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THE TALISMAN Magic and True Philosophers

Gregory Shaw (Stonehill College)

*For as they say in the mysteries,
The "thyrsus-bearers are many, but the Bacchoi are few"
and these Bacchoi are, I believe, those who have been true philosophers.¹*

In the sixth century of the Common Era, Damascius, the last teacher of the Platonic school in Athens, characterized the contrasting influences of magic and philosophy in the Platonic tradition. In his *Commentary on the Phaedo* he writes:

There are those who prefer philosophy, like Porphyry and Plotinus and many other philosophers, and those who prefer theurgy, like Iamblichus, Syrianus, Proclus and the rest of the hieratics. But Plato, realizing that strong arguments can be advanced from both sides, united them in a single truth by calling the philosopher a *Bacchus*. For if the man who has freed himself from generation were to stand in the middle, he would draw both ways to himself. And it is clear that Plato calls the philosopher a *Bacchus* in his desire to exalt him just as we call *Nous* a god or call physical light spiritual light.²

According to Damascius, philosophers who become theurgists are *Bacchoi*, souls that have recovered their divinity after the fragmentation and trauma of birth. But those who practise philosophy without performing rituals of purification and initiation, he says, will never bring their souls into union with the divinity.³ Put simply, the practice of magic was essential in the life of the true philosopher and only philosopher-magicians could become *Bacchoi*, deified souls. Damascius' interpretation of Plato reveals the influence of the divine Iamblichus, the Syrian Platonist whom he followed and whose teachings he admired.⁴

In the late third century, Iamblichus had integrated the rites of magic so prevalent in his age with the Platonic and Pythagorean philosophy he learned from Porphyry and others.⁵ Borrowing the term theurgy (*theourgia*) from second century 'Chaldeans', Iamblichus outlined a 'Pythagorean' way of life that joined philosophic and mathematical disciplines with rites of sacrifice and divination. This integration, which Iamblichus called the way of Hermes and way of the Ancients, insured that the soul was deified *in the body* and that deification would not simply be a discursive activity, or worse, an exercise in self-deception.⁶ As Damascius put it later, the union achieved through philosophy alone is merely *analogous* to the soul's "ineffable *henōsis*"; it remains conceptual, it fails to effect true deification.⁷ Iamblichus, therefore, was responsible for insuring among later Platonists that the "true philosopher" of Plato's *Phaedo* was understood to be a theurgist, a magician who performed divine rituals that both deified the soul and sustained the cosmos.

It scarcely needs to be said that the contribution of Iamblichus and the role that magic played in the Western philosophic tradition has largely been ignored or has been characterized as a superstitious residue, and thus dismissed. Nor is it necessary to point out that as we have lost an understanding of magic and have ridiculed its practice, philosophers today are no longer *Bacchoi*. Contemporary philosophers are regarded as intellectuals who provide analysis of society, language, history and cultural trends but they no longer stand as exemplars of a transformed life, to say nothing of a deified state. All such possibilities now seem lost to the

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West and are generally found only in the traditions of the East or Near East, for example among Tibetan Buddhists or in Sufi orders. While Western clergy may still be called 'divines', we generally understand the term as a ceremonial title without existential significance. The loss of magic and the experiential dimension of Western philosophy may have been exacerbated by the rise of Christianity or, as some have recently argued, the Church may have preserved it from an earlier demise.⁸ What is clear, however, is that prior to the rise of the Church in the Roman world there already existed a tendency among Greek thinkers to become increasingly attracted to the power of conceptualizing and the ability to explain our lived experience in abstract terms. It was precisely the role of discursive thinking in the philosophic life that had become a critical issue for the leaders of the Platonic school in late antiquity.

In the judgment of Iamblichus the importance given to discursive thinking had become so grossly exaggerated and unchecked that it was corrupting the Greek schools of philosophy, including his own Platonic tradition. Without the practice of magic and the *mystical ground of experience* that it affords, philosophers were becoming mere caricatures of their forebears: the heirs of Plato were becoming thyrsus-bearers, not *Bacchoi*. So Iamblichus returned to the roots of his tradition by promoting the practice of theurgy. These divine actions, which included a variety of sacrifices and divinational rites, were performed as an integral part of one's religious and philosophic life, but the experiences themselves could never be intellectually grasped. On this point Iamblichus was uncompromising and states clearly that philosophical reflection alone cannot deify the soul. He says:

Intellectual understanding does not connect theurgists with the gods, for what would prevent those who philosophize theoretically from having theurgic union with gods? But this is not true. Theurgic union is established only by the perfect operation of ineffable acts, correctly performed—acts that are beyond all understanding—and by the power of ineffable symbols comprehended by the gods alone. Thus, we don't perform these acts intellectually, for then their actualization would be part of a conceptual exercise and depend on us, which is not at all true.⁹

