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The Celestial Imagination: Proclus the Philosopher on Theurgy¹

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Abstract: This paper focuses on Proclus's *On the hieratic art of the Greeks* – considered as a contemporary philosophical problem – exploring some of its fundamental concepts and images, thus delineating Proclus's notion of theurgy, which he primarily conceived as divine action manifesting in the union between a god and the theurgist, and only secondarily as a technique. These aesthetic experiments of thought or philosophical performances, by means of which a divine self is created, had deep metaphysical, cosmological, psychological, ethical, linguistic and even political and religious implications for Late Antiquity Platonism, and had a profound impact on the development of Renaissance philosophy and magic. Such practices are meant to be understood in the context of the philosophical *paideia* of which it represents its final stage and consummation; they are developed by intricate hermeneutics of a poetic theology operated by very sophisticated conceptions of symbol, analogy and the imagination, all of which are at the base of the celestial-terrestrial correspondences used by theurgists in their hymn singing.

In this paper I present some of the main ideas I have been working on in relation to the problem of theurgy in Late Antiquity and Platonism in general, particularly Proclus's conception of theurgy and specifically in regard to the surviving passages of his text on theurgy (which he called *hieratike techne*), *On the hieratic art of the Greeks*. One of Proclus's most comprehensive definitions of theurgy is as follows:

theurgic power (*theourgikē dynamis*), which is more excellent than all human wisdom, and which comprehends divination's good (*mantikes agathe*), the

¹ Substantial portions of this text have been already published by Brill in José Manuel Redondo, 'The Transmission of Fire: Proclus' Theurgical Prayers', in *Platonic Theories of Prayer*, ed. J. Dillon and A. Timotin (Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition 19) (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016). I thank the publishers whom kindly gave permission to use this material and re-publish parts of it here.

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purifying powers in the accomplishment of the rites, and in short, all such things as are the effects of divine possession (*entheou katakojes energemata*).²

While I will make observations regarding philosophical notions expressed in several other texts of his, as well as in Iamblichus's *On the mysteries of the Egyptians* (a necessary reference for Proclus's theurgy), I will focus mainly on the passages from *On the hieratic* that are considered among the most important surviving expositions of ancient philosophy on theurgy. I will also consider fragments of *The Chaldaic Philosophy* and his own hymns.³ Proclus's Platonic theology and theurgy would become one of the main influences in the development of Renaissance magic as theorized and practiced by philosophers such as Marsilio Ficino.

² Numeni D'Apamea, *Oráculos Caldeos: con una selección de testimonios de Proclo, Pselo y M. Itálico. Fragmentos y Testimonios*, ed. Francisco García Bazán (Madrid: Biblioteca Clásica Gredos, 1991); Proclus, *Platonic Theology* (Frome: The Prometheus Trust, 1999), I.25, 113, 7–10; Proclus, *The Six Books of Proclus on the Theology of Plato*, trans. Thomas Taylor (London: A. J. Valpy, 1816), available at http://www.universaltheosophy.com/pdf-library/1816_Six-Books-of-Proclus-on-the-Theology-of-Plato_vols-1-2.pdf [accessed 30 November 2016]; and Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, 6 vols, ed. and trans. H. D. Saffrey and L. G. Westerink, Collection des universités de France (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1968-1997), p. 81.

³ The translations from Proclus's passages *On the hieratic art* are mine. The only translation in English that I know of is found in Brian Copenhaver, 'Hermes Trismegistus, Proclus and the question of a philosophy of Magic in the Renaissance', in *Hermeticism and the Renaissance*, ed. Ingrid Merkel and Allen G. Debus (Washington, DC: Folger Books, 1988), the edition of the Greek taken from Joseph Bidez, *Catalogue des manuscrits alchimiques grecs*, Vol. 6 (Brussels: M. Lamertin, 1928). For Proclus's hymns, see the edition, translation into English and with commentary by R. M. Van den Berg, *Proclus' Hymns: Essays, Translations, Commentary* (Leiden/Boston, MA/Köln: Brill, 2001). Regarding Proclus's biography (*Vita Procli*) by Marinus, see Mark Edwards, *Neoplatonic Saints. The Lives of Plotinus and Proclus by their Students* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000). For passages in Marinus's *Vita Procli* about Proclus's theurgical activities, see Marinus of Neapolis, *Marino de Neápolis: Proclo o De la felicidad*, trans. J. M. Álvarez Hoz and J. M. García Ruiz (Irún: Iralka, 1999), especially paragraphs 17–19, 24, 28–29.

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Allow me then to start by addressing the Muses, as both poets and theurgist do, in order to gain their favour for such an audacious enterprise.⁴ I'll quote a few verses from Proclus's own hymn composed to the Muses:

We hymn, we hymn the light that raises man aloft,
 on the nine daughters of great Zeus with splendid voices,
 who have rescued from the agony of this world, so hard to bear,
 the souls who were wandering in the depth of life
 through immaculate rites from intellect-awaking books,
 and have taught them to strive eagerly to follow the path leading
 beyond the deep gulf of forgetfulness, and to go pure to their kindred star
 from which they strayed away, when once they fell
 into the headland of birth, mad about material lots.
 But, goddesses, put an end to my much-agitated desire too
 and throw me into ecstasy through the noeric words of the wise.⁵

I. Theurgy in context

It is now becoming a common place in studies on Neoplatonic theurgy to point out how in the last decades the assessment of the ancient Platonists' practice of rituals has changed enormously in some respects; at least in specialized circles this is no longer considered an embarrassing fact for the history of philosophy. In part this has occurred due to pertinent comparative studies between theurgy and diverse Mediterranean and Near-Eastern religious, mystical, magical and divinatory traditions; fields of study which, significantly, have also undergone important changes in the last decades, among them, a growing awareness of the indissoluble link between divination and magic, as well as between divination and religion and between magic and religion.⁶ Three aspects – divination, religion and magic – are actually encompassed by what Platonists call theurgy, which is

⁴ For Proclus, as I will very briefly mention later in the text, both poets and theurgists operate with the same mythological hermeneutics; they are co-extensive. Myths have an analogous function to the initiations, that is, to incite and awaken the soul.

⁵ Van Den Berg, *Proclus' Hymns: Essays, Translations*.

