸ τὸ θεῖον πρὸς ἑαυτὸ σύνεστι.”

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The preceding account has argued that the philosophies of Iamblichus and Plotinus are in far greater accord than often held and that the differences between the two thinkers, although representative of real, philosophical tensions emerge primarily from a problem of perspective. By identifying the contradictory elements of each man's thought as stemming from the more fundamental problem of the divided life of the soul and other related oppositions, it is possible to avoid imposing modern, interpretive paradigms on their relationship and, instead, identify a difference of emphasis that emerges as a response to historical influences in the Platonic school. Such a reading is further supported by the development of a subtle, literary critique of Plotinus in Iamblichus' writings, where form and content are united and which, in turn, reveals an impulse to bring systematic precision to the Platonic tradition's doctrine of the soul and ontology.

With respect to Plotinus, the result of such a reading has been to problematize several notions by which he is often characterized: that his account degrades the cosmos and subsumes sensible creation into Intellect; that his psychology also manifests a similar blending of hypostases and that, as a result, his soteriology is excessively interior and even hostile to theurgy. Instead, we have seen that Plotinus' philosophy both preserves the divinity of the cosmos and the givenness of the divine in and through it, thereby providing the intellectual foundation for an account of theurgy. Furthermore, his psychology provides an account of the soul as both limited and unlimited, forming and formed, in which its two-sided character is developed and affirmed at each level of its ascent. Thus, the soul is determined *both* from within and from without, pointing to the simultaneous affirmation of both aspects of the divided soul and the need for its unification to come from outside of the soul itself. All of this, in the broadest sense, demonstrates an impulse in Plotinus' thought that seeks to reconcile problems in the tradition by unifying opposing Platonic perspectives through the simultaneous affirmation of both the rational and the supra-rational.

Plotinus' thought serves as the foundation for similar themes in Iamblichus' work. The soul is enmeshed in generation and fundamentally divided. Although this higher life is always present, the soul has forgotten itself and is therefore cut off from its divine life.

Through the philosophical examination of this double existence, the soul's limits in relation to itself and the broader ontology are disclosed, thereby revealing the necessity of fate and bringing about a consciousness of the soul's nothingness. However, in the moment of its loss and consciousness of its essential nothingness, there is also a replenishment that makes manifest the providential care of the gods. In the sheer fact that the soul persists emerges an attendant realization of an underlying stability — an absolute Being that undergirds all particular beings. In this new consciousness, there is a conversion and a movement towards the unification of the divided life of the embodied soul.

Thus, a clear understanding of Iamblichus' doctrine of the soul cannot be attained from outside of what is 'given', both in terms of a systematic philosophical treatment of the soul in itself and within the ontology, as well as with regards to the philosophical tradition in which it is transmitted. The development of both is manifest as an unfolding totality emerging from a primal unity, a procession that, given the temporality and dividedness of human existence, appears sequentially, but in absolute terms is accompanied by a simultaneous return that reveals an underlying stability. This given unity is effused throughout by the gentle insistence of the harmony present in each part that brings about the communion of the whole – a providential act of 'friendship' that emerges from the Good. In this movement, the self-constituting and demiurgic activity of the soul is shown to be an example of the whole ontological procession.

These similarities also reveal an underlying correction that Iamblichus seeks to provide in the broader, Platonic tradition concerning the ambiguity that can emerge through a failure to properly account for both the unity and division of essences. A scientific theology is required that reconciles the classification of philosophical dialectic with the perspective of the whole which comes through theology. Both must be emphasized equally in order for true knowledge of the gods and the soul to be attained and so that an account of salvation appropriate to the divided, embodied soul might be realized.

Thus, in Iamblichus' account, the awakening consciousness and intellectual purification that comes through philosophy is not, in itself, able to unify the soul's

divided activities in generation. The soul is a composite of soul and body, a formal unity of simultaneously opposing motions, the one receiving the freedom of a higher life and the other binding itself in fate. Although its parts can be divided for thought, they are a living unity. Since it is the salvation of the whole soul that Iamblichus seeks, it is in theurgy that the opposing motions of the soul are reconciled and this unity is brought into communion with the whole *πόλις* of essences. By purifying the soul's lower activities, theurgy unifies the soul so that it is able to receive the higher life of the divine as it is present through symbols in nature. Furthermore, it not only purifies the soul, but directs it to give form to the disorder of generation and, in this way, makes the practitioner demiurgic. The soul is both a passive recipient of the power of the gods, as well as, through the embodiment of this power, the actuality of their higher life in the cosmos. Thus, theurgy serves as the nexus in which the parts and the whole are brought to completion through each other, a mingling in which distinction is preserved, and yet the parts are shown to be the whole and the whole the parts. Philosophy demonstrates the necessity of a freedom from generation that is provided from outside of this generation, but theurgy is the means of salvation appropriate to the soul in the created world.

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