

# Philosophy, Ἱερατική, and the Damascian Dichotomy: Pursuing the Bacchic Ideal in the Sixth-Century Academy

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THE BEGINNING of the sixth century CE found the venerable Athenian Academy unexpectedly struggling to maintain its very existence. The institution enjoyed both curricular and political stability for much of the fifth century under the capable leadership of Proclus of Lycia, but after his death in 485, the school struggled to find a capable successor. Edward Watts has suggested that the failing fortunes of the Academy in this period were due to a dearth of candidates who possessed the right combination of the intellectual heft required to carry on the grand tradition of the Academy and the political deftness needed to protect it against encroaching Christian authorities. As a result, the school was perched on the razor's edge. In particular, Watts postulates that an impolitic emphasis on traditional forms of religious ritual in the Academy in the post-Proclan era, especially by the indiscrete Hegias, the head of the school around the beginning of the sixth century, intensified Christian scrutiny.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the assumption of the position of scholarch, the head of the school, by the

<sup>1</sup> See E. J. Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria* (Berkeley 2006) 118–142; and “Athens between East and West: Elite Self-Presentation and the Durability of Traditional Cult,” *GRBS* 57 (2017) 191–213, which contends that, with regard to religion, Athens retained a decidedly traditional character well into the fifth century. Even after the temples were shuttered in the second quarter of that century, elites supportive of ancestral practices extended financial support to the Academy, for it was known to be sympathetic to traditional deities and rites.

Syrian Damascius in the first decade of the sixth century came at a critical moment in the life of the Academy. His reconstitution of the curriculum was characterized, in part, by a critique of Proclus' readings of Plato's dialogues and the *Chaldean Oracles*, the second-century CE collection of λόγια cherished by the Late Platonists; some also have suggested that a concomitant devaluation of the hieratic/theurgic ritual directed towards traditional deities that had been prevalent during Proclus' stewardship of the Academy may have played a significant role in Damascius' success.<sup>2</sup> The scholarly portrait of Damascius developed from this hypothesis has been that of a sober rationalist who, as Polymnia Athanassiadi posits, "preferred the philosophical to the theurgic" and sought to rid the Academy of its theurgic tincture and to return the institution to

<sup>2</sup> F. Trabattoni, "Per una biografia di Damascio," *Rivista critica di storia della filosofia* 40 (1985) 179–201; P. Hoffman, "Damascius," *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques* II (Paris 1994) 555–556, follows Trabattoni; Sara Ahbel-Rappe, *Damascius' Problems and Solutions Concerning First Principles* (Oxford 2010) 5, follows Hoffman. A partial listing of significant scholarship on theurgy includes: E. R. Dodds, "Theurgy and its Relationship to Neoplatonism," *JRS* 37 (1947) 55–69; Laurence J. Rosan, *The Philosophy of Proclus: The Final Phase of Ancient Thought* (New York 1949); Friedrich W. Cremer, *Die Chaldäischen Orakel und Jamblich de mysteriis* (Meisenheim am Glan 1969); A. Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition* (The Hague 1974); H. Lewy, *The Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy: Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy*<sup>3</sup> (Paris 1978); A. Sheppard, "Proclus' Attitude to Theurgy," *CQ* 32 (1982) 212–224; R. Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles* (Leiden 1989); B. Nasemann, *Theurgie und Philosophie in Jamblichs de mysteriis* (Stuttgart 1991); P. Athanassiadi, "Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination: The Testimony of Iamblichus," *JRS* 83 (1993) 115–130; G. Shaw, "Theurgy: Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus," *Traditio* 41 (1985) 1–28, and *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park 1995); J. Stäcker, *Die Stellung der Theurgie in der Lehre Iamblichs* (Frankfurt 1995); C. Van Liefferinge, *La théurgie des Oracles Chaldaïques à Proclus* (Liege 1999); E. C. Clarke, *Iamblichus' De Mysteriis: A Manifesto of the Miraculous* (Aldershot 2001); J. Dillon, "Iamblichus' Defence of Theurgy: Some Reflections," *International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* 1 (2007) 30–41; I. Tanaseanu-Döbler, *Theurgy in Late Antiquity: The Invention of a Ritual Tradition* (Göttingen 2013); C. Addey, *Divination and Theurgy in Neoplatonism: Oracles of the Gods* (London/New York 2014).

its philosophical roots.<sup>3</sup> Athanassiadi is partly correct, for Damascius did allot greater efficacy to philosophy, but this does not mean that he disdained hieratic ritual. Indeed, he recognized the power and, in some ontological spheres, even the primacy of hieratic acts, but he also offered a vision of Late Platonist philosophy that incorporated the cathartic effects of the rites without requiring performance. In this, he differed from Proclus who valued the anagogic power inherent not only in philosophy but also in hieratic/theurgic ritual acts.

Although not an official component of the Academy's philosophical curriculum,<sup>4</sup> hieratic ritual had been identified with the school for the better part of the fifth century. This is due in no small part to the influence Proclus had on the school, which included formal studies of texts associated with the Chaldean and Orphic traditions that were valued for their contributions to both philosophy/theology and ritual performance. Further, many of his readings of Plato and Homer were infused with theurgic themes and references to ritual acts.<sup>5</sup> Finally, Proclus' own personal practices embraced an array of rites from different cultural traditions and were deemed to have cathartic efficacy. Not all of them were theurgic (if we limit the use of the term in this instance to rites associated with the *Chaldean Oracles*), but most could be described as "hieratic."<sup>6</sup> Ilinca

<sup>3</sup> P. Athanassiadi, *Damascius: The Philosophical History* (Athens 1999) 56; cf. 223 n.234 on fr.88: "one detects a criticism of the active interest in theurgy as theory and practice displayed by Proclus and Hegias." Trabattini, *Rivista critica di storia della filosofia* 40 (1985) 179, also argues that Damascius sought to "lead the school back to its genuine speculative characteristics, against the excess of religious and theurgical motives"; cf. Hoffman, *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques* II 574.

<sup>4</sup> *Anon.Procl.* 10 Westerink lists Plato's dialogues and the different types of virtues (natural, ethical, political, cathartic, and contemplative) that each addresses (according to Iamblichus), but there is no mention of ritual.

<sup>5</sup> Tanaseanu-Döbler, *Theurgy* 199–257.

<sup>6</sup> Marinus *V.Procl.* 18–19, 28. This differentiation is not one that will normally be made in this article, but it seems necessary to do so because Marinus alluded specifically to Chaldean purifications.

Tanaseanu-Döbler has emphasized the “strictly personal and private” nature of these acts, but Marinus indicates that Proclus lectured at length about the cathartic virtues, “what they are and how one comes to possess these also, and living strictly in accordance with them, doing on all occasions the things that produce separation for the soul.”<sup>7</sup> Marinus proceeds to allude to Chaldean and Orphic apotropaic methods, processions to the sea, observations of the rites of different ethnic groups, and other such practices as the means by which Proclus demonstrated his cathartic virtue. This is not to suggest that Proclus sought to flaunt his hieratic methods in a way that might prove overly troubling to Christian authorities, but his international reputation was surely forged, in part, by his embrace of the hieratic in both his exegesis and his classroom lectures.<sup>8</sup> The picture of Proclus painted by Marinus hints at a personal religiosity that informed the views he expressed and wished to impress upon his students. The aforementioned lectures, along with his tendency to regularly declare that a philosopher ought to be the “common priest of the entire world” (*V.Procl.* 20) and his inclusion of students in Chaldean rituals,<sup>9</sup> indicate that, though it was perhaps not a formal aspect of the curriculum, advanced students, at least, experienced sustained exposure to hieratic theory and practice in the course of their studies. Thus, when Damascius deemphasized ritual praxis in the school, he was bucking a tradition that had been associated with the Academy for at least half a century.

<sup>7</sup> *V.Procl.* 18; transl. Mark Edwards, *Neoplatonic Saints: The Lives of Plotinus and Proclus by their Students* (Liverpool 2000).

