

Chapter Title: Iamblichus, de Mysteriis, Book I The de Mysteriis

Chapter Author(s): Peter T. Struck

Book Title: Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice

Book Editor(s): Richard Valantasis

Published by: Princeton University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv39x560.50>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Princeton University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice*

JSTOR

Iamblichus, *de Mysteriis*, Book I
The *de Mysteriis*

Peter T. Struck

For many years, the *de Mysteriis* of the Late Antique Neoplatonist, Iamblichus (ca. 245–ca. 325 C.E.), languished under the stern judgments of philologists, who found his knotted prose tiresome, and historians of philosophy, who saw it as a final break with the promise of reason that had marked Greek philosophy from the classical age through the Stoics to Plotinus. While such judgments are fair enough, they are hardly the last word to be said on this pivotal tract. Running ten books, of which the first is excerpted here, the *de Mysteriis* stands as our most extensive extant tract devoted to ritual theory from the whole of the ancient period.

In this work, in which he lays out the case for a practice of ritual acts as part of a philosophical program that aims for spiritual enlightenment, Iamblichus does indeed abandon reason—but, one might say, he has good reasons for doing so. All the Neoplatonists took very seriously Plato’s isolated reference to an utterly transcendent Good that lies beyond even being itself (Republic 6 509b). The founder of Neoplatonism, Plotinus (205–269/70 C.E.), understood this Good as the ontological font of the cosmos. The “One,” as it became known, sat beyond being and, more pertinently for Iamblichus, beyond reason. Plotinus set the One at the center of his thought and convinced all his followers that it should be the *telos* (goal) of their philosophical project. Plotinus reconfigures philosophical thinking as an emphatically soteriological pursuit whose goal is nothing less than the thinker’s union with the utterly transcendent One. In their asymptotic pursuit of this goal, the Neoplatonists leave us with the ancient world’s most fully articulated thinking on the problems, and limitations, of making a rational accounting of transcendence.

Different thinkers in the school follow different strategies. Plotinus and his student and editor, Porphyry, firmly believed that by following a strict *askēsis* (asceticism) of contemplation alone, one inched ever higher through the orders

of being. From the dead material world, through the levels of pure Soul and pure Nous (or Mind), the devotee eventually arrived at the doorstep of the One. While Iamblichus shares in the project of ascent, he differs from the great master on precisely how one should go about it. He was skeptical of the human intellect's power to think its way beyond itself. He suggests that the true devotee of wisdom must supplement intellectual contemplation with a program of ritual praxis.

In place of thought, he advocates certain ritual acts, which he calls "theurgy" (*theion* + *ergon*—"divine work"), that lift the enlightened celebrant into an experiential moment of hyper-rational unity with the One (chapter 2). Iamblichus argues strongly that this unity is beyond the reach of human intelligence. He claims pointedly in a later section of his work that it is not "thought" (*ennoia*) that joins theurgists to the gods, but rather "the performance of rites that are inarticulable, beyond all thought, and effected divinely" (2.11).

This view is persuasive to nearly all those who follow Iamblichus. More or less endorsed by every subsequent Neoplatonist down through Marsilio Ficino in the Renaissance, it re-situates seven centuries of philosophical speculation squarely in the service of thinking about ritual, and makes Iamblichus especially relevant for all those concerned with religious practice in the ancient Mediterranean.

Background

In Neoplatonic thinking, a philosopher's movement upward toward the One retraces the path of ontological outpouring from the One that continuously manifests and sustains the cosmos as we know it. All of reality flows from the One including the highest gods, the lowest clump of dirt, and all intermediate links in the great chain of being. All of reality contains a vestigial trace of the One and yearns (whether it knows it or not) to re-enter a primal unity with it.

Because Iamblichus's theurgic rites make use of these traces and hidden properties of matter, several scholars have treated theurgy as roughly co-extensive with magic (Dodds 1968; Sheppard 1996). Both are said to operate according to a principle of "sympathy" (*sympatheia*), the traditional ancient term for the forces by which magical rites operate. Also in support of this view, some scholars cite Iamblichus's indebtedness to the "Chaldean Oracles." This tract of shadowy provenance claimed to assemble oracles from Greek gods and sayings channeled from the soul of Plato himself and was adopted as authoritative by the later Neoplatonists.

Against this view, however, must be counted Iamblichus's own concern to distinguish his rites from those of the *goētes* (magician) (*de Myst.* 3.25, 26, 28; cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.4.40): he asserts repeatedly that unlike the magicians' rites, which operate by "sympathy," his rites work according to a more divine, and less mechanistic principle, the force of "philia" (chapter 12, cf. 3.26, 4.9, 4.3, and all of 5.7–9). For Iamblichus, this term especially marks the higher orders' divine

plenitude and generosity toward what they have created. We are not too far afield to find an analogous notion in Augustinian grace. Though the distinction between magic and ritual remains unstable for contemporary scholars, Iamblichus himself was concerned about it and tried to convince his detractors that his rites were not of the magical sort. If we allow Iamblichus to define his own terms, the category of ritual is a more useful description of what Iamblichus means by the term “theurgy.”

