Οὐδένεια and *humilitas*: Nature and Function of Humility in Iamblichus and Augustine[1]

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Augustine's relationship to Neoplatonism has been the object of much philosophical and historical debate. The lines have been drawn in various ways, but generally the bishop has been opposed to and compared with Plotinus and Porphyry only, at times adding Apuleius of Madauros. The most striking differences were seen in his teachings on God and creation, on Christ and his humanity and humility, on the Church and the sacraments and, above all, on grace.

This article tries to introduce a comparison between Augustine and Iamblichus as principle exponent of the Eastern Neoplatonists. There seems to be no proof of any direct or even indirect literary connection between them. Denis O'Brien suspects that Augustine may have come upon Iamblichan interpretations of Aristotle's *Categories*, but the similarities remain too vague to prove direct literary dependence.[2] Fredouille's discussion of divine wrath in both authors also has not been able to shed more light on their relation.[3] Augustine knew Iamblichus' name (probably from manuals

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2. Cf. D. O'Brien, "«Pondus meus amor meus» (conf. XII 9.10): Saint Augustin et Jamblique," *Studia Patristica* 16 (= *Texte und Untersuchungen* 129) (1985): 524–27.

3. Cf. J.-C. Fredouille, "Sur la colère divine: Jamblique et Augustin Demiurgy," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 5 (1968): 7–13; Augustine, *De civitate Dei* (*civ.*) 22.2.1; Iamblichus, *myst.* 1.13, 43,2–8. *De mysteriis* (*myst.*) and *Protrepticus* (*protr.*) are cited according to Des Places, adding the respective line numbers of his editions (Jamblique, *Protreptique*, ed. É. des Places SJ, Collection des Universités de France (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1989); Jamblique, *Les mystères d'Égypte*, ed. É. des Places, Collection des Universités de France (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, ³1996), in pages (and line numbers) for *myst.* he reproduces Parthey: Iamblichus, *De mysteriis liber,* Ad fidem codicum manu scriptorum recognovit G. Parthey (Amsterdam: A.M. Hakkert, 1965); for *De vita Pythagorica* (*pyth.*) we use Jamblich, *Pythagoras. Legende-Lehre-Lebensgestaltung*,

or from his Neoplatonic contacts in Milan, Rome or later in Africa[4]). Both of them engaged in polemical controversy with Porphyry. Augustine never associated Neoplatonic theurgical practices with Iamblichus' name.[5]

Against the backdrop of the Plotino-Porphyrian tradition, our investigation attempts to elucidate Iamblichus' doctrine on the principle of 'humility' as based on his concept of the soul, and to ask in what sense Augustine would and could rightly have accused Iamblichus of the same *superbia* as Porphyry. The results of this comparison will aid in a greater appreciation of Eastern Neoplatonism and its theurgical interest as philosophically serious and will bring out more precisely the differences between the Iamblichan and the Augustinian responses to fundamental religious and philosophical problems.

I. Iamblichus the Divine

The "(most) divine" Iamblichus was born in the early 240s AD in Chalcis ad Belum (Syria) and died around 325, ignored or hated by the Church Fathers, venerated by the Later Neoplatonists. His son Ariston married Amphicleia, a student of Plotinus (204/5–270).[6] Thus, he is not much younger than Porphyry (232–305), "which perhaps explains the rather uneasy pupil-teacher relationship they appear to have enjoyed."[7] Their contro-

Eingeleitet, übersetzt und mit interpretierenden Essays versehen von M. von Albrecht, J. Dillon, M. George, M. Lurje, D.S. du Toit, Texte zur Forschung, Sapere 4 (Darmstadt: WBG, 2002); for *De communi mathematica scientia* (*math.*), Iamblichus, *De communi mathematica scientia liber.* Ed. N. Festa, editionem addendis et corrigendis adiunctis cur. U. Klein. Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1975); for *Theologumena arithmeticae* (*theol.arith.*), [Iamblichus] *Theologumena arithmeticae.* Ed. V. de Falco, editionem addendis et corrigendis adiunctis cur. U. Klein. Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana. (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1975); for *De anima* (*an.*), Iamblichus, *De Anima.* Text, Translation, and Commentary by J.F. Finamore and J.M. Dillon, Philosophia Antiqua 92 (Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill, 2002); for the fragmentary commentaries on Plato's dialogues, *Iamblichi Chalcidensis in Platonis dialogos commentariorum fragmenta,* ed. J.M. Dillon, Philosophia Antiqua 23 (Leiden: Brill, 1973); unless stated otherwise, the text of Augustine's works is from the *Corpus Christianorum,* for *epistulae* (*ep.*) from *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum,* for *Sermones* (*s.*) still from *Patrologia Latina.*

4. Cf. O'Brien, "Pondus meus amor meus" 526; R. Dodaro, "Theurgy," *Augustine through the Ages. An Encyclopedia,* ed. A. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 827f.

5. *Civ.* 8.12; cf. e.g., *De vera religione* (*vera rel.*) 4.7; *Confessiones* (*conf.*) 10.42.67; *ep.* 118.5.33; 235; *De trinitate* (*trin.*) 4.10.13.

6. Cf. J. Dillon, Iamblichus of Chalcis (c. 240–325 A.D.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II.36.2, ed. W. Haase and H. Temporini (Berlin-New York: de Gruyter, 1987) 862–909, esp. 865f (Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 9); Proclus, *The Elements of Theology.* A Revised Text with Translation, Introduction and Commentary by E.R. Dodds, 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963) xxii; G. O'Daly, "Jamblich," *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 16 (1994): 1243–59, esp. 1255f.

7. Finamore-Dillon, Iamblichus, *De Anima* 2.

versy which can be dated to the end of the third century comes out in Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo* to which Iamblichus responds in his *De mysteriis*.[8]

For a proper understanding of Iamblichus' particular standpoint within the (Neo-) Platonic tradition it is necessary to keep three points in mind: he saw himself as conservative and as true to the history of (Platonic) philosophy;[9] therefore, he proposed an understanding of theurgy and its relation to philosophy that consciously deviated from Porphyry; and he opposed Porphyry's interpretation of Plotinus to whose teaching he had access partially independent of Porphyry perhaps through his own family.

II. The Hierarchical Character of Iamblichus' Works and Thought

We cannot say when exactly Iamblichus wrote his ten volumes on the teachings of the Pythagoreans. What we know is that the first two volumes, *De vita Pythagorica* and *Protrepticus,* are logically consecutive[10] and, as I will try to show, are built upon the foundations laid in *De mysteriis.*

This interrelation of his different works must be taken into account when reading him with the honest intention of appreciating his doctrines. Iamblichus' exclusive interest in theurgy in *De mysteriis* and his collected invitations to the philosophical life in *Protrepticus* must be understood as steps on a spiritual and philosophical journey. *De vita Pythagorica* presents the philosophical life as a gradual process, and Iamblichus directs his writings to readers on different stages. Within his hierarchical philosophical system and pedagogical programme, *De mysteriis* must be taken seriously and read philosophically, as a kind of "fundamental theology" on which his whole system rests.[11]

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8. The original title is in *myst.* prol. 1,1-3: Ἀβάμμωνος διδασκάλου πρὸς τὴν Πορφυρίου πρὸς Ἀνεβὼ ἐπιστολὴν ἀπόκρισις καὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ ἀπορημάτων λύσεις. For Iamblichus' life cf. Finamore-Dillon, Iamblichus, *De Anima* 1–10; Des Places, Jamblique, *Protreptique* 1–4; Dillon, "Jamblich; Leben und Werke," Jamblich, *Pythagoras, Legende – Lehre – Lebensgestaltung* 11–21. The fundamental article is A. Cameron, "The Date of Iamblichus' Birth," *Hermes* 96 (1969): 374–76.

9. Cf. W.J. Hankey, "Philosophy as Way of Life for Christians?," *Laval théologique et philosophique* 59 (2003): 193–224, here 202f.

10. *Protr.* 1, 40,4–6.

11. Cf. articles on Iamblichus in *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature,* ed. C. Howartson (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 293; and in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church,* ed. F.L. Cross, 3rd edition ed. E.A. Livingstone (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 814 [both articles do not understand the fundamental value of *De mysteriis*]; more adequate remarks in G.W. Bowersock, P. Brown, O. Grabar, *Late Antiquity. A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press, 2000) 86.

Iamblichus' *Weltanschauung* is systematically hierarchical.[12] His plan of education, a systematic study of the Platonic dialogues dealing with different layers of reality according to the stages of intellectual and spiritual development of the student under a teacher's guidance, corresponds to a hierarchical universe.[13]

The soul has her special place in the hierarchy of beings, yet Iamblichus can also speak of souls that "lead upwards" and reach higher orders, or on the other side, of souls "leading downwards" and "nailing the souls to their bodies."[14] The soul is not identical with her body, although her individual fate depends on her relation to her body in this or a past life.[15] The fundamental differentiation between universal and particular soul, however, is emphasized,[16] the latter being embodied and under the dominion of both punitive and material *daimons*.

The human, thanks to his rational faculty, is superior to material *daimons*, although they enjoy greater power.[17] Theurgy, therefore, has a twofold face: human, in so far as *daimons* are called on as superior beings, and divine, insofar as by using divine symbols the theurgist "puts on the vestments of the gods" and becomes able to give orders to the (inferior) 'daimonic' energies.[18] "The theurgist was simultaneously man and god," but only insofar as the theurgists became empowered by the gods acting through them, "their souls, *qua* theurgic, were equal to these divinities."[19]

The metaphysical structure of the universe in Iamblichus defines both the way and the method the soul has to follow. The various higher classes each have their proper effect on the soul or body of a human being.[20] For

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12. *Myst.* 1.5, 15,5–17,7; *myst.* 2.3–9, 70,9–90,6; 5.14, 217,4–8; 2.7, 83,15–84,4; 8.2–3, 261,9–265,10. Cf. outlines in G. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul. The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, Hermeneutics, Studies in the History of Religion (University Park: Penn. State UP, 1995) 78f.

13. Cf. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul* 38.

14. *Myst.* 2.6, 83,3; cf. Plato, *Phaidon* 83d 2.

15. *Protr.* 13.12, 97,17–98,11.

16. *Myst.* 2.7, 84,6–20.

17. *Myst.* 4.2, 183,1–19; cf. 2.3, 72,12–73,5; 73,6–74,6; 2.4, 74,11–75,10; cf. Jamblichus, *Über die Geheimlehren,* Aus dem Griechischen übersetzt, eingeleitet und erklärt von Th. Hopfner (Hildesheim: Olms, 1987) 201f, n. 31; Dillon, Iamblichus of Chalcis 899–902.

18. *Myst.* 4.2, 184,1–13, cf. 6.6, 246,16–247,2: the theurgist commanding cosmic powers by symbols *as if* in order of gods. But no one can *force* the gods (*myst.* 6.7, 249,2–8); cf. J.M. Rist, "Pseudo-Dionysius, Neoplatonism and the Weakness of the Soul," *From Athens to Chartres. Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought*, Studies in Honour of E. Jeauneau, ed. H.J. Westra (Leiden: Brill, 1992) 135–61, esp. 144.

19. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul* 51; 67; cf. *myst.* 1.12, 41,4–11; 2.6, 83,3–6; Rist, "Pseudo-Dionysius, Neoplatonism and the Weakness of the Soul" 144.

