

THE CAMBRIDGE
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IAMBlichUS OF CHALCIS AND HIS SCHOOL

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1 LIFE AND WORKS

The sources available for our knowledge of Iamblichus' life are highly unsatisfactory, consisting as they do primarily of a hagiographical and ill-informed *Life* by the sophist Eunapius, who was a pupil of Chrysanthius, who was himself a pupil of Iamblichus' pupil Aedesius; nevertheless, enough evidence can be gathered to give a general view of his life-span and activities.

The evidence points to a date of birth around 245, in the town of Chalcis-ad-Belum, modern Qinnasrin, in northern Syria. Iamblichus' family were prominent in the area, and the retention of an old Aramaic name (*yamiliku-[El]*) in the family points to some relationship with the dynasts of Emesa in the previous centuries, one of whose family names this was. This noble ancestry does seem to colour somewhat Iamblichus' attitude to tradition – he likes to appeal on occasion for authority to 'the most ancient of the priests' (e.g., *De an.* §37), and was plainly a recognized authority on Syrian divinities (cf. Julian, *Hymn to King Helios* 150cd).

As teachers, Eunapius provides (*VP* 457–8) two names: first, a certain Anatolius, described as 'second in command' to the distinguished Platonic philosopher Porphyry, the pupil of Plotinus, and then Porphyry himself. We are left quite uncertain as to where these contacts took place, but we may presume in Rome, at some time in the 270s or 280s, when Porphyry, on his return from Sicily, had reconstituted Plotinus' school (whatever that involved). If that is so – and it is plain that Iamblichus knew Porphyry's work well, even though he was far from a faithful follower – then it seems probable that he left Porphyry's circle long before the latter's death, and returned to his native Syria (probably in the 290s) to set up his own school, not in his home town, but rather in the city of Apamea, already famous in philosophical circles as the home of the second-century Pythagoreanizing Platonist Numenius. There he presided over a circle of pupils, including a local grandee, Sopater, who seems to have supported him materially, and as long as Licinius ruled in the East, the school flourished. After

the triumph of Constantine, however, the writing had to be on the wall for such an overtly Hellenic and theurgically inclined group, and on Iamblichus' death in the early 320s the school broke up, his senior pupil Aedesius moving to Pergamum, where the Iamblichean tradition was carried on quietly for another generation or so. The Emperor Julian, we may note, sought to take on Aedesius as his mentor, but Aedesius, preferring the quiet life, prudently directed him to his own pupil Maximus of Ephesus.

Iamblichus was a prolific author, though unfortunately only his more elementary works survive intact – apart from the *Reply to the Letter of Porphyry to Anebo* (popularly known, since the Renaissance, as *On the Mysteries of the Egyptians*). Chief among these was a sequence of nine, or possibly ten, works in which he presented a comprehensive introduction to Pythagorean philosophy – an indication of his view of Pythagoras as the spiritual grandfather of Platonism. Of these, we still have the first four, beginning with a *Bios Pythagorikos* – not simply a 'life of Pythagoras', but rather an account of the Pythagorean way of life, with a biography of Pythagoras woven into it – and followed by an *Exhortation to Philosophy*, a treatise *On the General Science of Mathematics*, and a commentary on the *Introduction to Arithmetic* of the second-century Platonist Nicomachus of Gerasa. The doxographical portion of a treatise *On the Soul*, and extracts from a series of philosophical letters, the most philosophically significant being the *Letter to Macedonius on Fate*, also survive in the *Anthology* of John of Stobi.

Other than those, however, we have considerable evidence of commentaries on works of both Plato and Aristotle, fragments of which survive (mainly) in the later commentaries of Proclus. We have evidence of commentaries on the *Alcibiades*, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Sophist*, *Philebus*, *Timaeus* and *Parmenides* of Plato, and the *Categories* of Aristotle (this latter preserved extensively by Simplicius), as well as the *De Interpretatione*, *Prior Analytics*, *De caelo* and *De anima*. He is also on record as having composed a copious commentary on the *Chaldaean Oracles* (in at least twenty-eight books), and a *Platonic Theology*. The *Reply to the Letter of Porphyry to Anebo* mentioned above is an odd production, consisting of a response to a polemical open letter by Porphyry attacking the practice and theory of theurgy, which Iamblichus, taking on the persona of a senior Egyptian priest, Abammon, elects to defend.

2 PHILOSOPHY

Iamblichus' philosophical position is essentially an elaboration of the Platonic system propounded by Plotinus (and Porphyry), though strongly influenced by such sources as the Pythagorean pseudepigrapha and the *Chaldaean Oracles*. He

accepts the triadic system of principles, or hypostases, the One, Intellect and Soul, propounded by Plotinus, but he introduces complications at every turn.

First of all, in an attempt to resolve the contradiction between a One which is utterly transcendent but which also constitutes the first principle of all creation, he postulates a totally ineffable first Principle above a more 'positive' (i.e., causally efficient) One, which itself presides over a dyad of Limit and Unlimitedness, thus distinguishing the two antithetical aspects which Plotinus sought to embrace in his concept of the One. This we learn from a passage of Damascius' *De principiis* (§43, 2.1.1ff. C–W), in which he tells us that Iamblichus set out such a system in his *Chaldaean Theology*:

After this let us bring up the following point for consideration, whether the first principles (*archai*) before the first noetic triad are two in number, the completely ineffable (*hē pantē arrhētos*), and that which is uncoordinated (*asuntaktos*) to the triad, even as the great Iamblichus maintained in book 28 of his sublime *Chaldaean Theology*; or rather, as the majority of those who came after him preferred, that after the ineffable and single causal principle there comes the first triad of the intelligibles; or are we to descend even from this hypothesis and say, following Porphyry, that the single first principle of all is the Father of the intelligible triad? (My trans.)

