

Theurgy

Cosmology and Daimons as intermediaries – locative vs. utopian cosmology

- Daimons out of place in the locative order
 - unexpected supernatural intervention
 - imagining evil daimons
 - rites of relocation - exorcism and hostile magic
- Daimons in place in the locative order
 - daimons as the spirits of the dead
 - guardian daimons

Theory of Theurgy

- divine part of human being
 - mind - *nous*
 - soul - *psyche*
 - body - *soma*
- spirit vehicle for the soul going into and out of the body
- assimilation to the divine
- cosmic sympathy - all things in the cosmos interrelate (symbols, tokens, traces)

Shift from locative to utopian cosmology

- daimons as archons of the world
- rites of relocation - escape of spirits in exile

Mechanics of Theurgy

- systasis - meeting with the god
- invocation vs. ascent
- bringing down the gods - statues and symbols
- rising up to the gods - *anagoge*
 - lightening - *pneuma* and the sun's rays
 - paths and ways - conduit and *imux*
 - passwords and guardians
 - immortalization and release from fate

Issues for Discussion:

1. Theurgy as magic vs. religion:

Contrast the attacks of Porphyry and Plotinus with the defenses of Iamblichus, Sallustius, and Proclus

- What do the attacks critique?
- How do the defenses respond?
- How does formulating theories fight against charge of magic?

2. Ritual procedures in the Mithras Liturgy

- Analyze the spell: what (in order), who, when/where, why, how
- Compare the Mithras Liturgy with the Eighth Book of Moses

3. Further Issues:

What is the appeal of theurgy for thinkers in the first several centuries CE?

What does Johnston identify as different about theurgy from earlier religious forms?

How does theurgy fit in to Smith's categories of locative and utopian religious cosmologies?

Historical context of theurgy

Chaldaean Oracles

Julian the Chaldaean

Julian the Theurgist

Marcus Aurelius (2nd century CE)

Theurgy and Neoplatonism in the Roman Empire

Plato (428–348 BCE)

Plutarch (40-c.120 CE)

Apuleius (c. 124 – c. 170) Plotinus (205-269/270 CE)

Porphry (232-305 CE)

Iamblichus (250-325 CE)

Sosipatra and Maximus of Ephesus (c. 310-372 CE)

Synesius (c. 373-414), Hermias (c.410-450 CE), Hierocles (fl. 430)

Proclus (412-485 CE)

Damascius (462-539 CE)

Psellus - Michael Psellos (c.1019-1078)

Theurgy, Christianity, and Paganism in the Roman Empire

Constantine (272-337 CE)

Flavius Claudius Julianus (331-363CE) - Julian the Apostate

Maximus of Ephesus (d. 370 CE) and Saloustios

Eusebius (260-340 CE) & Augustine (354-430)