20. *Myst.* 2.9, 86,14–90,2. The doctrine is also in Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 111–13 [ed. P. Caramello (Turin: Marietti, 1962–63) I 522–534] and in Bonaventure's *Itinerarium*.

theurgy, as a reintegration of soul, and the divine will (behind it) have to encompass all the manifold divided 'lives' into which the embodied soul has fallen. Therefore, she must follow *all* the steps according to the hierarchy of being(s), beginning at the material level, otherwise no ascent to the immaterial is possible.[21] Performing purely spiritual sacrifices as Porphyry had recommended is adequate and attainable only for a tiny minority.[22] This elite, however, cannot have been selected by any other criterion than the successful performance of all material steps of ritual *before* becoming capable of spiritual cult. We must read *Protrepticus* on the theurgical principles of *De mysteriis*: Iamblichus acknowledges the inescapable difficulties for a philosophical life here on earth,[23] but these obstacles do not keep us from philosophy absolutely.[24] Not only after death, but even now there is a "heavenly way" to true philosophy.[25]

As a consequence of the necessary theurgical foundation for philosophy, Iamblichus distinguishes a "double state" of the soul:

1) As "wholly soul" and when "outside the body," we are raised up by *Nous* and wander/live in the heights with the immaterial gods.[26] This state is attained by very few, who by an immaterial cult are connected to the higher, immaterial energies. This perfection of the soul means assimilation and association with the gods, their purity and immortality, their essence and "revolution."[27] Hymnic Pythagorean symbols can promise that the humans become an "immortal god";[28] but philosophically speaking, Iamblichus maintains the gods' superiority and remaining difference compared to human souls.[29]

2) When in the body, we need a material cult. In this normal state, both peoples and individuals are connected materially to the material energies. If we leave out this step, neither material nor immaterial goods will be attained.[30]

21. *Myst.* 5.14, 217,3–11.
22. *Myst.* 5.15, 219,8–16; 5.18, 223,10f. 16f, cf. Porphyry, *De abstinentia* II 34, 163,15–164,11; II 45, 174,17–18 [*Porphyrii Opuscula Selecta*, ed. A. Nauck (Leipzig: Teubner 1886; Hildesheim-New York: Olms, 1977)].
23. *Protr.* 12.4, 89,26–90,1; 13.5f, 92,24–94,1.
24. *Protr.* 12.4, 90,1f.
25. *Protr.* 12.5, 90,5–7.
26. *Myst.* 5.15, 219,1–220,18.
27. *Protr.* 3.3, 44,14–16; 3.11, 48,8–10.
28. *Protr.* 3.11, 48,7.
29. *Protr.* 21.10 [sym. 4], 137,5–80.
30 *Myst.* 5.15, 220,13–17.

Iamblichus does not categorically condemn bodily ritual for our bodily needs.[31] In it, material *daimons* work on (our) bodies, and higher divinities operate *by means of* the material.[32] On the way up, the correspondence between the gods worshipped, the condition of the worshipping soul and the ritual and matter used in the cultic activity will always (have to) be maintained.[33] However, cultic life or theological thought must not be made to serve worldly cares; higher forms of theurgy can always reach down to the lower realms, but never *vice versa.*[34]

According to this 'law of correspondence,' not only must divinity and ritual be in agreement, but also the worshipping human (and the desired effects). Iamblichus distinguishes:[35]

(1) A small number, governed by the supernatural power of *Nous*, separated from nature: rational, immaterial ritual [possible readers of *Protrepticus* and *De anima*];

(2) Those in the middle, between *Physis* und *Nous* and using both material and spiritual forms of cult [*De vita Pythagorica*];

(3) Those freeing themselves from material bonds: cult according to nature and bodies [*De mysteriis*].

The highest, immaterial level of cult contains all (the lower) levels. Iamblichus stresses that only "very few" will reach this level, confessing that one may be happy to reach it at the end of one's life. He seems to include himself in this number, especially as he states that the intention of his work is to provide guidelines for those still needing a rule.[36]

The law requiring that we begin ritual ascent at the lowest level is further explained by the presence of the highest in the lowest level. The "Father and Creator" makes, inspires and preserves even the material world which, insofar as it is able to contain the divine, becomes a suitable medium for cult. The (higher) gods can even reach down to the lower levels and give "divine matter" to the theurgists directly.[37]

1. The Middle Position

Iamblichus separates soul from both Intellect and higher classes, introducing differentiations and gradations within the realm of the Intelligible

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31. *Myst.* 5.16, 221,1–222,3; 5.17, 222,19–223,9.
32. *Myst.* 5.17, 222,4–19.
33. Cf. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul* 56.
34. *Protr.* 21.6 [sym. 1], 135,11–22.
35. *Myst.* 5.18-19, 223,10–226,20.
36. *Myst.* 5.22, 230,15–231,17.
37. *Myst.* 5.23, 232,1–234,14.

(νοητόν) which for Plotinus was all homogeneous (ὁμοούσιον).[38] Against Plotinus' separation of higher and lower soul in order to explain her different activities, Iamblichus emphasizes her unity. His explanation for the tensions in the soul's activities insists on her middle position "between the world of becoming and the imperishable Being."[39]

For Iamblichus, the soul really *is* the self,[40] or at least what is closest to the self and its seat, the divine and good element.[41] She is able to gain wisdom, contemplation and understanding because "the divine" (τὸ θεῖον) has put in herself "the structure of universal reason containing the ideas of all beings and the meanings of all names and words."[42] There are obviously more powers or parts in the human soul, yet her unity is guaranteed by the one supreme principle. Only if this divine and spiritual part rules, can humans become happy.[43] The human soul's characteristic is her receptivity for "theoretical wisdom" which only the gods possess in and by themselves.[44] The basic capacity cannot be lost, but it can be corrupted *or* perfected.[45] Living in accordance with the divine element is the only liberation from chance, the way to self-possession and to one's true and indestructible identity which rests on the soul's relation to god.[46]

Nonetheless Iamblichus' answer to the problem of the soul's condition turns out to be the real problem. For letting the soul descend entirely, she necessarily becomes subject to change, as a whole, in her essence,[47] "without, however, losing its identity."[48] Steel has meticulously reconstructed Iamblichus' doctrine in such a way as to make clear that the Plotinian tensions in the soul's life and activities have (only) been shifted. With Iamblichus, the problem has become how we are able to ascribe to the entirely descended soul a double substance, capable of change but not changing entirely, holding thus a middle position between unchangeable higher and completely

38. Plotinus, *Enneads* IV 7 [2] 10,19 [*Plotini Opera,* ed. P. Henry and H.F- Schwyzer, Scriptorum Classicorum Biblitheca Oxoniensis (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977) II,159]; cf. Dillon, Iamblichus of Chalcis 885–90.

39. Cf. C.G. Steel, *The Changing Self. A Study on the Soul in Later Neoplatonism: Iamblichus, Damascius and Priscianus* (Brussels: Paleis der Academiën, 1978) 33, cf. 23–45.

40. *Protr.* 5.10, 59,26.

41. *Protr.* 5.7, 58,23.

42. *Protr.* 4.6, 51,21–24: τὸ τοῦ παντὸς λόγου σύστημα, ἐν ᾧ καὶ τὰ εἴδη πάντα τῶν ὄντων καὶ αἱ σημασίαι ἐνυπάρχουσι τῶν ὀνομάτων τε καὶ ῥημάτων; cf. 4.5, 51,4–6.

43. *Protr.* 5.16, 21f.

44 *Protr.* 5.25, 67,3–5, cf. 8.8, 78,15–21.

45 *Protr.* 16,2f, 110,14–111,17.

46 *Protr.* 5.25, 67,15–17; cf. 5.25, 67,7–19.

47 Cf. Steel, *The Changing Self* 50 n.67 (Damascius, *In Parmenidem* II 254,2–10).

48. Steel, *The Changing Self* 52.

changeable mortal beings.[49] The soul's substance is revealed by her activities and is therefore "somehow differentiated in itself and relaxed"; the soul is "*broken also in its substance.*"[50] "[Y]et however fallen the soul may be, it is still divine by its very nature, and god's task, essentially, is to clean it up, often by freeing it from the body and the bodily."[51] Iamblichus' language becomes paradoxical and even fully self-contradictory unless understood against the background of his doctrine of the soul's median position.

Μεσότης and change κατ᾽ οὐσίαν can only be ascribed to the embodied soul which "never escapes the contradictions which define its essence and is a *contradictio oppositorum.* Therefore, any opinion which does not give full justice to this tension within the soul must be rejected."[52] Due to the inter-relatedness of body and soul, there can be a kind of mutual influence, even if we have to allow that the movement always starts from or is led by the soul, or the gods, and aims at the soul, even if it goes through the body. The concrete outcome in any case will be a change in the whole human composite: a "truly musical" person, cultivating bodily harmony for the sake of the symphony in the soul.[53]

According to Simplicius, Iamblichus held that the soul is able both to descend (not simply "fall") into the sensible and also to ascend to the imitation of the intellectual, alternately.[54] The soul, standing ontologically between (ἐν μεσότητι) the extreme levels of life, seems to be free and able to move between them, to come close and similar to either without, however, losing her 'median' state, participating in both limit-states. The obvious paradox in ascribing contradictory qualities to the human soul is softened by qualifying particles (ποτε, ὡς, οἷόν τε, πως, τρόπον τινα). Even Iamblichus seems to hit the borders of language when trying to express his views on the soul's shifting conditions and qualities of essence.

Iamblichus insists that, despite all mutability, the soul never loses identity. In every "going out" (πρόοδος) she maintains her "remaining" (μονή), as median she remains and proceeds as a whole at the same time.[55] Thus, the

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49. Cf. Steel, *The Changing Self* 57, n. 19 (Priscianus, *Metaphrasis* 32,13–19).

50. Steel, *The Changing Self* 58f (his italics) (Priscianus, *Metaphrasis* 241,7; 220,2–15) cf. 52–61.

51. Rist, "Pseudo-Dionysius, Neoplatonism and the Weakness of the Soul" 157.

52. Steel, *The Changing Self* 64.

53. *Protr.* 5.17, 64,12–14.

54. Cf. Finamore-Dillon, Iamblichus, *De Anima* 232 (Simplicius, *In De anima* 5.38–6.17). The passages from Simplicus (collected by Finamore-Dillon 232–39) are perhaps the clearest elucidation of Iamblichus doctrine of the soul as median. On the authenticity of the *In De anima* cf. I. Hadot, "Simplikios," *Der Neue Pauly* 11 (2001) 578f.

55. Cf. Steel, *The Changing Self* 65, nn. 45; 49 (Priscianus [Simplicius], *In De anima* 219,37; 6,14: ὅλη πρόεισι καὶ μένει; 90,20: ὁμοῦ ὅλη καὶ μένει καὶ πρόεισι).

soul never loses her proper substance or essence and retains the abilities and activities inherent therein.[56] Being essentially similar to material *and* intellectual being, she is able to connect them, and herself to both of them, and thus become the *mediatrix*. Her whole being is 'in process,' "μονή and πρόοδος are 'substantial modes of being' of the human soul."[57] By her going-out the soul becomes different and alienated from herself, but the soul goes outside and returns to herself as a whole and by doing this, she remains self-identical.[58]

2. *Power and Acts of the Soul*

Following "Plato,"[59] Iamblichus distinguishes "activities" (ἐνέργειαι, κινήσεις) from powers (δυνάμεις) of the soul as "median" and "Changing Self." Some activities belong to the realm of change, division, matter, and thus to the soul-body composite. 'Arousal' of such activities may come from body and/or soul, but only the soul can be their efficient cause. Activities which properly are the soul's (κατ᾽ αὐτὴν) are essentially immaterial and distinct from the composite being, i.e., those of "divine possession, of immaterial intellection and, in a word, those by which we are joined to the gods." Iamblichus hierarchically distinguishes acts:

(1) of universal and divine souls as immaterial;

(2) of daimonic/heroic souls as efficacious (on the bodies); and,

(3) of animal and human souls as "of mortal nature."[60]

Embodied souls are more or less inhibited by their respective body,[61] which they are not able to govern with the same sovereignty as the higher souls.[62] The soul's freedom requires a certain separation from her body,[63] i.e., a (re)acquisition of her control over and care for it. For the realist Iamblichus, this separation can always only achieve "as much as is possible," and our similarity to the gods can, therefore, only be partial.[64]

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56. *Protr.* 16.1–2, 110,3–111,9.

