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IAMBlichus ON THE GRADES OF VIRTUE

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How many virtues does a philosopher require? Plato gave us four in the *Republic*: temperance, courage, justice, and wisdom. Plotinus argued that although these were indeed the four major virtues, they in fact exist at different levels: there are the four Political Virtues (πολιτικάι ἀρεταί) at the level of the embodied life (which we find in the *Republic*) and a higher sort of these virtues, the Purificatory (καθαρτικάι), that he found in the *Phaedo* and that lead the soul to the Intellect, where the paradigms of these four virtues pre-exist (*Enneads* I.2). Plotinus argues that the lower, Political Virtues are necessary for our embodied existence in that in this state we must control our lower souls. He also argues that, since our goal is to become like god (*Theaetetus* 176BC), the higher, purificatory virtues, in freeing soul from body, lead us more directly to that goal.

Plotinus' student Porphyry in his *Sententiae* 32 agrees with Plotinus concerning these two sorts of virtue but adds two more (although he himself would have argued that they are latent in Plotinus' treatise). As in Plotinus, the Political Virtues "provide order for the mortal human being" (i.e., for the soul when it is embodied, αἱ δὲ πολιτικάι τὸν θνητὸν ἄνθρωπον κατακοσμοῦσι, 32.19–20),¹ while the Purificatory Virtues "are seen in withdrawal from the actions of the body and from the affections connected with it" (ἐν ἀποχῇ θεωρούμεναι τῶν μετὰ τοῦ σώματος πράξεων καὶ συμπαθειῶν τῶν πρὸς αὐτό, 32.17–18). Porphyry adds two higher levels: one without a name that is higher than purification, when the soul after being purified attaches itself to Intellect (32.33–62), and another termed Paradigmatic (παραδειγματικάι), which exist in the Intellect and serve as the paradigms for the soul's virtues (32.63–70).

These then were the Neoplatonic precedents for Iamblichus' own gradations of virtue. He added three more levels to Porphyry's: the Natural (φυσικάι) and Ethical (ἠθικάι) at the lower end of the scale, and the Hieratic

¹ The text is that in Brisson (2005). I have consulted both the French and English translations in Brisson's edition, but all translations are my own. I have also benefitted from the notes of Brisson and Flamand, Vol. 2, 628–642.

or Theurgic Virtues (ἱερατικάί / θεουργικάί) at the top.² Thus, in Iamblichus' doctrine, there are seven grades of virtue:

- Hieratic/Theurgic (ἱερατικάί / θεουργικάί)
- Paradigmatic (παραδειγματικάί)
- Contemplative (θεωρητικάί)
- Purificatory (καθαρτικάί)
- Political (πολιτικάί)
- Ethical (ἠθικάί)
- Natural (φυσικάί)

It is mainly the two lowest classes of virtue, the Natural and Ethical, and the highest class, the Hieratic / Theurgic, that will concern us in this paper, but we will have occasion to consider the other grades of virtue as well. Iamblichus' writings on the grades of virtue have not survived, but his doctrine is recoverable from Damascius' commentary to the *Phaedo* I.138–144, Olympiodorus' commentary to the same dialogue (I.8.2–3), and Marinus' *Life of Proclus* (3.8–33; 21.1–9; 22.1–15; 24.3–25.13; 28). The purpose of this paper is to investigate why Iamblichus added the three new grades and to see how they fit with the other grades to form a coherent part of Iamblichus' metaphysical / religious system. We will begin with the Natural and Ethical Virtues and see what role they play in Iamblichus' philosophy before embarking on a consideration of the other grades and especially of the Hieratic / Theurgic.

Natural (φυσικάί) and Ethical (ἠθικάί) Virtues

Damascius (*In Phaed.* I.138) introduces the Natural Virtues as proper to the lower nature in human beings. They are found also in animals, he says, and are associated with our bodily mixtures (or “temperaments,” κράσεις, line 2). The virtues at this level are in conflict with one another (presumably as one sees in animals, when they seem calm one moment and agitated the next).³

² For the evidence that Iamblichus is the author of these classifications, see Westerink, *The Greek Commentaries on Plato's Phaedo*, Vol. 1 Olympiodorus (Amsterdam 1976) 117 and Saffrey and Segonds (2002) lxxxi.

³ Cp. Olympiodorus, *In Phaed.* 1.5.7–11, where in the lordship of Dionysus (which is at the level of the natural and ethical virtues in the soul) the god is torn apart because the virtues at that level “do not reciprocally imply one another” (οὐκ ἀντακολουθοῦσιν ἀλλήλαις, line 9). Unlike the four virtues at the higher level, where having one virtue means that you have them all, at these two lowest levels, one may have one virtue and not the others, as for example certain animals seem to do.

Damascius intriguingly adds that these virtues might have been the result of training in a previous existence (ἀπὸ προβιοτῆς γεγυμνασμένοι, line 4). We will return to this point shortly.

We gather corroborating evidence from Olympiodorus *In Phaed.* 8.2–3. While enumerating five of our classifications of virtue (omitting Paradigmatic and Hieratic at the top of the scale), he glosses the Natural Virtues as those that come from our bodily mixture (αἱ ἀπὸ κράσεως ἐπιγίνονται, 8.3.2). They are “especially appropriate to irrational animals, since they are from the [bodily] mixture” (καὶ οἰκεῖται αἱ μὲν φυσικαὶ μάλιστα τοῖς ἀλόγοις ζώοις, αἱ ἀπὸ κράσεως εἰσιν, lines 3–4). Olympiodorus explains that these virtues are naturally connected to these animals: all lions and their offspring are brave “because of their mixture” (διὰ τὴν κράσιν, line 5), all oxen temperate, all storks just, and all cranes wise (φρόνιμοι) (lines 4–7).

The natural virtues are then closely associated with the body and the way that the physical structure is organized at birth. We might, for the sake of illustration, compare what the Epicureans believed about the innate structure of the human soul at birth. The soul is, for them, made up of atoms of different sorts: fiery, windy, airy ones. Lions have an excess of fiery atoms and so are anger-prone, deer have an excess of wind and so are skittish, and cattle have an excess of air and so are calm (Lucretius, *DRN* III.288–306). So too we might think of the blending of the humors in medical texts.

We may wonder how a natural structure of the body might be termed “virtuous.” Clearly Olympiodorus (most probably recording Proclus’ beliefs) had no trouble saying that animals had virtues. But what would such virtues consist in?