⁶ For a recent and insightful up-date of this discussion, see Sarah Iles Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), particularly Ch. 5, 'The *Mantis* and the Magician'; interestingly, here, both theurgy and the practices of the *Greek Magical Papyri* are characterized as divinatory magic. For divination as the language of magic, see p. 13 and pp. 166–169. For divination as the instantiation of myths, see p. 114. Proclus's *On Providence*, trans. Carlos Steel (New York: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 39.

both a philosophical and mystical interpretation of Mediterranean religious traditions (including Greek, Egyptian, Chaldean, Assyrian, Persian) which conceives magic and divination as two facets of a complex activity supposed to be necessarily examined and practiced critically through philosophy but at the same time providing a non-discursive philosophical language in a sense complementary to formal demonstration but in another sense superior to it. The significant, important changes in the last decades in diverse fields of study related to research on theurgy belong, at the same time, to what seems to be the start of a major re-consideration or shift in our understanding of Neoplatonism, a category no longer entirely acceptable for the specialists, with at least some of them questioning the pertinence of it, given that it was created by seventeenth century German Protestant theologians to pejoratively identify and separate from Plato those Platonists who were the most severe critics of Christianity, in regard of which Plato was wanted to be seen as their natural (or even providential) precedent. This shift, in its turn, seems to encompass our understanding of ancient Greek philosophy as a whole in general, which, as has been recently suggested in the case of Plato and Aristotle, that they have far more in common with the philosophies of India and China than with modern European philosophy, which claims Greek philosophy as its prestigious ancestor.⁷

To speak of theurgy in late Platonism in general is a useful standardization of modern academic research but which may limit our understanding of what is envisaged as a complex and polyvalent phenomenon which in its different facets is designated by several names: *hierarike technē*, *telestike*, *katharmoi*, *mystagogy*, *theosophy*, *hieragisteia*, *theagogia*, *he theia episteme*, *hierourgia*, *theon therapeia*, *telesiourgy*, etc. However, there seems to be lacking a discussion of theurgy as a *philosophical praxis*; that is, not as a religious, magical or even esoteric practice done by philosophers, thus conceived as a complement to philosophy, but as a philosophical practice *per se*. Proclus refers to theurgists (*hoi hieratikoi*) as *palai sophoi*, the *ancient sages* to whom the hieratic art was revealed, thus making of theurgy an equivalent to standard, traditional divine service. Nevertheless this idea seems to be affirmed only by the Platonic philosophers in general. So, I would like to propose that while Proclus seems to consider theurgy as an exercise of both poetic and ritual analogical thinking and living, theurgy itself is conceived

⁷ Christos C. Evangelou, *Hellenic Philosophy. Origin and Character* (Bodmin: MPG Books, 2006).

in Proclus's philosophy as analogue to the religious, mystical and magical ancient traditions, but is never simply identical to them. This is what we may call a holistic hermeneutical exercise that requires simultaneously both a philosophical understanding of analogy and an analogical understanding of philosophy.

In the Platonism of Late Antiquity, theurgy is conceived according to lengthy and complex argumentative exercises regarding the limitations of reason and language. The goal of theurgy, expressed in mythical form as divinization (*theiosis*), is consummated in the ecstatic union of the soul with its leader or guardian deity, through that which is called psychologically the *one in the soul*, or in the poetics of revelation, the *flower of the intellect* and the *flower of the whole soul*. Such an experience seems to imply the creation, or activation, of a *divine self*, mediated by complex thought and imagination techniques as well as by the ethical practice that purifies both, driven in coordinated fashion by an Eros oriented, at the same time, by Beauty. This is a conception – making a very wide generalization – where the imagination, in a deep and important sense, may be a vehicle of knowledge and even be identified with *nóesis*, primary or essential knowledge. The imagination is represented as the fundamental epistemological activity of the soul, where we perceive both sensation and thought, but also as the foundation of all of our experience as memory.

The imagination has an active role revealing knowledge, but in order to effectively do so it's necessary that the philosopher generates the corresponding state of fitness (*epitedeiotés*) or capacity to receive that knowledge, to transform the imagination into a vehicle of comprehension by means of the ethical reform of his body, his emotions and his thought, but according to an integral conception of thought much broader and deeper than the single exercise of rational discourse, one that causes, integrates and coordinates simultaneously sensation, emotion and reflexivity. This active or creative imagination, subtle vehicle (*ochema pneuma*) of the soul, also pictured as descending from the stars and thus an astral vehicle or celestial imagination, is the faculty of divinization by excellence; the imagination divinizes, if I may put it so; it is hieratic, it is theurgy or divine action, a creative dynamic.⁸ Gregory Shaw, whose work

⁸ Regarding the notion of the *ochema pneuma* or astral vehicle (or astral body), see: Francisco García Bazán, *El cuerpo astral* (Barcelona: Ediciones Obelisco, 1993); and the study by John Finamore, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the vehicle of the Soul*, American Classical Studies 14 (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

has been a landmark towards a different and deeper, more sensible understanding of Neoplatonic theurgy, has pointed out how theurgy for the Platonists is a recreation of demiurgy, the activity of the creator god presented by Plato in the *Timaeus*.⁹ Soul irradiates intelligence and life to bodies like the heavens emanate light and life to our world, thus participating of the divine, the cosmos being eternally created. Proclus's *Eighteen arguments on the eternity of the cosmos* is probably the most representative text of antiquity on this topic and certainly a seminal influence in the debate of the same during the subsequent centuries in the medieval theological traditions. The human being, through soul – his essential nature considered precisely as his soul – participates in that which may be said to characterize divinity: creativity, actualizing his capacity as co-creator and ruler of the cosmos of his experience. But humans may only do this according to their capacity to align with the divine, so to speak.¹⁰ All theurgical acts are done by assimilation and familiarity, not by compulsion.¹¹ Theurgists never believe that they can coerce the gods, as vulgar magicians do, but they are the loving servitors of loving deities, which in their turn are the loving servitors of an utterly transcendent, unknowable and ineffable first god, or first principle, depending whether we refer to a theological or metaphysical discourse or to that which is also represented both as Unity and the Good.

II. Theurgic perspectives

The hieratic arts are contextualized according to several simultaneous philosophical perspectives – theological, cosmological, psychological, literary, etc. – all analogues to each other in several possible ways. Perspectives to which I will point, even if very briefly, by just sketching the main lines; but I'll try to do so by examining a contextualization of the discussion of theurgy as a philosophical practice of some kind, not a religious, magical or even esoteric practice, not essentially. One of the

1985). Also the article by Robert Christian Kissling, 'The OXHMA-PNEUMA of the Neo-Platonists and the de Insomniis of Synesius of Cyrene', *The American Journal of Philology* 43, no. 4 (1922): pp. 318–330.