Dramatic Setting

The *de Mysteriis* takes the form of a point-by-point answer to a polemical letter written by Porphyry, Iamblichus’s elder Neoplatonic colleague. In the letter, Porphyry levels a very broad attack against the practice of just about any sort of ritual at all as a means of reaching the divine. For reasons that remain opaque, Porphyry addressed the letter to a putative Egyptian priest named Anebo. Iamblichus goes along with the fiction, and answers back in the persona of Abammon, Anebo’s master. This critical debate over the future of Neoplatonism, then, is ventriloquized through Egyptian surrogates, an astonishing fact that still has no satisfactory explanation.

Notes on the Translation

Iamblichus’s prose is turgid by any measure. Scholars only decades after his death held that opinion. Eunapius revives Plato’s judgment against Xenocrates, saying that Iamblichus “has not sacrificed to the Hermetic Graces” (the governors of eloquence) (*Vit. Soph.* 5.1.4). His prose also presents special problems for the translator. Sentences break much less frequently than English will bear, antecedents are sometimes not clearly articulated, and his vocabulary forces English into gangly contortions. Especially problematic is the cluster of terms around the common Greek adjective *pathētos*, which recurs frequently in chapters ten through twelve and eighteen. In most cases, I have opted for the bulky formulation “subject to passions,” though it is worthwhile to remind ourselves that by this adjective Iamblichus also means a thing’s capacity to receive any kind of change or influence at all from an external source, not just a capacity to feel emotion.

I have followed des Places’s text, except in one reading: *kathairēsthai* for *kathairesthai* in chapter two (des Places 1.2 [6.9]). Although not fully satisfactory, the change does help make some sense of this difficult section of text.

Finally, I thank John Dillon, who generously provided me an advance copy of his forthcoming translation, which will surely become the standard. I am indebted to his insights.

The original of this translation is found in *Jamblique: Les Mystères d’Égypte*, ed. Edouard des Places, S.J.

Iamblichus, *de Mysteriis*, Book I

The god who governs language, Hermes, has been held rightly by all priests since ancient times to be universal. The chief of true knowledge concerning the gods is one and the same everywhere, to whom even our own forefathers used to dedicate their discoveries of wisdom, handing down all their own writings under his name. Assuming that we also participate in a share of this god, which is proper and fitting for ourselves, you act properly, posing to the priests, as pleases them, questions that relate to wisdom concerning theology, and I fittingly, believing the letter sent to my student Anebo to have been written for myself, will answer your inquiries with the truth itself. For it would not be fitting that Pythagoras and Plato and Democritus and Eudoxus and many other ancient Greeks should have hit upon the proper doctrine drawing from the priestly writings current in their own time, but that you living in our time and having the same wisdom as they did should entirely miss the guidance of those now alive who are universally called teachers. I then approach the present discussion in this way, but you, if you wish, consider that the same man answers you back to whom you sent a letter, but if, on the other hand, it should appear necessary to you, consider your correspondent to be me or any other Egyptian prophet, for this makes no difference. Or still better, I suppose, set aside the one speaking, should he be worse or better, and examine whether what is said is spoken truly or falsely, having eagerly awakened your mind. First, then, let us determine how many and of what sort are the problems now at hand. Let us go through the questions and propose both from what sorts of divine theologies and according to what branches of knowledge they are being examined. Some, then, call for a sort of separation of things improperly mixed together; others concern the cause according to which each thing exists and, thus, is apprehended in thought; others draw the mind to both things, since they are proposed according to a certain opposition; and some demand the whole of our mystagogy. Since the inquiries are of this sort, they have been taken up from many points of view and from different sciences.

For some pertain to the branches of knowledge drawn out of things which the Chaldean wise men have handed down, others generate their solutions out of things which the Egyptian prophets teach, and some also pertain to the contemplations of the philosophers and pose questions fitting for them. But now there are certain others also, who draw from other opinions not worthy of discussion, and drag after them a sort of inappropriate dispute, and others are set in motion from the common conceptions of human beings. Each of these, then, in itself is complex and assembled in many forms in relation to one another. So for all these reasons, they are in need of a particular kind of discourse to guide them appropriately.

[2] We will therefore hand down to you in truth our opinion with respect to the traditional Assyrian doctrines, and our own doctrines we will wisely

reveal to you, reckoning some, with wisdom, from the ancient boundless writings, and others from those things that later the ancients assembled into a completed book, the whole of their wisdom concerning divine things.