Here we may go to Marinus’ *Life of Proclus* for help. As Saffrey and Segonds point out in the outline of the biography in their introduction,⁴ Marinus has structured his biography around the grades of virtue, treating each ranking and the associated virtues of Proclus in turn. Proclus, he says, possessed these Natural Virtues:

3.13–18: Proclus was endowed from birth with good perceptible capacity (εὐαίσθησία, 3.13), which Marinus equates with “corporeal wisdom” (φρόνησις σωματική, 3.14). This inborn virtue, especially involving sight and hearing, is a divine gift that promotes philosophy and well-being.

3.19–27: Bodily strength (ισχύς σωματική, 3.19) is a kind of courage (τις ἀνδρία, 3.26). It endured in spite of Proclus’ light diet and his constant study.

⁴ Saffrey and Segonds (2002) xcvi–c. Cf. M. Edwards, *Neoplatonic Saints* (Liverpool 2000) 61 note 36.

3.27–43: Bodily temperance turns out to be a kind of corporeal beauty, for just as temperance is a harmony of the faculties of the soul, so too beauty is “a symmetry of the organic parts of the body” (3.32–33). Proclus had this physical beauty and it (most importantly for a Platonist) “blossoms from the soul in the body like a living light” (τὸ ἀπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐπανθοῦν τῷ σώματι οἶονεῖ φῶς ζῶτικόν, 3.36–37).⁵

3.44–60: Justice at this level corresponds to bodily health, for both are a kind of order or harmony of parts. Proclus was so constituted that he was ill only two or three times in his 75-year life span.⁶

Thus, the Natural Virtues are indeed inborn (συμφύντα, 4.5) with us. Like the Epicurean traits they might be better or worse. Proclus, of course, according to Marinus, is gifted with the finest innate constitution, but not all of us will be so lucky. As a category of virtue, they seem to be more impulses toward virtuous conduct than actual virtues, and we may consider them as virtues *in potentia*. If we have the four natural virtues (or indeed any combination of them, since they need not all exist in us from the beginning), it should make it easier for us to develop the next stage of virtue.

Before moving on to the Ethical Virtues, it will be good to pause and consider Damascius’ statement that these Natural Virtues may be related to a previous earthly existence. This idea goes hand-in-hand with Plato’s conception in the Myth of Er that each soul chooses its own future life. If the soul has led a good philosophical life before and has not drunk too deeply of the waters of Lethe (*Rep.* 621ab), it will choose a good, philosophical life—and not rush off and choose accidentally the life of a cruel tyrant or choose purposely some lesser life. Thus, training in the higher virtues in a previous existence may indeed help condition the choice of life and so also help determine the Natural Virtues with which we are born. So, in a real sense, the Natural Virtues are not merely determined by fate (as the Epicureans would have had it), but are also under “our” control.⁷ Thus, Marinus can say of Proclus that he alone seems not to have drunk of the cup of forgetfulness (μόνος οὗτος οὐδὲ τοῦ τῆς λήθης ἐδόκει πεπωκέναι πόματος, 5.6–7).⁸

⁵ See the notes of Saffrey and Segonds, 71.

⁶ On Proclus’ age at his death, see Saffrey and Segonds 73 note 4 and Edwards 63 note 47. He seems in actuality to have lived 73 years.

⁷ That is to say, it is under the control of our immortal rational soul. Since Iamblichus believed that the irrational soul (and vehicle) were also immortal, the training in the previous life (i.e., that of the immortal over the lower parts) should carry over into the next re-embodiment.

⁸ See Saffrey and Segonds 76 note 5; Edwards 65 note 58.

We learn about the Ethical Virtues in Damascius, *In Phaedonem* I.139 and Olympiodorus, *In Phaedonem* 8.2–3. These virtues build upon the Natural Virtues, and are ingrained in us by habituation and right opinion (ἐθισμός, ὀρθοδοξία, 139.1; cf. Olympiodorus, *In Phaed.* 8.2.3 αἱ ἀπὸ συνηθισμού). The two terms are important because these virtues are, unlike the Political Virtues above them, somehow connected to reason. There at first seems to be a variance between Damascius and Olympiodorus, for Olympiodorus tells us that the Ethical Virtues are not rational, and indeed restricts the term “rational virtue” to the Political and higher virtues at 8.2.9.⁹ Damascius, on the other hand, says that they belong to both the rational and irrational parts of the soul (εἰσὶ δὲ ὁμοῦ λόγου τε καὶ ἀλογίας, 139.4). The discrepancy is only apparent, however, since the Ethical virtues are appropriate to the lower-order of rational functioning in human beings that is roughly equivalent to the higher critical faculties of certain animals. As Damascius explains, the Ethical Virtues belong to children who are being brought up well and to certain animals (8.2.2), and so the kind of rationality involved is that which is inculcated in children and animals through habituation—that is to say, as we train dogs not to growl at friends or children not to chew with their mouths open. As Olympiodorus puts it, Ethical Virtues are appropriate to human beings and to such animals as have a more developed imaginative faculty and can learn through habituation (8.2.7–8). Thus, the Ethical virtues are instilled by repetition. Whereas the Natural Virtues were genetically determined traits (as anger in lions), the Ethical virtues are learned, both by children and domesticated animals, and so to that extent “rational.” Thus, Damascius says that they come to exist in us through “right opinion,” Plato’s term in the Divided Line for lower-order knowledge as opposed to *epistêmê*, which is the true mark of the rational human being. Children use lower-level reasoning (λογισμός) without abstract reasoning or concepts.

Damascius makes the further point that these virtues do not depend on bodily mixtures, as the Natural Virtues had done, and so they are not opposed to one another (τῶν κράσεων ὑπερανέχουσai καὶ διὰ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐναντιοῦμεναι ἀλλήλαις, I.139.2–3).¹⁰ Thus, if we have one of these virtues (Ethical justice, say) then we must have the others.

⁹ “The virtues that use reason” (λόγῳ χρῶντο αἱ ἀρεταί). Cf. 8.3.4–5: καὶ αἱ ἡθικαὶ δὲ ἀρεταὶ ἄλλογοί εἰσι.

¹⁰ I must disagree with Dillon (1987, 903), who says that the Ethical virtues “are also dependent on one’s physical make-up and conflict with one another.”