57. Steel, *The Changing Self* 66 (Priscianus [Simplicius], *In De anima* 312,6–7).

58. Cf. Steel, *The Changing Self* 61–69.

59. The distinction of ἐνέργειαι and δυνάμεις is however Aristotelian: cf. D.P. Taormina, "Le δυνάμεις dell'anima. Psicologia ed etica in Giamblico," *The Divine Iamblichus. Philosopher and Man of Gods*, ed. H.J. Blumenthal and E.G. Clark (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1993) 33; Finamore-Dillon, Iamblichus, *De Anima* 119.

60. *De an.* 18.

61. *Myst.* 3.20, 148,12–18; *protr.* 21.9 [sym. 4], 136,25–137,5; cf. Finamore-Dillon, Iamblichus, *De Anima* 103.

62. *De an.* 21, cf. 16; 19.

63. *Protr.* 13.3, 91,28–92,6.

64. κάθοσον δύναται/δύνηται *protr.* 13.1, 91,9; 13.4, 92.3; 13.12, 97,20; ἐφόσον οἷόν τε *protr.* 2.3, 42,21; ὅτι μάλιστα *protr.* 13.2, 91,11; 13.4, 92,2; 13.6, 63,29; ὅτι δικαιότατος *protr.* 14.9, 104,20; καθόσον μάλιστα δύναται *protr.* 5.13, 61,24f; καθόσον δ᾽ αὖ μετασχεῖν

The soul, however, remains the one cause of all movement of the human composite, being like the helmsman *and* the wind for the ship and using all the (secondary) elements and the ship or body itself to actually make the movement occur.[65] Matter is the "*index* of the soul's internal condition,"[66] and the body gradually is disposed to participate in the various levels of psychic life.[67] The soul is the "instrument of wisdom (ἔργον σοφίας) by which the human is the wisest of all living beings. The soul, we might say, makes the human truly human. Therefore, the call to philosophy corresponds exactly to human nature, because philosophy gives to the human soul that for which she is made.[68]

Iamblichus rejects an "impassible and always thinking" soul as Porphyry had conceived it. His argument is very simple: if there were such a part of the soul, the human would possess εὐδαιμονία, which obviously is not the case.[69] The soul's weakness is felt strongly. This weakness is the reason for preferring theurgy to philosophy, and the basis for this weakness can be nothing else but its bond to body.[70] The soul by its nature excels other beings, but is altogether inferior to the gods. She *can* achieve freedom, wisdom and happiness, but not in isolation from the gods! Beyond and before rational understanding, Iamblichus demands faith in divine power, and this means to recognize the fundamental superiority (ὑπεροχή) of the gods as compared to humans. By giving faith to the gods, concretely by following the Pythagorean teachings, the philosopher is able to have access to a knowledge that would be hard or even impossible to attain without being given a "*viaticum*" (ἐφοδιάζον) by the gods.[71]

3. Will and Grace

Human "weakness" (ἀσθένεια) causes bad "ecstasies" in a soul using only her *own* energies whereas the good ecstasy puts its trust in the "fullness of power" of the highest cause. The crucial factors are the suitability for and the attitude towards the energies, which depend on the subject's relation to its body.[72] The soul must "put no faith in anything but herself, that is, in that

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ἀνθρωπίνη φύσει ἀθανασίας ἐνδέχεται *protr.* 5.14, 62,3f; ὡς βελτίστην καὶ φρονιμωτάτην γενέσθαι *protr.* 13.15, 99,10f.

65. *De an.* 16.
66. G. Shaw, "Theurgy as Demiurgy: Iamblichus' Solution to the Problem of Embodiment," *Dionysius* 12 (1988): 50.
67. Cf. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul* 74f (Stobaeus I, 381,7–13).
68. *Protr.* 4.5–7, 50,23–52,13.
69. Cf. Iamblichus, *In Timaeum* fr. 87,18–20.
70. *Myst.* 3.18, 144,12–17.
71. *Protr.* 21.9f [sym. 4], 136,21–137,19.
72. *Myst.* 3.24–25, 156,4–161,9; cf. Taormina, "Le δυνάμεις" 35.

portion of real existence in and by itself which she can apprehend in and by herself." This faith (πιστεύειν) moves the soul's attention away from the "realm of sense and of the visible," so that "what she sees herself belongs to the intelligible and invisible." The soul, overcome by appetite, has become "an accomplice in her own incarceration." Therefore, philosophy must act and empower the soul to re-gather and receive her abilities,[73] which are both her own *and* philosophy's gift. The soul's fundamental capacity is to receive them by becoming "a proper receptacle of the gods."[74] This fitting 'match' causes the relation between agent and patient, and, with it, the terrestrial becomes able to receive the celestial.[75]

Consequently, invocations are effective in the *human* rather than in the divine, because the gods are not affected or influenced by them. The philosophical life begins with entrusting oneself to the gods, for "the gods' (good) will is sufficient for us."[76] The *Protrepticus* puts greater emphasis on the human will than do the preceding works. One of its exhortations explicitly starts from "the fact that the life we lead is deliberately and voluntarily chosen by us." People are themselves the principles (ἀρχαί) of their actions, they have the power to choose good rather than bad, and so they are their "own luck and *daimon*" (αὐτοὶ ἑαυτοῖς ἐσμεν ἐν τύχης τάξει καὶ δαίμονος). We have to use (χρώμενος) this *daimon* as the instrument to gain happiness in order not to be "unworthy" (ἀνάξιος). So there must be something presupposed as the basis for the liberty to choose.[77] Pythagoras himself is presented as a kind of *daimon* (δαίμονα θεῖον);[78] his science of harmonic proportions comes to him from a *daimon*;[79] all humans received a *daimon* to help them in the ascent.[80] This divine element, in a sense, is a natural gift (ἐκ φύσεως), but we still (have to) choose it (αἱρούμεθα) and ask for it in prayer.[81] Only "under the guidance of the *daimon*" can purification, illumination and union be achieved.[82]

The gods' spontaneous good will inspires the theurgists (Αὐτοφανὴς … καὶ αὐτοθελὴς …ἔλλαμψις). Thus, even the incarnate human souls are

73. *Protr.* 13.11, 96,27–97,17.
74. Shaw, "Theurgy as Demiurgy" 59.
75. *Myst.* 5.7, 10–15; 1.8, 28,20–29,1, cf. 5.23, 232,17–233,2; 1.2, 42,12–13; 3.2, 104,14–105,2.
76. *Pyth.* 1.2.
77. *Protr.* 3.5, 45,4–16.
78. *Pyth.* 3.15; cf. 6.30.
79. *Pyth.* 26.115f.
80. *Protr.* 3.9, 47,15–18, cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 111; q. 113. [ed. P. Caramello, I 522–34].
81. *Protr.* 3.5; 9, 45,11–13; 47,13–15.
82. *Protr.* 3.9–10, 47,18–28.

accustomed to a life outside the body and are prepared to return to their eternal, intelligible origin. The divine will must first build up the human ability to choose freely, yet the latter is clearly affirmed and thus declared necessary, even if only on its own lower level. Invocations achieve effects in the souls who receive a "new life" and "another power"; they believe themselves to be no longer human, having exchanged human life for the beatifying vision and activity of the gods. The soul hands herself over to divine power, which makes her become pure and unchanging, yet she does not become a god herself.[83]

Despite Iamblichus' enthusiastic language, the philosophical distinctions are clear, especially in *De mysteriis*. For behind all effects of calling-on the gods lies the universal "love of the gods holding together the universe," which is efficient in the world by its own nature and without needing to be influenced. The soul only has to let it operate in and on herself.[84] Even if the moral response of the soul requires discipline on her side, her fundamental attitude must be passive: she does not "oppose herself to this process of liberation."[85] All propitiation or apparent 'compulsion of the gods' changes the humans not the gods, and is always based on the gods' natural, unchanging and spontaneous good-will and love.[86] In Augustine, God's love and grace effect a change in the human while the God of Love remains unchanged.[87]

Iamblichus clearly sees the fundamental difference between divine will and human free choice.[88] In (σύμφοτος) the human, there is also an "alien" power, not of the same rank as our "primary and essential life." By means of philosophy, this divisive and chaotic power must be replaced by the simple divine energy which will not oppose itself, and instead will provide the "beginning of salvation."[89] Human will can be tempted, it potentially can be alienated from the good, but also be brought back to it again.[90] The question then remains, by what?

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83. *Myst.* 1.12, 40,16–41,4.
84. *Myst.* 1.12, 41,4–11, cf. *protr.* 3.9, 47,10–15; 3.10, 47,27f.
85. *Protr.* 13.12, 97,17–22: τῇ λύσει οὐκ οἰομένη δεῖν ἐναντιοῦσθαι; cf. 3.8, 46,22.
86. *Myst* 1.13–14, 43,1–45,4; on the treatment of divine wrath in Iamblichus and Augustine see Fredouille, "Sur la colère divine".
87. Augustine, *En.Ps.* 32.2.1.6–7.
88. *Myst.* 1.12, 41,3f.
89. *Protr.* 3.8, 46,8–24.
90. *Myst.* 4.1, 181,8–19.

4. Fall or Descent?

In presenting his exegesis of the *Timaeus* (41d–42a), Iamblichus describes the descent of the (individual) soul as a natural process,[91] yet the soul "projected for itself the mortal life that bound it."[92] Her composite existence reveals the soul's state through the choices she makes.[93] A new incarnation does not simply produce "an entirely new identity."[94] Pythagoras, for example, "knows his prior incarnations" and "reminds" others of theirs; so there clearly is a kind of 'self' connecting the subsequent embodied lives.[95]

Iamblichus distinguishes three purposes for which different classes of souls can become incarnate:

(1) Pure souls descend willingly for the sake of others;

(2) Souls on their way to purity descend voluntarily for their own improvement, and are not completely free of passions;

(3) Souls descending because of punishment without their own consent.[96]

With these distinctions he is also able to reject the position that all embodiments are (equally) evil.[97]

III. Οὐδένεια—The Turning Point

Iamblichus' philosophical justification of theurgy is coherent with his concept of the human soul. However, this does not make him a revolutionary, but rather the conservative defender of the philosophical religion Platonism had grown into, against the heterodox, but apparently very attractive Plotinian intellectualism.[98] The philosophical and personal closeness between Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus may not have made their controversies any easier.

Especially in *De mysteriis*, Iamblichus not only defends the "miraculous";[99] further, in using 'theurgical' language he regards himself as still doing philosophy, and he reserves a very high place for theoretical philosophy.[100] This

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91. *De an.* 26; on Iamblichan interpretation of the *Timaeus* see Shaw, "Theurgy as Demiurgy": 40–47.

92. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul* 77; cf. Shaw, "Theurgy as Demiurgy": 37–40 on Iamblichus' optimistic theurgical interpretation of Plotinus and *Timaeus*.

93. Cf. Finamore-Dillon, Iamblichus, *De Anima* 175f.

94. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul* 77.

95. *Pyth.* 14.63, cf. *theol.arith.* 40, 52,5–16.