But if you propose some philosophical question, we will decide this too for you in accordance with the ancient inscribed stones of Hermes—already in full knowledge of which Plato and Pythagoras formerly put together their philosophy—explaining away mildly and harmoniously inquiries that are foreign or illogical ones that manifest a certain quarrelsomeness, or we will make clear their absurdity. And as many things as proceed according to common conceptions we will try to discuss very intelligently and wisely. In addition, some things are accessible here only through discussion, although they require an experience of ritual actions for an accurate understanding, but others are full of intellectual contemplation and are able to be taken down completely. But it is possible to reveal signs of the ritual experience, which are fit for discussion, on the basis of which you and those like you can guide your mind concerning the essence of things as they are. As many things as are knowable through discussion none of these will we leave behind in the interest of a complete demonstration. In all cases we will render to you the proper thing in a fitting manner, we will answer theological matters theologically, theurgic matters theurgically, philosophical matters we will examine along with you philosophically. And among these as many as pertain to first causes we will follow along according to first principles and bring them to light, but as many as were spoken concerning human customs or purposes we will judge, as is necessary, according to the paradigm of human custom, and the rest in the same way according to the proper mode we will treat in order. Now let us turn to your questions.

[3] You say first, then, that you “grant that the gods exist.” But the matter is not correctly stated in this way. For an innate wisdom concerning the gods coexists with us in our very essence, and it is stronger than every judgment and inclination, it pre-exists both reason and logical proof. It is both united from the beginning to the proper cause, and it coexists with the real desire of the soul for the good.

Truth be told, the link to the divine is not even wisdom. For this is separated by, I suppose, a certain alterity. The uniform continuity stretching out from the gods is self-generated and spontaneous and prior to wisdom, considering wisdom as one thing knowing some other thing. It is not fitting, then, that we assent to this, as if we were able either to grant it or not grant it, nor to consider it in both ways (for it always stands uniformly according to its own actuality), nor thus to approve it as worthy of accusing or defending as we do to run-of-the-mill things. For we are rather embraced in it and filled by it, and the very thing that we are, we hold in knowing the gods.

I have the same argument for you also concerning the superior beings that follow the gods; I am speaking of daemons and heroes and pure souls.

But you seem to believe that knowledge of the gods is the same as of any

other sort of thing, and that one thing be “granted” from opposing sides, just as it is customary also in the case of propositions in dialectical arguments. But it is not in any way comparable. For knowledge of them is utterly different, and is separate from every opposition, and it does not consist in agreement for now to or in becoming, but from eternity it has coexisted uniformly in the soul.

[5] Let us go next to the solution of the problems that you posed. There is, of course, the good which is beyond being and also the good which pertains to being. I mean that “being” that is most important and honorable and exists incorporeally in itself. It is the singular quality of the gods and is present in all the classes of beings around them. On the one hand it preserves their proper distribution and order and is not detached from this, on the other hand, it nevertheless manifests itself the same, in the same way, within them all.

The essence of the good is no longer present to souls that govern bodies and are in charge of their care and, before their descent into being, are situated eternally in themselves. Nor is the cause of the good present, which is prior even to being, but a sort of hold and possession arises from it. This kind of participation of the beautiful and of virtue which we observe is very different from the sort we consider to be present in humans. For the latter has a certain ambiguity and arises like an addition among composite natures, but the other dwells within souls unchanging and unfailing, neither does it ever separate itself from itself, nor is it displaced by any other things.

[7] [The Good] is supreme, transcendent, and perfect, while [the rank of souls] is last, deficient, and rather imperfect. The one is able to do all things at once in the now uniformly; the other is not able to do everything, nor do them all at once nor instantaneously nor uniformly. The one produces and manages all things without inclining toward them; the other, by nature, inclines and turns attention to the things it generates and governs. The one initiates as the ruler and cause of everything; the other is suspended from the cause, the will of the gods, and from eternity exists as its companion. Also, the one, in a single brilliant flower, gathers the ends of all energies and essences; the other passes from one thing to another, and advances from the incomplete to the complete. Moreover, the highest and uncircumscribed one manifests itself to the former, better than every part and formless so that by no form is it circumscribed, while the latter is mastered by downward momentum, temporary condition, and decline, held in the grip of the appetite for the worse and an affinity with what is secondary, it is left behind among multiform things and is given form by parts from them. Accordingly, Nous is leader and king of existing things and is the demiurgic art of the whole, and on the one hand is always consistently present to the gods completely, and self-sufficiently and faultlessly, and by a single energy it stands inside itself purely. But soul participates in a nous that is divisible and in a multi-form state turns its attention to the managing of the whole, and it takes care of soulless things sometimes manifesting itself in some forms, other times in others.

[9] I assume, then, that you are not *really* asking the question, “Why, if the gods dwell only in the heavens, the theurgists use invocations of chthonic and subterranean beings?” for the premise is not true, that the gods range around only in the heavens—surely, everything is full of gods—but rather that you are asking, “how certain gods are said to belong to water and certain ones to the air, and some have some places while others have others, and how they are allotted portions of bodily substance, each in its own delimitation, and yet they hold power that is boundless and partless and uncircumscribed, and how they will have union with each other, if their parts are divided into distinct delimitations and considering the difference of their locations and of the underlying bodies they each take?”