The differences between the Natural and Ethical virtues are clear enough. Natural Virtues are inherited at birth, what we might call our “genetic inheritance.” Ethical Virtues cover the moral training that we gain in youth from our parents or guardians. Since we are not yet fully rational creatures, the virtues are learned by rote and not fully understood rationally. We act morally, but only in the way that a trained dog refrains from bad behavior. As we advance through the higher levels, the reason plays more of a role. In the Political Virtues, Reason regulates the lower soul parts (the irrational and spirited, as in the *Republic*). The Purificatory Virtues belong to reason alone, as it separates itself from all bodily aspects and passions. The Contemplative and Paradigmatic virtues involve the separated rational soul first as it intelligizes the Intellect in a separate fashion and then as it participates in Intellect inseparably.

We are left then with the puzzle of why Iamblichus thought that the lower two orders of virtue were necessary to his grades of virtue. It is of course true that as a scholastic philosopher, Iamblichus would have wanted to fill any perceived void in the grades of virtue, but the question remains as to why he would have thought there was a void at the lower levels at all.

An answer to this question may be found in Iamblichus’ tendency to divide humanity into separate categories depending on our mental abilities and theurgic practices. Here is what he says at *De Mysteriis* V.18, 223.8–224.4.¹¹

We may however employ another basis of division. The great mass of men, on the one hand, is subject to the domination of nature, and is ruled by natural forces, and directs its gaze downwards toward the works of nature, and fulfills the decrees of fate, and takes upon itself the order of what is brought about by fate, and always employs practical reasoning solely about natural phenomena. A certain few individuals, on the other hand, employing an intellectual power which is beyond the natural, have disengaged themselves from nature, and turned toward the transcendent and pure intellect, at the same time rendering themselves superior to natural forces. There are some, finally, who conduct themselves in the middle area between nature and pure mind, some following after each of them in turn, others pursuing a mode of life which is a blend of both, and others again who have freed themselves from the inferior level and are transferring their attention to the better.

There is a triple division of humankind here. The highest level represents Iamblichus’ class of theurgists. These make use of intellectual activity and have easy access to the Forms and the gods. Next come those who use both

¹¹ Translation of Clarke, Dillon, and Hershbell (2003) 257. On this passage see Finamore and Dillon (2002) 161.

intellect and “nature.” At the bottom are the mass of humanity who are subject to nature. If we impose this triple division on the grades of virtue, it should be clear that the lowest group in the *De Mysteriis* are those possessing the two lowest grades of virtue. They use at best πρακτικὸς λογισμὸς (223.12) and are subject to the forces of fate. As Damascius said, the Ethical Virtues are appropriate to rational and irrational activities. Olympiodorus adds (8.3.1–5):

Inasmuch as we possess Natural Virtues, we have knowledge of encosmic bodies, for bodies and what underlies them belong to such virtues. Inasmuch as we possess Ethical Virtues, we know what is fated in the cosmos, because what is fated abides around irrational forms of life, for the rational soul is not under fate and the Ethical Virtues are irrational.

Thus what Iamblichus has done is to associate the largest group of humanity with the lower two virtues. It is not surprising therefore that he had to add these virtues to Porphyry’s scale. He could not have left out the bulk of humanity.

What is of interest to us is how he has combined the division of humanity with the grades of virtue. The lowest of the three groups in the *De Mysteriis* passage lives at a mere animal level. It does not look up to the higher regions of the cosmos and does not make use of its intellectual capacity. For this reason it is subject to fate, which is of course all it can know. Even when this group reasons, it does so at the lowest level, thinking only about natural phenomena and never rising to intellectual thought about universals. It is divorced from the gods and subject to the conditions of the realm of generation. Their possibilities for redemption through theurgy are bleak, mainly because they have no impetus to seek out theurgic practices.

In a very real sense, then, what caused Iamblichus to add the lower orders of virtue was indeed his belief in theurgy. His view represents his pessimistic side. The mass of humanity never actualizes its divine aspect and so never seeks access to theurgic salvation. These people are touched by the goodness of the One, but fail to realize it and so are deprived of the gifts of the ascent of the soul.

As we move up the scales of virtue, the possibilities for humanity improve. The intermediate class of the *De Mysteriis*, which subdivides into three parts, does not map itself tidily onto the sevenfold classification of virtues, but it seems clear that this middle group is midway between a theurgist who actualizes the intellect in the soul and so achieves the highest degrees of the salvific ascent, including union with the divine Intellect and the One, and this lowest level of humanity. The three middle sorts of human beings are:

- Those pursuing a life of both *logismos* and intellect in turns.
- Those pursuing a life that is a mixture of both *logismos* and intellect.
- Those freeing themselves from the lesser *logismos* and changing themselves to the better (i.e., pure intellect).

Since the two lowest of these sub-groups make use of both lower reasoning and higher intellegizing, it would seem that they both fall into the grade of Political Virtue, which Damascius says uses the rational aspect of the soul for ordering the irrational (λόγου κοσμοῦντος τὴν ἀλογίαν ὡς ὄργανον ἑαυτοῦ, I.140.2). The highest of these sub-groups is marked by a change from the lower sort of thinking to the higher, and as such would fall into the grades of Purificatory, Contemplative, and Paradigmatic, where the soul mounts to Intellect and joins with it in varying degrees but (presumably) returns afterwards to its own human body and again exercises the lower sort of reasoning.

The Higher Virtues: Damascius, Olympiodorus, and Marinus

We have seen how the two lowest grades fit into Iamblichus' philosophical system, and we can now turn to the higher virtues and ultimately to the highest grade of Hieratic / Theurgic. We will proceed in three phases. First, we will look at the explanations of what theurgic virtues might entail based on the writings of these three philosophers, who took their ideas from Proclus and through him from Iamblichus. There are, I realize, problems with this way of proceeding since Iamblichean ideas might have been distorted by Proclus and by Syrianus before him. Nevertheless I believe that the consistency among the three authors together with Damascius' adherence to Iamblichean ideas gives credibility to the view that they are espousing basic Iamblichean doctrine, even if somewhat transformed. Next we will consider a problem, raised by several recent scholars, about the rank of Theurgic Virtues in these three philosophers, and argue that there is a consistent pattern of placement in all three. Finally, we will return to the role of the Theurgic Virtues in Iamblichus and demonstrate what he thought their purpose and effect was.