<sup>8</sup> The emphasis here on Proclus’ ritual side is not to suggest that this is the sole focus of his philosophical program. Tanaseanu-Döbler has demonstrated that Proclus was “first and foremost a philosopher” (*Theurgy* 255), that is, he was interested in reading and interpreting Aristotle and Plato, amongst others, in a manner similar to that of previous generations of philosophers. He did not define himself solely by his theurgic interests and practices.

<sup>9</sup> *V.Isid.* 59F Athanassiadi = fr.200 Zintzen.

Yet, it would be hasty to conclude that Damascius did not appreciate the cathartic power of the rites and was, as one scholar has written, “deeply alarmed about the subordination of philosophical studies to ritual.”<sup>10</sup> As will be argued, he believed the rites to have value, even if not to the degree that had characterized the philosophical life in Proclus’ Academy, but he reimagined the manner in which they were incorporated into philosophy.<sup>11</sup>

Two of Damascius’ works will be central to this discussion, the *Life of Isidore* and the notes from his lectures on the *Phaedo*. Both have reached us in a fragmentary state. As a result, context and, possibly, greater elaboration on the topics are absent, so that interpretation must be viewed as tentative. Further, a firm sense of when the two works were written is lacking. The lecture notes presumably were compiled after Damascius took the reins of the Academy, which likely occurred sometime in the early sixth century, but his tenure as scholarch lasted until the school was shuttered by Justinian in 529. Dating the *Life* is slightly less problematic as we have a ten-year window in which it was written, 517–526.<sup>12</sup> With the possibility that a decade or more may stand between the two works, it must be acknowledged that an individual’s perspectives might change and, thus, continuity of opinion cannot be assumed. One purpose of this article, however, is to examine statements on philosophy and *ιερατική*, and to suggest that Damascius assessed the two categories in a consistent manner.

#### *The Damascian Dichotomy*

One of Damascius’ best-known statements speaks to the purported divide between philosophy and ritual theory and

<sup>10</sup> Ahbel-Rappe, *Damascius’ Problems and Solutions* 5.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Iamb. *Myst.* 230 Des Places (hieratic ritual enables ascent to the One); Procl. *In Crat.* 71 Pasquali (theurgy enables ascent to Intelligible Intellect).

<sup>12</sup> L. G. Westerink, *The Greek Commentaries on Plato’s Phaedo II Damascius* (Amsterdam 1977) 8.

praxis and offers the opportunity to scrutinize these competing or, alternatively, complementary methods by which the divine might be approached and the soul emancipated from its material constraints. In his lectures on Plato's *Phaedo*, Damascius seemingly offered a dichotomous<sup>13</sup> description of the characters and characteristics of late Platonism (*In Phd.* I 172):

To some philosophy is primary, as for Porphyry and Plotinus and many other philosophers; to others hieratic, as it is to Iamblichus, Syrianus, Proclus, and the hieratic school in general.

ὅτι μὲν τὴν φιλοσοφίαν προτιμῶσιν, ὡς Πορφύριος καὶ Πλωτῖνος καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοὶ φιλόσοφοι. οἱ δὲ τὴν ἱερατικὴν, ὡς Ἰάμβλιχος καὶ Συριανὸς καὶ Πρόκλος καὶ οἱ ἱερατικοὶ πάντες.

With this statement, Damascius distinguished between the dialectical/theoretical approach to the divine that had been so closely associated with the philosophy of the Academy since its establishment nearly one thousand years earlier and the ritual emphasis that entered the Platonic tradition in the late third century CE. This ceremonial component, frequently designated by the interchangeable terms “theurgy” (θεουργία) and the “hieratic art” (ἡ ἱερατικὴ τέχνη), was introduced into the Platonist mainstream in earnest by Iamblichus (ca. 245–325), who contended in his *apologia* for theurgy, *On the Mysteries*, that the contemplative approach to the divine so favored by his predecessors was inadequate; instead, by engaging the aid of the divine via a complex ritual process, the soul could be purified and liberated from its material constraints and even enjoy union with the One, the Platonic First Principle.<sup>14</sup> Although this essay will follow the terminology of Damascius in differentiating between “philosophy” and “hieratic/theurgic/telestic” practice, this is not to suggest that the terminological

<sup>13</sup> Throughout the paper, I refer to this passage and the juxtaposition it presents as the Damascian Dichotomy.

<sup>14</sup> Iamb. *Myst.* 230.12–13. Ilinca Tanaseanu-Döbler (*per litt.*) has noted that Iamblichus' Pythagorean treatises demonstrate evidence of more traditional approaches to catharsis through mathematics and philosophy. See too her *Theurgy* 111–130.

dichotomy he established with this statement was nearly as tidy as his categories would suggest. Plotinus is listed by Damascius as one of those for whom philosophy was most important, but recent studies have highlighted the ritualistic nature of Plotinian contemplation and the similarities between it and mystical/‘magical’ practices of the period.<sup>15</sup> Further, it is to be noted that Porphyry was said to have admitted the value of theurgic techniques for the purification of the “spiritual” soul (*anima spiritalis*), which interfaces with the material realm.<sup>16</sup> Although he prized hieratic rites, Proclus was no less enthusiastic about philosophy. In his commentary on the *Parmenides*, two separate forms of ascent are mentioned, the philosophical (associated with Plato) and the theurgic (associated with the *Chaldean Oracles*).<sup>17</sup> Tanaseanu-Döbler observes that there is no hierarchy in which theurgy is presented as more elevated than theoretical philosophy; rather, each is presented as a legitimate method of ascent. And further, his readings of the *Chaldean Oracles* attest a similar philosophical approach, showing that Proclus read the text as much for its theological insights as for any ritual purposes.<sup>18</sup> In light of these examples, the Dichotomy was simplistic the moment Damascius spoke it into existence and the notion of a pure Plotinian or Porphyrian theoretical philosophy without any concern for ritual is problematic as is a pure Proclan hieratic philosophy. Given this complexity, it is important to note that, in this essay, ‘ritual’ ought to be understood to refer primarily to ritual involving material objects.

<sup>15</sup> See Z. Mazur, “‘Unio Magica’: Part I: On the Magical Origins of Plotinus’ Mysticism,” *Dionysius* 21 (2003) 23–52, and “‘Unio Magica’: Part II: Plotinus, Theurgy, and the Question of Ritual,” *Dionysius* 22 (2004) 29–55. Against Mazur, see L. Brisson, “Plotinus and the Magical Rites Practiced by the Gnostics,” in K. Corrigan and T. Rasimus (eds.), *Gnosticism, Platonism and the Late Ancient World. Essays in Honour of John D. Turner* (Leiden 2013) 443–463.

<sup>16</sup> August. *De Civ. D.* 10.9.

<sup>17</sup> Procl. *In Parm.* 5.990 (II 205 Steel).

<sup>18</sup> Tanaseanu-Döbler, *Theurgy* 219–220 and 252.

*Philosophy and ἱερατική in the Life of Isidore*

When the Damascian Dichotomy has been cited in scholarship, it has been used primarily to illustrate the historical division between pre- and post-theurgic Platonic philosophy,<sup>19</sup> but little note has been taken of the meaning that Damascius invested in the terms “philosophy” and ἱερατική or the context in which they were used.<sup>20</sup> It is necessary to attend to both issues, first by exploring the question of definition and then by addressing contextual matters. Insight into the use of the two words is gained from another Damascian work, the *Life of Isidore*, in which the terms again were employed appositionally:<sup>21</sup>

ἱερατική and philosophy do not stem from the same principles. Philosophy descends (καθήκουσα) from the one cause of all things to the lowest level of existence through all the intermedi-

<sup>19</sup> For example, G. Fowden, “The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society,” *JHS* 102 (1982) 37.