96. *Protr.* 8.6, 78,2–5.

97. *De an.* 29.

98. Cf. also A. Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition. From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989) xiii; 162.

99. Cf. the unfortunate title of E.C. Clarke, *Iamblichus' De Mysteriis. A manifesto of the miraculous*, Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Theology and Biblical Studies (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).

100. Cf. Hankey, "Philosophy as Way of Life for Christians?" 213f.

is especially true in the *Protrepticus*.[101] His basic conviction is: philosophy corresponds to human nature, i.e., to the essence of the highest part of the soul, the part which connects the human to the divine, and whose activity makes him divine. Thus, philosophy grants to the soul both divine and human virtues, and assimilates her to the gods.[102] Intellectual insight "is indeed a part of virtue and felicity: for we affirm that felicity either is from this or is this."[103] Thinking is the only proper or most important activity of the soul. "And in a perfect and free activity itself there is a pleasure, so that theoretic activity or contemplation is the most pleasant or delightful of all."[104]

Iamblichus shows the highest esteem for pure thinking and intellection, but does not declare it to be the only real philosophy. For him, rational thinking, intellectual understanding and, even more, union are different concepts; they are connected to each other, but not identical.[105] Indeed, above and in and, as we shall demonstrate, at the beginning of the soul's ascent, there also must be something else, or something more.[106]

1. Prayer and Faith

The foundation of our turning to the gods is the realization of their superiority. In a singular way, the following quotation formulates humility as the basic motivation to prayer and, as we endeavour to demonstrate, as a systematic Iamblichan principle:

> For the conscience of our nothingness compared to them, if one of us judges himself in relation to the gods, makes us automatically turn to prayers.[107]

For Iamblichus, prayer essentially starts with the confession of our human weakness, and thus it is the natural reaction of the human "comparing" itself to the gods. Prayers are *the* fundamental step toward discerning and affirming what is "most divine and primary in man."[108] "Invoking god" not only stands at the beginning of *De vita Pythagorica* (1.1), but really is the basis for the 'Pythagorean' philosophical life. Human faculties, as they are, will not suffice for the enterprise Iamblichus proposes. This starting point

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101. This is especially true for his mathematical works (*theol.arith., math.*).
102. *Protr.* 3.3, 44,12–26.
103. *Protr.* 7.8, 73,24–26. cf. 7.6, 72,22–73,9; 11.6, 87,23–88,1.
104. *Protr.* 11.7,88,1–8.
105. *Protr.* 4.4, 50,4f.
106. Against Clarke, *Iamblichus' de Mysteriis* 1f.
107. *Myst.* 1.15, 47,16–19: Ἡ μέν γὰρ συναίσθησις τῆς περὶ ἑαυτοὺς οὐδενείας, εἴ τις ἡμᾶς παραβάλλων τοῖς θεοῖς κρινοῖ, ποιεῖ τρέπεσθαι πρὸς τὰς λιτὰς αὐτοφυῶς; cf. 47,12–48,19.
108. *Protr.* 3.9, 47,18f.

from οὐδένεια is altogether crucial for our reading of Iamblichan philosophy for two reasons: First, it is the turning point in the soul's life on which all consecutive ascent will depend; and second, even if it does not occupy the same prominent post in Iamblichus, it at least sounds very similar to Augustinian *humilitas.*

For Iamblichus, once turned towards the gods, we are "raised up" and "slowly" (ἠρέμα) receive divine perfection. The verb (ἀναγόμεθα) seems to waver consciously between middle and passive, expressing the cooperation of divine and human will.[109] At the beginning of the cooperative process, the comparison by which the human comes to recognize its own distance from and inferiority to the gods, is the natural and, we might say, rational foundation of the super-rational activity of prayer.[110]

This "nothingness" is also a result of the superiority and nearly unbridgeable distance between individual soul and all higher beings.[111] This moment recalls both Job's confession of God's incomparable transcendence (*Job* 42,1–6), and the moment that Augustine realized his utter dependence on God's grace. In Augustine, the deepest metaphysical roots for his humble confession are found in the underlying concept of creation *ex nihilo.*[112] In Iamblichus, the soul, realizing her relative οὐδένεια, gives up the initiative to what has "superiority" (ὑπεροχή). "As the 'lowest' divinity, the human soul achieved its highest condition only when it was conscious of being lowest, for only then did it realize its place in the divine hierarchy."[113] In his proper place, the human as theurgist becomes part of the whole, and the gods operate in and through him. The philosopher's soul "offers no resistance against the process of liberation."[114] Similarly Augustine will say that those "*recti corde*" will not resist God.[115] In Iamblichus' terms, to say that the human chooses its own *daimon* really is to say that he recognizes the ever-present *daimon* in him as given by and continually dependant on the gods.[116] In negating the connection between human soul and higher beings/gods, Iamblichus establishes it firmly on true, theurgical grounds, i.e., lets the gods establish it.

109. Cf. the reflexive or passive translations by des Places (66) and Hopfner (30).

110. *Protr.* 3.9, 47,7–48,4.

111. *Myst.* 5.2, 200, 16f; *protr.* 21.9 [sym. 4], 136,23–25; *In Timaeum* fr. 88; cf. B. Nasemann, *Theurgie und Philosophie in Jamblichs De mysteriis*, Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 11 (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1991) 33f.

112. *Conf.* 1.2.2; 8.11.25. cf. J.M. Rist, *Augustine. Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1996) 106; 190.

113. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul* 56f.

114. *Protr.* 13.12, 97,17–20.

115. Augustine, *En.Ps.* 31.2.25.

116. *Protr.* 3.9, 47,15–18; 3.5, 45,4–16.

Divine epiphanies or revelations[117] help humans to acknowledge the gods' superiority and, at the same time, to recognize the privileges which they, as humans, possess.[118] Therefore, prophetic figures and collections of mysteries and myths have to be taken seriously as divine communications.[119] Pythagoras himself was so pious as to believe in everything miraculous concerning the gods. As a consequence, his "divine teachings" should not be doubted. Just as the Pythagoreans had great faith in traditional teachings, we also should not be incredulous about wonderful things, but recognize them as what they are: revelations of the gods whose power and being absolutely transcend our judgement and understanding.[120] The miraculous, therefore, appears as a kind of grace, it demands faith and helps humans to turn to the gods and thus begin the way to salvation.

This basic recognition of the soul's essential dependence on the gods and their help can be considered the most fundamental act of prayer. In this very moment, the soul must "perceive and feel together" (συναίσθησις) *both* its present lowliness or non-being *and* its future perfection or being. This can be seen as the deepest significance of Iamblichus' assertion that "[a]t the moment of prayer, the divine itself is literally joined with itself, and it is united with the spiritual conceptions in prayers but not as one thing is joined to another."[121]

2. Prayer in the Ascent

A similar kind of humility will have to accompany the soul's ascent. This is implicit in Iamblichus' oft-repeated affirmation that the soul's ascent can only happen "slowly," "gradually" and "not quickly."[122] Therefore, all initiation and teaching must proceed "methodically" and "continually."[123] Pythagoras' promises to teach "without labour," but his pupil should "apply himself to the acquisition of knowledge early in life and continue to learn for a long period of time."[124] Under the conditions of our present life, "learning and investigation is difficult … and scarcely is one able on account of mental sluggishness, and the unnatural life, to acquire a perception of this fact. But when saved, we return again to the place whence we came, it is evident that

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117. *Myst.* 2.10, 90,13–15.
118. *Protr.* 21.9 [sym. 4], 136,21–137,11.
119. *Pyth.* 28.138.
120. *Pyth.* 28.148.
121. *Myst.* 1.15, 47,9–11, transl. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul* 111; cf. 1.15, 47,12–48,4.
122. *Pyth.* 1.1; 4.19; 5.21; *protr.* 1.1, 40,16; 1.2, 40,19; 20.6, 23–27; 20.7, 123,4–6; *myst.* 1.15, 48,2; 5.20, 228,7; 5.22, 230,15–231,17; 5.26, 239,3.5; *math.* 6.22, 27,7f; 6.23, 27,19–22; 15.3, 55,17.
123. *Protr.* 1.2, 41,2; *pyth.* 5.21.
124. *Protr.* 20.6, 122,23–27.

we will learn easily and pleasantly."[125] For rising beyond the level of "merely living or vegetating" by philosophy, requires hard work and needs a long time.[126] This is the same humble realism as in the recognition that human perfection can always only attain "as much as possible."[127] This philosophical anthropology, which in significant respects is not contrary to Plotinus' doctrine and life, stands behind the need for education, a school, a programme, a teacher, for Pythagoras and his mysterious teachings, for an exhortation and initiation to philosophy, and even more fundamentally, for theurgy.

The necessity of humility can be seen from Iamblichus' condemnation of the "idol-maker" who mistakes his own pseudo-theurgical creations for gods. "The divine" will not give itself to one who resists (ἀντιδραστεῖσιν) it, be it only for one time. Instead, the idol-maker becomes incapable of receiving the divine light, and will be full of deceptions. For Iamblichus, such a negative disposition of the soul, trying to manipulate the gods, unable to wait upon them, and unwilling to hand herself over to them, is absolutely intolerable.[128] This is Iamblichus' criticism of Porphyry's argumentation, and it is not far from what Augustine will have to say about the consequences of Neoplatonic *superbia* and its dealings with the deceptive *falsus mediator*.[129]

Humility, based on a true knowledge of gods and self, is absolutely indispensable, informing both the beginning and the whole process of the theurgical ascent. The same is proven even by Iamblichus' brief and sharp rejection of the "atheistic," i.e., Christian, doctrine that all divination is inspired "by the bad *daimon*," "nourished by darkness from the beginning" and therefore "unable to recognize the principles." The Christians are only the most extreme example for all those who cannot accept theurgy. They do not understand the cosmic hierarchy and the soul's position within the cosmos, both of which theurgy presupposes.[130]

'Good' theurgy, therefore, on the one hand is efficient *ex opere operato*, but on the other hand it requires a certain state (or purification) of the soul.[131]

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125. *Protr.* 12.4, 89,26–90,2.

126. *Protr.* 8.5, 77,7–11;20.7, 123,4–10.

127. Cf. note 64.

128. *Myst.* 3.29, 171,5–173,8; cf. note 85.

129. Augustine, *conf.* 7.9.13–15; 21.27, *civ.* 9.15; *sermo Dolbeau* (*s.Dolb.*) 26,32, 38, 41f, 46; cf. Augustin d'Hippone, *Vingt-six sermons au peuple d'Afrique*, retrouvés à Mayence, édités et commentés par F. Dolbeau, Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 147 (Paris, Études Augustiniennes 1996) 73f.

130. *Myst.* 3.31, 179,13–180,4; cf. 10.31, 211,6–10; cf. Ph. Hoffmann, "Simplicius' Polemics," *Philoponos and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science*, ed. R. Sorabji (Ithaca: Cornell U Press, 1987) 57–83.

131. Cf. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul* 86.

The real *opus* actually is the soul herself on which the divine energies work using appropriate instruments, according to the level of theurgy. This requires true knowledge *and* humility, for all purification is a preparation to receive the gods, which presupposes, on the side of the gods, their pre-existence and their will to come to the soul, and on the side of soul, the recognition of being dependent on receiving them.