Damascius explicitly tells us that Iamblichus added the Hieratic Virtues to the list (*In Phaed.* I.144). It is clear from Plotinus and Porphyry that the grades of virtue are linked to stages in the life of the soul. The Political virtues concern the soul when embodied, the Purificatory the soul when it is freeing itself from the body and its passions, etc. The higher virtues therefore are linked to even higher stages in the soul's ascent to and becoming like the gods.

If we turn to the three philosophers and look briefly at what they say about the Political and Purificatory virtues, we will see that they match what we found in Plotinus and Porphyry. Political virtues belong to an embodied soul with the body's attendant passions, while Purificatory virtues belong to a soul that is in the process of freeing itself from the body and its passions.¹² Marinus expresses the difference between these two grades in the soul of Proclus in this way:

And thus the soul of the happy man [= Proclus] bringing itself together from all of these things and collecting into itself, nearly stood apart from its body, though still seeming to be held by it. For it no longer possessed a practical knowledge of a political kind—to fare well in matters that could be otherwise—but it intelligized purely itself by itself and was turned to itself, in no way in agreement with the body.

Καὶ οὗτος ἐκ πάντων ἑαυτὴν συνάγουσα καὶ ἀθροίζουσα πρὸς ἑαυτὴν ἢ τοῦ μακαρίου ἀνδρὸς ψυχὴ ἀφίστατο σχεδὸν τοῦ σώματος ἔτι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ κατέχεσθαι δοκοῦσα. Ἦν γὰρ αὐτῇ τὸ φρονεῖν οὐκέτι οἷον τὸ πολιτικόν, τὸ πράττειν εὖ περὶ τὰ ἐνδεχόμενα καὶ ἄλλως ἔχειν, αὐτὸ δὲ καθ' αὐτὸ εἰλικρινὲς τὸ νοεῖν καὶ τὸ πρὸς ἑαυτὴν ἐστράφθαι, μηδαμοῦ δὲ συνδοξάζειν τῷ σώματι.¹³ (21.1–9)

Thus, the Purificatory virtues are marked by the soul turning inward and finding its true self, leaving the kind of thought associated with practical matters aside and beginning to use intellectual thought. Olympiodorus (8.3.5–6) sums up the difference from another perspective by stating that we know encosmic things by the Political virtues but hypercosmic reality by the Purificatory. Thus the difference is marked by an ascent to a kind of thought associated with Intellect itself.¹⁴

The ascent to the Contemplative virtues marks the accomplishment of the purification that was begun earlier with the Purificatory virtues. The purpose of purifying the soul is to ascend to Intellect and join with it. Thus, while the Purificatory virtues belong to a soul in the process of this purification, the Contemplative virtues belong to the soul that has successfully purified itself and has arisen to Intelligible Realm. As Olympiodorus remarks (8.2.11–12), the Purificatory virtues flee passions but the Contemplative have already fled them (ἢ φεύγουσι τὰ πάθη, ὥς αἱ καθαρτικάι, ἢ πεφεύγασιν, ὥς αἱ θεωρητικάι).

¹² Olympiodorus, *In Phaed.* 8.2.9–11; Damascius, *In Phaed.* I.140–141; Marinus, *Vita Procli* 22.1–9.

¹³ For the Plotinian vocabulary in this passage, see Saffrey and Segonds (2002) 137–138 notes 2–4.

¹⁴ Cf. Damascius I.140–141.

Damascius also makes this distinction, stating that the Contemplative virtues arise “once the soul is already setting itself free or rather is bringing itself to what is prior to it” (τῆς ψυχῆς ἤδη καὶ ἑαυτὴν ἀφιεῖσης, μάλλον δὲ τοῖς πρὸ αὐτῆς ἑαυτὴν προσαγοῦσης, 142.1–2). Thus the process of separation and liberation, begun with the Purificatory virtues, is already assumed as the soul begins to take on the Contemplative. Indeed Damascius adds that the soul “as it were longs to be intellect instead of soul” (οἷον γὰρ νοῦς ἀντὶ ψυχῆς ἐπείγεται γενέσθαι, 142.3–4). Damascius then compares these Contemplative virtues with the Political ones below the Purificatory (142.4–6):

These [Contemplative virtues] are correlative with the Political since they [the Political] have their activity around what is inferior in accordance with reason while these [the Contemplative] have theirs around what is superior in accordance with intellect.

ἀντίστροφοι αὐται ταῖς πολιτικαῖς, ὥς ἐκεῖναι περὶ τὰ χεῖρω κατὰ λόγον ἐνεργοῦσαι, αὐται περὶ τὰ κρείττω κατὰ νοῦν.

Thus, for Damascius both the Purificatory and the Contemplative virtues belong to a soul in progression from its former embodied state to its future unification with Intellect. It longs to be Intellect, but is not yet so, and holds its activity around what is still superior to it.

Marinus presents the same sort of distinction as he describes Proclus’ ascent from the Purificatory to the Contemplative virtues (22.5–15):

For having been purified from and rising above generation and scorning those bearing the wand in it, he [Proclus] became a Bacchic adept in primary things and saw with his own eyes the truly blessed sights there,¹⁵ no longer gaining knowledge of them through discursive thought and demonstration but as if through sight seeing the paradigms in divine Intellect by simple apprehension of intellectual activity. He thereby received in addition virtue, which one would no longer rightly name practical knowledge but will rather call wisdom or even some more august name than this.

¹⁵ Marinus is making use of Platonic expressions from the *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*. See Saffrey and Segonds (2002) 138 note 1 and 26 note 2; Edwards (2000) 91 note 238. In *Phd.* 69c8–d1, Plato has Socrates quote a saying of those who concern themselves with mystery rites (οἱ περὶ τὰς τελετάς, 69c8): “Many are the wand holders, but few the [true] followers of Bacchus” (ναρθοφοροὶ μὲν πολλοί, Βάκχοι δὲ παῦροι). Socrates equates the followers of Bacchus with those who have led a philosophical life (d1–2). In our text, Marinus calls those who have not ascended to Contemplative virtue “wand bearers,” whom Proclus looks down on now that he is himself Bacchic, having attained to the Contemplative virtues (ἐβάκχευε, 22.8). Proclus can now enjoy a direct vision of the Intelligible objects, which are here termed μακάρια θεάματα, from *Phdr.* 247a4 (μακάριαι θεαί; cf. 250b6 μακάρια ὄψις).