There are a number of problems here which need to be teased out. First of all, it seems at first sight odd of Damascius to make a contrast between a principle which is 'completely ineffable' and one that is *unco-ordinated* with a following triad. One would expect the second principle to be *co-ordinated* with what follows it. However, the oddity is explained by what follows. Those who come after Iamblichus, notably Syrianus and Proclus, accept the completely ineffable first principle, but make their second One the monad of a primary triad, rather than distinguishing between it and the monad of that triad. Iamblichus preferred to preserve a distinction here, for reasons which Damascius gives in what follows (2.11–3.2): this second One needs to be able to preside over both Limit and Unlimitedness, and to serve as 'the cause of the mixture', as portrayed at *Phlb.* 23cd, so it cannot itself be identical with the monad, which represents Limit. We must presume that Syrianus and Proclus viewed the situation otherwise, and preferred to subsume the causative element into the monad itself; but we can at least appreciate Iamblichus' concern to have his One preside over both elements of this pair equally.

At any rate, Limit and Unlimitedness in turn generate a third principle, the Unified (*to hēnomenon*), which constitutes an ontological link with the next hypostasis, that of Intellect (*Nous*), as whose highest element it can also be viewed. Inhering in the Unified we may also discern a multiplicity of 'henads', which serve as unitary prefigurations of the system of Forms which are the

contents of Intellect. What, one might ask, is the justification for postulating such prefigurations of the Forms, which are themselves, after all, thoroughly unified within Intellect? One stimulus may be discerned as being a concern for what E. R. Dodds, with reference to Proclus, has termed ‘the principle of continuity’, requiring that reality should exhibit no sudden leaps, as from unity to multiplicity. This leads to the postulation of a succession of intermediate entities, and such is certainly the role filled by the henads.

The origin of the concept of henads has actually been a matter of dispute, as between Iamblichus and the later Athenian school, but the remarks of Proclus in his *Commentary on the Parmenides* (6.1066, 16ff. Cousin), as part of his critique of previous interpretations of the subject matters of the hypotheses of the second part of the *Parmenides*, seem clear enough (he is criticizing Iamblichus under the guise of ‘some of those we revere’). Iamblichus has just been presented as postulating the subject of the First Hypothesis as ‘God and the gods’:

Necessarily then, if indeed the divine is above being, and all that is divine is above being, the present argument [sc. the First Hypothesis] could be either only about the primal God, who is surely the only entity above being, or else it is about all the gods also who are after him, as *some of those we revere* would hold. So they argue that since every god, inasmuch as he is a god, is a henad (for it is this element, the One, which divinizes all being), for this reason they think it right to join to the consideration of the First God the discussion of all the gods; for they are all supra-essential henads, and transcend the multiplicity of beings, and are the summits of beings. (My trans.)

The reference to the henads as ‘gods’ may seem confusing, since for Iamblichus, as for his successors, there are gods at the intelligible level also, but the reason is that all entities in the realm of the One are *ipso facto* divinized – as Proclus indeed specifies here. Other passages of Proclus, notably *In Parm.* 7.36.8–28 Klibansky and *Theol. Plat.* 3.21, confuse the issue somewhat further by describing Iamblichus’ ‘gods’ as *noeta*, ‘objects of intellection’. This, however, only points up a basic, though somewhat confusing, feature of Iamblichus’ metaphysics, namely that the lowest element of a higher hypostasis also serves, from a different perspective, as the highest element, or ‘monad’, of the next lower (cf. Iambl. *In Tim.* fr. 54 Dillon). Thus the Unified, whose contents are the henads, may also be viewed as the One-Existent, or *hen on*, which presides as monad over the realm of Intellect, and whose contents are described as ‘the monads of the Forms’ (cf. Iambl. *In Phlb.* fr. 4 Dillon), which may be taken as the henads *qua* objects of contemplation by Intellect, a contemplation which results in the unified multiplicity of the Forms within Intellect. Such is the complexity which the relatively simple metaphysical system of Plotinus has now attained, within a generation of his death.

The realm of Intellect, in its turn, also undergoes elaborate subdivision in Iamblichus' system, first into a triad of three 'moments' or aspects, Being, Life and Intellect proper, and then into a subordinate series of three triads (again, of Being, Life, Intellect) arising out of each of these.

First there is a set of three triads of intelligible gods (*noetoi theoi*). This is followed by three triads of intelligible-intellective (*noetoi kai noeroi*) gods; and this in turn by a hebdomad of intellective gods, consisting of two triads and an entity termed the *hupēzōkōs*, the 'membrane', a concept borrowed from the *Chaldaean Oracles* (on which, as we know, Iamblichus composed an extended commentary), which has the function of constituting a barrier between the spiritual and material worlds. It is at this third level, among the Intellective Gods, that the Demiurge, identified with Zeus, holds 'the third rank among the Fathers', that is to say, the first intellective triad, composed of Kronos, Rhea (who is strictly speaking a Mother!) and Zeus himself. The curious circumstance that the intellective divinities constitute not three triads, but a hebdomad, may have something to do with the fact that these gods constitute a paradigm for the heavenly gods, who form a hebdomad, the *hupēzōkōs* performing a similar role to that of the Moon.