By giving theurgy the highest priority in the life of the philosopher, Iamblichus was opposing the philosophic method of his own teacher Porphyry who disparaged the practice of divination and maintained that the soul was capable of achieving deification through its own intellectual power.¹⁰ Porphyry questioned the validity of theurgic rites in a letter sent to an Egyptian priest, Anebo, and under the pseudonym of Abammon, an Egyptian priest, Iamblichus answered Porphyry's accusations on behalf of Platonic theurgists. The record of their exchange is Iamblichus' *On the Mysteries*, still an invaluable source for understanding the role of magic in the Western philosophic tradition. Iamblichus' extensive replies to Porphyry outline not only the importance and technical aspects of divine rites, they also argue that philosophy alone cannot deify the soul.¹¹

Porphyry was offended by Iamblichus' assertion that the way to the gods was realized by *theourgia* (θεουργία), divine action, and not by the intellectual path Porphyry ascribed to his master Plotinus. For theurgy represented Iamblichus' attempt to correct the over-rationalized philosophy of his Greek contemporaries and to recover the living wisdom of the Ancients received directly from the gods. Transmitted in rites of sacrifice and divination, theurgy was *an activity, an experience and a concrete revelation* in which human beings recovered their divine identity by becoming vehicles of the gods. This, Iamblichus argued, stood in sharp

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Porphyry, learned man that he was, had asked Iamblichus for a systematic explanation of the phenomenon of *mantikê* (μαντική), specifically the divination of the future. He asked for a *diarthrôthein* (διαρθρωθεῖν), a 'cutting up or dissection' of the matter,¹² but Iamblichus strongly objected to the presumption of Porphyry's question and chastised him for assuming that theurgic divination could be understood as if it were a natural phenomenon or human invention capable of scientific analysis.¹³ Iamblichus argues that Porphyry's question would reduce theurgic *mantikê* to a physical or conceptual datum and thereby cut out the very quality that makes it valuable. *Mantikê* is not a human activity at all but is, Iamblichus says, "divine, supernatural, sent down from heaven... eternal, ungenerated and authoritative by itself."¹⁴ It needs no explanation nor can it be *explained*. In order to begin even thinking correctly about theurgic *mantikê* therefore, Porphyry must come to terms with the fact that mantic experiences transcend our categories of discourse and until this is realized he will face innumerable difficulties and make no progress in contacting the gods. Iamblichus therefore gives him the following advice:

The greatest talisman (*megiston alexipharmakon*) against all such difficulties is this: know the principle of divination (*archê tês mantikês*), know that it is activated neither by bodies nor by bodily conditions, neither by a natural object nor by natural powers, neither by human disposition nor by its related habits... Know, rather, that its supreme power belongs entirely to the gods, and is bestowed by the gods. Divination is accomplished by divine acts and signs, and consists of divine visions and spiritual insights.¹⁵

Alexipharmakon, the Greek word translated as 'talisman', literally means anti-drug or counter-spell, thus, a talisman to protect us from false assumptions and habits of thought that prevent us from receiving the gods.¹⁶ This is a critical point. For Iamblichus, it is not merely that our theological assumptions are mistaken (and could be corrected), *our very way of thinking is mistaken* and keeps us alienated from divinity. As Plotinus put it, discursive thinking effects a kind of bewitchment that causes us to fall under the spell of our objects of thought.¹⁷ Therefore, Iamblichus tells Porphyry that what he needs is not more or better information but practice: the experience of receiving the gods in a theurgic rite, and what is required for such an experience is the capacity to free oneself from the spell of discursive thinking and from the presumption that knowing how to describe an experience is equivalent to the experience itself. As Iamblichus tells Porphyry:

Some of these [questions], such as require experience of actions for their accurate understanding, will not be possible [to explain] by words alone ... it is not enough simply to learn about these things, nor would anyone who simply knows these things become accomplished in the divine science.¹⁸

Like many philosophers in Iamblichus' era, Porphyry was bewitched by the *pharmakon* of discursive thinking; he had grown addicted to his sophistication, and as long as he attempted to make discursive sense of theurgic divination he would fail to understand it. Iamblichus, therefore, does not offer an explanation of *mantikê* but a talisman to protect Porphyry from the spell of discourse. For Iamblichus, the transformation of the soul and the recovery of its divinity was not an intellectual exercise but an ancient *practice* preserved by sacred races and

later received by Pythagoras and by Plato, but the Greeks, he argued, had turned this experiential art into an intellectual game incapable of penetrating the heart or changing the soul. To Porphyry's criticism of Egyptian theurgists for using words that have no discursive meaning, Iamblichus replies that Porphyry's concern for meanings and terminology was typical of the shallowness of Greek thinkers. He writes:

At the present time I think the reason everything has fallen into a state of decay—both in our words and prayers—is because they are continually being changed by the endless innovations and lawlessness of the Greeks. For the Greeks by nature are followers of the latest trends and are eager to be carried off in any direction, possessing no stability in themselves. Whatever they have received from other traditions they do not preserve; even this they immediately reject and change everything through their unstable habit of seeking the latest terms.¹⁹

I think it takes no great stretch of imagination to realize that in many respects we are the Greeks against whom Iamblichus argues so fiercely. Indeed, in the academic community we pride ourselves on it. Upon reading the words of an author like Iamblichus our first questions are not "What could he mean?" "What kind of experience is this?" or "What would allow me to enter this world?" Our questions, rather, are: "How was Iamblichus trying to one-up his former teacher?" "What rhetorical strategy was he employing in order to bolster his own authority?" or "What motivated a rationally trained Platonist like Iamblichus to become so irrational?" For we presume in some fashion that the mantic experiences Iamblichus describes are not as valuable as he seems to think and that we are in a far better position than he to evaluate what he was trying to say. If, for example, we afford some 'reality' to the trance states Iamblichus vividly describes in his exposition on divine possession,²⁰ we see these states as being less significant than our understanding of them. We explain them as being appropriate to those with a *primitive* mentality and prefer aspects of Iamblichus' work that seem akin to our own thinking. This is why many scholars continue to distinguish a lower form of theurgy for the less mentally sophisticated from a higher theurgy for advanced thinkers, despite the fact that Iamblichus says nothing of the kind.²¹ But like his Greeks, we preserve little of what we receive and translate everything into the most sophisticated and contemporary jargon available. In Iamblichus' terms, we have been drugged by our discursive habit and need an antidote, a talisman to protect us from the very thing we pride ourselves on.

Iamblichus' talisman threatens us precisely because we take pride in being the intellectual and cultural descendants of the 'Greek' mentality that he criticizes so harshly. At least from the time of the Enlightenment we have seen ourselves as the heirs of a great tradition of rationality that began with Parmenides, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Of course, to sustain this fantasy we have had to overlook or diminish the significance of the mystical elements that played such a critical role for Parmenides, Socrates, and Plato — if not for Aristotle. In the case of Socrates, probably the most celebrated philosopher in western history, we have a man who readily admitted that he knew nothing, was prone to enter deep states of trance that could last 24 hours, listened to an invisible daimon for guidance, and said that philosophy was nothing else than learning to die before we die. Socrates was surely discursively brilliant but, again, we tend to forget that it was the erotic magnetism of his discourse that transformed his listeners, not merely the logic of his arguments.²²

As represented by Socrates, the solution to our discursive bewitchment is to recognize that thinking, as we ordinarily practise it, goes nowhere, leads to a dead end, to what Socrates called *aporia*, literally meaning 'no path', no where to go. It is only by fully recognizing this

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condition, this not knowing, that we can begin to share in Socrates' realization that "human wisdom is worthless",²³ even more specifically, that *my* wisdom is worthless and that *your* wisdom is worthless too. The Socratic path gets very personal, embarrassing, but unless one is ready to lose face, to *not know*, to feel hopeless and empty, one cannot begin to receive the talisman that Iamblichus offers to Porphyry.

Iamblichus' former teacher was unwilling to acknowledge that states of ecstatic possession could unite us with the gods. Porphyry seemed to have forgotten that Plato himself extolled the virtues of losing one's mind in ecstatic possession. Our greatest blessings, Plato said in the *Phaedrus*, come to us in a state of *mania*, a madness sent from heaven.²⁴ For Iamblichus the phenomenon of mantic possession dramatically exemplified the transformation of the soul that was sorely lacking among Greek intellectuals like Porphyry. And since we see ourselves as the heirs of precisely this kind of Greek rationality it is difficult for us to understand or appreciate what Iamblichus means when he describes mantic possession. He tells Porphyry:

Divine possession is not a human action nor does its power rest in human attributes or actions, for these are otherwise receptively disposed and *the god uses them as his instruments*. The god completes the entire work of divination by himself...with neither the soul nor the body being moved at all, *the god acts by himself*....²⁵