3. Forms and Functions of Prayer

We have seen prayer as the expression of the soul's inner condition. As the crucial factor, in a sense standing between external (cultic) action and the deity addressed by it, prayer is always necessary and is basic in the beginning *and* in all (even the material) steps of the ascent. It "completes," "reinforces" and "perfects" sacrifice,[132] just as "the god" is at the beginning, middle and end of philosophy.[133] At all levels and steps, prayer is the expression of the soul's dependence on divine help and it shows that all philosophical theurgy essentially is a spiritual enterprise.[134]

Iamblichus distinguishes three kinds and functions of prayer along the steps of the ascent in which prayer essentially "establishes our friendship with the gods":

(1) συναγωγόν: illumination;

(2) συνδετικόν: common action;

(3) τελεώτατον − ἡ ἄρρητος ἕνωσις: fulfillment of soul.

Prayer fosters reason and our ability to receive the gods, it adapts us for contact with the highest, it instils in us the divine gifts of "persuasion (πειθὼ), communion (κοινωνίαν) and indissoluble friendship (φιλίαν ἀδιάλυτον)," "divine love" (θεῖον ἔρωτα) "good hope" (ἔλπιδα) and "faith (πίστιν) in the light."[135] Prayers strengthen desire, purify from all opposing tendencies, and make us humans familiar with the gods so we can become their scholars or listeners (ὁμιλητὰς). In talking about prayer, not only the consistent use of the first person plural is noteworthy and includes Iamblichus himself, but also the fact that the effects of prayer are basically identical with those of theurgy. Prayer, too, will not make us become gods, but it has the divine power to unite us with them in community and friendship: divine ἔρως is kindled and the divine part of the soul is inflamed.[136]

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132. *Myst.* 5.26, 237,9–11.

133. *Protr.* 4.15, 55,22, cf. 14–23.

134. *Protr.* 3,9f, 47,7–28.

135. *Myst.* 5.26, 237,8–239,12, cf. *math.* 6.1, 20,22–25; 8, 22,19–24; 19, 26,10–21; 15.3, 55,8–22; 17.7, 59,13–20; 24.1, 74,7–15.

136. *Myst.* 5.26, 239,7–240,10.

This striking parallelism between the effects of prayers and external rites shows that prayers and sacrifices really are *one* and share the one theurgic power of a coherent cult of which no part may be omitted. Iamblichus is not concerned for ritual aesthetics but for the profound unity and correspondence of all the elements in theurgy and reality.[137] Many of the Pythagorean symbols at the end of the *Protrepticus* express exactly this law of correspondence between inner disposition and external expression.[138]

Prayer really *is* the divine presence in the human soul, and once actualized, it has the natural desire for union with the gods: "it vehemently yearns for its match and is joined to perfection itself."[139] Prayer expresses the human attitude towards the divine; in that sense, invocations are gestures of humility, and prayer combined with theurgical rites continues the function it had in the beginning: it confesses human "nothingness" and desires to be connected to the gods. Prayer appears as an 'erotic extension' of the soul towards god. A certain parallelism to Augustine's *inquietum cor* and *desiderium cordis* yearning to know, invoke and love God can hardly be denied. Prayer, for Augustine, aims at the happy life and, therefore, is the expression of our heart's yearning and love for God.[140]

It is no accident that Iamblichus ends his explanations of theurgy with a prayer asking for divine gifts (παρέχειν; ἐντιθέναι) to reach full understanding of the gods *and* the "highest form of single-minded friendship (φιλία) with one another." This last and most beautiful remark is certainly the result of his strained relationship to Porphyry, but in its simplicity and grandeur it describes human perfection and happiness as a communion with the gods and a friendship or love between humans that is not opposed to the Christian double commandment to love God with all your heart and your neighbour as yourself. Augustine will take some time before he is able to integrate mutual human love into love of God.[141]

IV. BEFORE AND BEYOND PHILOSOPHY

With his hierarchical system, Iamblichus orders both the complex reality of the universal and psychic worlds, the philosophy that thinks it, and last but not least, the worship that corresponds to it. The human (soul) is able to think and know,[142] and therefore *must* do so, in order to find perfection and

137. *Myst.* 5.26, 240,11–16; cf. 5.26, 240,11–18.
138. Cf. *protr.* 21, especially sym. 1–3; 18; 27.
139. *Myst.* 1.15, 46,15f as translated by Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul* 111.
140. *Ep.* 130 *ad Probam* 9.18–10.20; *conf.* 1.1.1; cf. G. Lawless, "Desiderium sinus cordis est: Biblical resonances in Augustine's Tractatus in Evangelium Iohannis 4, §10," *Augustiniana* 48 (1998): 305–29.
141. *Myst.* 10.8, 293, 14–294,6; cf. Rist, *Augustine* 159–68.
142. *Protr.* 4.6, 51,21f; cf. 4.5, 51,4.

happiness which always include an essential noetic dimension, and even more the soul must practice φιλία, because it is the principle of universal cohesion and the basis of all insight, virtue, and thus of all similarity to the gods.

In working out his hierarchical structure, Iamblichus consistently applies a few very simple principles:

(1) "the good is more opposed to the bad than to the non-good";[143]

(2) lower goods are sought for the sake of higher;[144]

(3) the law of correspondence (gods—worship—worshipper—effect of cult);[145]

(4) the omnipresent principle of slow, patient and gradual change;[146]

(5) what can be reached by and, therefore, demanded from the soul must correspond to her abilities.[147]

In the light of these principles, Iamblichus' remarks on human οὐδένεια show him and his system as something for which Augustine's accusation of pride would have to be modified. In working out his system, Iamblichus himself accuses Porphyry of pride, i.e., of overestimating the soul and her capacities, of trying to go directly for immaterial cult and union with the One without having the humility to pass through all the necessary preparatory stages. The deeper question is this: In Iamblichus, is there anything that corresponds to *divine* humility as Augustine sees it? Salvation is mediated to men by the humility of the "man Jesus Christ" in which his believers participate but which still is the *humilitas Verbi incarnati*. This self-humbling new presence of God in the world and to human kind really is philosophically difficult to imagine in a Iamblichan universe, wherein the super-transcendent One is also already totally present. Must the voluntary descent of higher beings not be interpreted as mere actualizations of the One's fundamental 'super-immanence'?

The essential role assigned to prayer reveals how much the whole theurgical enterprise needs to be understood and practiced as a fundamentally internal progress towards a communion with the gods which can only be understood in terms of friendship and love. The brief final prayer takes up the φιλία-motif and has the whole *De mysteriis* end with the twofold love of go(o)ds and men. Iamblichus wants to present a system valid for everyone, even for the *simpliciores*, not only for intellectuals.[148] The role rituals and, even more,

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143. *Myst.* 3.31, 178,1f.
144. *Protr.* 5.12, 61,3–11.
145. Cf. also *pyth.* 29.162 "friendship is equality, equality is friendship"; *math.* 15.3, 55,8–22; 34.1, 96,9–15.
146. Cf. notes 122–23.
147. Cf. note 64.
148. *Pyth.* 6.28–30; 7.33f, 11.57; *protr.* 14.1–4, 100,21–103,22.

prayers play in effecting salvation is constantly recalling, expressing and strengthening the soul's humility before the gods and her relationship with them. The god(s) Iamblichus prays to are certainly of a different kind than the Augustinian Trinity and incarnate Saviour. Further investigation is needed to discern in what sense Iamblichus assigns different forms and levels of prayer to different hierarchical levels which ultimately are all unified by the One, and to compare his vision to the Augustinian doctrine on prayers as addressed to the Trinity, its individual persons, to the incarnate Son or the Saints. Is Iamblichus' First One beyond the reach of prayer? And how is this different from the apophatic final prayer of Augustine's *De trinitate*?[149]

Universal love as the basis for all theurgy is worked out most clearly in *De vita Pythagorica*, but the conviction that Father Zeus is helping humans in the ascent is presupposed throughout.[150] Not only have the gods given the *daimon* by which humans can ascend,[151] but their very essence is such as to allow humans to be nourished with "unlimited good life."[152] The gods' superiority over humans is absolute, but they empower the humans beyond their natural or, rather, unnatural limits.[153] This is because, for Iamblichus, to be connected to the gods reconstitutes the soul as what she *naturally* is able and supposed to be.

The underlying principle of all theurgical communication between gods and humans is love, that harmonic connection of the soul with what is below, besides and above herself. It will certainly not be easy to put this φιλία in a radical *opposition* to Christian and Augustinian *caritas*. Iamblichus can call the highest form of theurgy a kind of philosophy. But, as becomes clearest in the exemplary person of Pythagoras, this philosophy is anything but purely noetic. Instead, it presupposes and is accompanied by forms of theurgy and devotion to the gods. In it the priority of action is on the side of the gods, and human activity is unified more than in any other occupation, for in it product, knowledge and use are essentially one.[154] This 'philosophical theurgy' or 'theurgical philosophy' is the supreme way of moving towards union with the gods, and this is the philosophy Iamblichus proposes in the later of the ten volumes of his Pythagorean Συναγωγή.

The 'Pythagorean' praxis of philosophy reflects its inner nature. Pythagoras' motivation and goal in teaching is nothing else than love.[155] His school is

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149. *Trin.* 15.28.51.
150. *Protr.* 3.9, 47,10–12; 3.10, 47,27f; 5.15, 62,15–17; 13.18, 100,15f.
151. *Protr.* 5.13, 61,20f.
152. *Protr.* 5.25, 67,17.
153. *Protr.* 21.9–10 [sym. 4], 136,21–137,11.
154. *Protr.* 5.5, 58,9f.
155. *Pyth.* 6.38; 5.21; 24; 14.63.

set up as a community, the virtues he is interested in are profoundly social and they encompass all beings.[156] "Love of all to all," described in nearly hymnic language, must be considered the heart of Iamblichus' Pythagorean philosophy. Pythagoras himself is said to have detected φιλία as the underlying principle.[157] It is the basis of all justice and the norm for all education.[158] When the Pythagoreans combine what is objectively good with what is useful and effective for the individual,[159] their only motivation can be love. At the heart of their friendships is the conviction that one may "not tear apart the god in them." The ultimate goal of their whole philosophic life is union with god; all friendship indeed is based on love of the gods for humans, and perfected in a union of humans to gods that transcends, but yet includes human love.[160]

V. AN AUGUSTINIAN VIEWPOINT

For Augustine, love is God's essence, and Christ is the mediator because of and through his humility. Consequently, both *caritas* and *humilitas* are the crucial virtues for the Christian. After our consideration of Iamblichus, the differences and similarities between Christianity and Neoplatonism, as classically portrayed by St Augustine, appear in a new light.

Augustine's dealing with the Neoplatonist philosophers is conditioned by his personal history and contacts. His way to baptism 'through Neoplatonism' has been written of and speculated about sufficiently. Augustine's way to Christ the one mediator has been outlined by Remy,[161] but in Remy's exposition we miss the fact that some concept of theurgy seems not to have played any part in it. Augustine's report on his own first contacts with Neoplatonism omits any allusion to magical *curiositas* or theurgy.[162] His later remarks will always include this accusation against non-Christian Platonists. The controversy about theurgy must certainly have been very present in Neoplatonic discourse and writing, especially in Porphyry. Did Augustine come to know about Porphyry's theurgical and anti-Christian side only at a later time? However, his copious allusions to Catholic liturgy in Milan, his admiration for Ambrose, the bishop and liturgical preacher, the

156. *Pyth.* 6.32; 7.33f; 8.35f; 40; 45; 13.60–62; 24.107f; 27.129.

157. *Pyth.* 33.229; cf. 33.229f; 16.69.

158. *Pyth.* 30.167; 33.231.

159. *Pyth.* 21.204.

160. *Pyth.* 33.240.

161. Cf. G. Remy, *Le Christ médiateur dans l'oeuvre de Sainst Augustin.* (Lille: Atelier Reproduction du thèses, Université de Lille III; Paris: Diffusion Librairie Honoré Champion, 1979) I,25–80; esp. 60.