⁹ Proclus, *Commentary on the Timaeus of Plato*, 2 vols (Frome: The Prometheus Trust, 2006), IV, 847; Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).

¹⁰ Iamblichus, *On the mysteries, De mysteriis*, translated with introduction and notes by Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon and Jackson P. Hershbell (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003); II.11.

¹¹ Iamblichus, *On the mysteries*, III.18.

most important of such perspectives is the philosophical notion of *mania* – inspired knowledge, metaphorically termed madness – as referring to something incomprehensible and related to the above mentioned critical consciousness of the Platonists regarding the limits of discursive rationality’s formal demonstrations. Like Socrates in the opening passage of *Phaedrus*, the *maniai*, the diverse forms of divine inspiration, as an experience to be lived by the philosopher – not only as a concept – take us away from public places or common notions of our mental *polis*, outside the walls of the city of our ordinary cultural habits.¹² Could we thus conceive theurgy as a kind of *reasonable madness*, a form of ethical symbolical practice of self-knowledge, based on what we may call aesthetic experiments of thought or philosophical performances?¹³ If we understand that the forms or ideas, paradigms of virtue for the Platonists, are conceived as analogue to the gods, then ethics may be understood as analogous to ritual practice as the repetition of the paradigmatic, considered as divine (strictly speaking, the divine is the origin of the paradigmatic); as the establishment of a virtue as a habit that incarnates, that expresses in the world, manifesting thus the divine; and as what is just in itself or the idea of justice, for example, through the philosopher’s just actions. The just and good human being, in its practice of piety, assimilates to the divine, becoming its living image.¹⁴

Initiatory rites (*telestike*), for example, seem to be interpreted as, and at the same time, through the ethical perfecting (*teleo*) of the soul. Philosophically, divination is understood as a practice of self-knowledge, Socrates being the exemplar diviner, he who made his life’s work to interpret the Delphic oracle, not just intellectually but mainly, or rather, integrally, by the way he lived.¹⁵ For the Platonists, philosophy is the

¹² Plato, *Phaedrus* (227a), in Plato, *Phaedrus, Diálogos I. Apología. Critón. Eutifrón. Ión. Lisis. Cármides. Hippias Menor. Hippias Mayor. Laques. Protágoras*, introduction by Francisco Lisi, with introduction, translation and notes by J. Calonge Ruiz, E. Lledó Íñigo, and C. García Gual. (Barcelona: Gredos, 2003).

¹³ Iamblichus, *On the mysteries*, II.11, 96–7; for *symbolic mystagogy*, see VII.2.

¹⁴ Plato, *Republic* 383c, in Plato, *Diálogos IV. Republic, Timaeus, Critias*, translation and notes by J. Calonge Ruiz, E. Acosta Méndez, F. J. Oliveri, and J. L. Calvo (Madrid: Gredos, 2000).

¹⁵ For Iamblichus, for example, true divination is identified with what he considers to be the true philosophical understanding (See *On the mysteries*, III.31). As for Socrates’ mission set by the oracle of Apollo, see Plato’s *Apology*, in Plato, *Diálogos I. Phaedrus, Diálogos I. Apología. Critón. Eutifrón. Ión. Lisis. Cármides. Hippias Menor. Hippias Mayor. Laques. Protágoras*, introduction by

original activity of the human being, not just the activity of a group of specialists, professionals and bureaucrats; the philosopher is thought of as the paradigmatic human being. Put in a simple formula, we may say that in Platonism, regarding the individual, religion is to be understood as an ethical practice, whereas regarding the community and the state, religion is to be understood as politics, in both cases expressed and practiced along the philosophical discourse in mythical language, or in a mythical mode of discourse; in this way reifying the celestial script of the cosmic law or *Logos*, which is expressed by the stars.¹⁶

In the *Timaeus*, Plato distinguishes between secondary or auxiliary causality, which refers to that which is more immediate, and a primary or essential causality which refers not to the *how* but to the *what* and above all the *why*; that is, the end or goal, the reason of being, the meaning or purpose of something.¹⁷ In a very general way, even though it is possible and necessary to distinguish primary and secondary causality in Platonism, they are inseparable and operate simultaneously. According to this model, theurgy can only secondarily be considered a human activity and technique that operates through the network of natural correspondences between the gods and the diverse substances in the realm of secondary or auxiliary causality. Theurgy is then essentially an eternal intelligible activity of the gods and primary causality, in which the human being participates along with cosmological and natural dynamics. Such dynamics are themselves an image, an eternal recreation of divine activity. That is, the cosmos is the result or effect of the god's theurgy and it is the gods that illuminate the

Francisco Lisi, with introduction, translation and notes by J. Calonge Ruiz, E. Lledó Íñigo, and C. García Gual (Barcelona: Gredos, 2003).

¹⁶ For late antique Platonists mystical politics, see Dominic J. O'Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).

¹⁷ Plato, *Timaeus* 46e,d and 47a,b, in Plato, *Diálogos VI. Republic, Timaeus, Critias*, translation and notes by J. Calonge Ruiz, E. Acosta Méndez, F. J. Oliveri, and J. L. Calvo (Madrid: Gredos, 2000); Plato, *Philebus* 27a8–9, in Plato, *Diálogos V. Parménides. Teeteto. Sofista. Político*, introduction, translation and notes by Ma. Isabel Santa Cruz, Á. Vallejo Campos, and N. Luis Cordero (Madrid: Gredos, 2000); Plato, *Politicus* 281c–e, in Plato, *Diálogos V. Parménides. Teeteto. Sofista. Político*, introduction, translation and notes by Ma. Isabel Santa Cruz, Á. Vallejo Campos, and N. Luis Cordero (Madrid: Gredos, 2000).

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philosopher's imagination.¹⁸ In this case, theurgy can be imagined according to a mythological hermeneutics that interprets mythic images simultaneously as representations of metaphysical and ethical dynamics, in their turn conceived as analogous to cosmological dynamics. So it is that the same cosmological activity may be formally reasoned as caused by the intelligible, and reasoned by the imagination (*nous phantastikos*), as originating in the gods. The fundamental analogy is between the forms and the gods. However, to talk of the gods as such presupposes already a poetic theology or mythological hermeneutics, while talking about the forms presupposes coordinated metaphysical and ethical hermeneutics.¹⁹

This causality model implies, in its turn, a corresponding twofold model of reason and rationality in dialectical relationship: a primary reason and rationality, *nous poietikos* and *noesis* (an active intellect, cause of our being and of our activity of knowing), and a secondary form of reason and rationality, *nous pathetikos* and *dianoia* (a passive intellect whose activity

¹⁸ See for example, Iamblichus, *On the mysteries*, III.14, and Proclus, *Commentaire sur la République (On the Republic)*, trans. and notes J. Festugiere (Paris: J. Vrin, 1970), 1.39, 9–17; 2.167, 2–6 and 17–23.