In mantic possession our initiative is wholly given over to the god who acts through us. The soul becomes a medium through which the deity takes human form. Although this experience is definitive for theurgy and is necessary for a Platonic *Bacchus*, it is no longer worthy of consideration by today's philosophers. The legacy of "true philosophy" in the West may no longer be preserved in schools of philosophy but in the imagery of poets and visionary thinkers. D. H. Lawrence, for example, conveys the power and affect of mantic transformation in the opening stanza of his poem, 'Song of a Man Who Has Come Through'. He writes:

Not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me!
A fine wind is blowing the new direction of Time.
If only I let it bear me, carry me, if only it carry me!
If only I am sensitive, subtle, oh, delicate, a winged gift!
If only, most lovely of all, I yield myself and am borrowed
By the fine, fine wind that takes its course through the chaos of
the world
Like a fine, an exquisite chisel, a wedge-blade inserted;
If only I am keen and hard like the sheer tip of a wedge
Driven by invisible blows,
The rock will split, we shall come at the wonder, we shall find
the Hesperides.²⁶

Mantic possession may be sung, but it cannot be discursively explained; it must be experienced and from within such experiences an invitation may be proffered to those able to receive it. While living in his or her body, the theurgist becomes a vehicle of a deeper reality, a god. But Iamblichus warns Porphyry that as long as he presumes to know or to take any initiative at all in theurgic divination, he will lack the capacity he needs to receive the god. As Lawrence says, "not I, but the wind that blows through me." The essential skill of the theurgist

is not in learning the techniques of divination but in becoming sensitive and subtle enough to receive the divine and invisible presence.²⁷ Lawrence got it just right. When the soul has developed this refined sensitivity it becomes an instrument of the god and enters another order of reality. As Iamblichus puts it:

The soul is entirely separated from those things that bind it to the generated world. It flies from the inferior, exchanges one life for another (*zôên te heteran anth heteras allatetai*), and gives itself to another order of reality, having entirely abandoned its former existence.²⁸

The soul's loss of self-identity is required because Iamblichus believed — in contrast to Porphyry and Plotinus — that our descent into a body causes a profound self-alienation.²⁹ The 'self' associated with our name and professional role believes in its importance and the significance of its knowledge, yet in Iamblichus' view, this self is false, a mere puppet, a toy worth "nothing" when compared to the gods.³⁰ To recover our divinity, therefore, we must approach the gods not with knowledge or insight but with the only quality we genuinely possess, our nothingness. Only by enduring this emptiness at the core of our identity can we receive the god. Iamblichus says we then undergo an *ekstasis*, a displacing of self-consciousness, to become organs of the god, "chisels" as Lawrence put it, driven by divine blows into another world.

Plotinus had addressed the problem of embodied suffering and alienation by maintaining that there is a part of the soul, its "head," as he calls it, that remains in heaven and never descends into the division and suffering of the material order.³¹ Thus, to solve the problem of embodied suffering the Plotinian soul must escape the material order altogether as if it had never descended into this world. Ultimately, the Plotinian soul "does not altogether come down,"³² but merely animates the body from above. *Salvation for Plotinus is not here but elsewhere.*³³

The Iamblichean soul, in contrast, loses more in embodiment. Nothing remains above. As the lowest entity among divine beings, the human soul experiences constraints in the material realm that the World Soul and gods never experience. The divine proportions, the *logoi*, of the World Soul remain joined to their essence and never become trapped in material entanglements. The *logoi* of the human soul, however, are projected into nature and recovered only through their material manifestations. Although it is divine, the soul descends into mortality and a deep entanglement with the material world. It is Iamblichus' unique contribution to his tradition to have outlined a psychology that recognizes the soul's fundamental alienation and its essential paradox. He says:

[T]he soul is a mean (*meson*), not only between the divided and the undivided, the remaining and the proceeding, the noetic and the irrational, but also between the uncreated and the created . . . Thus, that which is immortal in the soul is filled completely with mortality and no longer remains only immortal.³⁴

Perhaps even more significant from a theurgical perspective are the existential consequences of this paradox. Because the soul projects its *logoi* into nature, the recovery of its divinity must occur in and through the material world. *The human soul must be deified in a body.* The theurgist does not escape from the material realm or from his body but transforms them into a receptacle of the gods. To effect this the theurgist employs elements from the material world and embodied life that correspond to the *logoi* lost when the soul descends into a body. Through

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a theurgic use of plants, animals, stones, images, hymns, and incantations the soul recovers its divinity as entirely as does the Plotinian soul, but with this important difference: *the Iamblichean soul is not deified elsewhere, but here in the material world*. The theurgist embraces the material powers that the Plotinian soul casts off, and by integrating these material daimons theurgically, he becomes an embodied demiurge wielding authority over the elements. Thus, it is *precisely* our entanglement with the material world and mantic engagement with its powers that transforms the soul into a terrestrial god. To become *Bacchoi*, philosophers must experience this paradox fully. Immortality must be realized through a mortal body, and every theurgic ritual reflects this duality. As Iamblichus puts it:

All of theurgy has a dual character. One is that it is a rite conducted by men which preserves our natural place in the universe; the other is that it is empowered by divine symbols, is raised up through them to be joined on high with the gods, and is led harmoniously round to their order. This latter aspect can rightly be called taking the shape of the gods.³⁵

The theurgic recovery of our lost divinity parallels the Orphic myth of Bacchus. For just as the divine Dionysus/Bacchus is tempted out of heaven by seeing his reflection in mirrors and is then dismembered and devoured by Titans, so each human soul is drawn out of its unity and is swallowed up by material drives and passions. And just as Dionysus receives divine aid to recover his wholeness and unity, so theurgists recover their divinity with the help of the gods. Damascius explores the correspondences between the soul's experience and the myth of Dionysus. In his *Phaedo Commentary*, he writes:

[H]aving entered into the divided body, the soul must be torn asunder with it and end in utter disintegration until, through a life of purification, it gathers itself from a dispersed state, unties the bond of sympathy, and actualizes the primal life within that exists by itself without the image of the body. The myth describes the same events taking place prototypically in the soul. When Dionysus had projected his reflection into the mirror, he followed it and was thus scattered over the universe. Apollo gathers him and brings him back to heaven....³⁶

Explaining the psychological significance of the Titans devouring Dionysus, Damascius characterizes our self-identity as a mirage, a false appearance. He says:

The apparent self-determination (*to dokoun autexousian*) of wanting to belong to oneself alone, and neither to superior nor to inferior beings, is produced in us by the Titans. Through it we tear asunder the Dionysus in ourselves, breaking apart the natural continuity of our being, our communion so to speak, with superior and inferior beings. While in this condition, we are Titans but when we recover that lost unity, we become Dionysus and we attain true perfection.³⁷

Damascius characterizes this recovery as achieving the condition of *Bacchus*. He writes: "cleansed from the taints of Titanic existence and gathered together, souls become *Bacchus*, that is to say, they become whole again, as the Dionysus who remains above is whole."³⁸ Thus, the 'true' philosophers of the Platonic tradition, the *Bacchoi*, are those souls who, by theurgic recovery of their divine *logoi*, become terrestrial gods. Later Platonists such as Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino honored such souls with the title of *magus*. These

philosopher-magicians of the Renaissance recognized the importance of magic as "the absolute consummation of the philosophy of nature."³⁹ Reflecting the influence of Iamblichean theurgy, Pico writes: "As the farmer marries elm to vine, so the *magus* marries earth to heaven, that is, lower things to the qualities and virtues of higher things...."⁴⁰

Like the theurgist, the Renaissance *magus* is a mediator of two worlds, linking heaven to earth. But to achieve this state he must possess the talisman of Iamblichus, the counter-spell to our discursive habit. He or she must be subtle, sensitive, and most importantly, *receptive* enough to become the instrument of a deeper reality and pass through a purification and initiation that, as Damascius put it, brings souls "back to a final destination, which is also the starting-point from which they first set out on their downward journey."⁴¹ Contemporary scholars, with few exceptions, find such theories to be superstitious accretions of primitive thinking. And theurgy—except for its use of Platonic theory—continues to be viewed with suspicion, specifically because it seems to strip discursive knowledge of its authority and function. While Iamblichus says that thinking cannot unite the soul with the gods, it would seem unrealistic to assume that knowledge has no role whatsoever in theurgy. In fact, it does. Iamblichus says that theurgic union with the gods "never takes place without knowledge" but he adds, "it is not identical with it."⁴² What kind of knowledge is this? What kind of thinking supports theurgic action? To address this question, let us reconsider Iamblichus' talisman as an anti-*pharmakon*, a counter-spell to our fixation in discursive thought.

Perhaps the talisman we need lies in the drug itself. For the Greeks, a *pharmakon* was either a medicine or a poison depending on how it was used and I believe the same holds true with discursive thinking. I would argue that the contraction of awareness that results in self-consciousness and attachment to discursive thinking, is not, itself, the poison. Iamblichus believed that the soul's attachment to the body, to objects of sensation, and to objects of thought, was part of a demiurgic unfolding effected by *daimons* charged with performing the work of creation.⁴³ The contraction of our present awareness, therefore, was understood by Iamblichus to be part of a divine creation, one that includes our bewitchment and self-alienation as a necessary consequence of embodiment.⁴⁴ Yet Iamblichus believed this bewitchment could be theurgically engaged with counter-spells that transform the conditions of our attachment and alienation into vehicles of transcendence. Through a life-long discipline of performing such spells, a theurgist lived simultaneously in the contraction as well as the expansion of divine life.