162. *Conf.* 7.20.26.

depiction of his mother as a fervent churchgoer, and the narration of his own experiences of liturgy and prayer show how acute his sensibility was for cult and *sacramenta*. For Ambrose and Milan's Christian Neoplatonists, two questions would deserve greater interest: how far and how consciously did Catholic liturgy take the place of theurgy?[163] And did they read Plotinus and Porphyry as anti-theurgical to the degree as Iamblichus did?

There are strong similarities and analogies between Augustine and Iamblichus, two apparently opposed thinkers, not only on account of a common Neoplatonic background as the one "*verissima philosophia*" into which according to both of them Platonic and Aristotelian thinking have converged.[164] Both are deeply and, at times, negatively influenced by Plotinus, and both are in polemical dialogue with Porphyry, their 'common enemy.' The criticisms of Porphyry as they understood him as a half-hearted advocate of theurgy point at very similar deficiencies in Plotinus' first follower. In Augustine, our connection with Christ incarnate must always include a historical dimension. Without being able to pursue this question here, we at least and perhaps provocatively, would like to ask how far Iamblichus would understand the 'Pythagorean life' and tradition and its connection to Pythagoras as a 'history of salvation'?[165]

In opposition to 'Plotinus *alla Porphyriana*' both Iamblichus and Augustine hold that the *way* to (the) God(s) can only be theurgic or sacramental; and this they take so seriously as to make it the basis and the criterion for philosophical life and speculation. It is important to see, that for Augustine sacraments are related to the incarnate Word both theologically *and* historically. As a consequence of the incarnation, sacraments are not only philosophically necessary, but are actual and real works of Christ. In this limited sense, Iamblichus' devotion to theurgy corresponds to the liturgical and sacramental life of the catechumen, Christian, monk, priest, and bishop Augustine. Both of them will philosophically show how such a cultic life makes sense and 'works', connects to the true reality of human nature, and is most fundamentally the activity of grace.

163. Cf. J.J. O'Donnell, online commentary on Confessions 7.9.13 (http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/).

164. Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 3.19.42; cf. *civ.* 9.4; Cicero, *Tusculanae Disputationes* 1.18; Finamore-Dillon, Iamblichus, *De Anima* 101.

165. Cf. B. Studer, *Schola Christiana. Die Theologie zwischen Nizäa und Chalzedon* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1998) 234. 308f; Rist, *Augustine* 80; D.S. du Toit, "Heilsbringer im Vergleich. Soteriologische Aspekte im Lukasevangelium und Jamblichs De vita Pythagorica," Jamblich, *Pythagoras, Legende – Lehre – Lebensgestaltung* 293f, also J. Dillon, "Die Vita Pythagorica, ein 'Evangelium'?," *ibid.* 295–301.

Iamblichus' rather anti-Christian thinking anticipates some of Augustine's corrections to Neoplatonic philosophy as he came to know it in the West. Augustine himself, in his quest for truth and peace, experienced the interrelation of philosophic investigation, moral purification, and visible signs and sacraments of the Church which played an essential part before, in and after his conversion. Of course, Augustine relies mainly on the patristic tradition for the solutions he presents in his theology of *Deus caritas* and his Christology/Soteriology emphasizing Christ's *humilitas* and *humanitas*.[166] But seeing the analogies to Iamblichus helps us to a better historical understanding of Augustine's response to Porphyrian theurgy, and to a philosophically more informed view of the differences between the Christian and Neoplatonic doctrines of mediation and salvation. Augustine himself developed his theology also as a response to theurgical practices and concepts which he as a Catholic bishop took fairly seriously. His answers, in part, can been seen as alternative to Iamblichus' older theurgical theology. Despite fundamental differences, the bishop and the theurge certainly share significant philosophical and spiritual preoccupations and problems unattended to in their versions of Porphyry. Porphyry's own position on theurgy as such is certainly unclear to us, even "he himself may not have been entirely clear where he stood."[167]

Augustine certainly did not borrow anything from Iamblichus directly, but his treatment of Porphyry and Apuleius at the least shows a limited awareness of pagan inner-Platonic controversies in which Iamblichus was a major player. He generally accuses the Porphyrians of *superbia* and *curiositas*; for Pythagoras as he portrays him, Augustine limits his criticism to *superbia* only. Could he have accused a third, Iamblichan kind of philosophers of *curiositas* only? The logic of humility as fundamental for Christ's incarnation makes this rather difficult to imagine.

The focal point in the following discussion will be the idea of mediation and more specifically the role of Christ, *Verbum incarnatum, unus mediator Dei et hominum*, as compared to the Iamblichan multiple levels and hierarchical agents of mediation.[168] For a more complete picture the role of Church or community, sacraments or ritual, Holy Scriptures, priests and love would have to be addressed. To do greater justice to both sides, two points should be kept in mind:

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166. Cf. B. Studer, *Trinity and Incarnation. The Faith of the Early Church,* ed. A. Louth (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993) 167–85.

167. A. Smith, "Porphyrian Studies Since 1913," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II.36.2, 763; cf. A. Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition. A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974) 81–150.

168. Cf. Remy, *Le Christ médiateur* I,13.

(1) Despite the colourful and manifold divine beings in the his hierarchy, it is Iamblichus who posits the Monad even beyond the One. His system is pervaded by a most profound unifying tendency.

(2) For Augustine, Christ is the one and only mediator between God and mankind and/or creation. But, as is visible in his own biography, this Christocentrism will not entirely solve the question of how the individual soul, practically and efficiently, will come to know and accept Christ as the one saviour. Mediation between the one universal mediator and the individual is still a problem.

1. Augustinian Critique of Neoplatonic Theurgy

Augustine sees both superficial and essential differences between the Neoplatonism he knows and the Catholic faith. How far would his criticism be valid also against Iamblichus? Without a more comprehensive study of Augustine's works, our intent in this article can only be a very moderate one, only able to point out avenues or questions which a more thorough comparative study of Iamblichus and Augustine would have to start from and include.

1.1 Ontology of Mediation: the Middle Position

The fundamental question in our comparison is about mediation and, more specifically, about the mediator(s). We have seen how the ascent of the soul is initiated and accomplished in Iamblichus' system and who is capable of it. How can this process be 'mediated' for Augustine?

We have to distinguish two levels of argumentation in Augustine, popular and philosophical, which for him are, however, always in tune. His interpretation of Apuleius, Porphyry and Hermes in the *City of God* is certainly polemical, sometimes to the point of irony, but he never simply abandons philosophical discussion.[169]

Augustine's understanding and critique of pagan, especially Platonic philosophy has a long history.[170] But is there not a lack of familiarity with pagan *pietas* that ignores the religious traditions philosophers like Iamblichus stand in and echo? Iamblichus and Augustine agree that understanding the difference between God and man is crucial. But what is this difference for either of them, and what is the more precise nature of the humility that results from this recognition? Even Iamblichus' entirely descended soul still is naturally co-immortal with the gods, while eternal life for Augustine is the fruit and the gift of Christ's resurrection and includes the body. Iamblichus has

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169. *Civ.* 8.20; 9.13, cf. Remy, *Le Christ médiateur* I,233f.

170. Cf. R.D. Crouse, "In Aenigmate Trinitas (Confessions, XII,5,6). The Conversion of Philosophy in St. Augustine's Confessions," *Dionysius* 11 (1987): 53–62, esp. 53f.

emphasized the gods' superiority over mankind more than Plotinus and Por-phyry; yet the difference between the creator and his creatures *ex nihilo* is even sharper. Augustinian humility, in that sense, has to go even further 'down' and has to bridge the one ontological abyss between God and crea-tion; it can do so, because the Word himself did.

What stands in between creator and human creature for Augustine is ambivalent: it can be mediator *or* obstacle. For him, confusing these mediat-ing powers has the most disastrous consequences.[171] For him, the demons stand in a *medius locus* between blessed and immortal gods and miserable and mortal humans and, therefore, they have to be miserable and immor-tal.[172] In his Christian reinterpretation of Apuleius, Augustine radically op-poses mediating gods and demons, the latter receiving all traditional criti-cism and becoming associated with Satan.[173] Still, he also stresses the dis-tance and difference between *creator* and *creatura*, and thus is proving the necessity of a mediator. Even within a pagan theology which acknowledges such a distance, the gods must possess an immediate and immaterial knowl-edge of humans. A connection between different levels of being cannot be established by bodily relations but by moral qualities; this is where the de-mons fail.[174] Perhaps due to Apuleius' lack of philosophical depth and Por-phyry's lack of clarity, Augustine never came to know a philosophically worked out system of theurgy in which, as in Iamblichus, the various levels of me-diators correspond to varying human conditions, and in the end the One is operational on each level.

Augustine's discussion of mediating beings becomes more serious when he distinguishes angels and demons. After identifying the Platonic gods with Christian angels,[175] he lets only good beings have a part in mediation. Angels are distinct from God and, according to Scripture and Platonism, are his creatures.[176] The fundamental difference is: demons cannot mediate the good because they are evil, and angels or gods cannot do so because they, being blessed and immortal, are not 'median.'[177] The One God Platonists and Christians know is the same;[178] but the former also adore other powers in-stead of Him alone (*Romans* 1.21). For this they are to blame; but it is also

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171. *Civ.* 9.15.2; cf. J. den Boeft, "Daemon(es)," *Augustinus-Lexikon,* ed. C. Mayer (Basel: Schwabe) 2, Fasc. 1/2 (1996) 213–22; G. Madec, Art. Angelus: *Augustinus-Lexikon* 1 (1986–1994) 303–15; Remy, *Le Christ médiateur* I,266–68.

172. *Civ.* 9.12f.

173. *Civ.* 8.20; cf. Remy, *Le Christ médiateur* I,222f.

174. *Civ.* 8.21; 9.9; cf. Remy, *Le Christ médiateur* I,228f.

175. Cf. Remy, *Le Christ médiateur* I,261–65.

176. *Civ.* 9.23.3; *ep.* 234.2 (*Psalms* 50,1; 95,3; *1 Corinthians* 8,5).

177. *Civ.* 9.15; 9.23.3.

178. *Exodus* 22.20 in *civ.* 10.7.

the work of the deceptive and jealous spirits themselves.[179] Victims of this deception are the humans, not God.[180] Angels want us to be associated with them in the cult of the one God, demons want to separate us from Him and subject us to themselves.[181]

On the one hand, Augustine's picture of the Platonic *daimons* is a caricature. But on the other hand, there is also his very generous Christianisation of the Platonic gods as angels. Thus, Augustine shows a loyalty both to his Church's faith and Scripture as well as to his preferred school of philosophy. While deconstructing the need for many mediators corresponding to forms of cult and states of soul, Augustine takes up the problem. He does not see a long set of steps, but the one mediator, who as *Christus totus* is like a chain whose links are angels, saints and living faithful Christians. Consequently, an ecclesial and social dimension is more important in Augustinian sacramental theology. Iamblichus holds his steps together by the omnipresent divine energy of the super-transcendent One on the divine side, and the spirit of humble prayer on the human side. Augustine establishes an even more determinate unity of the operation of grace in the one true *mediator Dei et hominum* operating in his angelic ministers or faithful servants.