<sup>20</sup> Recently Tanaseanu-Döbler has examined the relationship between philosophy and ritual in Damascius’ philosophy. She correctly argues that dialectical philosophy offered access to the First Principle, and hieratic practice, which operated within the encosmic realm, did not (*Theurgy* 272). Second, she indicates that the meaning of ἱερατική, a term that became associated under Proclus with ceremonial praxes of both a theurgic nature (“theurgy” being a term she links to acts specifically associated with the Chaldean tradition) and a more traditionally priestly cast, tilted heavily towards the latter (268–275). In her reading, ἱερατική lacked the theurgic overtones and was simply a “term used for the sum total of living pagan cults” (271). The impulse to reconnect Damascius to the hieratic is correct, but it is argued in this essay that he included in his use of “hieratic” not only the sacerdotal sense, but also the theurgic.

<sup>21</sup> *V.Isid.* 4A Athanassiadi = fr.3, 3α Zintzen. I have modified Athanassiadi’s translation slightly, and have preferred to retain the order of the version in the *Suda* which placed “Nothing ... Egyptian ones” in its current position rather than Athanassiadi’s version inserting it after the description of ἱερατική. I think Damascius was drawing a distinction between philosophy, which was universal, and ἱερατική, which was ‘originally’ Egyptian and only imported to the Greeks via Pythagoras; on this last point see Hdt. 2.58, Diod. 1.9.6. I note that Tanaseanu-Döbler also made the decision to leave the text in the form found in the *Suda* (*Theurgy* 271 n.67).

ate orders—the divine, the next in excellence after the divine and, on the so-called third level, the visible. Nothing is exclusive to philosophers on one side [of the Mediterranean] only; so that it is easy, if one wishes, to adapt Greek notions to conform with Egyptian ones. As for *ιερατική*, which is the worship of the gods, it ties the ropes of anagogic salvation on the third, pericosmic level, that of generation; it has its root in the pericosmic causes and this is its subject—the immortality of the soul (on which the philosophy of the Egyptians is the same), the infinite variety of fates allotted in Hades according to one’s good or bad qualities, and also the infinite changes in life, how at different times souls inhabit different human bodies or different species of animals and plants. The Egyptians were the first men to philosophise on these things. Indeed it is from the Egyptians that the Pythagoreans introduced all these matters to the Greeks.

ιερατική καὶ φιλοσοφία οὐκ ἀπὸ τῶν αὐτῶν ἄρχονται ἀρχῶν, ἀλλ’ ἢ μὲν φιλοσοφία ἀπὸ τῆς μιᾶς τῶν πάντων αἰτίας, εἰς τὴν ὑποστάθμηγ τῶν ὄντων καθήκουσα διὰ μέσων τῶν ὄλων γενῶν, θεῶν τε καὶ τῶν μετὰ θεοὺς κρειττόνων καὶ ἐν τρίτῳ, φασί, βήματι φαινομένων. ἐν γὰρ οὐδὲν ἐστὶ τῶν καθόλου προειρημένων τοῖς ἐκατέρωθι φιλοσόφοις, ὥστε καὶ ῥαδίαν εἶναι τὴν ἐφαρμογὴν τῷ βουλομένῳ προσαρμόττειν τοῖς Αἰγυπτίοις τὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων. τὴν δὲ ἱερατικὴν, ἣ ἐστὶ θεῶν θεραπεία, ἐντεῦθεν ποθεν ἀπὸ τῶν περικοσμίων αἰτιῶν ἄρχεσθαι καὶ περὶ ταῦτα πραγματεύεσθαι, ψυχῶν περὶ ἀθανασίας, ὅτι κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ καὶ Αἰγυπτίοις φιλοσοφεῖται, τῶν τε ἐν ἕδου {μυρίων} λήξεων παντοίων πρὸς ἀρετὴν καὶ κακίαν ἀφορισμένων, ἔτι τῶν περὶ τὸν βίον μυρίων μεταβολῶν, ὡς ἄλλοτε ἐν ἄλλοις σώμασιν ἢ γένεσιν ζῴων καὶ φυτῶν διατριβουσῶν. Αἰγύπτιοι δὲ ταῦτά εἰσιν οἱ πρῶτοι φιλοσοφοῦντες· ἀπὸ γὰρ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων ἕκαστα τούτων οἱ Πυθαγόρειοι ἐξήνεγκαν εἰς τοὺς Ἑλληνας.

Described in this passage are two methods by which the divine might be approached. The first, philosophy, was universal, accessible, and easily translated trans-ethnically for all who had the ability to see through the cultural trappings, such as local or regional mythologies, that encased the philosophical truths. Damascius’ allusion to the existence of a perennial philosophy,

a notion with roots in Stoicism and Middle Platonism, was a recurring theme in Late Platonism and appears at other points in his works.<sup>22</sup> At the end of *On First Principles*, for example, Damascius sought to find correspondences between aspects of his metaphysics and Chaldean, Orphic, Babylonian, Persian, Sidonian, and Egyptian theologies so that he might demonstrate that the qualities of the divine adduced in his own exploration of the intelligible realm were compatible with the theologies of more ancient cultures.<sup>23</sup> As a product of the First Principle, philosophy descended from “higher” to “lower” ontological orders. The verb used in the *Life of Isidore* to describe this descent, καθήκειν, was commonly employed by Late Platonists to signify the expansion of divine powers into the material world and, frequently, the sympathetic relationship between the divine and material expressions of these powers.<sup>24</sup> Proclus hinted at the theurgic expression of this process when he spoke of the special character of the encosmic, planetary gods, such as Helios, reaching down “even as far as grass and stone—and there is grass and stone dependent on the power of the sun, whether you care to call them ‘heliotrope’ or by any other name. It is much the same in the case of the other gods.”<sup>25</sup> Proclus elsewhere counted the heliotrope as an indicator of the divine in the material and, by extension, as

<sup>22</sup> See G. Boys-Stones, *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy: A Study of its Development from the Stoics to Origen* (Oxford 2001); J. Schott, *Christianity, Empire, and the Making of Religion in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia 2008) 16–51.

<sup>23</sup> Damasc. *De princ.* I 314–324 Ruelle; cf. H.-D. Saffrey, “Accorder entre elles les traditions théologiques: une caractéristique du néoplatonisme athénien,” in E. P. Bos and P. A. Meijer (eds.), *On Proclus and his Influence in Medieval Philosophy* (Leiden 1992) 35–50.

<sup>24</sup> For example, Procl. *In Ti.* I 111.11, 167.8 Diehl; *Elem. Theol.* 140, 145 Dodds; *In Parm.* 4.874 (II 49); *Iamb. Myst.* 56.14, 192.14; similar (though not identical) use of the term by Damascius at *De princ.* 259.10.

<sup>25</sup> Procl. *In Ti.* I 111.10–13: ὅπου καὶ μέχρι πάσας καὶ λίθων ἢ τῶν θεῶν τῶν ἐφόρων ιδιότης καθήκει, καὶ ἔστι λίθος καὶ πόα τῆς Ἡλιακῆς ἐξηρητημέναι δυνάμεως, εἴτε ἡλιοτρόπιον εἴτε ἄλλως ὁπωσοῦν καλεῖν ἐθέλοις; παραπλησίως δὲ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων θεῶν.

theurgically potent (*CMAG* VI 148.14). Damascius' characterization of philosophy in the *Life of Isidore* as descended from the First Cause accomplished two things. The first and most obvious effect was the establishment of a link between philosophy and the First Principle, which accorded to philosophy a singular status; secondly, because in the context of Late Platonist metaphysics the language of descent necessarily implied a return to the source or, in this case, the One, philosophy was granted an anagogic role similar to that claimed for theurgy by Iamblichus.<sup>26</sup>