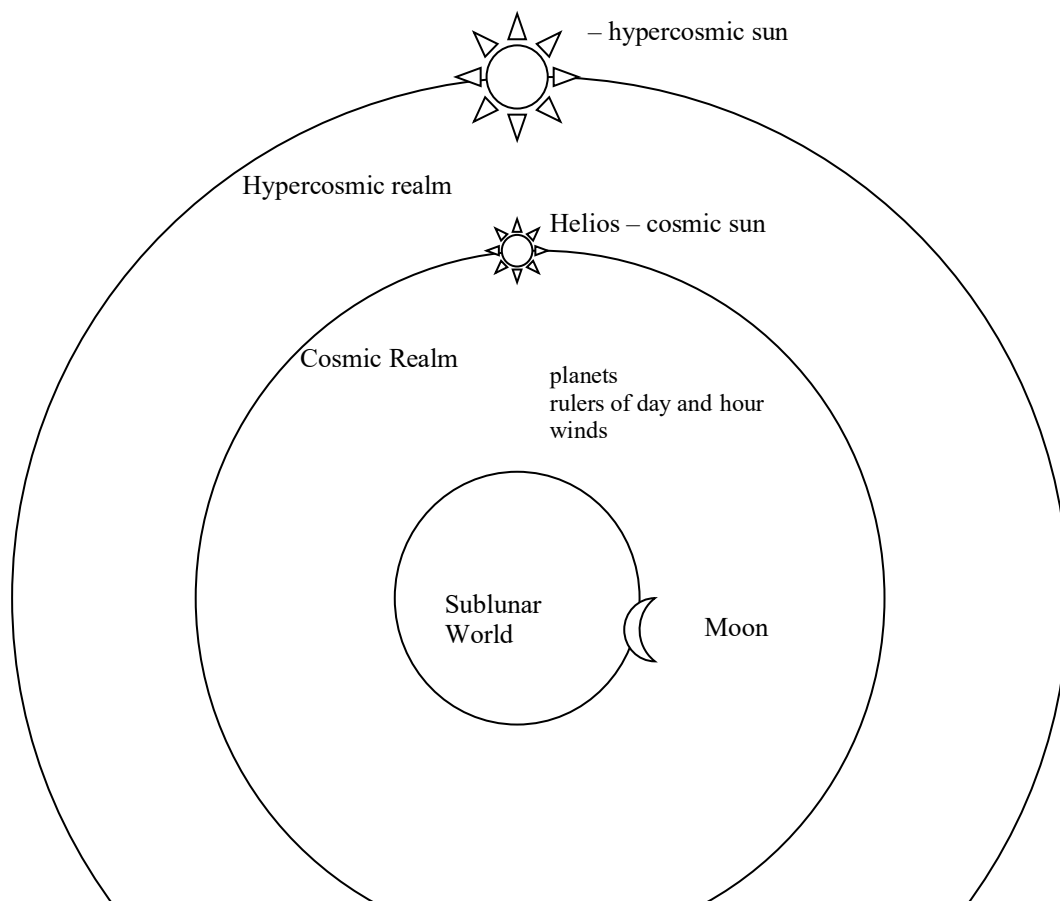
Theurgy and Elitism

Academic and Imperial circles

parent-child relation in transmission

theurgy and theology - Porphyry vs. Iamblichus

theurgy vs. goetia - religion and magic



Proclus, *de sacrificio et magia* 150.24-151.5

The masters of the hieratic art found the way to pay divine honors to the higher powers, by following what lay in front of their eyes, and by mixing together some things and removing others, as appropriate. And when they made use of a mixture of things it was because they had observed that unmixed each thing has some quality of the god, but taken alone was not sufficient to invoke them. So by mixing together many different things they unified the emanations referred to previously and by the production of one thing from many, they made a likeness of that whole which exists before every thing else comes into being. And so they often constructed images and incenses from these mixtures, mingling into one the divided divine symbols, and making by art that which a god contains essentially. Thus they unified the multiplicity of powers which when dispersed are weakened, but when combined lead back up to the essential form of its archetype.

Plato, *Symposium*, 203a

Daimons, you know, are halfway between god and man.

What powers have they, then? I asked.

They are the envoys and interpreters that ply between heaven and earth, flying upward with our worship and our prayers, and descending with the heavenly answers and commandments, and since they are between the two estates they weld both sides together and merge them into one great whole. They form the medium of the prophetic arts, of the priestly rites of sacrifice, initiation, and incantation, of divination and of sorcery, for the divine will not mingle directly with the human, and it is only through the mediation of the spirit world that man can have any intercourse, whether waking or sleeping, with the gods. And the man who is versed in such matters is said to have spiritual powers, as opposed to the mechanical powers of the man who is expert in the more mundane arts. There are many daimons, and many kinds of daimons, too, and Love is one of them.

PGM LXXXIX.1-27

I, Abrasax, shall deliver. Abrasax am I! ABRASAX ABRASICHO'OU, help little Sophia-Priskilla. Get hold of and do away with what comes to little Sophia-Priskilla, whether it is a Shivering Fit -- get hold of it! Whether a Phantom -- get hold of it! Whether a Daimon -- get hold of it! I, Abrasax, shall deliver. Abrasax am I! ABRASAX ABRASICHO'OU. Get hold of, get hold of and do away with... what comes to little Sophia-Priskilla on This Very Day, whether it is a Shivering Fit -- do away with it! Whether a Daimon -- do away with it!