1.2 The Humble Mediator

In the person of Christ both the unity of mediation and the idea of humility are radicalized. The Son of God humbles himself and thus becomes way and example. As opposed to that, pride is the principle of demonic life. There *is* a real mediation of the sinful and proud and immortal demons for the sinful and proud and mortal humans, but it is the mediation of death as "*stipendium peccati.*"[182] The true mediator stands between God and man in his humility as mortal but sinless and just. Augustine stresses: Christ is mediator as man, as Word he is "equal to God"; he unites all in his person, he is "victor and victim," "priest and offering"; he brings redemption by God's power which is much greater than human "illness."[183] Iamblichus' trust in the gods' superiority and their goodwill is hardly less pronounced,[184] and we can "see in Iamblichus' account of the 'divine will' the notion of personal intervention by the gods—the very thing Plotinus so fiercely rejected."[185] For both, the recognition of divine superiority and transcendence is not discouraging, but instead an invitation to connect one's life to divine grace.

179. *Civ.* 10.21.
180. *Civ.* 10.5.
181. *Civ.* 10.16.1–2; 10.19; 10.21.
182. *Romans* 6,23: *conf.* 10.42.67.
183. *Conf.* 10.43.68 (with *John* 1,14); *s.Dolb.* 26.39f.
184. *Protr.* 21.9f [sym. 4], 136,21–137,19
185. Rist, "Pseudo-Dionysius, Neoplatonism and the Weakness of the Soul" 144.

The logic of humility versus pride can be developed by Augustine to include a specific attack on those who accept a false philosophy and sacrilegious rites. The mutual attraction between proud mediator and souls on the one side and their humble counterparts on the other side was already mysteriously present before Christ's incarnation. In both official cult and private theurgy, the 'immortal' devil pretending to be stronger than the humble Christ seduces humans who are offended by death more than by iniquity.[186] Not mortality, but ultimately sin is what separates humans from God,[187] but the sinless incarnate mediator heals human pride and mortality. He bridges both the metaphysical and the moral gap. By baptism humans become associated with Christ's humility, its water is the sacrament of confession, self-humbling and salvation.[188]

For Augustine, salvation is not achieved in steps but by an immediate way: Christ gives a share in divinity by sharing our humanity, leading us directly to the life of the Trinity. It is crucial to see how Christ not only is the model (*exemplum*) for human humility but its principle (*adiutorium/sacramentum*)[189] in his humanity as "*mediatrix creatura.*"[190] "The Word Incarnate is thus at once the *principium fidei* and the *principium philosophiae*, the principle of Augustine's Christian Platonism, both intellectually and morally."[191]

Christ's incarnation is the condition of the possibility of human salvation. By his incarnation humans are given a share in humility, just as the demons share their pride with the damned. The effective and actual moments of this divine communication in both Augustine's life and theology will be mystical, i.e., sacramental. Without manifold levels of mediation, Augustine presents a system that is quite as unified, comprehensive and necessarily sacramental as Iamblichan theurgy. Based and centred on Christ's incarnation, sacraments and especially baptism for Augustine are expressions of God's forgiveness and love for humans. The baptized Christian receives divine adoption through Christ, i.e., Christ is both the historical example of a theoretical necessity *and* the actual cause and sacrament of human salvation. In Augustine's eyes, Porphyrian Neoplatonism was able to show the *patria* but did not know and even pretended not to need the *via*; a theurgical concept was right in so far as it recognized the need for *a* media-

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186. *Trin.* 4.10.13; *s.Dolb.* 26.38; 41.

187. *S.Dolb.* 26.40.

188. *En.Ps.* 31.2.18.

189. *Trin.* 4.13.17; cf. B. Studer, "«Sacramentum et exemplum» chez saint Augustin," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 10 (1975): 87–141.

190. *S.Dolb.* 26.44, cf. our discussion below.

191. Crouse, "In Aenigmate Trinitas" 55, cf. also R.D. Crouse, "St. Augustine's De Trinitate: Philosophical Method," *Studia Patristica* 16 (1985): 501–10.

tor, but failed to lead to the *true* one.[192] This failure is due to that *superbia* of which even a 'more Iamblichan' theurgist could not be acquitted, not accepting divine humility as revealed and communicated in Christ's incarnation. The difficulty these philosophers and in the end human beings in general have with accepting the incarnation has to lie in the fact that Christ's humanity includes his mortality. This reminds humans of their own death of which they are more afraid than of sin and evil. True humility is not only accepting God's superiority but also accepting his humility which makes our own humility and conversion to him possible.[193] Iamblichus, in that sense, recognized a basic philosophical and spiritual requirement and solved it within the limits and conditions of his universe. In Augustine's *Weltanschauung*, there is greater opposition between *creator* and *creatura* and, at the same time, a more concrete connection between them in the *unus mediator*. The humility required for humans is communicated to them by Christ sacramentally and by his example, and thus it is grounded and gracefully granted through divine humility itself.

1.3 Superbia

Even more than for magical *curiositas*, Augustine criticizes the Neoplatonists for their *superbia*,[194] and this is more than a moral criticism and, as a love of oneself over and against God, it has interesting antecedents in Plotinus.[195]

Humble people acknowledge the impossibility to achieve perfect happiness in this life. This is not simply Augustine's pessimism. In the context of mediation he is arguing that heroes as envisioned by theurgists cannot mediate salvation. Heroes as mortal and happy are truly 'median' between blessed immortal gods and unhappy mortal humans and, therefore, able to mediate, in a sense. But in Augustine's logic, the mediator, being God *and* man at the same time and having humbled himself into mortality, must first take away sin in order to then grant immortality and happiness.[196]

Superbia, therefore, is more than intellectual pride. It is the attitude of those not willing to accept this mediation by the *humilitas Christi*. The mediator, in order to be able to communicate anything, must be 'median' *in the right way*. He must take away what really is the reason of human misery, namely pride and sin, and be able to give happiness. Here we hit the core of

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192. *Conf.* 7.21.27; *S.Dolb.* 26.37
193. *Civ.* 10.29, see below, "1.3. Superbia."
194. *Conf.* 7.9.15; 10.35.57; 10.42.67; *v.rel.* 4.7; *ep.* 118.5.33.
195. Cf. J.C. Cavadini, "Pride," *Augustine through the Ages* 679–84; Rist, *Augustine* 188–90.
196. *Civ.* 9.14f,

what Augustine means by *superbia* and *humilitas* respectively: Humans have to recognize that their own sinfulness not their nature has separated them from God. Suppressing this truth and aiming at demonic immortality is the most profound self-deception of a human who does not humbly want to 'know himself.' For Augustine, however, it is the truth that needs to be realized and confessed. He sees it unanimously testified by human nature in general, by his personal experience, and not least by Scripture.

Within the Iamblichan system, nothingness surely takes a form and place that is different from Augustinian *humilitas*, but in principle it is hardly less radical. Augustine puts humility in the centre, and in the end he cannot do otherwise if he wants to maintain that Christ is the only mediator and human sin the ultimate cause for human alienation from God. On the human side, Augustine argues 'psychologically' that we need to fear *iniquitas* more than *mortalitas.* Therefore, only Christ who humbly assumed our mortality while retaining his justice is the true mediator and can heal those humans from pride who confess their sins and are purified by Christ's justice. Thus, "by humble participation in his mortality" they will come to eternal life.[197]

Augustine stresses human sinfulness as the first thing the mediator has to overcome, whereas Iamblichus puts the emphasis on the theurgical participation of divine life and immortality that enables the soul to choose and, thus, live rightly; the soul's perfection is dependent on her capability of moral choices achieved *via* theurgy. In Augustine, the grace of Christ and his (sacramental) forgiveness is the indispensable foundation for Christian life and salvation. To use the language of St Thomas, we might be able to say: the grace of union that is unique in the person of Christ for Augustine is somehow present in all souls for Iamblichus, and it is the theological basis for the conversion and redemption of the human soul in both cases.[198] There also is an analogy between Christ and Iamblichan souls in their pre-existence and descent.

The Church offers another way to make humility more concrete. God and the Church are the heavenly parents of the Christian which he has to honour by a humble attitude towards them. Turning to God for Augustine includes biblical repentance which is longing for God's forgiveness and fundamentally dependant on preaching, for there can be no faith and no prayer without Christ's incarnation and the Church's proclamation of his salvation.[199] In following Christ in his 'human' humility and mortality and also in his Church, the human finds out that his salvation is precisely in his humanity which Christ shares with him and thus empowers to come to

197. *S.Dolb* 26.38–41; *conf.* 10.42.67f; *trin.* 4.10.13.
198. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 2, a. 10 [ed. P. Caramello, III 21f)].
199. *Conf.* 1.1.1; 1.5.5f; *s.Dolb.* 26.44f.

God. In Iamblichus there is a radical distance of the One, but precisely its super-transcendence, i.e., the fact that the One cannot be 'something' but must be present in everything, makes the First One present to the human as human in a both mediated and immediate way.

What distinguishes Augustine from Iamblichus is that, for the bishop, the soul on her way up does not need to be associated with various levels of mediating beings, which ultimately are all connected to the One, but only needs to be connected to Christ on his way down in order to be with him on the way to glory. Augustine stresses the humanity of the mediator, which is mirrored in the way to salvation and its final result: a life of human *caritas* which leads into the communion of Saints, both angels and humans, in God's City. Saints and angels, for Augustine, cannot be called mediators. As creatures, they are fundamentally on the same level as the human beings; they can offer help only in so far as they are members of Christ's body, and as humans learn to love Christ in them. On the way down the Christian is with Christ in *humilitas*. Is the theurgical philosopher alone in his οὐδένεια? Or is this not rather the moment he meets the divine as he "automatically" turns to prayer?

For Augustine, philosophers may come as far as to know the goal, but the faithful alone, even if they do not philosophically know the goal, know the way. Thus, *humilitas* is the central and basic principle of all mediation as Christ's incarnation and life teach it. "Our way is humility."[200] To be able to follow Christ's example without recourse to astrology, haruspicy, magic, and theurgy will prevent the faithful from falling into the devil's trap, and will help them to achieve what proud wise men only see from afar. Not by venerating powers which all are subject to Christ, but by loving him and all things because of him will the humans come to salvation. Christ himself is the principle and the goal of the way to salvation.[201] Augustine's concentration on and limitation to Christ surely goes a step beyond Iamblichus' realism.

2. Analogies

It is a common Neoplatonic doctrine that the final goal of the soul's ascent is beyond thinking.[202] But against Plotinus and Porphyry, Iamblichus and Augustine emphasize the requirement of 'sacraments' that communicate to the soul what she cannot give to herself and cannot receive from other humans or philosophy.[203] Both eastern Neoplatonists and Milanese

200. *S.Dolb.* 26,59–61.
201. *S.Dolb.* 26.62.
202. Cf. W.J. Hankey, "Ratio, Reason, Rationalism," *Augustine through the Ages* 698–701.
203. Cf. Hankey, "Philosophy as Way of Life for Christians?" 216.

Christian Neoplatonists shared an interest in cultic life and, therefore, did not follow the elitist, 'proud' intellectual tendency of Plotinus and Porphyry. Our comparison between Iamblichus and Augustine demonstrates, how much of Augustine's criticism of Porphyry is not exclusively Christian.

Augustine, because of his own history, stands in the very centre of this philosophical debate. From the beginning he did not simply follow Porphyry; and as far as he did, it brought him to a frustration which ultimately made him give up resisting Christ and the faith of His Church. Yet, Augustine not so much converts from Platonism to the Church as he converts to Christ as a Platonist.[204]

Within the Neoplatonic spectrum, Augustine stands between Iamblichus and Porphyry. His insistence on direct human contact with the Word seems to be a Plotino-Porphyrian inheritance.[205] In Christ, union of the divine and the human is established once and for all and in an absolute way, namely in the very person of the Word. Christ in his incarnation has assumed humanity, the Church and all creation.[206] All levels of mediation are concentrated in him alone. Neither Iamblichus nor Porphyry could have accepted this exclusive Christian claim. But for our discussion of the similarities and dissimilarities between the Iamblichan and the Augustinian system, it is the crucial divergence. For Iamblichus interprets the basic union between divine and human realms in different terms: The ineffable One in its super-transcendence contains the difference from it already in itself. The One is also there at the other end of the ontological hierarchy, if we dare say so, 'in the least of his brethren.'