Our source for this degree of elaboration, admittedly, is given by Proclus (*In Tim.* 1.308.18ff.) as an essay of Iamblichus' entitled *On the Speech of Zeus in the Timaeus*, which Proclus contrasts with the simpler scheme which Iamblichus presents in his *Timaeus Commentary*, but there seems no reason to believe that he is inventing this. Iamblichus thus becomes the ancestor of the complex system of the later Athenian school of Syrianus and Proclus. The impulse for such elaborations seems to stem from a consciousness of the complexity of the spiritual world, and of the many levels of divinity which inhabit it, but it may not be entirely fanciful to suggest that it was to some extent stimulated by the ever-increasing degree of complexity manifested in the imperial administrative system from the late third century on, following the reforms of Diocletian and his successors.

Something should be said, in conclusion, of two features of the realm of Intellect, Eternity (*Aion*) and the Paradigm, which serve as elements binding the whole multiplicity together. For Iamblichus, *Aion* would seem to be simply *to hen on*, or the Monad of the noetic realm (or indeed, more properly, *to aei on*, cf. *In Tim.* fr. 29), in its capacity as measure, or structuring principle, for that realm, in the same way that, as we shall see, Time is the measure of the psychic realm. In fr. 64 of his *Timaeus Commentary*, à propos the exposition of his theory of transcendent Time, Iamblichus lists the various characteristics of Eternity, stressing its uniformity, infinity, simultaneity, and permanent presentness (*to hen kai apeiron kai ēdē on kai homou pan kai en tōi nun menon*), in such a way as to bring out its archetypal position vis-à-vis Time.

As for the Paradigm (as the object of the Demiurge's contemplation), in a comment on *Tim.* 28c (= *In Tim.* fr. 35 Dillon), Iamblichus on the one hand identifies it with the highest element in the noetic world, 'Being Itself' (*auto to hoper on*), which we may take as equivalent to One-Being, but on the other hand he is reported by Proclus (*In Tim.* 1.336.16ff. = Iambl. *In Tim.* fr. 36) as declaring it to inhere in the Demiurge, which may only, after all, be an assertion that the whole noetic world is subsumed into the Demiurge (cf. *In Tim.* fr. 34), insofar as he transmits it to the physical world (through the mediation of Soul) in the form of *logoi*.

The realm of Soul, likewise, exhibits complexity in comparison with the system of Plotinus. Iamblichus makes a distinction between pure, or unparticipated, Soul (*amethektos psuchē*), which serves as the Monad of the psychic realm, and participated Soul, which is in a way the sum-total of individual souls. Some individual souls, likewise, transcend any contact with body, while others are destined to be embodied, and even these descend into body on various different terms. The highest element of Soul, however, as we learn in *In Tim.* frs. 55 and 56, is linked to what is above it through participating in the lowest element of Intellect, participated (*methektos*) Intellect:

The Soul participates in Intellect, insofar as it is intellectual (*noera*), and through it unites itself even to the Divine Intellect (sc. the summit of the intelligible world, *to hen on*); for by participating in Intellect, the Soul of the Universe (*hē tou pantos psuchē*) ascends to the Intelligible. (Fr. 55)

Thus is the Iamblichean universe bound together. In his exegesis of *Tim.* 36c (in the fragments just mentioned), Iamblichus interprets the outer circle of which the soul is made up, the 'Circle of the Same', as actually referring to this participated Intellect. That implies, presumably, that, in cognizing an intelligible Form, one grasps the sameness linking individual things, which is a prerequisite for rational discourse.

In his treatise *On the Soul* (cf. in particular §§6–7 Finamore and Dillon), Iamblichus sought to differentiate himself from his predecessors Plotinus, Amelius and Porphyry, on the issue of the relation of the soul with what is above it, postulating a less direct contact with Intellect and the One, and a corresponding need of theurgy, or 'sacramental' ritual, to secure personal salvation. He may thus be reasonably accused of making Platonism much more of a religion, a characteristic which endeared him in particular to the Emperor Julian, a generation after his death. However, all he really seems to be objecting to is the distinctive postulate of Plotinus that an element of the human soul – or, arguably, the *true* human soul – 'remains above', that is, does not in fact lose contact with the intelligible realm. His objections to this are well set out by Proclus at *In Tim.* 3.334.3ff. (= Iambl. *In Tim.* fr. 87), in connection with

an exegesis of *Tim.* 43cd. Iamblichus is not being quite fair to Plotinus here, perhaps, but he professes to fail to see how, if the highest element of our souls actually remains impassive, we could not be cognizant of this:

But if when the best part of us is perfect, then the whole of us is happy (*eudaimon*), what would prevent us all, the whole human race, from being happy at this moment, if the highest part of us is always enjoying intellection, and always turned towards the gods? If the intellect is this highest part, that has nothing to do with the soul. If it is part of the soul, then the rest of the soul must also be happy. (My trans.)