Plutarch, *de facie* 945ad

when they are excited by restlessness and emotion and drawn away from the moon to another birth, she forbids them to sink towards earth and keeps conjuring them back and binding them with charms, for it is no slight, quiet, or harmonious business when with the affective faculty apart from reason they seize upon a body. Creatures like Tityus and Typho and the Python that with insolence and violence occupied Delphi and confounded the oracle belonged to this class of souls, void of reason and subject to the affective element gone astray through delusion.

Iamblichus, *de Myst.* 4.1

There is, however, another class of being from among those which surround us, devoid of reason and judgement, which has been allotted just one power, in the apportionment of tasks which has been prescribed for each entity in each of the parts (of the universe). Even as, then, the role of a knife is to cut, and it does nothing else but this, so also, of those spirits that are distributed about the universe, according to a particular natural necessity, one divides while another brings together things in the realm of becoming. This truth can be observed also from the evidence of our senses; for the so-called "caves of Charon" emit from themselves a certain vapour, capable of destroying indiscriminately

anything that falls into them. Even so, then, there are certain invisible spirits, each allotted different spheres of operation, who are naturally adapted to perform only that role to which they are assigned.

Empedocles, fr. 115

There is an oracle of Necessity, an ancient ordinance of the gods, eternal and sealed fast by broad oaths, that whenever one of the demons, whose portion is length of days, has sinfully polluted his hands with blood, or followed strife and forsworn himself, he must wander thrice ten thousand seasons from the abodes of the blessed, being born throughout the time in all manners of mortal forms, changing one toilsome path of life for another. For the mighty Air drives him into the Sea, and the Sea spews him on the dry Earth; Earth tosses him into the beams of the blazing Sun, and he flings him back to the eddies of Air. One takes him from the other, and all reject him. One of these I now am, an exile and a wanderer from the gods, for that I put my trust in insensate strife.

Menander, fr. 550

A daimon is appointed as a mystagogue for every person as soon as he is born.

Heraclitus fr. 121

Character (*ethos*) is fate (*daimon*) for humans.

Plutarch, *On the Daimon of Socrates* 591be

But the mode of mingling is not the same for every soul. Some are merged entirely into body, and are disturbed by passions throughout their whole being during life. Others are in part mixed up with it, but leave outside their purest part, which is not drawn in, but is like a life-buoy which floats on the surface, and touches the head of one who has sunk into the depth, the soul clinging around it and being kept upright, while so much of it is supported as obeys and is not overmastered by the affections. The part which is borne below the surface within the body is called soul. That which is left free from dissolution most persons call mind, taking it to be something inside themselves, resembling the reflected images in mirrors; but those who are rightly informed know that it is outside themselves and address it as spirit.

Synesius, *On Dreams* 6

During its descent, the soul gathers pneuma from the astral sphere which forms its first body and vehicle, the seat of the imaginative faculty. This vehicle then enables the soul to connect with a material body and mitigates the clash of extremes. Spellbound by nature and matter, the soul renounces its freedom and becomes a slave to matter, a situation from which deliverance is possible only with the hardest, truly Heracleian labours. Certain cathartic rituals (*teletai*) provide help toward the ascent.

Hierocles, *On the Golden Verses of Pythagoras* 26.22

Surely then it is necessary that thestic purifications go along with mathematical purifications and that hieratic elevation accompany the deliverance wrought by dialectics. These practices in a special way purify and perfect the pneumatic vehicle of the rational soul: they separate it from the lifelessness of matter, and they also render it to be in a capable state for the fellowship of pure spirits. For it is not lawful for the impure to lay hold of the pure.

Psellos, PG 112 1132a; *Chaldaean Oracles* fr. 104

The Chaldaean says that we cannot be borne up to god, unless we strengthen the vehicle of the soul through material rites. For he believes that the soul is purified by stones, herbs, and conjurations in order to become well-wheeled for the ascent.

Plato, *Timaus* 90c

But he who has seriously devoted himself to learning and to true thoughts, and has exercised these qualities above all his others, must necessarily and inevitably think thoughts that are immortal and divine, if so be that he lays hold on truth, and in so far as it is possible for human nature to partake of immortality, he must fall short thereof in no degree; and inasmuch as he is for ever tending his divine part and duly magnifying that daimon who dwells along with him, he must be supremely blessed.

Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* VIII.7

There is another principle of the soul which is superior to the whole realm of nature and generated existence. By it we can be united to the gods, rise above the established order of the world, and likewise participate in the life eternal and in the energy of the gods of the highest heaven. Through this principle we are able to set ourselves free. For when the better qualities in us are in activity, and the soul is exalted to those beings superior to itself, then it becomes separate altogether from every thing which held it fast in the realm of generated existence, keeps itself aloof from inferior natures, exchanges one life for the other, and gives itself to a different order, entirely abandoning the former order with which it was connected.

Saloustios, *On the Nature of the Gods and the World* 14-15

The truth simply is that, when we are good, we are joined to the Gods by our likeness to live according to virtue we cling to the Gods, and when we become evil we make the Gods our enemies - not because they are angered against us, but because our sins prevent the light of the Gods from shining upon us, and put us in communion with spirits of punishment. And if by prayers and sacrifices we find forgiveness of sins, we do not appease or change the Gods, but by what we do and by our turning toward the divine we heal our own badness and so enjoy again the goodness of the Gods. ... The divine itself is without needs, and the worship is paid for our own benefit. The providence of the Gods reaches everywhere and needs only some congruity for its reception. All congruity comes about by representation and likeness; for which reason the temples are made in representation of heaven, the altar of earth, the images of life (that is why they are made like living things), the prayers of the element of thought, the mystic letters of the unspeakable celestial forces, the herbs and stones of matter, and the sacrificial animals of the irrational life in us.

Proclus, *de sacrificio et magia* 149.28-150.2; 148.10-18

The earth is full of celestial Gods and the heavens are full of supercelestial Gods. Each 'chain' increases in number as it proceeds to its final terms, and the same qualities which are present in all the members of a 'chain' are there in the Unity preceding their manifestation. ... How else could it be that the sunflower (*héliotropia*) moves in accordance with the sun and the moonflower (*selénotropia*) with the moon, each, according to its ability, turning around with the luminaries of the world? For all things pray according to the rank they occupy and hymn the Leaders who preside over the whole of their 'chains' (*tôn seirôn*), either spiritually (*noerós*), rationally, naturally (*phusikós*) or in a sensory manner (*aisthêtós*) So the sunflower moves with what makes it open as much as it can, and if one could hear how it makes the air vibrate (*plêsontos*) as it turns around, one would realise from the sound that it is making a hymn to its King, of the kind that a plant can sing.

Proclus, *in Crat.* 71.18-19, 29-35

For as the fathers of all things brought everything into being, they sowed into everything tokens and traces. ... In everything existent, down to the very last, there is a token of the ineffable cause itself that is beyond the intelligible, a token through which everything is connected back to it, some further and some nearer, depending on the clarity or vagueness of the token that is in them, and this is what moves everything toward the desire of the good and instills into the existing things this inextinguishable love.

Origen, *Contra Celsum*. XXXI.

Moreover, if any one would wish to become acquainted with the artifices of those sorcerers, through which they desire to lead men away by their teaching (as if they possessed the knowledge of certain secret rites), but are not at all successful in so doing, let him listen to the instruction which they receive after passing through what is termed the "fence of wickedness,"- gates which are subjected to the world of ruling spirits. (The following, then, is the manner in which they proceed): "I salute the one-formed king, the bond of blindness, complete oblivion, the first power, preserved by the spirit of providence and by wisdom, from whom I am sent forth pure, being already part of the light of the son and of the father: grace be with me; yea, O father, let it be with me." They say also that the beginnings of the Ogdoad are derived from this. In the next place, they are taught to say as follows, while passing through what they call Ialdabaoth: "Thou, O first and seventh, who art born to command with confidence, thou, O Ialdabaoth, who art the rational ruler of a pure mind, and a perfect work to son and father, bearing the symbol of life in the character of a type, and opening to the world the gate which thou didst close against thy kingdom, I pass again in freedom through thy realm. Let grace be with me; yea, O father, let it be with me." They say, moreover, that the star Phaenon is in sympathy with the lion-like ruler. They next imagine that he who has passed through Ialdabaoth and arrived at Iao ought thus to speak: "Thou, O second Iao, who shinest by night who art the ruler of the secret mysteries of son and father, first prince of death, and portion of the innocent, bearing now mine own beard as symbol, I am ready to pass through thy realm, having strengthened him who is born of thee by the living word. Grace be with me; father, let it be with me."