Of all these and countless other similar questions, then, there is a single best solution, to survey the manner of the divine allotment. Accordingly, this allotment, whether it is assigned certain parts of the whole, for example sky or earth, or sacred cities and lands, or even certain temples or sacred statues, it illuminates everything from without, just like the sun shines from the outside upon everything with its rays. Just as light surrounds the things it illuminates, in the same way also the power of the gods has enveloped the things that partake of it from outside. Also, just as light is present in the air without being mixed with it (as is clear since nothing is left behind in it once the light source withdraws, and yet heat is present in it, when the heat source withdraws), in this way also the light of the gods illuminates while remaining separate and advances throughout the whole of things although it sits steadily within itself. Even the light, which is visible, after all is one and everywhere the same continuous whole, so that it is impossible to cut off some part of it, or to ring it off, or to set the light apart in any way from its source.

According to the very same principles, then, the whole cosmos together also is divisible and distributes itself about the single and indivisible light of the gods. But the light is one and entirely the same everywhere, and it is indivisibly present to all things able to participate in it. By a perfecting power it has filled up everything, and by some kind of boundless excess with respect to cause it finishes out all things in itself. It is both united everywhere to itself and joins together end points with first principles. Also the whole heavens imitate this very process and the cosmos goes around its cyclical revolution. It is both united to itself and it leads the elements wheeling around in a circle. It binds all existing things in each other and brings them to each other. It distinguishes by equal measures even things dispersed farthest away, and it causes end points to join to first principles; for example, earth to sky. It works out a single continuity and agreement of everything to everything.

By observing that this visible statue, so to speak, of the gods is so unified, wouldn't a person be ashamed to hold a different opinion concerning the gods, who are the causes of it, and attribute to them both divisions and distributions and circumscribe them within bodily forms? I suppose that *everyone* is disposed to consider the matter this way. For if there is neither rhyme nor reason, nor

state of harmony, nor any commonality of essence, nor interweaving, potentially or actually, of what is set in order to that which sets it in order, it would be as if nothing, so to speak, has a settled place, with no extension by regular intervals, nor discrete spatial units, nor discernible distribution, and no other sort of balancing rooted in the presence of the gods. For considering things of a similar nature, in essence or potentially, or even entities that are in any way of a similar form, or even things of a similar genus, it is possible to conceive of some kind of comprehension or control, but as regards whatever is entirely transcendent over all things, can one justly conceive of any kind of reciprocal interchange in their case, or of a permeability of them as wholes, or of a distinct circumscription or extent in space, or anything at all of such things?

Rather, I believe that those things which participate in the higher principles are each of them such that some participate in them aetherially, some with respect to the air, some, the water. Observing these things, then, the art of rituals also uses the correspondences and invocations appropriate to each division and environment.

[10] Very well, let this much be said concerning the distribution into the cosmos of the higher beings. But next after this you submit another division, and you separate "the essences of the greater beings by a distinction between the passive and the impassive." But neither do I accept this division. For absolutely none of the greater types of being is subject to passions, nor is any one of them impassive in such a way that it is separated from that which is capable of receiving passions, nor in such a way that it is naturally capable of receiving passions on the one hand, but is released from them because of virtue or some other excellent condition. But since they transcend completely the opposition of being subject to passion and not being subject to passion, and since they do not possess a nature at all subject to passion, and since in essence they hold a firmness that is incapable of change, because of this, I consider impassability and unchangingness to exist in them all.

Consider if you will the lowest of the divine things, the soul unmixed with body. What need does this soul have of the creative force in pleasure, or of the return in it toward nature, when it is above nature and lives the ungenerated life? What share does it have of the pain that leads to corruption, or of the pain that dissolves the harmony of the body, seeing that it exists separately from every body and from the divided nature that surrounds bodies, and seeing that it is in every way separate from that nature that descends from the harmony in the soul into the body? But neither does it have need of the passions that govern perception, for it is not at all restrained in a body, nor, since it is not enclosed, does it in any way need to perceive through corporeal organs any other bodies that exist outside it. But since it is wholly partless and remains in one and the same form, and since it both exists in itself incorporeally and has nothing in common with the corporeal, which is subject to generation and passions, it would be affected by nothing either on account of difference or on account of alterity; nor would it at all admit of anything whatsoever that admits of change or passion.