We may note that Iamblichus has no objection to the idea that there may be an element within us which is in touch with the divine realm, so long as that is not postulated to be an element of the soul. Indeed, he himself postulates within us, not just an intellect, but even a correlate of the One, which he terms, the 'One of the soul', or, using Chaldaean terminology, 'the flower of the intellect' (*anthos tou nou*) – presumably signifying the supreme element of intellect, which somehow also transcends it. We hear of this latter through Damascius (*Princ.* §70, 2.104.17ff.), who is quoting from Iamblichus' *Commentary on the Chaldaean Oracles*. Strictly speaking, this *anthos tou nou* is able to cognize only the highest element of the noetic realm, wherein lie the 'monads of the Forms', but that brings it close to the One.

On the other hand, we have from Hermeias (*In Phdr.* 150.24ff. Couvreur = Iambl. *In Phdr.* fr. 6) his exegesis of *Phaedrus* 247c, where the issue is the correct identification of the 'helmsman' (*kubernētēs*) of the soul. Here Iamblichus feels the need to make a distinction between the 'helmsman' and the 'charioteer', and, since the charioteer is plainly the intellectual element of the soul, the helmsman must be something else:

The divine Iamblichus takes the 'helmsman' as being the One of the soul; its intellect is the charioteer. The term 'spectator' (*theatēs*) is used not to signify that it directs its gaze on this object of intellection as being other than it, but that it is united with it and appreciates it on that level. This shows that the 'helmsman' is a more perfect entity than the charioteer and the horses; for it is the essential nature of the One of the soul to be united with the gods. (My trans.)

This identification of the helmsman with a special 'one-like' faculty of the soul implies that the 'realm above the heavens' (*hyperouranios topos*), in which True Being is to be viewed is not just the intelligible world, as intended by Plato, but rather the realm of the One. That is an unnatural interpretation of the text, but one possible for a Platonist to make, if one distinguishes it from the realm in which the heavenly ride of the myth takes place (248a ff.), during which the charioteer (*not* the helmsman) views the Forms. At any rate, that is how Iamblichus is taking it, and for the grasping of it he must postulate

a special faculty of the soul, which would be a source of non-cognitive, or supra-cognitive, contact with the One.

Nonetheless, it is Iamblichus' view that the essence of the soul is quite distinct from that of the intellect. His position emerges forcefully in what remains of his treatise *On the Soul* (e.g., §7), and in certain passages of Pseudo-Simplicius (very probably Priscianus), *In De anima*, which reports his views. What emerges from these latter passages (e.g., *In De an.* 5.38–6.17; 89.33–90.25) is that Iamblichus postulated a truly hybrid essence for the soul. According to the latter passage:

But if, as Iamblichus thinks, a distorted and imperfect activity cannot proceed from an impassible and perfect substance, the soul would be affected somehow even in its essence. Thus also in this way it is a mean not only between the divisible and indivisible, or what remains and what proceeds, or the intellective and the irrational, but also between the ungenerated and the generated. It is ungenerated in accordance with its permanent, intellectual and indivisible aspect, while it is generated in accordance with its procession, divisibility and association with the irrational; it possesses neither its ungenerated aspect purely, as an intellectual entity does, since it is not indivisible or permanent, nor its generated aspect as the lowest entities do, since these never completely exist. (Trans. Finamore and Dillon)

This goes on some way further, driving home Iamblichus' very distinctive view of the soul's median position. The basis of his dispute with Plotinus is not a belief that we cannot attain enlightenment and union with the gods, but rather that we do not start with one foot, so to speak, still in the higher world; we must work our way up to it the hard way, with the help of theurgy, as it is not, strictly speaking, with our soul that we attain this union, but with some higher faculty, the activation of which requires theurgic intervention.

Within the realm of Soul, two salient features which must be noted are Time and Space. On both Iamblichus has distinctive views, relayed to us mainly by Simplicius in his *Commentary on the Physics*, but also by Proclus (= Iamblichus. *In Tim.* frs. 62–8 for Time; fr. 90 for Space). Iamblichus postulates, as a principle governing all particular manifestations of time, what he terms 'transcendent Time' (*exēirēmenos chronos*) as the immediate image of Eternity in the psychic realm. He defines it as 'that which contains and orders the measures of all motion within the cosmos' (fr. 63, from Simplicius), and, in a phrase which caught the attention of Proclus also (fr. 64), 'an order – but not in the sense of being ordered, rather of ordering' (*taxis . . . ou mentoi hē tattomenē, alla hē tattousa*). As for Space, he defines it (fr. 90, from Simplicius) as 'a corporeal power which supports bodies and forces them apart and gathers them up when they fall and collects them together when they are scattered, at once completing them and encompassing them about from all sides'. Between them, Time and

Space serve as the basic conditions which distinguish the realm of Soul from that of Intellect above it. All that is distinctive to Iamblichus here, perhaps, is the postulation of a transcendent Monad of Time, to act as the psychic correlate of Eternity.

It is significant, perhaps, that alone among post-Plotinian Platonist exegetes, Iamblichus does not choose to situate Soul in the third hypothesis of the *Parmenides* (cf. *In Parm.* fr. 2), but places there what he terms 'the higher classes' (of being) – *ta kreittona genē* – comprising angels, *daimones* and heroes, as needing to be found a place in the scheme of things following on Intellect and prior to Soul. Soul he apportions between the fourth and fifth hypotheses, the fourth concerning rational souls, the fifth 'those secondary souls which are woven onto (*proshuphainomenai*) rational souls' – a view of the lower, or irrational, soul which in fact brings him close to Plotinus.