¹⁹ For Proclus, for example, the analogy between the forms and the gods seems that always stays thus, never are both of those terms completely identified. We may even say that this analogical relationship is metaphysical for Proclus, though not ontological, since the gods, as mythological representations of the *henads* or unities, are as such above being, thus their nature is unknowable; however, they may be known by way of analogy and similarity through their own symbols (*symbola* and *synthemata*), but not by trying to think about them – the gods – through their symbols, but, through their symbols, the theurgist is able to unite with them:

Since Iamblichus asserts that questions may be discussed, in a philosophical, theological, or theurgical manner, it is possible to see the cosmological description of the Forms as proper to philosophical discourse while an anagogic description would stress the theurgic function of the Forms as *sunthêmata*. In other words, although every soul was created by the Demiurge with harmonic ratios (*logoi harmonikoi*) (*On the Timaeus* I,4,32), and divine symbols (*sumbôla theia*; *On the Timaeus* I,4,32–33), the former were active in all souls by virtue of cosmogenesis while the later remained inactive until awakened in theurgy. Thus, when the *logoi* that constitute the soul's essence were ritually appropriated and awakened in the life of the soul, these *logoi* could then be called *sumbôla* or *sunthêmata* (In Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, pp. 164–165).

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is reflexive discourse), according to Plotinus's standardization.²⁰ Again, this model in its turn implies a corresponding twofold model of language: one side of it is based on human convention, whose dynamic, in philosophical usage, must be logical; and the other may be seen as a natural, metaphorical aspect of language whose dynamics are based in affinity and similarity, the expression of a non-linear, erotic, and both a *sub* and *meta-cognitive* dimension. A farfetched description of something that may be understood as simple or unitary, but that analysis, by itself, can't be grasped. Theurgical integral exercises of symbolic exegesis incorporate in a rigorous and systematic way analogy, symbol and metaphor as part of a method of metaphysical reflection that coordinates both poles of thought: formal demonstrative reasoning and intuitive reasoning, which thinks through images in terms of wholes, thus going beyond and at the same time integrating the limitations of discursive reasoning whose virtue is revealed in its capacity to delimitate – its function, in the last stance, corresponding to its capacity to limit itself. Luc Brisson contextualizes the use of myth by the Platonic philosophers as an acknowledgement of the limits of reason which leads not to irrationalism: 'the power of reason paradoxically lies in its ability to recognize its own limits'. It was the philosophers who saved the myths, according to Brisson's formula.²¹ On the part of the

²⁰ A distinction very similar to the platonic *noesis* and *dianoia* (Plato, *Republic*, VI.509d). For Plotinus, see for example the *Enneads*, trans. A. H. Armstrong (London: The Loeb Classical Library. Harvard University Press, 1984), V.9, 3 and V.9, 5 1–10. However they may be distinguished, their difference is not literal or logical, but in the end, I would say, metaphorical. For Plato, true being is to be apprehended by *noesis* together with *logos* (*Timaeus*, 28a), see Proclus, *Commentary On the Timaeus*, I.341, 13–16; I.248, 1–6. Pierre Hadot observes, regarding discursive reasoning:

But this is only ratiocination, and ratiocination, always remaining on the plane of consciousness and reflection, does not really allow us to know the levels of divine reality which it distinguishes. It is only a preliminary exercise, a support and a springboard. Knowledge, for Plotinus, is always experience, or rather, it is an inner metamorphosis. What matters is not that we know rationally that there are two levels of divine reality, but that we internally raise ourselves up to this levels, and feel them within us as two different tones of spiritual life (In Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus or The Simplicity of Vision* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 48).

²¹ Luc Brisson, *How philosophers saved myths: Allegorical Interpretation and Classical Mythology* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), see the Introduction, p. 3.

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philosophers, such metaphysical considerations must be coordinated with the study of diverse philosophical, scientific and artistic disciplines just as with the philosopher's own ethical development. This comprehensive or integral coordination of knowledge with life culminates, at the end of both the Platonic curriculum of study and at the end of the curriculum of ethical development, in theological hermeneutics as well as in the theurgical practices.²² That is, progressively, theurgy is meant as a practice for the intellectually and emotionally mature philosopher.

III. Insider/outsider

Important for the modern study of religions and mysticism is an understanding of the insider/outsider problem, the way scholars understand their own personal position in relation to the topic of their investigation. To me, it seems like an inevitable epistemological problem faced in a research on a theme like theurgy, or some kind of mystical practice, especially when the tradition to which it belongs, in order to be properly understood, appeals to a direct experience of knowledge, of some sort, on the part of the investigator: epistemological problems, then, resulting from the relationship of the subject with the object of his investigation. In my opinion Platonists address these matters very coherently, in a way that may still be significant for contemporary researchers – and it is with this intention that I am addressing this issue. However, from the philosophical perspective, it is not just an epistemological question but also fundamentally a metaphysical problem that should not be separated from its epistemological derivation. Proclus, for example, asserts how the question of being, all the philosophical and scientific considerations, are inextricably related to the discernment of one's own being, knowledge being inseparable from self-knowledge.²³ We are hermeneutical beings, so to speak; we are what we integrally interpret ourselves to be. That is, it may be said that self-knowledge determines what we are as much as what we are, expressed by all that we do, determines our knowledge. As human

²² Marinus's *V.P.* portrays, for instance, such program of integral education. Proclus's life is narrated according to the ground plan of ethical and intellectual development, considered a parallel and necessary complement. Compare with Leendert Gerrick Westerink, ed. and trans., *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* (Frome: The Prometheus Trust, 2011); pp. 7–12, 24–27.

²³ Plato, *Charmides. Alcibiades I y II. Hipparchus. The lovers theages. Minos. Epinomis*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson, trans. W. R. M. Lamb (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955).

beings we are always operating from a philosophical stance, continually interpreting ourselves, interpreting reality, whether we acknowledge this or not.