Proclus, *de sacrificio et magia* 148.21-149.7

The wise men of old brought together various things down here with their heavenly counterparts, and brought down divine powers into this mortal place, having drawn them down through similarity: for similarity is powerful enough to attach beings to one another. For instance, if a wick which has been heated beforehand is placed under a lamp, not far from the flame, you will see it light up even though it has not touched the flame, for the transmission of the flame takes place downwards. By analogy, you may consider the heat already there in the wick to correspond to the sympathy between things, and its being brought and placed below the flame to correspond to the hieratic art making use of material things at the right time and in the right way

Iamblichus, *de mysteriis* V.23

Observing this, and discovering in general, in accordance with the properties of each of the gods, the receptacles adapted to them, the theurgic art in many cases links together stones, plants, animals, aromatic substances and other such things that are sacred, perfect and godlike, and then from all these composes an integrated and pure receptacle

[Psellos], *Certain Ideas of the Greeks about Demons*, ch. 7

I shall sum up briefly the efficacy of the (magical) power possessed by the hidden covenant concluded by the Chaldaeans. First of all, they prepared a purifying sacrifice: spices, plants, and stones, crocuses, myrrh, and laurel, mystically purified by fire. These were planted or buried in a circularly marked-off space. Then, he who concluded the covenant, a man of great magical powers, named the business, with a view to which he offered up the sacrifice. Digging up the soil in which the plants and the purified hylic substances were buried and suddenly lifting up all these together with his left hand, he invoked certain hidden powers: these were the teacher of the lifted-up sacrifice, the masters of the hylic substances, the ruler of the day, the lord of time, and the demon lord of the Four.

Augustine, *City of God* 8.23

Any one who hears this, as I have stated it, no doubt supposes that it has reference to images, because they are the works of the hands of men; but he asserts that visible and tangible images are, as it were, only the bodies of the gods, and that there dwell in them certain spirits, which have been invited to come into them, and which have power to inflict harm, or to fulfil the desires of those by whom divine honors and services are rendered to them. To unite, therefore, by a certain art, those invisible spirits to visible and material things, so as to make, as it were, animated bodies, dedicated and given up to those spirits who inhabit them,—this, he says, is to make gods, adding that men have received this great and wonderful power. I will give the words of this Egyptian as they have been translated into our tongue: “And, since we have undertaken to discourse concerning the relationship and fellowship between men and the gods, know, O Æsculapius, the power and strength of man. As the Lord and Father, or that which is highest, even God, is the maker of the celestial gods, so man is the maker of the gods who are in the temples, content to dwell near to men.” And a little after he says, “Thus humanity, always mindful of its nature and origin, perseveres in the imitation of divinity; and as the Lord and Father made eternal gods, that they should be like Himself, so humanity fashioned its own gods according to the likeness of its own countenance.” When this Æsculapius, to whom especially he was speaking, had answered him, and had said, “Dost thou mean the statues, O Trismegistus?”—“Yes, the statues,” replied he, “however unbelieving thou art, O Æsculapius,—the statues, animated and full of sensation and spirit, and who do such great and wonderful things,—the statues prescient of future things, and foretelling them by lot, by prophet, by dreams, and many other things, who bring diseases on men and cure them again, giving them joy or sorrow according to their merits.

Iamblichus, *de myst.* 9.9

when the personal daimon comes to be with each person, then he reveals the mode of worship proper to him and his name, and imparts the particular manner in which he should be summoned.