In this connection, we may note Iamblichus' doctrine of the vehicle (*ochēma*) of the soul, which is quite distinctive (cf. *In Tim.* fr. 81), though he is not necessarily the originator of the concept as such (there is some evidence for its featuring, in at least some form, in the thought of some second-century Platonists, such as Atticus and Albinus: Procl. *In Tim.* 3.234.9ff.), and it was certainly a doctrine of Porphyry before him. This concept addresses the problem of the mode of contact between soul and body. Its relation to the irrational soul (*alogos psuchē*) is somewhat fluid, but it is best seen, perhaps, as a sort of 'receptacle' for the 'irrational' functions of the soul (including the passions, sense-perception, and even *phantasia*, or the image-forming capacity). These Plotinus was unwilling on the one hand to situate within the soul proper, but on the other, he seems to have disliked the concept of the *ochēma*, and makes only indirect references to it (e.g., *Enn.* 3.6.5; 4.3.15). Porphyry recognizes it, but regards it as a composite made up of planetary influences picked up like 'tunics' (*chitōnes*) during the soul's descent to embodiment through the heavenly spheres, and dissolving again into the spheres on the soul's ascent. Iamblichus, by contrast, is reported by Proclus (*In Tim.* 3.234, 32ff. = *Iambl. In Tim.* fr. 81) to have maintained the immortality of the *ochēma*, and its creation by the gods themselves, rather than just being formed by accretion from the heavenly bodies. It is less than clear what Iamblichus has in mind here, but it may be that he is asserting that the individual soul retains some archetypal form of 'lower' or sensory soul even in its disembodied state; otherwise we are driven to suppose that the *ochēma* is somehow 'parked' in the upper reaches of the cosmos, awaiting the return of its soul to incarnation. With the former alternative, however, we might see Iamblichus as postulating something like a Platonist equivalent of the Christian 'resurrection body', at least in the form that this doctrine was advanced by such theologians as Origen.

On the question of the soul's relation to the body, Iamblichus has a number of interesting things to say in his *De anima*. At §28. 379 Finamore and Dillon, he makes a distinction between the relation of higher souls to their bodies and those of human souls:

The association of all souls with bodies is not the same. The All-Soul, as Plotinus also believes, holds in itself the body that is appended to it, but it is not itself appended to this body or enveloped by it. Individual souls, on the other hand, attach themselves to bodies, fall under the control of bodies, and come to dwell in bodies that are already overcome by the nature of the universe. The souls of gods adapt their bodies, which imitate intellect, to their own intellectual essence; the souls of the other divine classes direct their vehicles according to their allotment in the cosmos. Furthermore, pure and perfect souls come to dwell in bodies in a pure manner, without passions and without being deprived of intellection, but opposite souls in an opposite manner. (Trans. Finamore and Dillon)

Who are these 'pure and perfect souls', one might ask? We have evidence here, in fact, of an interesting doctrine of Iamblichus, which he elaborates on just below, to the effect that there are fully three distinct modes in which classes of human soul relate to their bodies. The highest (and no doubt far the smallest) group are those who descend 'for the salvation, purification and perfection of this realm'; these are not polluted by their descent. This class, which would no doubt include such great teachers as Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato, are strangely similar to the *boddhisatvas* of the Buddhist tradition. There had of course been a recognition previously, in Pythagorean and Platonist circles, that some souls, notably that of Pythagoras, were special, but such souls had not, so far as we know, been formalized into a class.

The median class, comprising (presumably) the majority of embodied souls, has descended for the purpose of 'exercise and correction of its own character' (*dia gymnasian kai epanorthōsin tōn oikeiōn ēthōn*), implying, certainly, some degree of imperfection and past misbehaviour, but no great guilt; it is rather a portrayal of the normal human condition, as well as a recognition of the role of the physical cosmos as a necessary theatre for the moral and cognitive development of the human soul. Lastly, however, there is the class of those who are sent down here 'for punishment and judgement' (*epi dikēi kai krisei*), a category that may be postulated to explain the existence of apparently naturally evil and perverse individuals – a phenomenon addressed also by Plotinus in the course of his treatise *On Providence* 3.2–3 (cf. e.g., 3.2.4; 13). A similar three-way division is set out in *Myst.* 5.18:

The great mass of men, on the one hand, is subject to the domination of nature, and is ruled by natural forces, and directs its gaze downwards towards the works of nature, and fulfils the decrees of fate, and takes upon itself the order of what is brought about by

fate, and always employs practical reasoning (*praktikos logismos*) solely about natural phenomena. A certain few individuals, on the other hand, employing an intellectual power which is beyond the natural (*huperphuei tini dunamei tou nou chrōmenoi*), have disengaged themselves from nature, and turned towards the transcendent and pure intellect, at the same time rendering themselves superior to natural forces. There are some, finally, who conduct themselves in the middle area between nature and pure mind, some following after each of them in turn, others pursuing a mode of life which is a blend of both, and others again who have freed themselves from the inferior level and are transferring their attention to the better. (Trans. Clarke, Dillon and Hershbell)

These divisions are similar, as I say, to those in the *De anima*, but not identical. In particular, the lower two classes are presented somewhat differently, the lowest seeming here to comprise the general run of human beings, while the median class (here subdivided, oddly, into three sub-classes) seems to represent a class of intellectuals who, while not yet accomplished theurgists, are capable of moving in that direction; and no class is represented as seriously sinful. We may see here, perhaps, the outcome of a good deal of speculation, in later Platonist circles, as to the reasons for differences in moral and intellectual capacity between human beings.