These observations follow some of the main remarks made by Plato in his *Alcibiades I*.²⁴ It is crucial at the beginning of any philosophical investigation to examine such naturally founded prejudices from where we approach our investigation and which will determinate it as such, ourselves not being aware of it, if we don't first examine where are we starting from: what images and notions do we have about the human being, the universe, about reality? So, beyond theoretical issues, but including them, hermeneutics relate to vital questions; it's an integral vital affair; it is about the way we construct, somehow, our whole experience; it's not just about what and how we think – a mere methodological concern – thinking at the same time that mind is something completely, literally separate or different than body or physical reality, for example. For the Platonists, given its ontological condition, soul, that which we essentially are, soul is simultaneously an *outsider* and an *insider*, both. That is, soul is conceived as double, a double unity: we are both our embodied selves and our own selves.²⁵ Soul is both an insider of the cosmos and an outsider of it; the same way it may be said that we can be both subject and object of ourselves, of our thought. Thus, the human being, structured in the same

²⁴ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, a dialogue whose authenticity is still today questioned and defended by reputed scholars alike. For several centuries, different Platonic schools considered it the first dialogue to be read, according to certain schemes of study of the dialogues.

²⁵ The polemics of interpretation regarding soul in the Platonic tradition are far too complex to be adequately represented here. Basically, it is Plotinus' presentation, which he recognizes as rather unorthodox (see the *Enneads* IV.8, 8), followed in the main lines by Porphyry, which will trigger severe criticism from later Platonists like Iamblichus and Proclus, who will not accept Plotinus' so called undescended soul; that is, an aspect of soul that never really leaves the intelligible realm when it descends into incarnation (IV.7, 13, 10; Cf. IV.3). For the late Platonists, soul fully descends, even if Iamblichus and Proclus may differ somewhat regarding how this is to be understood. However, in the same vein and in a general way, we can say that all these philosophers share a notion of soul as somehow double, a double unity, even if they differ regarding exactly how this is to be understood and the consequences following. For Plotinus, see for example the *Enneads*, IV.4, 10, 15; IV.8, 4, 30; II.3, 30. For Proclus, see *Elements of Theology*, revised text with translation, introduction and commentary by E. R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), pp. 211 and 186–191.

way as the whole of reality, is considered twofold, in dialogic relationship with himself, a relationship which at the same time is diachronical, that is, temporal: we are our temporal doubles, our temporal unfoldment. Two aspects in dynamic, dialectical relationship, not just two separated or completely different things, the way mind and body, subject and object, are represented in western modern culture, generally speaking.²⁶ So, if a researcher pretends to be exclusively objective, an *outsider* only, he is sort of pretending not to be human, not to be also a human inside the cosmos, an *insider* (with all the experiences that implies). In the same way, we may say then, that the *insider* is not just an *insider*, as if he could only be that, totally determined by such a condition. The subject may be said to be always in relationship with the object, at the same time being able to observe it or reflect on it, that relationship being ethical; thus the ethical state of the subject determines his epistemological relationship with the object, they are continuous, the same way being and thought, after Parmenides, are identified in Platonism; and in the same way we can say that soul gives continuity between the intelligible and the sensible. Hermeneutics are vital, not just theoretical, because as human beings, belonging to a context – *insider*, we are ethical beings.

It is in this context that we may understand Proclus's proposal of the exercise of several different and simultaneous discourses by the philosopher, both demonstrative and inspired.²⁷ Discourses understood to be analogous but irreducible to each other, then, none of them in sole possession of truth, or all of them, in their own way, simultaneously true. Ultimate truth, being beyond representation, is a sort of an emptiness, but more an incomprehensible fullness, or unity, regarding which, reason must rationally conclude the impossibility of a rational knowledge about. The only thing that I want to point out right now is that, in my opinion, theurgy, as a divinatory and magical philosophical practice, poses a contemporary philosophical problem since it is concerned with a critical conception of thought and reason and so of philosophy itself, always a contemporary problem. And at the same time it poses a philosophical challenge to both the study of theurgy as much as regarding its practice, both to those who research it and to those who practice it, whether we may be talking about the same subjects or not. To end this excursus, we could, for example, ask

²⁶ For a good introductory overview of Neoplatonists's psychology, epistemology and anthropology see Pauliina Remes, *Neoplatonism* (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), Chapters 4 and 5.

²⁷ Proclus, *Platonic Theology* I, 4.

ourselves, how distorted a subject of research like theurgy, or divination, may be, when we, as researchers, assume uncritically, as real, a notion of time as a horizontal, linear succession? Our *common* notion of time is also understood, rather literally, as external, historical, instead of a notion of time as cyclical and simultaneous – a perpetual flow of life, also understood as psychological, that which structures our experience – as is implied in theurgical divination, in its turn implying a cosmological conception of the cosmos as eternal.²⁸

IV. Belief?

So, given the complexity and richness of the theurgist's exegetical methods, we may ask, did the Platonists *believe* in their gods? Perhaps not like *most of us believe* they did. While theurgists share many technical procedures with religious and magical practitioners, they do not seem to believe in the gods the way many of their contemporaries did. While for an external observer, theurgists, on one hand, and religious and magical practitioners, on the other, may seem to be performing exactly the same actions, the understanding of theurgists regarding what they do and their motivations for doing so, their experience of it, in general, would be very different, or even exactly the opposite.

I would like to suggest that theurgists believed in the gods the way we may be said to believe in the characters of a movie: in a delimited ritual space, inside the movie theatre, during the projection of the film, we believe, we identify ourselves with several characters; we suffer or delight with them, we live an experience that transforms us both emotionally and intellectually, an experience that acquires a life of its own, its own reality, but once the movie is over no one has to worry about the literal existence or inexistence of the characters. Moreover, the observer of the movie performs an exegesis believing that he sees those characters and scenes that so intensely affect him, in what are but colourful lights (Cf. *photos charakteres*) reflected in a screen; light, of course, being one of the

²⁸ In a strict sense, for the Platonists, the cosmos is thought of as perpetual, against the eternity of the forms, the intelligible realm admitting no change. The cosmos is seen as perpetually becoming according to an eternal paradigm. See *Eighteen arguments on the eternity of the cosmos*, 15 (Cf. 5, 7, 13), in H. S. Lang and A.D. Macro, *On the Eternity of the World (de Aeternitate Mundi)*, Greek text with introduction, translation and commentary by H. S. Lang and A. D. Macro, argument I translated from the Arabic by J. McGinnis (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, and London: University of California Press, 2001); Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, p. 52.

favourite metaphors used by the theurgists to describe the nature of the gods.²⁹ So we watch the movie both with our eyes as with our thought, with our imagination; it is the imagination which gives continuity to the activity of our eyes and thought. The experience of one person with an educated imagination, or perfected thought and sensibility, will differ quite a lot from someone who has not such an education, even when for an external observer they might seem to be performing the same action, watching a movie.