Ἦδη γὰρ κεκαθαρμένος καὶ τῆς γενέσεως ὑπερέχων καὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ ναρθηκοφόρων ὑπερορῶν, περὶ τὰ πρῶτα ἐβάσχευε καὶ αὐτόπτης ἐγένετο τῶν ἐκεῖ μακαρίων ὄντως θεαμάτων, οὐκέτι μὲν διεξοδικῶς καὶ ἀποδεικτικῶς συλλογιζόμενος αὐτῶν τὴν ἐπιστήμην, ὥσπερ δὲ ὕψει ἀπλαῖς ἐπιβολαῖς τῆς νοερᾶς ἐνεργείας θεώμενος τὰ ἐν τῷ θεῷ νῷ παραδείγματα καὶ ἀρετὴν προσλαμβάνων, ἣν οὐκέτ' ἂν τις φρόνησιν κυρίως ἐπονομάσειε, σοφίαν δὲ μάλλον προσερεῖ, ἣ καὶ τινα σεμνοτέραν ταύτης ἐπωνυμίαν.

Marinus, here making use of Platonic terminology from the *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*, illustrates the distinction as between the “wand bearers” (who have mere Purificatory virtue and have not yet attained the status of a true philosopher) and “Bacchics” (who are the real philosophers, having attained to the Contemplative virtues). The Bacchics no longer think discursively with *phronêsis* but have an instantaneous awareness of the Intelligible objects that is akin to *sophia*. Thus, again, the Contemplative virtues belong to a soul that has united with Intellect and shares in its vision of the Forms.

For the Paradigmatic virtues, we must rely upon Damascius and Olympiodorus, since Marinus does not mention them. (We will return to this seeming discrepancy shortly.) The distinction between the Contemplative and the Paradigmatic virtues has to do with the kind of knowledge that the soul has of the Intelligible objects. Damascius writes (143.1–4):

These are virtues of the soul when it no longer contemplates Intellect (for contemplation takes place with separation) but has established itself through participation in the being of the Intellect that is the paradigm of all things. Therefore these are paradigmatic because they are virtues primarily of the Intellect itself.

Ὅτι παραδειγματικαὶ ἀρεταὶ αἱ μὴκέτι θεωρούσης τὸν νοῦν τῆς ψυχῆς (τὸ γὰρ θεωρεῖν σὺν ἀποστάσει γίνεται), ἀλλ' ἤδη στάσης ἐν τῷ νοῦν εἶναι κατὰ μέθεξιν ὅς ἐστι παράδειγμα πάντων· διὸ καὶ αὗται παραδειγματικαί, ὅτι προηγουμένως αὐτοῦ εἰσιν τοῦ νοῦ αἱ ἀρεταί.

Paradigmatic virtues, which for Plotinus did not belong to the soul but to Intellect but for Porphyry were the soul's, now belong to the soul *through* the Intellect, once the soul has united with the Intellect without separation or distance from it.

Olympiodorus explains this unification with an analogy. After stating that Plotinus added Purificatory virtues to the list, he says (8.2.13–20):

For there are Paradigmatic virtues, for just as our eye before it is illuminated by sunlight differs from what is illuminating it inasmuch as the eye is illuminated, and then later it is somehow united and conjoined and as it were becomes one and unlike, thus also our soul is in the beginning illuminated by Intellect and actualizes in accordance with the Contemplative virtues, and later as it were becomes the illuminator and actualizes in a unified way in

accordance with the Paradigmatic virtues. The task of philosophy is to make us intellect, but that of theurgy is to unite us with the Intelligible objects so that we actualize conformably to the [Intelligible] paradigms.

εἰσὶ γὰρ καὶ παραδειγματικαὶ ἀρεταί· ὥσπερ γὰρ τὸ ἡμέτερον ὄμμα πρότερον μὲν φωτιζόμενον ὑπὸ τοῦ ἡλιακοῦ φωτὸς ἕτερόν ἐστι τοῦ φωτίζοντος ὡς ἐλλαμπόμενον, ὕστερον δὲ ἐνοῦται πῶς καὶ συνάπτεται καὶ οἷον ἐν καὶ ἡλιοειδὲς γίνεται, οὕτω καὶ ἡ ἡμετέρα ψυχὴ κατ' ἀρχὰς μὲν ἐλλάμπεται ὑπὸ νοῦ καὶ ἐνεργεῖ κατὰ τὰς θεωρητικὰς ἀρετάς, καὶ ὕστερον οἷον ὕπερ τὸ ἐλλάμπον γίνεται καὶ ἐνοειδῶς ἐνεργεῖ κατὰ τὰς παραδειγματικὰς ἀρετάς, καὶ φιλοσοφίας μὲν ἔργον νοῦν ἡμᾶς ποιῆσαι, θεωργίας δὲ ἐνώσαι ἡμᾶς τοῖς νοητοῖς, ὡς ἐνεργεῖν παραδειγματικῶς.

Again the distinction has to do with the kind of union involved. When the soul acts in accordance with Contemplative virtues, it is like an eye that sees in sunlight. The soul is separate from the Intellect and sees the Intelligible through it. When the soul acts in accordance with the Paradigmatic virtues, it is like an eye that has become sunlike, by which Olympiodorus means that it is more unified with that sunlight. Thus, the soul now is unified with Intellect and sees the Intelligible objects not separately by participation with the Intellect but by being actually conjoined and united with the Intellect.

At this point two things seem clear. First, whatever else Iamblichus may have said about the grades of virtue, he clearly accepted a notion that as the soul ascended, its ascent involved not only a refinement in its thinking but also in the sort of virtues that accompanied those modes of thought. Second, concomitant with the refined thought processes was a similar closeness in the sort of unity with the higher principles that the soul underwent. Each step in the ascent and each grade of virtue involves more unitary thought and a more unified conjunction with the principle.

A Problem in Our Sources?

Before we can discuss the Hieratic virtues, however, we must consider a possible disharmony among our three sources. Festugière has argued that our three main sources for Iamblichus' grades of virtue (Damascius, Marinus, and Olympiodorus) gave differing accounts of the top grades of virtue.¹⁶ He was followed in this by Saffrey and Segonds and by Westerink.¹⁷ According to these scholars:

¹⁶ Festugière (1969) 294–296.