Apart from gods and mortal souls, the Iamblichean universe is replete with various grades of intermediate being, termed collectively *ta kreittona genē*, ‘the superior classes (of being)’, such as he saw as being the subject of the Third Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*. If we turn to his comprehensive discussion of the various grades of intermediate being in book 2 of the *De mysteriis*, we find first a broad distinction being made between *daimones* and heroes (2.1–2), which may perhaps owe something to the much earlier (and now lost) treatise of Posidonius *On Daemons and Heroes*. Iamblichus identifies *daimones* as representing ‘the generative and creative powers of the gods’, while heroes represent ‘their life-giving powers, which are directive of human beings’. The contrast here seems to be between the bestowal of bare existence and that of life; at any rate, Iamblichus states that the powers of *daimones* extend further into the cosmos than those of heroes, who are concerned specifically with the organization of souls (*hē tōn psuchōn diataxis*).

This, however, is only a preliminary to a far more elaborate set of distinctions which he produces (2.3ff.), in response to a query of Porphyry’s as to how to distinguish the epiphanies of the various classes of higher being. We are now presented with a succession of archangels, angels, *daimones*, heroes and two levels of sublunary archon, occupying the space between gods and men, each with their distinct essences, potencies and activities.

To go into the details of these would be beyond the proper scope of this survey, but we should note another feature of Iamblichus’ daimonology that is

distinctive, and which indeed seems to bring him near to certain Gnostic beliefs. We are informed by a scholion on Plato's *Sophist* (= Iambl. *In Soph.* fr. 1 Dillon) that Iamblichus held that the subject of the dialogue, that is to say, the Sophist, is the sublunary Demiurge. This being is portrayed as a figure who presides over the realm of nature, which he has created as a snare and delusion for souls who descend into it, but from which they can free themselves through philosophy and the exercise of dialectic (cf. Plotinus' exaltation of the role of dialectic in *Enn.* 1.3). To that extent he can be described not only as an 'image-maker' and 'sorcerer', but also as a 'purifier of souls' (*kathartēs psuchōn*). This figure may reasonably be assimilated to the 'greatest daemon' (*megistos daimōn*) whom John Laurentius Lydus (*De mens.* 83.13ff.) reports Iamblichus, in book 1 of his work *On the Descent of the Soul* (a work which doubtless elaborated on many of the themes that we have just been discussing), as placing over three tribes of sublunary daemons, and equating with Plouton or Hades. Here we find a somewhat different (though not necessarily incompatible) scheme to that set out in the *De mysteriis*:

According to Iamblichus, the tribe of *daimones* below the moon is divided into three classes. Of these that nearest to the earth is punitive (*timōron*), that in the air is purificatory (*kathartikon*), and that nearest to the zone of the Moon is salvific (*sōtērion*) – this class we know also as heroes. All these are said to be ruled over by a certain supreme *daimon*, who is probably to be identified with Plouton. (My trans.)

That this sublunary realm is in fact the realm of Hades/Plouton is a belief attested within Platonism as early as Xenocrates in the Old Academy (fr. 213 Isnardi Parente), so that is not, as such, an innovation, but the equating of Hades with the Sophist, and the accompanying description of his modes of deception, may indeed be original to Iamblichus.

An issue connected with the sublunary realm, and its relation to what is above it, is the doctrine of Fate, Providence and Free Will, and on this we may derive some enlightenment from various of Iamblichus' *Letters*, notably those to Macedonius, to Poemenius and to Iamblichus' own senior pupil Sopater. This topic, as Iamblichus sees it, primarily concerns the realm of Nature, which may be taken as that lower aspect of the World Soul which concerns itself with the generation and administration of the physical world. It is at this level that we find the sphere of operations of Fate (*heimarmenē*).

In the *Letter to Macedonius* (*Letter* 8 Dillon and Pollechner), we are faced to all appearances with a strictly determined world, on the Stoic model – as indeed one finds also in Plotinus (e.g., *Enn.* 3.2–3); but Iamblichus is also at pains to emphasize that the soul *in itself*, insofar as it emancipates itself from worldly influences and concerns, 'contains within itself a free and independent

life' (fr. 2). This is in fact more or less in accord with the doctrine of Plotinus, who also holds that what is for him the 'higher' soul is free from the bonds of Fate, though it is really only free to assent to the order of the universe. For Iamblichus, Fate itself is dependent on Providence (*pronoia*), which is a benign force guiding the higher, intelligible realm, of reality. In fr. 4, their relationship is set out as follows:

For indeed, to speak generally, the movements of Destiny (*peprōmenē*) around the cosmos are assimilated to the immaterial and intellectual activities and circuits, and its order is assimilated to the good order of the intelligible and transcendent realm. And the secondary causes are dependent on the primary causes, and the multiplicity attendant upon generation on the undivided substance, and the whole sum of things subject to Fate is thus connected to the dominance of Providence. In its very substance, then, Fate is enmeshed with Providence, and Fate exists by virtue of the existence of Providence, and it derives its existence from it and within its ambit.