V. On theurgy being astrological

The Platonists' theurgy is astrological.³⁰ Proclus's text on the hieratic art is probably one of the clearest statements about the said fundamental astrological condition of theurgy. Even when theurgists are very critical of astrology as so poorly understood by common practitioners, reduced to a technical, secondary knowledge, theurgy is astrological in a technical sense since the diverse theurgical practices are supposed to be performed at the appropriate time (*kairon*), be it the purifications and initiations, the hymn singing to the different gods, or the composition, animation and ritual work with them through their living statues, integrating thus the ritual display into the cosmic harmony as an organic expression of it.³¹ All the hieratic

²⁹ Traditional symbols and patterns that correspond to each divinity, revealed by the same, as patterns of light, during their apparitions or visions. Proclus, *On Plato's "Cratylus"*, trans. Brian Duval (New York: Cornell University Press, 2007), pp. 71, 31, 6–8. Compare to Ruth Dorothy Majercik, ed. and trans., *The Chaldean Oracles* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), f. 146.

³⁰ Some scholars, after Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles*, f. 107, affirm that theurgists completely rejected astrology, along with most traditional forms of divination, something which, if very briefly, I suggest in this paper that is not the case, particularly regarding astrology. If I understand correctly, though, certainly theurgists can be very harsh against most traditional forms of divination, they are against the way it is understood and practiced, or rather, misunderstood, especially by professionals. They are very critical with the way astrologers understand and practice their discipline, which they reduce to a technical procedure of interpreting astral charts instead of understanding it and practicing it theurgically. See Iamblichus, *On the mysteries*, p. 11, for Iamblichus's comments on Porphyry's conceptions on the theurgic art.

³¹ In fact, it seems that most magical practices of late antiquity were astrological, in the sense of depending on the right astronomical moment for being done successfully; the *Greek Magical Papyri* are full of diverse examples. See also Plotinus's 4th *Ennead*, particularly IV, 4 for an exposition of the astrological base

works are based on celestial-terrestrial correspondences. As a symbol charged with divine presence, every terrestrial substance used in theurgical practice is the counterpart of a celestial element, which is in turn an intelligible expression originating in the gods. ‘In heaven are found the terrestrial [things] celestially, according to cause and, reciprocally, in the earth are the celestial [things] in a terrestrial manner’ (*en ourano men ta kthonia kat aitian kai ouranios, en te ge ta ourania geinos*).³² The palm tree resembles the Sun in the same way that the sunflower and the rooster converge or are dynamically attuned with the luminary; the Sun, the sunflower and the rooster moving together co-ordinately (*synkineitai*), their lives being linked in some way. It is sympathy (*sympatheia*) that binds together all the orders (*taxin; seiron*) of the cosmos which, presided over by the gods as their guides, stretch from the very first beings to the very last. Angels, demons, souls, animals, plants, minerals – all share certain similar living properties and are full of the breath emanated from the stars (*phosteron aporroiais*); properties which, while being analogously displayed in multiple forms, simultaneously through all the orders of the cosmos have their unity in a god, all participating in the divine whose presence embraces it all. ‘Thus all is full of gods’ (*Houto mesta panta theon*) repeats Proclus, after the sage Thales.³³

Though theurgy may be said to be astrological in a technical, secondary sense, primarily it is astrological in a metaphysical sense, since, for the Platonists, the whole of reality is astrological. Sensible, corporeal experience is the astrological phenomenology of the soul of the cosmos composed by the celestial spheres. Bodies are the results or effects (*apoteles*) of the soul’s self-creative contemplation and portrayal in the astral dynamics which, according to a *logos*, mediate between the intelligible and the sensible. The participation or causality of the intelligible to the sensible is one of simultaneity or co-presence (*sympnoia*, Plotinus), the same way that intellection and sensation may be seen to be continuous and simultaneous in the case of the human being.³⁴ This way,

of magical practice This was a key treatise for Ficino’s own developments of astrological magic theory and practice.

³² Proclus, *On the hieratic art*, in J. Bidez, *Catalogue des manuscrits alchimiques grecs*. Vol. 6 (Bruxelles: Lamertin, 1928), p. 32.

³³ Proclus, *On the hieratic art*, p. 40; Thales of Miletus, A 22, in J. Bidez, *Catalogue des manuscrits alchimiques grecs*, Vol. 6 (Bruxelles: Lamertin, 1928).

³⁴ Plotinus, *Enneads*, II, 3,7,10–20. In general terms the vision of the cosmos in Neoplatonism is of a unitary whole where it reigns in a single harmony or coordination of all. Plotinus will criticize the causality models that, taken to the

astrological methods, understood in a philosophical context that goes far beyond an understanding of astrology as a technique to interpret an astronomical figure (*sjema*), become, for the Platonists, an ethical tool for the ordering of embodied experience, the coordination of sensation and thought – conscious and unconscious, we could say, with the sensible and the intelligible represented respectively by the earth and the sky, a very, very ancient primal mythological image already by the time of Proclus. This ethical coordination is based on the imitation of the dialectical cosmological rhythm or nature's coordination (the astonishingly beautiful self-regulation of the cosmos, hence an aesthetical/ethical paradigm), a perpetual living image (*eikon*) of the metaphysical eternal dialectical rhythm; a *physiology* for the Platonists, after the *Timaeus*. It is a metaphorical ethical exercise for the cosmization of consciousness³⁵ based in the application of analogy understood to have not only a discursive

letter, view in the intelligible the cause of the sensible as a temporary sequence of cause-effect (VI.7.33). Causality must be understood as inter-dependence, and this is not a doctrine, but a dialectical tool that helps us to think and to understand, against our habits, this relationship. Sara Rappe calls this model 'simultaneous arising or simultaneous manifestation and also co-rising, co-manifestation' – see Sara Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism: Non-discursive Thinking in the texts of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 37–40 – thus indicating that while there is still a sequence of events these are not causal sequences – in the common sense of the term – but rather, the cause and the effect have a reciprocal origin. Sensible reality, then, appears as an immediate and necessary expression of the intelligible. We can say that the sensible is the co-presence of the intelligible (Plotinus speaks of *simultaneous coordination*, an idea of causation that suggests rather a notion of resonance and sympathy). The relationship between the sensible and the intelligible is central in Neoplatonic thought, that relationship being operated by soul. In the first line of the tractate *On Fate* (III, 1) Plotinus distinguishes between 'The things that become and those that are', to begin the questioning regarding the causal relationship among them', in Plotinus, *Enneads* (I-VII), trans. A. H. Armstrong (London: The Loeb Classical Library. Harvard University Press, 1984). The things that become, or sensible things, for the Neoplatonic tradition, are assimilated symbolically to the terrestrial, and those that are, or intelligible, assimilated to the celestial, as clearly expressed in Proclus's text on the hieratic art (148.9–11).