Augustine shares with Iamblichus the fundamental conviction that only by grace communicated through sacraments, the soul can be liberated *and* perfected and, thus, make a steady rise towards God, and not only escape the conditions of this life for brief moments of vision. Augustine's disappointment after his ecstasies in Milan and even in Ostia points in a similar direction. These experiences are not only exceptional, but also unstable. Augustine surely did not consider them necessary for everyone, and even for him-

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204. Cf. Remy, *Le Christ médiateur* I,24; R.D. Crouse, "Paucis mutatis verbis: St. Augustine's Platonism," *Augustine and his Critics*, ed. R. Dodaro and G. Lawless, (London-New York: Routledge, 2000) 37–50, esp. 37f.

205. Cf. W.J. Hankey, "Self-Knowledge and God as Other in Augustine. Problems for a Postmodern Retrieval," *Bochumer Philosophisches Jahrbuch für Antike und Mittelalter* 4 (1999): 83–123, esp. 120f; W.J. Hankey, "Augustinian Immediacy and Dionysian Mediation in John Colet, Edmund Spenser, Richard Hooker and the Cardinal de Bérulle," *Augustinus in der Neuzeit, Colloque de la Herzog August Bibliothek de Wolfenbüttel, 14–17 octobre 1996, sous la direction de Kurt Flasch et Dominique de Courcelles*, ed. D. de Courcelles (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998) 125–160, esp. 127f; W.J. Hankey, "Mind (mens)," *Augustine through the Ages* 566.

206. *Civ.* 9.13; *S.Dolb.* 26.44; 61.

self there were no repetitions after Monnica's death and his reflection on her
Christian model life.[207] As distinct from Plotinus and Porphyry, for Iamblichus
and Augustine the ascent of the soul does not consist in extraordinary mo-
ments of transport, but in her *bodily* life, for only that is complete human
life. For Augustine, this way is *homo Jesus Christus*, adequate to the human
sinful condition and leading to eschatological fulfillment.[208]

2.1 Loving God

For Augustine, God himself wants to be worshipped not for his own but
for the worshippers' sake. True knowledge of God cannot be achieved with-
out loving him.[209] The relation of the Catholics to God-Father and to Mother-
Church, i.e., the Body of Christ and its various members can only be under-
stood fully in terms of love.[210] True love of neighbour must be love of Christ
in our neighbour. Only in this sense, it is legitimate and, we might add, it
becomes really inevitable to honour God's City, the universal Church, and
that must include to love her.[211]

What in Iamblichus has been a coherent enumeration of φιλία-relations,
in Augustine becomes a centred cosmos. Love is clearly recognized as the
strongest human power. Christ in his incarnation came so close to humans
that they *could* indeed love him and all other beings in him.[212] Christ can
and must be loved mediately *and* directly, as God and man, as in me and
above me; a human being can hardly show the same love for a super-tran-
scendent One. Analogously, the Church can pray to the Father "*per Christum*"
and "in (the unity of) the Holy Spirit"; can Iamblichus ever address the last
principle? Again, we detect a profoundly Augustinian logic in operation.
Human love is converted to Christian charity on the basis of the incarnation
by which God himself turns to the humans and, in Christ, creates both the
possibility and the model for what is truly a conversion of human love to
affectus in Deum. What in Iamblichus is transcendentally, and somewhat
theoretically, the case, in Augustine becomes operational, historically con-
crete and humanly possible.

2.2 Grace and Humility

For the question of grace and humility, Augustine's general criticism of
(Neoplatonic) philosophy could not be applied to Iamblichus in the same

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207. *Conf.* 7.17.23; 9.6.14; 9.10.24; 9.13.36f.
208. *Trin.* 15.7.11; *ep.* 3,4; Cf. Rist, *Augustine* 97–104; Remy, *Le Christ médiateur* I,126f.
209. *S.Dolb.* 26,12; 22; 29.
210. *S.Dolb.* 26.42; 47; 54; 57f.
211. *S.Dolb.* 26.48; 53; 56.
212. *S.Dolb.* 26.62.

way. In short, *humilitas* for the bishop means two different, yet interrelated things:

(1) the fundamental recognition that humans exist as different from and dependent on the creator and that they are separated from God and happiness not by their nature or mortality but by sin, both original and personal;

(2) the acceptance of Christ, *Verbum incarnatum*, as the one humble mediator who operates through the sacraments of His Church.

In Iamblichus' thought, the place of 'humility' is less prominent, but ultimately equally important in the form of the consciousness of one's "nothingness" and in the continued reliance on the gods' primary activity in theurgy. Both Iamblichus and Augustine reach the existential and philosophical conclusion that philosophy in itself is insufficient and, therefore, must be relativized: the starting point of the ascent, according to both, is below or, really, beyond what philosophy can reach, and the same is true for its final perfection.

We can certainly detect important similarities between the Augustinian Christology and Iamblichus' depiction of Pythagoras as quasi-divine teacher who still remains truly human, and whose soul certainly descended, and thus humbled herself, for the purpose of helping others ascend.[213] For Augustine however, the mediator's *humilitas* is unique, totally different from, and yet the condition of, that *humilitas* which all others must learn. Christ alone intercedes for us, all others do it for each other under the one head.[214] To recognize this is to be able to become a Christian. It sounds very much like the consciousness of one's οὐδένεια, but Augustine gives it a new, very determinate content. Both would agree that the way up starts from the very bottom, but for Augustine that means it starts by becoming humble *as* a baptized Christian, i.e., by following Christ in his descent and ascent.[215] The incarnation revealed and taught humility which is the one and only way to the mediator or, rather, *with* the mediator to what is beyond creation.[216]

Humility for both Augustine and Iamblichus is a philosophical necessity, not only an ethical precept.[217] The accusation of *superbia* cannot be upheld against Iamblichus in the same way as against Porphyry. We have come to know the theurge as a sincere advocate of humility before the gods. Iamblichan theurgy corresponds to his metaphysical theory and to the human soul's weakness. The same is true for sacraments in Augustine. In the bishop's concept the reasons for human alienation from God and happiness come out as

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213. *Pyth.* 2.8–11, 3.14f; 4.18f; 5.20; 6.30; 28.143f; *protr.* 8.6, 78,2–5.
214. *S.Dolb.* 26.57; 63.
215. *S.Dolb.* 26.59; *En.Ps.* 31.2.18.
216. *S.Dolb.* 26.60f.
217. Partially against Remy, *Le Christ médiateur* I,146f.

both metaphysical and historical-ethical. The historical work of Christ the saviour and mediator corresponds to this. Yet, the person and school of Pythagoras occupies a place so central and unique in Iamblichus' thought that his role is certainly similar to Christ. We cannot exclude that Iamblichus consciously opposed Christian claims both by introducing a unique saviour figure and giving historical proofs and foundations to his metaphysical theory. If in Augustine there is a danger of opposing the work of grace to nature, in Iamblichus the danger comes from the other side: theurgy is fundamentally "a function of the actual nature of the universe,"[218] in which the One is so transcendentally present as to make it difficult to imagine a new kind of presence to be able to occur. What unites both thinkers is that they do not only expose a theory of salvation but they propose a system of institutions and practices that goes with it.

What is missing in Iamblichus is the concreteness of grace given in the incarnation, both as a model and, even more fundamentally, as the *condicio sine qua* one cannot be truly humble. Is humility a virtue of the gods in Iamblichus? The gods and their powers certainly reach down; purified souls return from above in order to help others on the way up. The concept is not completely alien. Porphyry rejected any contact with the flesh as contamination of the gods.[219] But does Iamblichus? His *De mysteriis* primarily wants to show that our use of material means in approaching the gods neither manipulates them nor fails to reach them because they *contain* the material and they act towards us through it. Indeed, Iamblichus shows that our action towards the gods in all the forms of sacrifice is their action towards themselves in us. In this *co-operation* the human is united to the gods by their agency.

The soul of the mediator Pythagoras on the one hand is not compromised by her descent into his special body, and that can surely be interpreted as an act of humility; but then on the other hand, the unity of soul and body with the Word in Christ's person is much more intimate and determinate than Apollo's special relation to Pythagoras.[220] To have the one Son of God dwell among humans is a new, definitive level of divine humility and, thus, of divine communion with humans.

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218. Rist, "Pseudo-Dionysius, Neoplatonism and the Weakness of the Soul" 143, cf. 146f.
219. Cf. Remy, *Le Christ médiateur* I,148f.
220. *Pyth.* 15.66; 28.135.

3. Final Words

At the end of our comparison between the theurge and Augustine, our results seem to be more questions than answers. Still, comparing these two great figures in the history of thought and religion does shed light in both directions. Even if historical connections to Iamblichus are weak, Augustine should be read more carefully with Iamblichan philosophy in the background. The two also exemplify the confrontation into which eastern and western Neoplatonism came with and after Plotinus; and they show where the line between Platonic philosophy and Christianity really runs or, rather, what the conversion *of* love and philosophy really changes. Radical difference *and* intimate communion between human and divine realms, humility as the natural relationship between the soul and God, the need for 'grace,' the correspondence between external and internal realities in the ascent, political concern, the quest for the mediator, a universal love that turns us back to the One: Augustine would be surprised again by what one can find in the Platonists. It is within these basic analogies that their differences should be placed. For Iamblichus, souls can be reincarnated and descend again, be it on a higher level of purification. For Augustine, there is only one human life. This fact conditions not only the uniqueness of Christ's status as mediator but also contributes to Augustine's general tendency to greater concreteness. In Iamblichus, the accent lies on the transcendence of the principle: the One is both more transcendent and, thus, more present, directly and indirectly. In Augustine, the presence of the divine to the human is more concrete and, if we can say so, more human in virtue of the fundamental union between the two in Christ which makes all other unions possible and creates the possibility for true humility.

Even when Augustine, in his great sermon on 1 January 404, explicitly warns his listeners against theurgical *curiositas*, his message is not contrary to Iamblichus' spirituality. Augustine's preaching obviously was addressed to adherents of a more Iamblichan form of theurgical Neoplatonism among his listeners. The bishop consciously takes up their interests, their anxieties and philosophical insights, which he understands and tries to convert to Christ. For them, for his Catholic congregation and perhaps even for himself, dealing with the theurgical temptations provides a valuable opportunity and a backdrop against which he was able to develop and clarify his own doctrine on Christ's mediation and humility.

The comparison between the 'Doctor of Grace' and the 'most divine Iamblichus' shows the philosophical and spiritual nature of humility on both sides, and it helps ascertain more precisely where the Christian difference really lies. Those, says Augustine, who believe in Christ need not procure their salvation either with the help of spirits or by their own powers and

virtues alone: "*securi sumus*" because of our High priest Jesus Christ; the "Head intercedes for all members," so they can intercede for each other and "safely" turn to him.[221] This freedom from cares is the consolation, the joy and the hope Augustine promises to those who accept the gift of his humility and who adhere to Christ, his Church and his sacraments, to those who are converted to him in their lives.[222]

221. *S.Dolb.* 26.57, cf. 26.54; cf. *En.Ps.* 31.2.20f; 24f (etymological play with *se-cur*/ *curi-osi*).
222. *S.Dolb.* 26.63.