This is all expressed in fairly impersonal terms, as is also the case in the *Letter to Sopater* (*Letter 12*), but in the *Letter to Poemenius* (*Letter 11*), we actually find an assertion of the benign guidance of Fate by the gods, to an extent that seems to accord more with theology than philosophy:

The gods, in upholding Fate, direct its operation throughout the universe; and this sound direction of theirs brings about sometimes a lessening of evils, sometimes a mitigation of their effects, on occasion even their removal. On this principle, then, Fate is disposed to the benefit of the good, but in this disposing does not reveal itself fully to the disorderly nature of the realm of generation.

We seem to discern here a role, though that is not stated in the present context, for the operations of theurgy.

We may now turn to a consideration of his ethical doctrines. Basically, Iamblichus does not deviate from the relatively austere, Stoicizing (as opposed to Peripateticizing) tendency in ethical theory advanced by Plotinus, and thereafter more or less universal in later Platonism, tending, for example, to the extirpation rather than the moderation of the passions, and advocating of 'assimilation to God' (*homoioōsis theōi*) – presumably with the assistance of theurgy – as the purpose (*telos*) of human life. In what remains of his *Letters*, we find many ethical sentiments expressed, on a relatively popular level, but there is little that is remarkable. He writes to his senior disciple Sopater on Virtue, on Ingratitude, and on Bringing Up Children, to Asphalius on Wisdom (*phronēsis*), to the lady Arete on Moderation, to Anatolius on Justice, and to Olympius on Courage. In the last instance, we find him making a good Platonic distinction between courage 'in the strictest sense', which is constituted by 'the sameness and stable condition of the intellect in itself', and that courage which derives from this higher kind,

which is concerned with the control of the passions in the area of what is and what is not to be feared. This seems to owe something to Plotinus' distinction of higher and lower levels of virtue in *Enn.* 1.2, as well as to Plato's *Laches*.

It is in fact Iamblichus' theory of the grades of virtue, itself merely a further elaboration of that propounded by Porphyry in *Sent.* §32, which constitutes perhaps his most distinctive contribution to late Platonic ethical theory. We learn of this from the so-called 'B' Commentary on the *Phaedo*, attributed to Damascius (113.14ff. Norvin). Iamblichus sets out a sequence of fully seven grades of virtue, amplifying Porphyry's four at either end. Prior to Porphyry's (and Plotinus') 'civic' level, he lists the 'natural' and the 'ethical', the former being those attributable to animals (e.g., lions are naturally courageous, storks just, and cranes wise), the latter to well-brought-up children and non-reflective adults; and, to cap Porphyry's highest level, the 'paradigmatic', Iamblichus postulates the 'hieratic', proper to the accomplished theurgist, who has attained union with the gods. In between these are the Porphyrian four levels, the civic, the purificatory, the theoretic and the paradigmatic.

Iamblichus' contributions to the development of logic are not of great significance, despite his composition of a commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*. He lavishes praise on the dialectic method in two letters, those to his pupil Dexippus (who himself composed a brief commentary on the *Categories*) and to Sopater, both *On Dialectic*, but in his commentary he is mainly concerned with defending Aristotle's coherence and correctness against the attacks of the earlier anti-Aristotelian Platonist tradition, including Plotinus in *Enn.* 6.1–3. The other salient characteristic of his exegesis of the *Categories* is what Simplicius terms his *noera theoria*, or 'transcendental interpretation', which essentially consists in trying to show that, contrary to what Plotinus would maintain, Aristotle's list of categories is true, in an analogical way, for all levels of reality. One example of this approach may suffice. It concerns Aristotle's assertion, at *Cat.* 4b20, that 'of quantities, some are discrete, others continuous' (*Simpl. In Cat.* 135.8ff. = fr. 37 Larsen):

Since the power of the One, from which all quantity derives, extends identically through all things, and demarcates each thing in its procession from itself, in so far as it penetrates totally indivisibly through all things, it generates the continuous, and in so far as it performs a single and indivisible procession without interval; whereas in so far as it halts in its procession at each of the forms and defines each and makes each of them one, in this aspect it produces the discrete. So in virtue of being the single dominant causal principle of these two activities it produces the two types of quantity.

Such an interpretation of the *Categories* might well be said to pertain rather more to metaphysics than to logic proper, but, as we can see from various remarks in

his letters to Dexippus and to Sopater, Iamblichus sees logic, or at least dialectic, as very much a means of reconnecting us to the intelligible world, and even to the One. The opening section of his *Letter to Sopater on Dialectic* (fr. 1 Dillon) makes his position clear:

All men employ dialectic, since this power is innate in them from their earliest years, at least in some degree, though some have a larger share of it than others. Something that is a gift of the gods [cf. *Phlb.* 16c] should by no means be cast aside, but should rather be fortified by practice and experience and technical training. For behold how during one's whole life it continues to be outstandingly useful: in one's encounters with one's fellow-men, for addressing them in accordance with the common notions (*koinai ennoiai*) and opinions; in investigating in the arts and sciences, for discovering the first principles of each; for calculating, prior to each action, how one should proceed; and for providing marvellous methods of preliminary training for the various philosophical sciences. (My trans.)

There is, of course, nothing particularly distinctive here. Iamblichus' position is very much a development of that taken up by Plotinus in *Ennead* 1.3; but it is an indication that logic was by no means neglected in the curriculum of his school.