Damascius' description of *ἱερατική*, the "priestly art," suggests that it played a role different from that of philosophy. Its characterization as service or worship of the gods (*θεραπεία θεῶν*) indicates the accent that he placed on the special relationship between hieratic practice and the gods. Whatever philosophy might have been and whatever its interface with the divine, it was not *θεραπεία θεῶν*, a status reserved for *ἱερατική* alone. While Tanaseanu-Döbler's association of the term *solely* with priestly acts is too exclusive, it is important to emphasize the sacerdotal qualities implied by *ἱερατική*; the use of this word both in the fragment from the *Life of Isidore* and in the Damascian Dichotomy alludes not only to ritual acts, but also to a lifestyle centered upon the celebration of traditional rites and the observation of holy days. Surely, the example of Proclus, arguably the quintessential representative of the philosophico-hieratic lifestyle, would still have been fresh in the collective memory of the Athenian Academy. As noted above, Proclus was portrayed in Marinus' *Life* as one involved in the cathartic rituals of the Orphics and Chaldeans that "produces

<sup>26</sup> As noted above, Iamblichus vouched for theurgy's ability to unite the individual with the One (*Myst.* 230.12–14); Proclus, on the other hand, suggested that theurgy's efficacy did not extend as far as the One (*In Crat.* 71); see C. Helmig and A. L. C. Vargas, "Ascent of the Soul and Grades of Freedom: Neoplatonic Theurgy between Ritual and Philosophy," in P. d'Hoine and G. van Riel (eds.), *Fate, Providence and Moral Responsibility in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought* (Leuven 2014) 253–266.

separation for the soul” (18) and who piously observed the “significant holidays of every people and the ancestral rites of each” (19); thus, he sought to personify his frequently-proclaimed maxim that a philosopher “should be the common priest of the entire world” (19). The ‘hieratic school’ of the Damascian Dichotomy must be understood in light of the Proclan model, which not only embraced ritual, but also sought to position the philosopher as a sacerdotal figure.<sup>27</sup> The *θεραπεία* of the gods, a phrase used in some contexts to describe worship in a general sense, but also employed to label the services associated with priests and temples, further emphasized the priestly qualities of *ιερατική*.<sup>28</sup> Elsewhere in the *Life of Isidore*, Damascius again accentuated the hieratic nature of the late Platonists by describing them as a “sacred race” who “lit holy fire on the altars.”<sup>29</sup> Such a depiction evoked the recollection of an increasingly distant past in which the altar fires had blazed in front of the temples, and thereby connected, rather idealistically, the Platonists with the practice of traditional cultic ceremonies in a period in which private displays of sacrificial piety, such as those alluded to in the *Vita Procli* and the *Life of Isidore*, would have been the norm.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of the priestly pretensions of philosophers in Late Antiquity see H. Marx-Wolf, “High Priests of the Highest God: Third-Century Platonists as Ritual Experts,” *JECs* 18 (2010) 481–513. Also, if Watts, *GRBS* 57 (2017) 208–209, is correct that wealthy benefactors of the school gave money because of the Academy’s reputation as a repository of traditional beliefs and praxes, this may be a result of the type of language found in the *Life of Isidore*, and, in turn, may have provoked the use of these phrases as a way of reminding potential benefactors of the conservationist ethos present in the Academy.

<sup>28</sup> General: Pl. *Euthphr.* 13D, *Phdr.* 255A; Arist. *Pol.* 1329a32; Jul. *Or.* 5.159b; Marin. *V.Procl.* 19. Priests/temples: Pl. *Resp.* 427B; Hermias *In Phdr.* 99.14–16 Couvreur.

<sup>29</sup> *V.Isid.* 73B Athanassiadi = *Epit.* 96 Zintzen.

<sup>30</sup> *V.Procl.* 19, alluding to Proclus’ participation, or at least his presence, in a sacrificial context; *V.Isid.* 73A Athanassiadi = *Epit.* 95 Zintzen: “The holy race [the Late Platonists] led a private life (διέζη βίον) dear to the gods and

The object of worship in the phrase *θεραπεία θεῶν*, the gods, also requires further examination. Damascius described *ιερατική* as a process dependent upon the pericosmic causes, that is, the deities directly responsible for the creation and oversight of the material realm. This finds accord with earlier descriptions of the theurgic process in which the celebrant propitiated pericosmic beings who elevated the soul to higher classes of deities, who in turn liberated it from the bonds of generation.<sup>31</sup> The designation of the soul's elevation as *ἀναγωγή* also is consonant with the Late Platonists' use of the term in a theurgic context to refer to the soul's liberation from the body and its subsequent ascent.<sup>32</sup> This anagogic aspect provides evidence of a primary difference between *ιερατική* and philosophy: as noted above, Damascius depicted philosophy as proceeding *from* the First Cause, but *ιερατική*, though rooted in the material realm, focused on return *to* the gods. Procession (*πρόοδος*) and reversion (*ἐπιστροφή*) were elemental aspects of Late Platonist metaphysics and were used, in part, to describe the ontological descent into multiplicity and the return to unity, respectively.<sup>33</sup> As a discipline in procession, philosophy was the fairest of gifts from the gods because it offered the soul a means by which to effect reversion or, as Damascius called it, "perfection" (*τελειοῦται*, *In Phd.* I 173). Its connection with the First Cause is indicative of Damascius' estimation of philosophy's potency on all ontological levels from the encosmic to the transcendent. *ιερατική*, on the other hand, was positioned as an epistrophic process poised to guide the soul towards the

blissful, a life dedicated to philosophy and to the worship of things divine (*τὸν τὰ θεῖα θεραπεύοντα*.)"

<sup>31</sup> Iamb. *Myst.* 209.9–210.10, 217.1–218.13, 230.12–14; Procl. *De Sac. et Mag.*, *CMAG* VI 151.15–23.

<sup>32</sup> For references see Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy* 487–489; Lewy notes that the term was not always used in a theurgic context, but in the passage from the *Life of Isidore* it makes the most sense to view it as referring to theurgic ascent.

<sup>33</sup> Procl. *Elem. Theol.* 25–39.

pericosmic sources and to aid in its journey from the encosmic realm towards that of the divine. Its association with the pericosmic entities and its intense focus on the enmattered soul suggests that Damascius understood *ἱερατική* to be specifically a cathartic process by which the soul was purified and freed from the bonds of generation and positioned to progress to ontologically higher tiers, but its efficacy was limited.

It was, in fact, the immortality of the soul with which *ἱερατική* was primarily concerned. Such a statement is deceptive as it could be read to suggest that Damascius viewed philosophy as a discipline that was uninterested in the nature or salvation of the soul, but this would be to misunderstand his position. Even a casual perusal of *On First Principles* and the lecture notes on the *Parmenides* and the *Phaedo* finds the soul to be of central importance;<sup>34</sup> however, the focus of *ἱερατική* was steadfastly on the soul ensnared in the cycles of generation, and it is in this context that the hieratic approach shone. The fragment from the *Life of Isidore* provides insight into the central interests of the hieratic rites, such as fate and metempsychosis, and indicates that *ἱερατική*'s essentially pericosmic order of operations was that which enabled its efficacy in this realm. Both metempsychosis and fate were viewed by Platonists such as Iamblichus and Proclus as byproducts of the soul's embodiment, and both held that hieratic ritual could offer respite from these afflictions.<sup>35</sup> Damascius shared this perspective and, like both his

<sup>34</sup> See Damascius' interpretation of the Third Hypothesis in *In Parm.* 4.1–50; C. Steel, *The Changing Self* (Brussels 1978) 79–119; Ahbel-Rappe, *Damascius' Problems and Solutions* 28–34.

<sup>35</sup> Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul* 158–161; Procl. *Hymn.* 1.48–50; 3, a hymn to the Muses in which intellect-awaking books help the soul to ascend to its kindred star (R. M. van den Berg, *Proclus' Hymns* [Leiden 2001] 212–213, notes that the Muses were associated with the study of philosophy, which accords well with the general picture of Proclus painted by Tanaseanu-Döbler as one who embraced both philosophy and hieratic rites. Tanaseanu-Döbler also adopts a cautious stance *contra* van den Berg, who argued that the hymns were used in theurgic rites, and suggests that the hymns were modeled upon theurgy “as a distinct but related endeavor” [*Theurgy*

predecessors, found philosophy and hieratic to be compatible; but whereas Iamblichus and Proclus emphasized hieratic ritual either in their hermeneutical methods or in specific treatises,<sup>36</sup> Damascius emphasized philosophy, but not to the neglect of the hieratic impulse.