³⁵ A notion used by Pierre Hadot in several of his works, where he also defines ancient philosophy as a way of life and a spiritual exercise.

reality but mainly a metaphysical one.³⁶ Theurgists reciprocate natural entities whose living being is imagined or seen with thought as a natural hymn (*hymnos physikos*), like the lotus opening its petals like lips singing to the rising sun.

Proclus, after Plotinus, with his presentation of the chains of orders that extend from the first to the very last beings, all bounded by the henads or gods whom express their will through a heavenly *logos* or celestial writing, seems to echo millennial Babylonian traditions, where the gods have in their hands ropes that bind under their command everything in the lower world.³⁷ The cosmos is the divine temple, adorned with an extraordinary altar, the celestial vault wherein are found the stars, statues of the gods whose eternal act of the creation of the cosmos is a ritual act, led by the demiurgic hierophant, dedicated to the god of gods. The whole cosmos is an eternal liturgical activity.

Astrological methods – particularly regarding the ruler of the astral chart (*oikodespotes*) for the knowledge of the *daimon*, for the Platonists, knowledge of the deity leader of the soul – perhaps should be further

³⁶ Octavio Paz comments in *Los hijos del limo* (Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral, 1974), p. 84: ‘Si la analogía hace del universo un poema, un texto hecho de consonancias, también hace del poema un doble del universo, doble consecuencia: podemos *leer* el universo, podemos *vivir* el poema. Por lo primero la poesía es conocimiento; por lo segundo acto.’ [‘If analogy makes of the universe a poem, a text made of consonances, also makes of the poem a double of the universe, double consequence: we can *read* the universe, we can *live* the poem. By the first poetry is knowledge; by the second act.’].

³⁷ Regarding Babylonian celestial divination see Francesca Rochberg, ‘Elements of the Babylonian contribution to Hellenistic astrology’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 108, no. 1 (1988): pp. 51–62.

- “Heaven and Earth. Divine – Human relations in Mesopotamian celestial divination”, in *Prayer, Magic and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World*, ed. Scott Noegel, Joel Walker and Brannon Wheeler (USA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003).

- *The heavenly writing*. Divination, horoscopy, and astronomy in Mesopotamian culture. USA: Cambridge University Press, 2004.), and Erica Reiner, *Astral Magic in Babylonia* (Philadelphia, PA: The American Philosophical Society, 1995) as well as Nicholas Campion, *The Dawn of Astrology: A Cultural History of Western Astrology* (London: Continuum Books, 2008), Chapters 3 and 4. Reiner refers to Haphaistio, a Greco-Egyptian astrologer roughly a contemporary of Proclus, as evidence of the continued vitality of Mesopotamian divinatory traditions, somehow influencing or still present in the development of late antiquity astrology, see Reiner, *Astral Magic in Babylonia*, p. 79.

reconsidered as they may provide a very important key about theurgical procedures. Through the insights that this technique could offer, as preliminary knowledge, at least some pertinent symbols may be gathered for the invocation of the soul's patron deity. Because, while for theurgists' proper knowledge of the tutelary goddess or god would mean a direct contact and further unification with it, to pretend to have knowledge about it just through calculations and discourses would be naive. However, as part of a tradition revealed by the gods themselves, from those astrological techniques understood as a preliminary knowledge will result in what may turn out to be significant symbols of the gods, given all the appropriate correspondences of the gods with all the orders and elements of the cosmos, these being the means to contact with them (as revealed by the gods themselves), a communication that would confirm the pertinence of the symbols used. That is, a direct experience that would rectify and deepen that known only indirectly, in an imperfect way, through the astrological discursive practice of interpretation of a chart; imperfect in comparison with the perfecting of the soul through the contact and progressive union with its god or divine unity. So, while the technical interpretation of astrological symbolism may be imperfect, it may also be a first step, so to speak, though not a necessary one, since the gods could directly inspire the theurgist as how to proceed without himself having to resort to the investigation of astrological figures, which, for the theurgists, the professional astrologers – the so-called 'experts' in these matters – so superficially understand.³⁸

VI. Images, statues and hymns

The theurgists prepared statues of the gods at the same time as preparing themselves to receive divine illumination. That is, theurgical work,

³⁸ Regarding question of the ruler of the astral figure, see Porphyry's *Introduction to the Tetrabiblos*, trans. James Herschel Holden (USA: Fellow of the American Federation of Astrologers, 2009), p. 30, and Iamblichus's *On the mysteries, De mysteriis*, trans. Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon and Jackson P. Hershbell (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), IX; PGM XIII 710–730, IV 36–51; and Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, ed. and trans. F. Robbins (Cambridge: Loeb, 1980). III.10. Also see the works of Antiochus of Athens, Paulus Alexandrinus, Haphaistio of Thebes, Firmicus Maternus and the *Liber Hermetis*, for example, regarding the kind of astrological works known by theurgists. We actually have the so-called Paraphrase on Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* as well as an *Introduction to Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos*, both attributed to Proclus, an attribution considered dubious by some.

consisting in unification, expresses this externally through the mixing together of diverse materials which as signals (*synthemata*) and symbols correspond to the same god, thus forming a unity assimilated to the pre-existing divine unity: theurgists operating simultaneously in an intelligible, discursive, natural and perceptible manner.³⁹ The assembling and formation of the said images resembles divine manifestation itself, where formless beings take form for us, who are bounded by form. An anthropomorphism, but not operated by the theurgist but secondarily, being primarily operated by the divinities and their messengers (*angeloi*), who move, inspire and teach theurgists when they themselves identify with the former (Proclus uses the same term, *hegemones*, guides, to refer to both gods and theurgists), a union conceived by Proclus as erotic or loving, one of the main analogies used in the text.⁴⁰ In an example where the philosopher uses an analogy, the said union is preceded by the warming or preparation of a fit material to be ignited by the loving gods when their fire is transmitted (*pyros diadosis*), the same way as when a heated wick is put near a source of heat and without actually touching it catches fire; that is, the ignition, likened to divinization, doesn't depend on a corporeal, external causation but only in a secondary, auxiliary way.⁴¹ This divinization is what theurgy really is, not a technique, which deals with secondary, auxiliary causes, necessary but not sufficient for divinization to happen. Let's keep in mind that, for the Platonists, the problem of the limited conception of theurgy just as a technique is co-relative with the problem of limiting our conception of philosophy just as a rational discursive technique.⁴²

Prayer is a gift from the gods, as expressed in the inspired prayers, the improvisations which move theurgists to sing with their souls ablaze. Participation in the divine fire is a compassionate activity of the gods to those whom they love and who reciprocate their love – as expected from

³⁹ Iamblichus, *On the mysteries*, V.23.