¹⁷ Saffrey and Segonds (2002) xciii–xcviii; Westerink (1976) Vol. I, 117–118. Cf. Brisson (2005) Vol. II, 637 note 63.

1. Damascius alone places the Paradigmatic Virtues between the Contemplative and the Hieratic.
2. Marinus, although he does not mention the Paradigmatic Virtues by name, places them above the Hieratic, which he calls "Theurgic Virtues."
3. Olympiodorus equates the Paradigmatic Virtues with the Theurgic (which are equivalent to the Hieratic).

Thus, we would have Damascius following the schema we laid down for Iamblichus, Marinus switching the places of the Paradigmatic and Hieratic virtues, and Olympiodorus equating these two grades. This is an intriguing set of deductions about the placement of the virtues in Marinus and Olympiodorus, but it is (I believe) a mistaken notion. Let's look at the evidence.

Olympiodorus (8.2) first lays out five classes of virtue, corresponding to the first five classes of Iamblichus: Natural, Ethical, Political, Purificatory, and Contemplative (lines 1–12). He then considers a sixth class, referring to Plotinus' category of Paradigmatic Virtues (lines 12–20). As we have seen, he considers the Paradigmatic virtues more unitary. At the end of his discussion (lines 19–20), he draws a distinction between philosophy (which makes us intellect) and theurgy (which unites us with the Intelligible objects). The scholars just mentioned take theurgy here as a seventh kind of virtue, one that is superior to Paradigmatic Virtue. It makes more sense, however, since Olympiodorus neither here nor elsewhere mentions a Theurgic or Hieratic Virtue, to note the distinction as between philosophy and theurgy (which is a typical Iamblichean distinction) and then to connect philosophy with Contemplative Virtue and theurgy with Paradigmatic. In this case, what philosophy and the Contemplative Virtues do is bring the soul into contact with the Intellect and its objects so that it can contemplate them, whereas theurgy and the Paradigmatic Virtues actually make us one with the Intellect and its objects. There is a distinction, in other words, between thinking the intelligible objects as other and unifying with them so that they and we become one.

If we turn to Damascius' interpretation of the virtues, we can form a better picture of what Olympiodorus is saying. Damascius describes the Contemplative Virtues as leading the soul to Intellect, and the soul then strives to become Intellect (I.142). The soul possesses Paradigmatic Virtues when it no longer is separate from and contemplates Intellect but rather *is* the Intellect by virtue of participating in it (since the Intellect is the paradigm of all). These virtues are paradigmatic, Damascius says, because they are primarily the virtues of the Intellect itself. Thus at this stage the

soul participates in Intellect and is unified with it, but its virtues are those properly of the Intellect (not of itself) which it possesses by participation in Intellect (I.143).¹⁸ The Hieratic Virtues exist in the godlike aspect of the soul (κατὰ τὸ θεοειδὲς ὑφιστάμεναι τῆς ψυχῆς, 144.1) and unlike the other virtues are unifying (ἐνιαιῖαι, 144.2). Thus, the three grades of virtue go along with a greater amount of unity between soul and Intellect. It is precisely this degree of unity that the passage in Olympiodorus is trying to capture, at least with regard to the Contemplative and Paradigmatic virtues.

Thus Olympiodorus is *not* discussing Hieratic Virtues, but is leaving them (perhaps purposefully) off his list. The highest grade that he discusses is the Paradigmatic, and like Damascius' ranking, these virtues are unifying (and so "theurgic" in that sense) whereas the Contemplative maintained the distinction between thinker and thought (soul and Intelligible entities), and so they are "philosophical" rather than "theurgic." If there is a difference between Olympiodorus and Damascius, it would seem to be that Olympiodorus thinks that the Paradigmatic virtues imply a greater degree of unity than Damascius would allot them. Olympiodorus' analogy of sunlight suggests that the soul unifies with Intellect. However, it is important to notice two points. First, Olympiodorus qualifies the sort of unity involved by use of the words οἷον ὅπερ (line 18). The soul "as it were" becomes Intellect. Thus the kind of unity involved may be more akin to Damascius'. Second, in the final sentence (lines 19–20) Olympiodorus contrasts philosophy (which makes us intellect) with theurgy (which fully unifies us with the Intelligibles). The distinction may at first seem to imply that we are fully unified under the Paradigmatic virtues, but since our unity is qualified by οἷον ὅπερ Olympiodorus may be suggesting that there is another step taken with theurgy that finally unifies our souls to a greater degree. If so, there may be Theurgical / Hieratic virtues in Olympiodorus' system, about which he chooses to remain silent, possibly because of their ineffability.

Let us turn to the passage in Marinus, where he lays out the grades of virtue (3.1–7).¹⁹ There are seven grades: Natural, Ethical, Political, Purificatory, Contemplative, Theurgical, and the highest virtues that are given no name but about which Marinus will remain silent because they are above

¹⁸ On the soul participating in Intellect, see Finamore (2009) 129–134, where Priscianus' *Metaphrasis* is combined with Iamblichus' *In Tim.* Fr. 55–56 to show that the human soul is incapable of intelligizing without the aid of the fully actualized Intellect. Thus, the human soul must participate in the transcendent Intellect. The Intellect is therefore "paradigmatic" in the sense that it provides the paradigms of intellectual activity to the soul.

¹⁹ Marinus discusses the differences between Purificatory and Contemplative virtues in chapters 21 and 22.

the human level (τὰς δὲ ἔτι ἀνωτέρω τούτων σιωπήσαντες ὡς καὶ ὑπὲρ ἀνθρώπων ἤδη τεταγμένας, 3.4–6). There is no indication here that these unnamed virtues are the Paradigmatic.²⁰ It seems doubtful that they are to be so identified, since both the Paradigmatic and Theurgic virtues in Damascius are distinctively associated with the human soul and so are not “above the human level.” They are human but at a very advanced state of human ability. Further Marinus himself, when he discusses Proclus’ Chaldaean studies in chapter 26, specifically calls the Theurgic virtues human (26.20–22):

... he [Proclus] ascended to the highest of the virtues for the human soul, which the inspired Iamblichus excellently called Theurgic.

Thus, the Theurgic virtues in both authors are decidedly human virtues.