In fr.4A of the *Life of Isidore*, philosophy and ιερατική were neither antagonistic nor opposites of one another; theirs was a difference of orientation. Philosophy descended to the generated world from on high and provided the soul the opportunity to secure its own salvation and to return to its source, while ιερατική was grounded in the material realm and, through priestly ministrations addressed to the gods, acted to address the condition of the soul entrapped in the cycle of fate. In this limited pericosmic layer, hieratic rites were complementary to the aims of philosophy and, to a minor degree, even more efficacious. Indeed, at one point he claimed, “Just as the other arts and sciences appeal to philosophy for corroboration, philosophy looks to hieratic to establish her own doctrines.”<sup>37</sup> In light of what the *Life of Isidore* says of ιερατική’s preeminence in the pericosmic realm, philosophical methods of purification were confirmed by comparing them to hieratic practices and interpretations.<sup>38</sup> As will be seen, by accenting this relationship, Damascius did not subordinate philosophy to ritual, but instead established the value of hieratic catharsis and affirmed

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254]. In either case, the hymns do provide insight into the power of the gods to cleanse the soul and aid its escape and ascent from materiality. Whether or not the hymns themselves were used in hieratic ritual is immaterial, for the rites also were directed towards the same deities and sought purification and ascent in much the same way seen in the hymns [see e.g. *In Crat.* 176]; 4; 6. *De prov.* 21 Boese describes how the *Chaldean Oracles* teach how to escape from fate. This passage does not refer directly to ritual means for this escape, but it is likely that these play into it.

<sup>36</sup> Iambl. *Myst.*; Procl. *De sac. et. mag.*, *CMAG* VI 148–151.

<sup>37</sup> Damasc. *In Phd.* II 109: ὅτι ὡσπερ αἱ ἄλλαι τέχναι καὶ ἐπιστήμαι ἐπὶ φιλοσοφίαν καταφυγοῦσαι βεβαιοῦνται, οὕτω καὶ φιλοσοφία ἐπὶ τὴν ιερατικὴν ἀναβάσα τὰ οἰκεία δόγματα συνίστησιν.

<sup>38</sup> *In Phd.* I 496, 508, II 108.

that philosophy, too, could approximate the cathartic success associated with *ιερατική*.

*The Bacchic Philosopher*

Further evidence of Damascius' esteem for both is found in the Dichotomy. Although there is, in his division of Platonism into philosophical and hieratic schools, a degree of historical reflection, readers often neglect to allow Damascius to finish his thought.<sup>39</sup> His statement was made in the context of the exegesis of a particular Platonic dialogue, the *Phaedo*, a text understood by Late Platonists to be focused on psychic catharsis, and was but a preface to a grander statement on the ideal philosopher and the purification of the soul:<sup>40</sup>

Plato, however, recognizing that strong arguments can be advanced from both sides, has united the two into one single truth by calling the philosopher a "Bacchus." For by using the notion of a man who has separated himself from generation as an intermediate term, we can identify the one with the other.

ὁ δὲ Πλάτων τὰς ἐκατέρωθεν συνηγορίας ἐννοήσας πολλὰς οὔσας εἰς μίαν αὐτὰς συνήγαγεν ἀλήθειαν, τὸν φιλόσοφον "Βάκχον" ὀνομάζων· καὶ γὰρ ὁ χωρίσας ἑαυτὸν τῆς γενέσεως εἰ τεθείη μέσος εἰς ταῦτ' ἄξει τῷ ἑτέρῳ τὸν ἕτερον.

The purified, "Bacchic" philosopher perfectly blended the hieratic and the philosophical. Damascius derived this reference to the philosopher as a Bacchus from the passage under his consideration, *Phaedo* 69C–D, in which Plato claimed that virtue, exemplified by self-restraint, justice, and wisdom, was a form of purification analogous to that gained through the mysteries. Plato suggested that the anonymous founders of the mysteries, themselves crypto-philosophers who asserted that those who were initiated and purified would dwell with the gods, indicated the presence of a deeper truth in the ceremonies. These initiates, the *Bakchoi*, were associated by Plato

<sup>39</sup> Exceptions are found in Athanassiadi, *Damascius, Philosophical History* 57; Tanaseanu-Döbler, *Theurgy* 268–269.

<sup>40</sup> *In Phd.* I 172, transl. Westerink, slightly modified.

with the True Philosopher.

In the *Life of Isidore*, Damascius described Heraiscus, a philosopher who “had become a Bacchus,” as a man whose intellectual and thaumaturgical gifts were innate.<sup>41</sup> In the fragment, the predominant emphasis was placed on the latter; for example, Damascius related how Heraiscus, with merely a glance, could determine whether or not a statue of a god was alive with the deity’s presence.<sup>42</sup> Other illustrations gave insight into Heraiscus’ divinatory abilities and sensitivity to impurity.<sup>43</sup> The intellectual side of the philosopher was not ignored entirely by Damascius, who suggested that Heraiscus was blessed at birth with good fortune (εὐμοιρία),<sup>44</sup> a term defined elsewhere in the *Life* as a divine illumination of the soul that allowed the one so blessed to be able to perceive and understand truth and falsity.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps the highest praise was reserved until the end of the brief biography where Damascius compared his subject to the great Proclus: “even Proclus recognized Heraiscus as being superior to himself; for Heraiscus knew all that Proclus knew, whereas the reverse was not the case.”<sup>46</sup> For those figures whom he admired—and Heraiscus must be counted amongst these—Damascius displayed hagiographical tendencies, which must caution one against attempting to map Heraiscus’ qualities precisely on the model presented in the notes on the *Phaedo*.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, the contours of the Bacchic

<sup>41</sup> 76A Athanassiadi = fr.172 Zintzen. For a full discussion of the Platonic virtues in the *V.Isid.* see D. J. O’Meara, “Patterns of Perfection in Damascius’ *Life of Isidore*,” *Phronesis* 51 (2006) 74–90; O’Meara views Heraiscus as a representative of theurgic (hieratic?) virtue (86).

<sup>42</sup> *V.Isid.* 76E Athanassiadi = *Epit.* 106, *Epit.* 107, fr.174 Zintzen.

<sup>43</sup> *V.Isid.* 76B, E Athanassiadi = *Epit.* 104 Zintzen.

<sup>44</sup> *V.Isid.* 76D Athanassiadi = fr.182 Zintzen.

<sup>45</sup> *V.Isid.* 33C Athanassiadi = *Epit.* 32, fr.72, 73 Zintzen.

<sup>46</sup> *V.Isid.* 76E Athanassiadi = *Epit.* 106, 107, fr.174 Zintzen.

<sup>47</sup> On biography/hagiography in late antiquity see P. Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man* (Berkeley 1983); H. J. Blumenthal, “Marinus’ Life of Proclus: Neoplatonist Biography,” *Byzantion* 54 (1984)

philosopher found in both works are similar enough to be noteworthy. A man blessed with both supernatural and intellectual gifts, the Bacchic Heraiscus bore the marks of the two poles characteristic of such philosophers described in the *Phaedo* lectures and was deemed by Damascius and Proclus to possess a transcendent greatness. At the same time, the special qualities of Heraiscus were present even at birth, according to Damascius, which runs counter to what appears to be the more methodical approach, characterized by leading a life of philosophical virtue, found in the *Phaedo* commentary. Exacting detail in the mechanics of the process by which the philosopher becomes a Bacchus should not be expected from a historical and, in places, hagiographical work like the *Life of Isidore*, but in Heraiscus, the outline of such a philosopher can be discerned. The lectures on the *Phaedo*, however, offer greater insight into the potency inherent in a ‘Bacchic’ philosophy, that is, a philosophy in which the hieratic and the dialectical were combined.