On the one hand the theurgist was a particular mortal man preserving his natural place in the universe, yet through mantic receptivity he exchanged one life for another; he was breathed into the circle of the gods. Iamblichus says repeatedly that we are mortal *and* immortal, created *and* uncreated, and that in theurgy, while remaining human, we become gods.⁴⁵ According to the tradition of magician philosophers this was the fulfillment of human existence: theurgists were the mortal immortals, Plato's *Bacchoi*.

From an Iamblichean perspective therefore, discursive thinking is not rejected but theurgically engaged so that our patterns of thinking become vehicles of transformation. Our prose must become poetic. Our thinking, erotic. Iamblichus's solution to our alienation and suffering was not to escape from, but to enter, the world, the body, and discursive thinking in a divine way, theurgically. Perhaps the focus of a conference such as this, on divination and sacred knowledge, might allow us to recognize how much we remain bound by the spell of discursive thinking. As Peter Kingsley put it, discussing the magic of Empedocles: "To know how to free you have to know how to bind. If you want to break a spell, you have to be able to make one."⁴⁶ If we can begin to see how we effect our own bewitchment through our habits of thought, we can begin to see how these habits might be changed into receptacles of

transformation. purification, the become a medium Neoplatonists un long process of p was not its discu

¹ Plato, *Phaedo* 69c-d.

² Damascius, *In Phaedra text with translation a Plato's Phaedo*, Vol. I Company, 1977). All

³ Westerink, I. 169.

⁴ See Athanassiadi's d

⁵ The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation scholars have sought t has been effectively cl god was informed by t

⁶ *Magica: Part I: On the*

⁷ Garth Fowden write: absorbed into God, so *Egyptian Hermes: A h*

⁸ Westerink, I. 168, 13

⁹ See Wayne Hankey, Virtue, and Philosoph

¹⁰ *DM* 96.13-97.4. My in Jena, Germany, 200

¹¹ Disdaining divination *Porphyre: De L'Abst Belles Lettres, 1977).*

¹² The original title is *On the Mysteries since De mysteriis*, translate Society of Biblical Li

¹³ *DM* 99.9.

¹⁴ *DM* 99.10-100.6.

¹⁵ *DM* 100.6-7.

¹⁶ *DM* 100.8-101.2.

¹⁷ Plato's *Laws* (12.95 who would be lawgiv against all other spee

¹⁸ *Ennead* IV.4.43.16.

¹⁹ and Damascius (Cam *DM* 6.6-7, 114.1-2.

²⁰ *DM* 259, 5-14. A s Greeks, O King, who their philosophy, a m which are full of effe

²¹ Lettres, 1954-1960; r

²² "...for many, even divine inspiration...."

²³ For a critique of th Iamblichus', *Traditio*

²⁴ For an excellent s *Dillon*, ed. John Clea

²⁵ Alcibiades' speech in

²⁶ Plato, *Apology*, 23e

²⁷ *Phaedrus* 244a, 6- (244a-e).

magic as "the absolute Iamblichean theurgy, the path to heaven, that is,

is, linking heaven to us, the counter-spell importantly, *receptive* through a purification and union, which is also the way."⁴¹ Contemporary creations of primitive magic are to be viewed with respect for its authority and for the gods, it would argue. In fact, it does. "Without knowledge" but of that kind of thinking Iamblichus' talisman as

is, a *pharmakon* was the same holds true is that results in *self-poison*. Iamblichus, and to objects of with performing the, was understood by and self-alienation and this bewitchment the conditions of our life-long discipline of action as well as the

his natural place in her; he was breathed and immortal, created gods.⁴⁵ According to existence: theurgists

is not rejected but transformation. Our too our alienation and discursive thinking in us, on divination and bound by the spell of pedocles: "To know you have to be able it through our habits into receptacles of

transformation. To recognize these habits and the "worthlessness" of our wisdom is the soul's purification, the first step in the mysteries. To endure our nothingness and receive the god, to become a medium for a divine presence, is the soul's perfection. This, I believe, is how Neoplatonists understood the relation between thinking and divine experience: through a long process of purification they transformed thinking into divine action whose significance was not its discursive meaning but its capacity to serve as a vehicle of the gods.⁴⁷

¹ Plato, *Phaedo* 69c-d.