⁴⁰ Following Plato's *Symposium*, where the *hiereon techne* are mentioned in Diotima's speech on Eros as the greatest *daimon*, magician and diviner, in Plato, *Diálogos II. Gorgias. Menéxeno. Eutidemo. Menón. Crátilo*, introduction, translation with notes by J. Calonge Ruiz. E. Acosta Méndez. F. J. Oliveri, and J. L. Calvo (Madrid: Gredos, 2000), 202e-203d.

⁴¹ Iamblichus, *On the mysteries*, V.7, and Simplicius, *On Categories* 9, 302, 28–303.

⁴² Iamblichus, *On the mysteries of the Egyptians*, II.11.

any lover – as was said about Proclus’s relationship with Athena.⁴³ An experience both of knowledge or intelligible illumination as well as of psychological heating or an enlivening intensification, in the same way that in fire we may distinguish between light and heat; the simultaneous activity of both what Proclus calls *the flower of the intellect* and *the flower of the whole soul*,⁴⁴ the latter of which encompasses the former establishing the unity of the soul in the unity of the gods.⁴⁵ It is an experience that may be conceived as simultaneously cyclical, both an ascent of the human and a descent of the divine. In Proclus’s complex metaphysics, ontology is encompassed by henadology. The realm of being, that which makes the world intelligible, is subordinated to the henads or divine unities – the gods – which, from beyond existence, bind everything together, giving unity to the All.⁴⁶ A two-fold metaphysics mirrored by the human being: ‘We are images of intellectual essences, but statues of unknown signs’.⁴⁷ The gods themselves suffer no passion but their messengers seem to represent the mutual passion, the *sympatheia* or compassion that unites divinities and theurgists in love born from the latter’s astonishment and inspiration, ignited by the perception of beauty’s splendour irradiated from the cosmos, from our bodies.

To conclude, I would like to point that Marsilio Ficino adapted theurgical practices in 15th century Florence, fully integrating theurgy at the heart of his philosophical system, as much as in his own heart, we could say. He also translated Proclus’s text on the hieratic art, rendering his title as *De sacrificio et magia*. Ficino clearly comprehends and emphasizes the essential astrological dimension of the whole of theurgical procedures, as expressed particularly in the third book of his *De Vita*, entitled *De vita coelitus comparanda*. Here, though rather discretely and briefly, he wrote about the need of the philosopher to be able to follow his own star and

⁴³ *Life of Proclus*, p. 30, in Mark Edwards, *Neoplatonic Saints. The Lives of Plotinus and Proclus by their Students* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), p. 30, and Marinus of Neapolis, *Marino de Neápolis: Proclo o De la felicidad*, trans. J. M. Álvarez Hoz and J. M. García Ruiz (Irún: Iralka, 1999).

⁴⁴ The mind and the heart, put into simple terms. D’Apamea, *Oráculos Caldeos*, p. 4.

⁴⁵ Proclus, *On the Timaeus*. I.211, 24–8.

⁴⁶ In Late Platonism, the first principle of their metaphysics, regarded as Unity, is also regarded as beyond being or existence; the same way that Plato conceives the first principle, called by him the Good, as beyond being or existence; Plato, *Republic* 509b.

⁴⁷ D’Apamea, *Oráculos Caldeos*, 5.211, 18–25.

genius, giving some technical directions regarding how to know about one's guardian spirit in the astrological natal figure, followed by some critical remarks on the same, just as the theurgists did. In other of his works, mainly his commentaries on Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, Ficino expanded on the astrological dynamics of *eros* (expounding a notable astrological theory of being in love), which for late Platonists was the base of all theurgical actions.⁴⁸ Ficino didn't call his magical practice theurgy, something that would have put him in very much trouble with the Christian church authorities; this is the reason why he chose to present his system as natural magic – as opposed to ritual magic – since it is based on 'just' natural sympathies. Nonetheless he structures his magical practice according to Proclus's theurgical virtues: faith (*pistis*), truth and love (*eros*), by which theurgists are recommended to unite with the gods. The triad of virtues derived respectively from the triad of main divine presences which are the sources of plenitude to all beings are Goodness, Wisdom and Beauty, the three main ethical principles.⁴⁹ Goodness, Wisdom and Beauty, in their turn, are related respectively to the main triad of metaphysical principles: the One-Good, Intellect (*Nous*) and Soul, respectively. Both perspectives – ethical and metaphysical – again in their turn mediated through the astrological symbols of Jupiter, the Sun and Venus respectively, what Ficino calls *the three Graces*, the main working symbols of his magical system, thus making of astrology, as a theurgical practice, an applied metaphysics, that is, ethics: a care of the self as well as a practice of self-realization, a *philosophical praxis* expressed through the splendid poetic language of the stars.

⁴⁸ I think that one has to contextualize the whole proposal of the *De Vita* against the mystical project of the divinization of the soul that Ficino presents in his *Platonic Theology*. The practices recommended in the *De Vita* may be seen as the starting point of such a project. Regarding how to follow one's own star and guardian spirit, see Marsilio Ficino, 'De vita coelitus comparanda', in *Three books on life*, translated with introduction and notes by Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark (Tempe, AZ: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies and the Arizona Board of Regents for Arizona State University, 1998), Chapters 13 and 14. Copenhaver, 'Hermes Trismegistus'.

⁴⁹ For Proclus on this triad of virtues: *Platonic Theology*, 1.25 (113, 10); *On the Alcibiades*, trans. W. O'Neill (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), I.1, 51, 13–52, 2; 1.52, 10–53, 2; *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon, with introduction and notes by John M. Dillon (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 927, pp. 18–29; *Commentary on the Timaeus of Plato*, 2 vols (Frome: The Prometheus Trust, 2006), 1.212, 12–25.