But neither, once it has come into the body, is it subject to passions nor are the principles, which it gives to the body. For these also are forms and are simple and uniform, and admit no single disturbance nor displacement from themselves. In a thing with a composite nature, then, it is what remains that is the cause of being subject to passion, and the cause is not, of course, the same thing as the effect. Just as, therefore, the soul itself, in itself, is not susceptible to generation and corruption—even though it is the primary origin of animals with a composite nature, which come to be and pass away—so also the soul in itself is unchangeable—even though the things that participate in it are susceptible to passions and do not entirely possess life and being, but mix with the indefiniteness and the otherness of matter. The soul is unchangeable and not susceptible to generation and corruption on the grounds that it is greater, in its essence, than being subject to passions, and not on the grounds that it is something subject to passions involved in a sort of choice inclining toward both things, nor as something that, in participating with unity or of power, borrows its unchangingness as a newly acquired property.

Since, then, we demonstrated that participation with being subject to passions is impossible in case of the lowest type of the better kinds of beings, why should one apply it to the daemons and the heroes, who are both eternal and companions of the gods everywhere, and an icon of the gods' orderly arrangement of the universe, and who themselves keep a close watch on the same things, and are eternal and bring to completion the divine arrangement and never abandon it? For we know, of course, that this is in no way of itself, since passion is disorderly and out of tune and uncertain, but that it belongs to that by which it is held and to which it is a slave to the generative power. So then this belongs to some other sort of thing, more than to the thing eternally linked to the gods, which travels around both the same arrangement and the same circuit with them. Therefore the daemons also are not subject to passions and all the things of the greater types of being that accompany them.

[11] How is it, then, you ask, that many things are performed in the sacred rites toward the gods as if they were subject to passions? But I assert that this also is said by one ignorant of the sacred mystagogy. For of the things which are celebrated regularly in the rites, some have a cause which is beyond speech, in a way, and greater than reason, others have been sanctified as symbols to the higher beings from eternity, others preserve and sustain a different sort of image, in just the same way that the nature that concerns itself with generation stamped out certain visible shapes from invisible principles, others are introduced for the sake of honor, or aim at a likeness of any sort at all or even just an affinity. Some provide something useful to us or purify us, in a certain way, and remove our passions from us, or turn us away from some other of the fearful characteristics that are our companions. Still, surely no one would agree that any part of the rite is referred to the gods or daemons being worshipped as if they were subject to passions. For neither does that essence, which is in itself eternal and incorporeal, naturally admit of any change from corporeal things.

Nor, if it has in as great a degree as possible such a lack of passions, would it have ever needed humans for such a service, because it is fulfilled from itself and from the nature of the cosmos and from the entire perfection that exists in the world subject to generation. It is even, if it is possible to say this, *prior to needing*, being something self-sufficient, on account of the flawless wholeness of the cosmos and its own particular fullness, and because the stronger forms of being manifest themselves entirely full of the good things proper to them.

Let these then be our general explanations concerning the flawless divine service, since it assimilates everything else to beings higher than us, and since a pure rite is introduced to pure beings and impassive to impassive beings. But to follow up on the issues individually, we claim that the erection of phalli is a sort of symbol of generative power, and we believe that this power is invoked into the generating of the world, which is why many things are dedicated in the spring, just when the entire cosmos also receives from the gods the rejuvenation of creation as a whole. And in my view the vulgar expressions signify a token of the depravity of the beautiful surrounding the material world, and of the prior shapelessness and deformity of things that are going to be arrayed into the cosmos, things that long for order, since they are lacking it (in as great a degree as they despise the ugliness surrounding themselves). One pursues, in turn, the causes of the forms and the beautiful, when one observes the shameful from the expressing of shameful things. The act both dissuades from the shameful, while through the expressions it brings knowledge of it into the open, and it transfers one's desire to the opposite.

But another similar sort of reasoning also pertains to these things. The powers of the human affections inside us, if they are entirely blocked up, are rendered more violent, but if they are let out into activity for a short time and up to a due proportion, they are gratified and sated in a measured way, and hence they are cleansed by catharsis and are stopped by persuasion and not through force. Through this very same process, in both comedy and tragedy, when we watch the passions of others we check our own passions and work them off moderately and purge them away. Also in the divine rites, by particular sights and sounds of shameful things, we are set free from the harm that befalls shameful actions.

Such rites are introduced, then, for the care of the soul in us, and for moderation of the evils that naturally attach to it through the process of generation, and for the sake of freedom and release from its bonds. For this same reason Heraclitus fittingly called them "cures," since they heal awful things and render our souls free from the ills of the process of generation.

[12] "But invocations," you say, "are referred to the gods as if they were subject to passions, so that not only are daemons subject to passions but also the gods." But the matter is not exactly as you have assumed. For the illumination that arises through prayers is a something self-revealing and voluntary, and it stands aloof, far from being coerced, it emanates into the visible world

through its perfection and divine activity, and it surpasses voluntary movement by as much as the divine will of the good transcends the life of inclination. Through such a will then the gods radiate their light upon the theurgists without begrudging it, since they are benevolent and gracious, and they call up the theurgists' souls to themselves and orchestrate their union with them, and accustom them to stand aloof from their bodies, even while they are still in bodies, and to turn to their timeless and intelligible source.