#### *Hieraticized Philosophy*

For Platonists like Damascius, to lead the philosophical life was to lead the virtuous life. By the sixth century (and well before), Plato’s dialogues had taken on something close to scriptural status for many Platonists and each dialogue was thought to treat a specific aspect of the late Platonic way of life.<sup>48</sup> This required the holistic embrace of a spectrum of

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474–480; B. Gentili and G. Cerri (eds.), *History and Biography in Ancient Thought* (Amsterdam 1988); A. Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography*<sup>2</sup> (Cambridge [Mass.] 1993); P. Cox Miller, “Strategies of Representation in Collective Biography: Constructing the Subject as Holy,” in T. Hägg and P. Rousseau, *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley 2000) 209–254; J. F. Finamore, “Biography as Self-Promotion: Porphyry’s *Vita Plotini*,” *Dionysius* 23 (2005) 49–62; A. P. Urbano, *The Philosophical Life: Biography and the Crafting of Intellectual Identity in Late Antiquity* (Washington 2013).

<sup>48</sup> To gain a sense of just how ingrained in the Platonic life these virtues were, one can look to Marinus’ biography of Proclus, in which the author framed his text around the list of virtues and demonstrated how his subject exemplified these virtues in all aspects of his life; see also *Anon.Prol.* 10.

virtues that Platonists, following the example of Iamblichus, denoted as (from the lowest to highest stages) physical, ethical, political, cathartic, contemplative, paradigmatic, and theurgic/hieratic.<sup>49</sup> While some of the preliminary virtues emphasized the perfecting of the embodied soul,<sup>50</sup> the others worked to effect change in the soul as it sought to separate itself from the body and attain likeness to the divine.<sup>51</sup> As noted above, the Platonists viewed the *Phaedo* to be a work addressing cathartic virtue, which divested the rational soul of the need of the body and delivered it from the bonds of the generated world. It was the cathartically virtuous person, the philosopher who led the Dionysian life and whose “troubles [were] already ended and ... [was] free from his bonds and released from custody, or rather from the confined form of life” (*In Phd.* I 171), who was the Bacchic and in whom neither hieratic nor philosophical catharsis was preferred; rather, he led a balanced life “dedicated to philosophy and worship of the divine.”<sup>52</sup> If it was desirable to shift the emphasis away from the active encourage-

<sup>49</sup> *In Phd.* I 138–144. See L. Brisson, “The Doctrine of the Degrees of Virtues in the Neoplatonists,” in H. Tarrant and D. Baltzly (eds.), *Reading Plato in Antiquity* (London 2006) 89–105; D. Baltzly, “Pathways to Purification: The Cathartic Virtues in the Neoplatonic Commentary Tradition,” in *Reading Plato* 169–184; O’Meara, *Phronesis* 51 (2006) 74–90.

<sup>50</sup> *In Phd.* I 151; the virtues first manifested themselves on the ontological level of soul, so it would be only natural that they would be most beneficial to the same.

<sup>51</sup> O’Meara, *Phronesis* 51 (2006) 76.

<sup>52</sup> *V. Isid.* 73A Athanassiadi = *Epit.* 95 Zintzen: τὸν τε φιλοσοφοῦντα καὶ τὸν τὰ θεῖα θεραπεύοντα; as indicated above, this last citation is taken from a description of the “sacred race” (ἡ ἱερὰ γενεά), a phrase that appears to have had some currency in the Platonist lexicon (see Phot. *Bibl.* 173a, in which it is applied to Platonists from Plotinus [and his teacher Ammonius] to Plutarch of Athens, Hierocles’ own teacher). In the *Life of Isidore*, ἡ ἱερὰ γενεά synchronizes with Hierocles’ usage, but with this reference to philosophy and worship of the gods, the phrase is given further definition and, unlike the Dichotomy, idealistically imagines the late Platonists as a collection of philosophers in whom both philosophical and hieratic practices were combined.

ment of ritual praxis, how might such a holistic philosophy be configured? Damascius' solution was to blend the philosophical and hieratic in such a way as to invest theoretical philosophy with *ιερατική*'s cathartic potency, that is, to retain the power associated with the rites without requiring their performance. Indeed, Damascius stated that the one who led a Dionysian life was "the philosopher in the stage of purification" (*In Phd.* I 171).

This hieraticized philosophy was analogous to and offered (nearly) the same results as the rituals. Insight into this fusion is offered in a lengthy explication of *Phaedo* 69C–D, in which Damascius drew a comparison between the Eleusinian mysteries and the Platonic scale of virtues (*In Phd.* I 167):

In the mysteries, the first stage used to be general purifications, followed by more secret ones, after which conjunctions (*συστάσεις*) took place, then initiations (*μύσεις*), and, finally, visions (*ἐποπτῆαι* [the highest degree of initiation]). The ethical and political virtues are analogous to the public purifications, the cathartic, in which all the external things are discarded, to the secret purifications, contemplative [virtues] on the dianoetic level to conjunction, the syntheses of these into a unity to initiation [i.e. the paradigmatic virtues], and the simple visions of simple forms to *ἐποπτῆαι* [i.e. the hieratic virtues].

ὅτι ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς ἡγούντο μὲν αἱ πάνδημοι καθάρσεις, εἶτα ἐπὶ ταύταις ἀπορρητότεραι, μετὰ δὲ ταύτας συστάσεις παρελαμβάνοντο καὶ ἐπὶ ταύταις μύσεις, ἐν τέλει δὲ ἐποπτῆαι. ἀναλογουσι τοίνυν αἱ μὲν ἠθικαὶ τε καὶ πολιτικαὶ ἀρεταὶ τοῖς ἐμφανέσι καθαρμοῖς, αἱ δὲ καθαρτικάι, ὅσαι ἀποσκευάζονται πάντα τὰ ἐκτός, τοῖς ἀπορρητοτέροις, αἱ δὲ περὶ τὰ διανοητὰ θεωρητικάι ἐνέργειαι ταῖς συστάσεσιν, αἱ δὲ τούτων συναίρέσεις εἰς τὸ ἀμέριστον ταῖς μύσεσιν, αἱ δὲ ἀπλαῖ τῶν ἀπλῶν εἰδῶν αὐτοψῆαι ταῖς ἐποπτῆαις.

With this analogy to the mysteries, Damascius participated in the time-honored tradition of Plato and his intellectual successors in which the rites and terminology of the initiations were employed to describe and give insight into transcendent

realities.<sup>53</sup> The Eleusinian ceremonies had not been practiced in over a century, but the memory of them and the connection made between them and the soul's ascent remained intact; indeed, Proclus utilized mystical language specifically in connection with theurgic ascent (*Theol. Plat.* 4.29–30). Our passage finds Damascius more circumspect about the hieratic influence than his predecessor, which is consistent with the observation that he placed less emphasis on hieratic ritual. In this instance, the mysteries were not aligned with theurgic ascent, but rather with ascent through attainment of the Platonic virtues. These were grasped not by means of ritual, but through study of philosophy and a coordinate lifestyle. Nevertheless, it is also evident that by assigning a grade of initiation to each virtue, Damascius intended his audience to view philosophy as an initiatory process in the same vein as the defunct mysteries. In large degree, the power of ascent once found in ritual was still attainable in a time and place where such praxes were forbidden. As is seen in the case of Proclus, the language of the mysteries was often interwoven with allusions to theurgic praxes, but this is not the case in Damascius' statement. Here is an instance in which the broader range of *ιερατική*, referring to a full complement of priestly and ritual activities, rather than the more narrow association with theurgic practice, might be found. Nevertheless, this passage shows Damascius navigating a fine line in which philosophy was both primary, in that it was the principal means of ascent, and secondary, in that the mysteries were an idealized method of attaining likeness to god.