When Marinus later discusses Proclus’ ascent to the Theurgic virtues at 28.1–8, he indicates that, like Damascius, he sees these virtues as involving a higher perch in the metaphysical hierarchy.

But since, as I said, he [i.e., Proclus] came to the still greater and more perfect Theurgic Virtue from his study concerning such things [i.e., concerning the Chaldaean texts, mentioned in 26.1–23], he no longer remained among the Contemplative Virtues nor did he situate himself in one or the other of the two properties belonging to the gods, viz., intellegizing and reaching toward what is better, but he established now a pre-intellective activity²¹ over secondary entities in some manner more divine than and not in accordance with the previously mentioned Political manner.

... ἀλλ’ ἐπεὶ, ὡς ἐκ τῆς περὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα σχολῆς ἀρετὴν ἔτι μείζονα καὶ τελειωτέραν ἐπορίσατο τὴν θεωρητικὴν, καὶ οὐκέτι μέχρι τῆς θεωρητικῆς ἴστατο οὐδὲ κατὰ θάτερον τῶν ἐν τοῖς θεοῖς διττῶν ἰδιομάτων ἔζη, νόων μόνον καὶ ἀνατεινόμενος εἰς τὰ κρείττονα, πρόνοιαν ἤδη καὶ τῶν δευτέρων ἐτίθετο θεϊότερόν τινα καὶ οὐ κατὰ τὸν ἔμπροσθεν εἰρημενον πολιτικὸν τρόπον.

Theurgic virtue, then, transcends the Contemplative (which, as we saw, included instantaneous vision of the Intelligible at that level, 22.1–15). It involves not a mere use of intellectual thought or the contemplation of entities above Intellect *from the level of Intellect*, but actually acting *prior to Intellect* (πρόνοια, 28.6, = πρὸ νοῦ).²² Thus, Theurgic virtue is associated with a higher kind of thought than simple unification with Intellect. It transcends Intellect itself, and so would seem to involve a higher kind of unity, most likely at the henadic level. Conceptually, the soul exists intermediate between One and Intellect.

²⁰ As Saffrey and Segonds (2002) 68 note 13 contend. So too Festugière (1969) 295–296.

²¹ For the translation of πρόνοια, see Saffrey–Segonds (2002) 152–153 n. 1.

²² See, with Saffrey and Segonds (2002) 153 n. 1, Proclus, *El. Th. Prop.* 120.

Before turning to the role of the Theurgic virtues in Damascius, we must first look at the next sentence in Marinus. He has just stated that the Theurgic virtues exist at a level between Intellect and the One. He now explains further about this ranking using Chaldaean terminology (28.8–10):

He made use of Chaldaean conjunctions,²³ prayers,²⁴ and divine and unspeakable Iunges.²⁵

Ταῖς γὰρ τῶν Χαλδαίων συστάσεσι καὶ ἐντυχίαις καὶ τοῖς θείοις καὶ ἀφθέγκτος στροφάλις ἐκέχρητο.

Marinus here uses three technical terms from the *Chaldaean Oracles*. Their importance for our purpose is that they are associated with the gods and communications between cosmic realms. A conjunction (σύστασις) is a form of communication with a divinity of any sort. Julian the Chaldaean performed a rite with σύστασις to associate his son, Julian the Theurgist, with

²³ For the term σύστασις, see Des Places (1996) 150; Majercik (1989) 214; Lewy (1978) 228–229; Edwards (2000) 100 note 293; Saffrey and Segonds (2002) 153 note 2. It denotes the conjunction between the theurgist and the god or administering daemon that takes place before the soul's ritual ascent.

²⁴ For the term ἐντυχία, see Des Places (1966) 117 note 1; Lewy (1978) 239; Majercik (1989) 214; Saffrey and Segonds (2002) 153 note 3. These are prayers to the gods and daemons offered preparatory to the ascent ritual.

²⁵ For the term στροφάλις (= ἵνυξ or ῥόμβος), see Lewy (1978) 249–252; Majercik (1989) 214 (her commentary to the use of the word in *Chald. Or. Fr.* 206) and 9–10; Saffrey and Segonds (2002) 153–154 note 4. The Iunx was originally a bird, the wryneck, which could twist its head about while standing still. The term was later applied to a disk that was spun on a thread between the fingers in magic rituals, the whistling sound being assimilated to apotropaic prayers. See Ogden (2009) 240–242 and for further bibliography 350. For the Iunges in the *Chaldaean Oracles*, Fr. 75–77, see Des Places (1996) 85 and 136 and Majercik (1989) 171–172. See also Lewy (1978) 132–137 and Finamore and Johnston (2010) 167–169 and 172. In the *Oracles* the Iunges are both Intelligible entities that help guide the universe and descend to the planetary spheres when called upon by priests and also the magical wheels which are used not for erotic attraction, as in common magical practice, but for calling the Intelligible Iunges to the cosmic realm to assist in ritual ascent. It should be noted that the Iunges in Fr. 77 are conceived as the descending thoughts of the highest god, the Father, who (we are told) sends the Iunges “by means of his unspeakable will so that they might intelligize” (βουλαῖς ἀφθέγκτοις κινούμεναι ὥστε νοῆσαι, 76.3). Thus the adjective used by Marinus to describe the Iunges themselves was used in the *Oracles* to describe the moving activity of the highest god. This “will” is therefore akin to the Iunges themselves, which in Fr. 76 “move into” (ἐπεμβαίνουσι, 76.2) our cosmos. It is difficult to translate the plural “wills” into English, but the idea is that the Father sends individual instances of his eternal Will into the cosmos, just as he sends individual Forms. It should be noted that Marinus cites a more typical “white magic” use of a Iunx in 22.19–21, where Proclus is said to have prevented a drought in Attica by using a Iunx. See Edwards (2000) 101 note 301.

all the gods and the soul of Plato.²⁶ The rite is preliminary to the actual ascent ritual, the priest calling upon the divinity to aid in the rite. The prayers (έντυχίαι) are also preliminary to the ritual, addressed to divinities to gain their assistance.²⁷ The Iunx, a magical disk spun between the two hands on a thread to create a whirring noise, is also the name of an Intelligible entity sent from the Father into the cosmos. Like the Forms they can move easily between realms and assist the priest in the ascent ritual. The material Iunx is used by sympathetic magic to set the Intelligible Iunges in motion. Thus, all three of these Chaldaean terms are applicable to pre-noetic gods. We can therefore imagine Proclus invoking these higher gods in theurgic ritual as he enlists their aid in the ascent of his soul. In such a case, the Theurgic virtues associated with these rites would involve unity with gods above the Intellect.