The thing which we are just now claiming, is clear also from the acts themselves, that they are a *savoir* of the soul. For in seeing "the blessed sights," the soul takes another life and enacts another activity and then is not even considered to be a human, when it is considered correctly. But often, when it has abandoned its own life, it takes in exchange the most blessed activity of the gods. If, then, the ascent through invocations provides for the priests a purging of passions and a release from the process of becoming and a unity toward the divine source, why in the world does anyone attribute passions to it? For this sort of ascent does not draw down those not subject to passions and pure, toward what is subject to passion and impure, but the opposite is the case, it renders us who have become subject to passions, on account of the process of becoming, pure and permanent.

But neither do the invocations join the priests to the gods through passions, but through the divine *philia* that embraces everything they provide a communion of the indissoluble engagement of things. It is not the case, as the name on its own appears to suggest, that "in-vocations" "call down" the mind of the gods to humans, rather, according to the truth itself as it means to teach us, they render the mind of humans suitable for participating in the gods, and lead it up to the gods and adapt it through suitable persuasions. For which very reason also the names of gods that are befitting the sacred and the rest of the divine symbols that are anagogic are capable of joining them to the gods.

[13] And in addition, our "appeasements of wrath" will be clear if we consider the wrath of the gods. This is not, then, as it seems to some, a sort of ancient and enduring anger, rather it is a turning away from the beneficial care that comes from the gods, which we abandon, turning *ourselves* away, just as if we veiled ourselves from the light in the noonday sun, and set the darkness on ourselves and hardened ourselves from the gods' excellent giving. Propitiation, then, has the power to turn us toward the participation in the higher world, and to bring us forward into communion with the divine care that has been pushed back from us, and to bind to each other in due proportion what is participated and what participates. Therefore the act of appeasement is so far removed from accomplishing its work through passion that it even removes us from our troubled rejection of the gods, which is an act of the passions.

The "sacrifices that expiate" heal whatever evil is present in the places of the earth and prepare us so that not a single inclination nor any affection exists around us. Therefore, whether such an expiation should arise through the gods or through daemons, it summons these as helpers and warders-off of evil and

saviors, and through them it leads away every approaching harm arising out of the passions. It is not in any way at all possible, then, that they who divert the blows of becoming and of nature, bar them through passions. And if anyone should believe that the cutting off of their care introduces any harm automatically, persuasion of the stronger orders through expiation, since it calls back again their goodwill toward caring and turns away privation, would be entirely pure and permanent.

[14] In addition, the so-called “necessary compulsions of gods” are just this, necessary compulsions that come *from* the gods, and arise in their presence. In just the same way as the Good is necessarily beneficent, thus are they disposed entirely in this particular way and in no other, and not as something from outside nor as by force. Such a necessity as this, then, is blended with an intention that has the form of the Good, and is a friend of love. By its particular station it has the sameness and permanence of the gods—since it is, in relation to the same things and in the same manner, embraced by a single boundary—and because of this steadfastness it also is never displaced. Certainly then, on account of all these things, the matter is the opposite from what you inferred: the divine turns out to be unconjurable and not susceptible to passions and not liable to compulsion, if, that is, such powers actually are truly in theurgy, as we proved.

[15] Continuing on, after this division you proceed to another, between gods and daemons: You say: “Gods are pure intellects,” advancing the opinion as your hypothesis, or relating it as one acceptable to certain people, but you explain daemons as being “psychical entities that partake of mind.” That these things seem to be the case to many of the philosophers has not escaped my notice either, but in speaking to you I don’t suppose I need to hide the clear truth. For all such opinions have been a little confused. On the one hand, attributes of daemons are transferred to souls (for *souls* are participants of mind); on the other hand, those of gods have fallen away to the mind, which is immaterial in its activity, but which the gods, of course, utterly surpass. Why then must one assign these characteristics, which are not wholly fitting to them? With respect to the fact of differentiation let this much discussion be thought fitting (for what remains is beside the point), but the things about which you are in doubt in addition to this, since they are linked to the sacred service, let them meet up with a fitting argument.

Still more, having said that pure intellects are “unbending and unmixed with sensible things,” you doubt whether it is necessary to pray to them. But I assume one ought not pray to anyone else. For the divine in us, which is both One and intellectual, or if you wish “intelligible,” is awakened into activity during prayers, and when it is awakened it strives after what is similar to it in an exceptional manner and links itself to perfection-in-itself. But if it is plainly unbelievable to you, how something without a body hears a voice, and in what way one that also lacks perception, and even ears, hears what is spoken by us in prayers, you willfully forget the presence of the first causes both in the act

of knowing and in the participation in the first causes of all things under them, for they have gathered together into a unity in themselves the whole of things altogether. Neither, then, through activities, nor through organs, do the gods receive prayers into themselves, but they comprehend within themselves the energies of the words of good men, and especially of whichever words, through the sacred rites, have been established by the gods and hit upon a unity to them. For the divine itself, at that time, is literally unified to itself and communicates with the thoughts inside the prayers (and not as one person to another).