PGM I. 42-195

If you give him a command, straightway he performs the task: he sends dreams, he brings women, men without the use of magical material, he kills, he destroys, he stirs up winds from the earth, he carries gold, silver, bronze, and he gives them to you whenever the need arises. ... He will carry you into the air, and again hurl you into the billows of the sea's current and into the waves of the sea; he will quickly freeze rivers and seas and in such a way that you can run over them firmly, as you want. And especially will he stop, if ever you wish it, the sea-running foam, and whenever you wish to bring down stars

PGM XIII. 63-72 ≈ 568-581; 796-800

I call on you, who are greater than all, the creator of all, you, the self-begotten, who see all and are not seen. For you gave Helios the glory and all the power, Selene the privilege to wax and wane and have fixed courses, yet you took nothing from the earlier-born darkness, but apportioned things so that they should be equal. For when you appeared, both order arose and light appeared. All things are subject to you, whose true form none of the gods can see; who change into all forms. You are invisible, Aion of Aion. I call on you, lord, to appear to me in a good form. ...

For you are I, and I, you. Whatever I say must happen, for I have your Name as a unique phylactery in my heart, and no flesh, although moved, will overpower me; no spirit will stand against me – neither daimon nor visitation nor any other of the evil beings of Hades, because of your name, which I have in my soul and invoke.

Proclus, *de sacr.* 151.14-23

Longing to go beyond these and similar things, they came to know the daimonic powers which are essentially linked to the activities of nature and physical bodies, and by this means they drew down these powers in order to communicate with them. From the daimonic powers they moved straight up towards the actual doings of the gods, instructed in some matters by the gods themselves, but in others moved by their own efforts to an accurate conception of the appropriate symbols. And so, leaving nature and physical operations below, they came to directly experience the primordial and divine powers.

Iamblichus, *de myst* 1.12

The gods in their benevolence and graciousness unstintingly shed their light upon theurgists, summoning up their souls to themselves and orchestrating their union with them, accustoming them, even while still in the body, to detach themselves from their bodies, and to turn themselves towards their eternal and intelligible first principle.

Julian, *Hymn to the Mother of the Gods* 172ce

It has also been demonstrated that the god's rays are by nature uplifting; and this is due to his energy, both visible and invisible, by which very many souls have been lifted up out of the region of the senses, because they were guided by that sense which is dearest of all and is most nearly like the sun. ... And if I should touch on the secret teaching of the Mysteries in which the Chaldaean, divinely frenzied, celebrated the God of the Seven Rays, that god through whom he lifts up the souls of men, I should be saying what is unintelligible, yea wholly unintelligible to the common herd, but familiar to the happy theurgists.

Chaldaean Oracles, Fr. 110. "Seek out the channel of the soul, from where it <descended> in a certain order to serve the body; <and> seek <how> you will raise it [the soul] up again to its order by combining (ritual) action with a sacred word." That is, [Psellus comments,] seek the source of the soul, from where (the soul) had been led astray and has served the body; and how someone, raising it up and awakening it by means of telestic rites, might lead it back up from where it has come.

Chaldaean Oracles, Fr. 124 'Those who, by inhaling, drive out the soul, are free.

Chaldaean Oracles, Fr. 123 And (the order of angels) causes a separation with matter by "... lightening (the soul) with a warm breath [pneuma]," and causing a rising up through the anagogic life. For the "warm breath [pneuma]" is the sharing of life.

Chaldaean Oracles, Fr. 116 For the divine is accessible not to mortals who think corporally, but to all those who, naked, hasten upward toward the heights.

Chaldaean Oracles, Fr. 115 You must hasten toward the light and toward the rays of the Father, from where the soul, clothed in mighty intellect, has been sent to you.

Chaldaean Oracles, Fr. 122 How does the order of angels cause the soul to ascend? 'By making the souls bright with fire.'

Chaldaean Oracles, Fr. 130 Drawing in the flowering flames which come down from the Father.

Chaldaean Oracles fr. 224 (Porphyry, *De philosophia ex oraculis* 130ff)

Create a statue, purified in the manner I shall teach you. Make the body of mountain rue and adorn it with little animals, with domestic lizards, and when you have crushed a mixture of myrrh, styrax, and frankincense, blend it with these creatures, go out into the open air under a waxing moon and perform the rite by saying this prayer.