Thus the three philosophers, though not in perfect harmony, are in general accord. The higher virtues are aligned with purer thought and greater unity. Marinus leaves the Paradigmatic virtues off his list, and Olympiodorus does not discuss the Hieratic virtues (although this need not imply that he does not accept their existence). Damascius presents the clearest picture, with all seven grades of virtue. The differences between the philosophers is consistent with an Iamblichean doctrine that parallels that of Damascius.

Iamblichus and the Hieratic Virtues

What then was Iamblichus' doctrine about the Paradigmatic and Theurgic/Hieratic Virtues? If we are right that the sort of unity attained involves the gods existing above Intellect and below the One, then Damascius' description of these virtues is apt:

The Hieratic virtues subsist in the godlike [element] of the soul and are parallel to all the above-mentioned [grades], which were related to being, while these are related to unity. Iamblichus introduced these [virtues], and those around Proclus [discussed them] more clearly.

Ὅτι εἰσι καὶ αἱ ἱερατικάι ἀρεταί, κατὰ τὸ θεοειδὲς ὑφιστάμεναι τῆς ψυχῆς, ἀντιπαρήκουσαι πάσαις ταῖς εἰρημέναις οὐσιώδεσιν οὖσαις ἐνιαθαί γε ὑπάρχουσαι. καὶ ταύτας δὲ ὁ Ἰάμβλιχος ἐνδείκνυται, οἱ δὲ περὶ Πρόκλον καὶ σαφέστερον.

(144.1–4)

²⁶ Lewy (1978) 229; Majercik (1989) 25–26. According to Lewy (1978) 234, Chaldaeans summoned Aion (= the Father, and so above Intellect) with conjunctions.

²⁷ Lewy (1978) 238–240. As with the conjunctions, the rites addressing the divinities could involve *nomina barbara*.

Given Damascius' emphasis here on the distinction between Being (in the lower grades of virtue) and Unity (in the Theurgic) and also given that Being is the lowest moment of the Realm of the One (as well as the highest of the Intelligible Realm), we have more evidence that the Theurgic virtues involve pre-Intelligible entities, such as the Henads.²⁸ Further the place of the Theurgic virtues—and so the source of the kind of thought that accompanies them—Damascius calls the “godlike element of the soul” (τὸ θεοειδὲς τῆς ψυχῆς). As Westerink states, this would be “the ‘divine’ or ‘one-like’ element in the soul.”²⁹ Since one would expect to have contact with pre-Intelligible entities not via the intellectual capacity of the soul but through its one-like capacity, the term further corroborates our view that Theurgic virtues belong to a soul that is actualizing its henadic aspect.

We are now in a position to see how Iamblichus distinguished the Paradigmatic and Theurgic / Hieratic virtues. As we have seen, the Paradigmatic virtues are marked by participation in Intellect. Like objects that participate in the Form of, say, Red, they are what they are by virtue of the Form, not by virtue of themselves. As the object's redness depends on the presence of the Form in it, so too the soul's intellectual nature depends on the presence of the Intellect. In the Hieratic virtues, however, the one-like aspect of the soul surpasses mere participation in the Intellect.

In his *De Anima* section 50, Iamblichus compares the views of Numenius and “the ancients” (i.e., of Iamblichus himself) about the sort of unity the soul has to Intellect. Whereas Numenius prefers an undifferentiated sameness (ταυτότης ἀδιάκριτος, 72.19) that is a kind of dissolving of itself into Intellect (ἀνάλυσις, 72.21) and a union without individuation (ἀδιόριστος συναφή, 72.22), Iamblichus prefers a unity with more individuality for the soul. This would seem to be the sort of unity, then, that he champions in the passage about the Paradigmatic Virtues. The soul is still itself but is co-arranged with the Intellect and filled by it. The relationship is more participation in a higher entity than total submersion. The human soul remains what it is even in its highest form of union with Intellect.³⁰

²⁸ For the Henads in Iamblichus, see *In Parm.* Fr. 2 with Dillon's notes ad loc and his Appendix B, 412–416. There are two new, important articles on the Henads in Iamblichus by Svetlana Mesyats (in this volume) and Dennis Clark (2010), both of which support Dillon's thesis against Saffrey and Westerink (2003) xvii–xl.

²⁹ Westerink (1977) Vol. II, 87.

³⁰ See the notes of Finamore and Dillon (2002) 218–221.

Theurgic virtues surpass Paradigmatic ones in regard to the entity with which the soul unites. The one-like aspect of soul reaches out and creates a more unitary (ἐνιαῖος) type of bond. The amount of internal differentiation is necessarily reduced, but it would not disappear. The human soul remains a mean and cannot achieve total unification without differentiation. Nonetheless, the type of union and the accompanying process of thought (if that is indeed a proper term at this level) is more unified than that at the Intelligible level.

In Book 5 of the *De Mysteriis*, Iamblichus says that union with the One happens, if at all, late in life and rarely.³¹ It is the highest form of union allowed to a human being, and it is appropriate that it coincide with the highest grade of virtue. Unless of course Iamblichus, like Marinus, thought there was another, higher form of virtue, one which cannot be spoken. If Iamblichus did hold such a view, it would help explain the positions of both Marinus (a highest grade about which one must remain silent) and Olympiodorus (who omits mention of the Theurgic virtues, the highest grade). If I may carry this speculation further, one could imagine Iamblichus dividing Theurgic/Hieratic virtues into two sorts: a henadic union and one beyond that with the One proper (the second One in Iamblichus' system, or perhaps even the Ineffable One?), which would be unable to be expressed in words. The dichotomy in the Theurgic virtues could also explain the divergence in Marinus and Olympiodorus.

However one may view such speculative thoughts, we can safely conclude that Iamblichus championed the seven grades of virtue that we discover in Damascius. The grades parallel the soul's ascent to higher levels in the universe. As the soul ascends, the soul's thinking becomes more unified and so does its virtue. Thus, the four cardinal virtues assume different aspects at each level, and the higher the grade the more simple and unified the virtues and the soul's cognizing becomes.

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³¹ *De Myst.* 5.22, 230.14–231.2.

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