But “the prayers of petition,” as you claim, “are improperly directed to the purity of the intellect.” Not at all. On account of this sort of reason: since in activity and purity and in all things we are inferior to the gods, it is the most appropriate thing of all to supplicate them in an extreme degree. For humans’ awareness of their own nothingness, if anyone should judge by comparing them to the gods, makes them turn themselves spontaneously to prayers of petition, and from supplication we are led up, little by little, toward that which we supplicate, and we acquire a sameness to it, from conversing continuously with it, and from our imperfection we slowly acquire divine perfection in addition.

If one should also consider the supplications in the sacred rites, how they were sent down to humans from the gods themselves, and that they are symbols of the gods themselves and are familiar only to the gods, and that these somehow hold a power that is the same as that which belongs to the gods, how could one still justly assume that such a supplication is perceptible and not divine and intellectual? Or what affection could reasonably intrude into the supplicatory rite, in which not even an earnest human character is able to be easily cleansed.

“But the offerings,” you claim, “are offered as though they were directed to beings with sensory perception and souls.” Yes, if they are filled up only with bodily powers and composite ones or are ear-marked as though for the bare service of the sense organs. But since the offerings participate in incorporeal forms and in certain principles and in the simpler measures, by this fact alone is seen the proper sense of the offerings. And if some near or distant relationship or likeness exists, even this is sufficient for the connection that we are just now discussing. For not even among the things incrementally close to the gods is there anything to which the gods are not immediately present and linked. The union arising from the offerings to the gods themselves, as far as is possible, arises not as it turns out as if to beings with sense perception or souls, but in accordance with the divine forms themselves. Thus, we replied sufficiently also concerning this distinction.

[17] Let us, then, in place of this, substitute the doubts you raised against current opinion. “How,” you ask, “according to your reasoning, will the sun and the moon, and the visible beings in the heavens, how will they be gods, if the gods are only bodiless?” Well, we claim that they are not circumscribed by

bodies, but that *they* circumscribe their bodies with divine lives and activities; and that they are not turned toward the body, but they hold the body, which is turned toward its divine cause; and that the body does not hinder their intellectual and bodiless perfection, nor does it produce problems for the perfection by interrupting it. On account of this, then, the body does not need extra attention, but it follows along spontaneously and in a certain way automatically, and without needing to work on its own, but by the anagogy of the gods toward the one, it also is uniformly lifted up by itself.

But if it is necessary to say this, the heavenly body is the body most closely related to the bodiless essence of the gods. For, since that essence is single, partless, and immovable, the heavenly body is simple, indivisible, and in the very same way unchangeable. And even if some one of the divine essences uniformly appends its activities under itself, even this maintains a single circuit. The heavenly body imitates also their sameness, by an everlasting motion distributed across the same things and in the same way and in the same direction, and by a single principle and in a single order of being, it also imitates the divine life by the innate life that belongs to aetherial bodies. For which very reason their body is not mixed together as if from opposing and differing things, just as indeed our body is composed, nor was soul put together with body into a single living thing from two parts. But the creatures in the heavens, among the gods, are entirely alike and united, and are wholes throughout wholes and are uniform and not composite. For the greater levels of being always and consistently dominate inside them, and the lesser levels are suspended from the head of the prior ones and never drag it down to themselves, and the wholes of things are gathered together into a single order and a single consummation; also, in a certain way, all bodiless beings, even gods, throughout the whole are gathered together, since the divine form rules in them, throughout everything, and inserts the same whole single substance everywhere.

[18] In this way, on the one hand, then, the beings visible in the heavens are all gods and in a certain way incorporeal. But your next question raises a difficulty, "How is it that some of them are beneficent and some maleficent? In fact, this opinion has surely been taken from the horoscope-takers, and totally misses reality. For all of them are good and the causes of good things alike, and they cast their attention toward a single good and uniformly conduct themselves solely according to the beautiful and the good. Nevertheless the material bodies that lie under them also themselves hold an extraordinary number of powers, some remaining only in the divine bodies themselves, others proceeding out from them into nature and its material manifestation in the cosmos, descending in order throughout all of creation, and stretching un hindered down to particulars.