3 IAMBlichus' SCHOOL

It is plain, from Eunapius' account, that when Iamblichus finally settled in Apamea, possibly under the patronage of his pupil Sopater, as mentioned earlier, quite a group of followers gathered round him, constituting what can reasonably be described as a school. It is even possible that the site of this school has been discovered by the current excavators of Apamea, in a large villa which boasts a fine mosaic of Socrates and the Seven Sages. At any rate, we learn from Eunapius (*Vit. Soph.* 458–9) that Iamblichus owned, or had the use of, more than one suburban villa. As to the school itself, we may quote Eunapius (*ibid.*):

He had a multitude of disciples, and those who desired learning flocked to him from all parts. And it is hard to decide who among them was the most distinguished, for Sopater the Syrian was of their number, a man who was most eloquent both in discourse and in writing; and Aedesius and Eustathius from Cappadocia; while from Greece came Theodoros and Euphrasius, men of superlative virtue, and a crowd of other men not inferior in their powers of oratory, so that it seemed marvellous that he should satisfy them all.

Apart from those mentioned here, we know of Dexippus, author of a short question-and-answer commentary on the *Categories*, to whom, as mentioned above, Iamblichus dedicates a letter, and whom Simplicius describes (*In Cat.*

2.25) as *ho Iamblicheios*; and a certain Hierius, teacher, along with Aedesius, of the notorious Maximus of Ephesus, one of Julian's chief gurus (Ammonius, *In An. Pr.* 31.16). The school in Apamea seems to have survived well enough as long as Licinius had control of the East (and indeed we have a series of interesting letters to Iamblichus, preserved among the letters of Julian, from an unknown former pupil who was on Licinius' staff), but after his defeat at the hands of Constantine in 324 it would seem that things became more difficult, and ultimately the school had to disperse. Sopater met a violent death in 326 through going off to Constantinople and getting mixed up in imperial politics, and it was left to Aedesius to carry on after Iamblichus' death. He moved the school to Pergamum, where he doubtless felt more comfortable, and he was succeeded on his death by Eustathius. Eustathius was a correspondent of St Basil (*Letter 1*, dated 357), at which time we find him established at Caesarea in Cappadocia, though the letter refers to his travels to Egypt and even to Persia.

We do not know how long the direct Iamblichean succession survived in Asia Minor, but more interesting, though still mysterious, is the question of what the link may have been between Iamblichus and the Athenian school of Plutarch, Syrianus and Proclus. There is on the one hand the figure of Theodorus of Asine (presumably the Theodorus from Greece mentioned by Eunapius), but he in later times became quite critical of Iamblichus (cf. Julian, *Ep.* 12 Bidez, to Priscus), establishing an allegiance rather to Plotinus' elder pupil Amelius, many of whose distinctive formulations he adopted. About Euphrasius we know nothing more, but the Priscus to whom Julian is writing in *Letter 12* is a possible candidate for passing distinctively Iamblichean doctrines on to Plutarch, and so to Syrianus. At any rate, it is plain that for the Athenian School the most significant figure among their immediate predecessors was Iamblichus, both for his adoption of theurgy and for the greatly increased elaboration of his metaphysical scheme, which seemed to them to do justice to the true complexity of the intelligible world. As Proclus presents the situation, in his commentaries on the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides*, the majority of Syrianus' distinctive exegetical positions are essentially elaborations of Iamblichean doctrines. Iamblichus may thus be regarded as the true father, for what that is worth, of later, post-Plotinian, Platonism.

4 A NOTE ON THEURGY

In the body of this chapter, the role of theurgical theory and practice in the thought of Iamblichus has been rather played down, as having, in my view, been in the past given too prominent a role in his philosophy, but it cannot at the same time be denied that Iamblichus himself accorded quite a prominent role

to the practice of rituals in ensuring the efficacy of philosophical speculation; and this after all reminds us that, for later Platonists, Platonism was a religion as well as a philosophical system.

There is a notable passage in Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis* which makes the point well:

Granting, then, that ignorance and deception are faulty and impious, it does not follow from this that the offerings properly made to the gods, and divine procedures (*theia erga*), are invalid, for it is not (primarily) intellectual activity (*ennoia*) that connects theurgists to the gods. Indeed what, then, would prevent those who are theoretical philosophers from enjoying theurgic union with the gods? In fact, however, the situation is quite otherwise: it is rather the correct performance of acts not to be divulged and beyond all conception, and the power of unutterable symbols, understood by the gods alone, that establishes theurgic union. (trans. Clarke, Dillon and Hershbell, lightly emended)

There is no doubt something of a polemical edge to this pronouncement, and Iamblichus is making it in the guise of a senior Egyptian priest, but nonetheless it will serve well enough as a manifesto for the sort of 'sacramental theology' which Iamblichus thought it proper to embrace as an essential aspect of his philosophical system. As he is careful to specify to Porphyry, however (see his extended exposition in *De Myst.* 1.11–12), the performance of such rituals is not to be taken as implying that the gods can in any way be constrained to do one's bidding – that is the pretension of 'vulgar' magicians. Rather, the gods, out of their infinite benevolence, are pleased to respond to rituals correctly performed, and performed with a suitably respectful attitude. Theurgy, in fact, is really a means of organizing the natural *sympatheia* of the world to concord with the benevolent providence of the gods. It may be viewed, therefore, as a sort of theologized science.