² Damascius, *In Phaed.* I. 172, modifying the translation of Polymnia Athanassiadi, *Damascius: The Philosophical History*, text with translation and notes (Athens: Apamea Cultural Association, 1999), 57. Also see *The Greek Commentaries on Plato's Phaedo*, Vol. II, *Damascius*, text and translation by L. G. Westerink (Amsterdam: The North-Holland Publishing Company, 1977). All subsequent references to Damascius' commentary cite the Westerink text.

³ Westerink, I. 169.

⁴ See Athanassiadi's discussion of Damascius' attempt to follow Iamblichus' teachings, op. cit., 54-55.

⁵ The Greek Magical Papyri demonstrate the variety and popularity of magic in Late Antiquity; see *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells*, ed. H.D. Betz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Although scholars have sought to distinguish the world of magic as represented by these spells from pure philosophy, this distinction has been effectively challenged by Zeke Mazur who has argued convincingly that Plotinus' notion of union (*sustasis*) with god was informed by the pattern of joining with god in a variety of spells found in the magical papyri. See Z. Mazur, 'Unio Magica: Part I: On the Magical Origins of Plotinus' Mysticism', *Dionysius* XXI, December 2003, 23-52.

⁶ Garth Fowden writes: "The way of Hermes is the 'way of immortality'; and its end is reached when the purified soul is absorbed into God, so that the reborn man, although still a composite of body and soul, can himself be called a god." *The Egyptian Hermes: A historical approach to the late pagan mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 110-111.

⁷ Westerink, I. 168, 13-15.

⁸ See Wayne Hankey, 'Philosophy as a Way of Life for Christians: Iamblichus and Porphyrian Reflections on Religion, Virtue, and Philosophy in Thomas Aquinas', *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 59:2 (June 2003), 193-224.

⁹ *DM* 96.13-97.4. My translation with help from John Dillon's in 'Iamblichus' Defence of Theurgy', unpublished talk given in Jena, Germany, 2004.

¹⁰ Disdaining divination, see *De Abstinencia* II.52.2-4; "the philosopher is the savior of himself," *ibid.*, II.49.2; Porphyry, *Porphyre: De L'Abstinence*, 2 vols., translation and introduction by Jean Bouffartigue and Michel Patillon (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1977).

¹¹ The original title is *The Reply of the Master Abammon to the Letter of Porphyry to Anebo* but the text has been known as *On the Mysteries* since Marsilio Ficino entitled the reply *De Mysteriis Aegyptiorum*. For an English translation see Iamblichus, *De mysteriis*, translated with introduction and notes by Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003). All citations refer to the text as *DM*.

¹² *DM* 99.9.

¹³ *DM* 99.10-100.6.

¹⁴ *DM* 100.6-7.

¹⁵ *DM* 100.8-101.2.

¹⁶ Plato's *Laws* (12.957d) uses ἀλεξιφάρμακον in a similar way to indicate an antidote to mistaken views. Plato says those who would be lawgivers must possess the writings of the divine lawgiver and use these as a talisman (ἀλεξιφάρμακον) against all other speeches.

¹⁷ *Ennead* IV.4.43.16. Cited by Sara Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism: Non-discursive thinking in the texts of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 104.

¹⁸ *DM* 6.6-7, 114.1-2.

¹⁹ *DM* 259, 5-14. A similar criticism of the Greeks in contrast to the Egyptians is found in the Hermetic corpus: "For the Greeks, O King, who make logical demonstrations, use words emptied of power, and this very activity is what constitutes their philosophy, a mere noise of words. But we [Egyptians] do not [so much] use words (λόγοι) but sounds (φωναί) which are full of effects" *CH* XVI.2. *Corpus Hermeticum*, 4 vols., tr. A.-J. Festugière, ed. A.D. Nock (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1954-1960; reprint 1972-1983), 232.

²⁰ "...for many, even when fire is applied to them, are not burned, since the fire does not touch them on account of their divine inspiration...." For the entire passage see *DM* 110.5-111.2.

²¹ For a critique of these categories in the study of theurgy see G. Shaw, 'Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus', *Traditio* (1985), 1-28.

²² For an excellent study see John Bussanich, 'Socrates the Mystic' in *Traditions of Platonism: Essays in Honor of John Dillon*, ed. John Cleary (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1999), 29-52; for Socrates' erotic power see especially Alcibiades' speech in the *Symposium* 215b-222c.

²³ Plato, *Apology*, 23a.

²⁴ *Phaedrus* 244a, 6-8; Plato suggested that *mantikê* etymologically derived from the Greek word for madness, *mania* (244a-e).

²⁵ *DM* 115, 3-7.