And as concerns the powers that remain in the celestial divine bodies, no one would dispute that they are all similar. Let us then go through the remaining issue, which concerns those that are sent down here and mingle with the generated world. Now then, these come through for the salvation of the

universe and they likewise hold together creation as a whole according to the same mode. They are both impassive and immovable, and yet they descend into what receives change and is susceptible to passions. Since creation is surely multifarious and assembled from diverse things, it receives their unity and undifferentiation with struggle and in a partial way because of its own contrariness and division. It receives what is not subject to passions, in a manner subject to passions, and entirely in accord with its own nature, not in accordance to their power, it naturally participates in them. Just as, then, what comes to be partakes of being by means of generation and the corporeal partakes corporeally of the incorporeal, so also the natural and material world within creation sometimes partakes of immaterial things and celestial bodies beyond nature and beyond the created world in a disorderly and inharmonious fashion. Then those who apply color and shape and texture to intelligible forms are absurd, since it is the things that partake in them that have such qualities; also absurd are those who attribute evil to the heavenly bodies, since it is the things that participate in them that at times have an evil nature. For there would not have been such a thing as participation in the first place, if the participant didn't have also some kind of difference from it. But if the participant receives the thing participated in as into something other and different, then doubtless this thing, as something other and among earthly things, is the evil and disordered thing.

Participation, then, becomes the cause of the great otherness in secondary things, and the commingling of material things with the immaterial emanations, and furthermore the fact that the thing which is given in one way is received by the things of this world in another way. For example, the emanation of Kronos is unifying, whereas that of Ares causes motion; however, among material things, the receptacle, which is subject to passions and generation, receives the one as rigidity and coldness, and the other as heat beyond measure. Isn't it true that the thing that corrupts and makes disproportionate comes to be on account of the differentiating, material, and passive deviation of the recipients? Furthermore, since the weakness of the material and terrestrial realms does not make room for the unmixed power and purest life of aetherial beings, it transfers its own passivity to the first causes. It is as if someone who is sick in their body and is unable to bear the life-giving heat of the sun, were to dare falsely to accuse it, because of his own problems, as if not it were not advantageous for health or life.

There might be something of this sort also in the harmony and blending of the whole, since the same things are salvation, on the one hand, to the whole and the universe, on account of the completeness both of things present in it and the things in which it is present, but for its parts; on the other hand, these same things are harmful on account of the parts' divisible asymmetry. Also in the movement of the whole, then, all the revolutions preserve the whole cosmos in the same way, but a particular one of them, in one part, is often oppressed by another part, which very thing we also see arising clearly in a dance.

So then, once again, the passivity of being corrupted and changed is innate

to those things made of parts, and one ought not attribute this to the complete and primary causes, either as being in them or as having descended from them to things here. Through these things, then, it has been shown that neither the gods themselves in the heavens, nor their gifts, are malevolent.

[21] The division, which you take up, of what is subject to passions from what is not someone might equally reject as suitable to neither of the stronger forms of being, for reasons we have mentioned before. And also for this reason it is right to overturn it, that it establishes its claim from rites performed upon beings, *assuming* that they are subject to passions. For what sort of sacred rite and service, if it is performed according to sacred customs, is generated through the passions, or produces any fulfillment of passions? Was this sacred rite not legislated intellectually according to the laws of the gods and according to first principles? It imitates the order of the gods, both the intelligible order and the encosmic one. It maintains the eternal measures and wondrous tokens of the things that exist, which are sent down from the demiurge and the second father of wholes, and by which also things beyond language are brought to light through inarticulable symbols; formless things are held within forms, things greater than every image have images impressed on them, and everything is fulfilled through a single divine cause, which particular cause has been separated so far from the passions, that it is not even possible to reach a logical account of it.

This is nearly also the cause of the error of our thoughts concerning the passions. For although humans are unable to grasp wisdom by logical reckoning, they consider it to be possible and are carried along wholly toward things that are characteristic of themselves: human passions, and from them, which belong to themselves, they infer divine passions. They entirely mistake them doubly, then, both since they fall away from divine things and, when having missed the mark on these, they drag the divine down to human passions. But it is necessary with things being done in the same way toward gods and humans; for example, making prostrations and obeisances and gifts and first-fruits, not to understand them in the same way in both cases, and to set each of them apart, according to the difference in the case of the more worthy entities, and to glorify some as holy, but to consider the others as human and easy to be despised. It also must be granted that the efficacy of the human actions arises by passion both within those performing them and those to whom they are directed (for they are human and corporeal), but since the divine actions are efficacious through an unchangeable wonder and a holy condition, both of intellectual joy and steadfast wisdom, it is necessary to value differently their actual power, since they are dedicated to the gods.

Bibliography

- Dillon, John. 1987. "Iamblichus of Chalcis." *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 2.36.2.

- Dodds, E. R. 1968. "Theurgy," appendix 2 in Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Finamore, John. 1985. *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul*. Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press.
- Lewy, Hans. 1978. *The Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire*. 2d ed. edited by Michel Tardieu. Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes.
- O'Meara, Dominic J. 1989. *Pythagoras Revived: Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- des Places, Edouard, S. J., ed. 1966. *Jamblique: Les mystères d'Egypte*. Paris: Belles Lettres.
- Shaw, Gregory. 1995. *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Sheppard, Anne D. R. 1996. "Theurgy." *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3d ed. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Struck, Peter. "Pagan and Christian Theurgies." *Ancient World*. Forthcoming.