Damascius turned next to *τελεταί*, initiatory rituals of purification, and again drew comparisons with philosophy. However, the shift from the imperfect tense in the previous analogy, in which Damascius referred to rituals no longer practiced, to the present tense suggests that he referred here to more recent or even contemporary practices, most likely those

<sup>53</sup> For Plato see A. M. Farrell, *Plato's Use of Eleusinian Mystery Motifs* (diss. U. Texas Austin 1999). Cf. Cic. *Leg.* 2.14; Plut. *Mor.* 81D–E; Procl. *Theol. Plat.* 4.30, 4.76–77 Saffrey/Westerink.

of theurgic purification. The object of *τελεστική*, a term frequently used in reference to psychic catharsis,<sup>54</sup> was the return of the individual soul to Dionysus/Bacchus, the god whom late Platonists understood to preside over the pericomic world,<sup>55</sup> from whom souls flowed on their journey into materiality, and, more importantly, who functioned as the valve through which souls returned on their anagogic ascent towards the Intelligible realm (*In Phd.* I 10–11). Damascius wrote of two forms of telestic rites, each of which were efficacious on different ontological levels. Those “here” (*ἐνθάδε*), in the material world, cleansed the material body and were preparative to those rites that were efficacious “there” (*ἐκεῖ*) in the immaterial realm.<sup>56</sup> The latter category was bifurcated further, its two types purifying the pneumatic and luminous vehicles of the irrational and rational souls, respectively.<sup>57</sup> The effectiveness of the rites was not disputed by Damascius; rather, he looked for similarly effective parallels in Plato’s works: “the way upward through telestic has three degrees as also has the way through philosophy” (*In Phd.* I 168). Evoking here the assertion at *Phaedrus* 249A that the philosopher reached perfection only after three thousand years, Damascius found in these three millennia analogues to the three telestic grades.

The function of the telestic ceremonies accorded well with

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Hermias *In Phdr.* 86.22–99.20, Hierocles *Aur. Carm.* 26.25; cf. Tana-seanu-Döbler, *Theurgy*, 197–198.

<sup>55</sup> Procl. *In Crat.* 182; Saloust. *De diis* 6.4.6 Nock.

<sup>56</sup> *In Phd.* I 168; cf. I 544, in which Damascius says that cathartic power is twofold, corporeal and incorporeal.

<sup>57</sup> Sometimes spoken of in the singular and with reference only to the rational soul. Damascius followed Proclus who argued for two vehicles of the soul which he believed housed the irrational and rational souls. See E. R. Dodds, *Proclus, The Elements of Theology* (Oxford 1963) 319–321; J. Finamore, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul* (Oxford 1984); J. Opsomer, “Was sind irrationale Seelen?” in M. Perkams and R. M. Piccione (eds.), *Proklos: Methode, Seelenlehre, Metaphysik* (Leiden 2006) 136–166; G. Smith, “Physics and Metaphysics,” in S. F. Johnson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity* (Oxford 2015) 533–538.

the hieratic description in the *Life of Isidore*, which was concerned with the immortality of the soul and its entanglement with and liberation from fate and metempsychosis; ιερατική's purgative aptitude, unmatched in the pericomic realm, meant that its potency in this ontological layer exceeded that of philosophy. Damascius acknowledged this, stating that the connection (συναφή) made through philosophy was not "as exact (ἀκριβής) as the ineffable union (ἀπόρρητος ἔνωσις)" associated with the rites (*In Phd.* I 168), an assertion consonant with his portrayal of ιερατική as a paradigm for philosophy.<sup>58</sup> Telestic acts had unmatched cathartic value, to be sure, but the power of the rites found parallels in the philosophical pursuit of the Platonic virtues that nearly replicated their potency; because of its origins in the First Principle, however, philosophy had a salvific capacity that ultimately exceeded ιερατική.<sup>59</sup> By weaving the two together in a complementary fashion, Damascius worked to follow Plato's Bacchic example and, even as he de-emphasized hieratic practices, to build a bridge to those in the Academy who still valued the rites.

*Hieraticized Philosophy and the fin-de-siècle Academy*

With this understanding of Damascius' appreciation of the potency of hieratic ritual, new light is cast on passages in the *Life of Isidore* that have been read as derogatory of hieratic ritual.<sup>60</sup> One passage belongs not to Damascius but to his teacher Isidore. Isidore's comments, addressed to one of the leading lights of the new generation of Platonists (and Damascius' predecessor), Hegias, were made in the transitional period that followed the death of Proclus' successor and biogra-

<sup>58</sup> That is, within the cathartic context of the *Phaedo*; see n.37 above.

<sup>59</sup> Damascius made numerous correctives to Proclus' philosophical positions, but on this issue they appear to have been in accord. In *In Ti.* III 300.13–20, Proclus allowed that philosophy contributed to the purification of the soul, but judged ιερατική to be the superior cathartic method. For a full discussion see Baltzly, in *Reading Plato* 175–183.

<sup>60</sup> Athanassiadi, *Damascius* 56–57 n.121; Tanaseanu-Döbler, *Theurgy* 272–273.

pher Marinus ca. 490. As Marinus' health declined, Isidore assumed the mantle of scholar, but had little interest in the position and purposed to return to Alexandria, which he appears to have done shortly after Marinus died. It is probable he would have left anyway, as Isidore demonstrated a disdain for administrative matters, but he likely also was aware of the support that Hegias enjoyed amongst segments of the school's population, which would have fostered a toxic atmosphere.<sup>61</sup> In the *Life of Isidore*, Damascius portrayed Hegias as an enthusiastic restorer of ancestral rites whose lack of discretion in this area endangered the existence of the Academy.<sup>62</sup> As his departure neared, Isidore sought to temper Hegias' zeal for *ιερατική* in order to preserve not just the school but philosophy itself.<sup>63</sup>

"If, as you maintain, Hegias," Isidore used to say, "hieratic practice is divine, I too admit it. But those who are destined to be gods must first become human;<sup>64</sup> this is why Plato, too, has said that no greater good than philosophy has ever come down to mankind, but it has come to pass that nowadays philosophy stands not on a razor's edge, but truly on the brink of extreme old age."

εἰ δὲ θειότερον χρῆμα, ὡς σὺ φῆς ὁ Ἥγιά, ἔλεγε πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁ Ἰσίδωρος, ἡ ἱερατικὴ πραγματεία, φημὶ μὲν τοῦτο κάγω· ἀλλὰ πρῶτον ἀνθρώπους γενέσθαι τοὺς ἐσομένους θεοὺς δεῖ. διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ὁ Πλάτων ἔφη μὴ ἐλθεῖν εἰς ἀνθρώπους μείζον ἀγα-

<sup>61</sup> See Watts, *City and School* 118–128.

<sup>62</sup> *V.Isid.* 145B Athanassiadi = fr.351 Zintzen; Watts, *City and School* 124.

<sup>63</sup> *V.Isid.* 150 = *Epit.* 227 Zintzen.

<sup>64</sup> The same phrase was used nearly a century earlier by Hierocles of Alexandria (fl. 408–450) with reference to the functions of the civic and contemplative virtues. For Hierocles, the latter led to divinization, while working out the civic virtues enabled one first to "become human." These civic virtues actually were a component of a bipartite category, which he branded "practical" philosophy, the other element of which was telestic ritual, which worked to purify the luminous body of the soul. Hierocles deemed contemplative philosophy to be superior to the civic virtues, which were, in turn, of greater value than the telestic purifications. See H. Schibli, *Hierocles of Alexandria* (Oxford 2002) 81–84, 107–108.

θὸν φιλοσοφίας ἀλλὰ τοῦτο συμβέβηκε νῦν ἐπὶ ξυροῦ ἐστάναι  
οὐ τῆς ἀκμῆς, τοῦ δὲ ἐσχάτου γήρωος ὡς ἀληθῶς.