²⁶ D. H. Lawrence, *Selected Poetry* (New York: Penguin Publications, 1986). Lawrence emphasizes the experience of receptivity, of our being *carried* by the wind to another world. Peter Kingsley has emphasized the critical role of 'being taken' among ancient philosopher-magicians to effect the soul's transformation and deification. He writes: "We can never make our way to the truth. That would be out of the question. Like Parmenides, *we have to be taken there instead*; all we can do is wait. And it's only when we finally are taken that we can begin to see just how impossible it would have been to work our way out of the illusion towards the truth... (my emphasis)." Peter Kingsley, *Reality* (Inverness, California: The Golden Sufi Center, 2003), 257.

²⁷ Iamblichus uses the Greek verb *chôrein* to describe how theurgists receive the light of the gods (*DM* 86.6; 87.7; 125.7; 173.5). *Chôrein* is the cognate of *chôra*, the term Plato uses in the *Timaeus* (49a-b; 52a) for the receptacle, the 'space' that receives and transmits the Forms without distortion.

²⁸ *DM* 270.15-19.

²⁹ According to Iamblichus, the soul in its attachment to the body is "alienated" (ἀλλοτριωθῆν, 223.26) and "made other to itself" (ἑτεροιοῦσθαι πρὸς ἑαυτὴν, 223.31), in Simplicius, *De anima*, ed. M. Hayduck (Berlin: B. Reimeri, 1882). Throughout his commentary, Simplicius (or pseudo-Simplicius, since the author's identity has been questioned) explicitly cites Iamblichus' opinions.

³⁰ *DM* 146.10-12.

³¹ Heads in heaven, *Ennead* 4.3.12.5-6; descent as illumination, 1.1.12.25-29; the soul does not altogether come down, 4.8.8.1-6.

³² *Ennead* 4.8.8.2-3.

³³ Plotinus' position is more nuanced than Iamblichus represents it to be. After all, of the soul's connection with the divine Nous, he says: "the Nous is ours *and* not ours" (5.3.3.27-28), and he draws very careful distinctions between the soul and the Nous (5.3.3). Plotinus' references to the soul being undescended with its head in heaven should be taken as evocative statements, not as descriptive or normative doctrine. Yet Iamblichus received Plotinus' philosophy from Porphyry who seems to have heard the poetry as prose.

³⁴ Simplicius, *De anima* 89.33-37; 90.21-23.

³⁵ *DM* 184. 1-8.

³⁶ Westerink, I. 129.1-3.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 9.5-8. In 166.2-3 he says: "Having fled the undivided Dionysian life and fixed their actual existence on the level of the Titanic and confined way of life, souls are in shackles and in 'custody'" (*Phaedo* 62b 4).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 166.4-6.

³⁹ Pico della Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man, On Being and the One, Heptaplastus*, tr. Glenn Wallis (Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1965 [Reprinted Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998]), 26.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴¹ Westerink, 168.2-3.

⁴² *DM* 98.6-7.

⁴³ See G. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1995).

⁴⁴ According to Iamblichus, the soul in its attachment to the body is "alienated" (n, 223.26) and "made other to itself" (n, 223.31), in Simplicius, *De anima*.

⁴⁵ Reference to taking the shape of the gods, see *DM* 184.8-13. For Iamblichus' description of the soul as the mean term of opposites such as created/uncreated, divided/undivided, etc., see Simplicius, *De anima*, 89.33-37; 90.21-23.

⁴⁶ Peter Kingsley, *Reality*, 447. In a different context, yet with similar insight, David Abram refers to the power of the written word to "cast a spell upon our own senses," leaving us alienated from our bodies and from the natural world. *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 133.

⁴⁷ Rappe discusses this transformation of discursive thinking into theurgic receptacles in the work of Proclus. She suggests that Proclus' *Platonic Theology* can be seen "as a kind of textual *symbolon*...[where] the text itself has the status of a ritual invocation" (*Reading Neoplatonism*, 179).

DIVINA

I would like to start possible to separate of a particular perspective generalisation. Non since such contingencies and to suggest, how consist of what Web my methodological and therefore more in times when and divination. Then, if conditions are more intend to ask in relation Iamblichus' theurgy question.

Divination

In this paper there is be obliged to summarise evidence as well as, such a consideration

Pluralist. In 'the a context of animism a large but limited decline and impoverishment of their ideological, that in order to flourish spiritual nature, or pejorative and teleological

Even classical or to aboriginal divination just undespotic but a pluralism, a geopolitical oracle ever uttered."

Local. What Sea nature, that wisdom to preserve a place which to begin an exchange anchors the other particular natural place the experience of the spirits. (Note too the

Sensuous. As David its own intelligence"