This passage has been understood to show Isidore's and, by proxy, Damascius' preference for philosophy and concomitant disdain for *ιερατική*, but there is no discernible reason to suspect that Isidore was insincere in his belief that the hieratic approach was divinely oriented and led to divinization. For a period in the 470s, Isidore studied with Proclus and participated in the Chaldean ceremonies during which, much to the bemusement of Proclus, Isidore imitated the mannerisms and cries of birds.<sup>65</sup> It is difficult to account for this behavior, but it appears not to have been deemed by Proclus to be disrespectful or even terribly disruptive. It certainly was not a stain on Isidore's character or standing as a philosopher, for he was asked by the aged scholar to be the designated successor to Marinus, that is, to be the third link in the chain after Marinus and Proclus himself. Isidore took no great issue with hieratic practice on its own, but believed it to have its proper place in the philosophical life. He was of the opinion that a young man embarking on the study of philosophy ought to possess "a zealous enthusiasm for his subject." "Pious devotion to the gods," on the other hand, "most suited those who were already advanced and far on the road both in years and in philosophy."<sup>66</sup> In his statement, Isidore was not castigating *ιερατική πραγματεία*, but rather Hegias' disregard of the proper philosophical protocol;<sup>67</sup> for Isidore, hieratic ritual was appropriate to philosophers who were advanced both in age and in knowledge. It is noteworthy that Isidore's stance is more conservative than that

<sup>65</sup> *V.Isid.* 59F Athanassiadi = fr.200 Zintzen.

<sup>66</sup> *V.Isid.* 59D Athanassiadi = fr.136 Zintzen: τὴν δὲ εὐσεβῆ προθυμίαν καὶ φιλόθεον προσήκειν μάλιστα τοῖς ἤδη προβεβηκόσι καὶ πόρρωθεν ἐλαύνουσι τοῦτο μὲν ἡλικίας, τοῦτο δὲ φιλοσοφίας.

<sup>67</sup> It is unclear whether Damascius' reservations about ritual resulted from Isidore's influence. That the latter participated in the Chaldean rites might indicate an openness to them, but his bizarre behavior in the course of the ceremonies might be read as indifference.

adopted by Proclus, who seemingly was encouraged to embrace telestic ritual at a relatively young age.<sup>68</sup>

When the youthful Hegias entered the Academy around 480, Proclus viewed him as one who possessed great potential and granted the young man the opportunity to attend his lectures on the *Chaldean Oracles*, the capstone course in the Academy.<sup>69</sup> Although not explicitly stated by Damascius, the inference to be made is that Hegias missed out on crucial steps in the Platonic curriculum and did not prize philosophy as highly as he ought to have done; instead, he inordinately prioritized *ἱερατική* and deemed it something of a shortcut to divinization. The hieratic virtues, which, as Damascius indicated, belong to “the godlike part of the soul” (*In Phd.* I 144), stood at the peak of the scale of Platonic virtues and were to be attained later in life; Hegias’ emphasis on these to the detriment of the other virtues troubled Isidore because it indicated that the younger philosopher had an improper focus for one of his age and stature. When Isidore spoke of “becoming human,” he advocated a full embrace of philosophy and the practice of the physical, ethical, and political virtues. In his description of the virtuous qualities of Proclus, Marinus drew a line between these “lower virtues” and those that were “over” them, the cathartic, contemplative, and theurgic.<sup>70</sup> These latter effected the flight of the soul from the concerns of materiality, enabled the contemplation of the divine mind through dialectic philosophy, and, ultimately, allowed for an intimate relationship with divinity through theurgic virtue. It was necessary, therefore, first to “become human” by embracing the lower virtues that led, in turn, to the higher virtues through which divinization was achieved.<sup>71</sup> Isidore was not denigrating the value of

<sup>68</sup> Hermias *In Phdr.* 92.

<sup>69</sup> *V.Procl.* 26; *V.Isid.* 145B Athanassiadi = fr.351 Zintzen.

<sup>70</sup> *V.Procl.* 3; above all these were the paradigmatic virtues. In Damascius’ schema, the paradigmatic virtues were actually a tier below the hieratic virtues.

<sup>71</sup> See O’Meara, *Phronesis* 51 (2006) 79–84. Political virtue, O’Meara

hieratic practice; rather, he was lamenting the lifestyle of Hegias, and, perhaps, others like him, who forsook the scale of virtues, the knowledge of which was made accessible through careful study of Plato's dialogues, for what Isidore perceived to be a headlong and headstrong rush into hieratic praxes for which they were not yet ready.

One last fragment from the *Life of Isidore*, used to support claims of a 'rational' Damascius, leads also to some concluding remarks. Commenting on the practices of Patricius, about whom little else is known save that he seems to have sought out hieratic knowledge "in breach of the philosophical rule" (παρὰ νόμον τὸν φιλοσοφίας), Damascius averred, "It does not befit a philosopher to profess and cultivate divination or any other part of hieratic practice (ιερατική πραγματεία); for the domains of the philosopher and of the priest are no less separate than those of the Mysians and the Phrygians, according to the proverb."<sup>72</sup> In this instance, the scholar contended that the one who identified himself or herself as a "philosopher" was not to expend effort on acquiring ritual expertise, for in Damascius' Academy, this was no longer the province of the philosopher.<sup>73</sup> As has been seen, Damascius was not disdainful of ritual acts and did not view theoretical and hieratic approaches to purification as at odds with one another; in fact, he recognized that the hieratic rites so prevalent in the Academy under Proclus were particularly effective for the purpose of purification. Yet the Dichotomy posited the ideal philosopher in whom the two were combined, the Bacchic, "the philosopher in the stage of purification" (*In Phd.* I 171). This balance had not been found in the Academy of Proclus and his im-

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states, "represents the highest level of perfection in *human* existence, in the embodied life of the soul" (83, emphasis in original).

<sup>72</sup> *V.Isid.* 88A Athanassiadi = E132; F213: φιλοσοφοῦντος οὐκ ἔστι μαντικὴν ἐπαγγέλλεσθαι καὶ προφέρειν οὐδὲ τὴν ἄλλην ἱερατικὴν ἐπιστήμην· χωρὶς γὰρ τὰ τῶν φιλοσόφων καὶ τὰ τῶν ἱερέων ὀρίσματα, οὐδὲν ἦττον ἢ τὰ λεγόμενα Μυσῶν καὶ Φρυγῶν.

<sup>73</sup> Tanaseanu-Döbler reaches a similar conclusion: *Theurgy* 272–273.

mediate successors, Marinus and Hegias; indeed, a trace of chastisement is found in Damascius' description of Proclus as one who "put theology before any branch of philosophy and ... seemed to prefer piety to its counterpart—a life strong in virtue."<sup>74</sup> Damascius felt it necessary to restore the Academy's equilibrium and placed a renewed emphasis on theoretical philosophy as a method for the purification and salvation of the soul, but it was theoretical philosophy of a sort different from that he assigned to Plotinus and Porphyry.<sup>75</sup> He had inherited a philosophical tradition deeply affected by Platonism's hieratic turn and, as a result, argued for a Bacchic blend of his own in which philosophy emulated effectively, if not perfectly, hieratic catharsis. In this way, Damascius' philosophy incorporated the ethos and efficacy attached to hieratic ritual, thereby neutralizing any need for such practices. This hieraticized philosophy, sent from the "one cause of all things,"<sup>76</sup> ensured that the soul was purified and thereby prepared for its ascent to transcendent realms.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *V.Isid.* 59E Athanassiadi = fr.134 Zintzen. This also appears to be a rather strong repudiation of the claims of and, indeed, the very foundation upon which the *Life of Proclus* was constructed: Marinus gave to the biography the alternate title *On Happiness*, for he deemed Proclus a truly happy man because his life was a paragon of the Platonic virtues.

<sup>75</sup> Tanaseanu-Döbler reasonably argues that Proclus viewed theoretical philosophy and hieratic ritual as alternate paths of ascent, with neither being better than the other. This paper is more concerned with Damascius' perception, because the Dichotomy is rooted in his notion that Proclus was to be numbered with οἱ ἱερατικοί and that he preferred theology and piety (which included hieratic acts of all stripes) to theoretical philosophy.

<sup>76</sup> *V.Isid.* 4A Athanassiadi = Zintzen fr.3.

<sup>77</sup> I wish to thank I. Tanaseanu-Döbler for her comments on an earlier draft of this article and the reviewer for her or his insights which were extremely valuable. Thanks are also due to Kent Rigsby for both helpful suggestions and references. Any errors are my own.