

Proclus on Place as the Luminous Vehicle of the Soul¹

Michael Griffin

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Abstract: Proclus argues that place (*topos*) is a body of light, identified as the luminous vehicle of the soul, which mediates between soul and body and facilitates motion. Simplicius (*in Phys.* 611,10–13) suggests that this theory is original to Proclus, and unique in describing light as a body. This paper focuses on the function of this theory as a bridge between Proclus' physics and metaphysics, allowing the Aristotelian physical notion of "natural place" to serve as a mechanism for the descent and ascent of the soul.

Proclus advanced a theory about the nature of place and space which, according to Simplicius, was original to him, and played a significant role in his physics, metaphysics, and psychology.² Proclus hypothesised that place (*topos*), understood as three-dimensional extension, is a luminous body (*sôma*), endowed with life (*empsukhos*), which imparts motion to moving bodies. He ranked *topos* as the medium between soul and body, and identified it with the luminous "vehicle" of the soul that had been described by Porphyry (Proclus *in Remp.* 2.196) and elaborated by Iamblichus. Simplicius tells us that Proclus' hypothesis was novel and unique. One of Proclus' conclusions struck Simplicius as especially distinctive and even exotic: "This theory," he writes (*in Phys.* 611,10–13), "was propounded with great originality (*kainoprepê*) by Proclus ... of all whom we know, he was the only one who elected to say that place is a body." Whatever else might be said about the theory, then, it is an interesting example of a novelty introduced into the Neoplatonic mainstream by Proclus—one of many according to Marinus,

1. This essay was first delivered to a meeting of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies in New Orleans in 2004, where the argument benefited from the participants' detailed responses and critical questions. I am grateful to several readers for their subsequent suggestions and criticisms, among whom I would like to record particular thanks to John Dillon, John Finamore, Lucas Siorvanes, Richard Sorabji and Robert Todd. For any slips and muddles that remain in the essay, I am, of course, solely responsible.

2. I will deal primarily with two sources for Proclus' theory of place: pages 611–17 of Simplicius' "Corollary on Place" in his commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*, *CAG* 9–10, in *Simplicius: Corollaries on Place and Time*, trans. J.O. Urmson (London: Duckworth, 1992); and Proclus' commentary on the Myth of Er in *Republic X*, *in Remp.* 193–201 Kroll.

whose report of his teacher's innovations is often digested with several grains of salt (*Vita Procli* §23).

Proclus' reflections on locality have attracted a good deal of scholarship during the past half-century.³ In the present paper, I would like to consider the theory from a particular vantage point, namely, how Proclus makes *topos* serve as a mediator between soul and body, and as a hinge between speculation about the intelligible and the physical, or broadly speaking between his metaphysics and his physics.⁴ Broadly, I attempt to trace Proclus' integration of the theory of the pneumatic vehicle—already posited by Porphyry as a substrate of the lower, immanent soul—with the Aristotelian account of “natural place.” For Proclus, natural place becomes the mechanism of vehicular theurgy: in order to perform its function and rise to the luminous sphere, the substrate of the lower soul must itself constitute a “luminous vehicle” (*augoeides okhema*) of a nature analogous to the “luminous vehicle” of the cosmos.⁵ Thus Proclus' theory performs a crucial eschatological func-

3. R.R.K. Sorabji carefully examined this hypothesis in *Matter, Space and Motion* (London: Duckworth, 1988), chapter 7, summarising the Proclan texts (109–10), comparing the position of Syrianus, so far as this can be determined from pages 84–86 of his *Metaphysics* commentary (111–14), and pointing out potential difficulties in Proclus' arguments (115–18). Lawrence Schrenk offered two excellent studies which make use of the *Republic* commentary: “Proclus on Space as Light,” *Ancient Philosophy* 9 (1989): 87–94, and “Proclus on Corporeal Space,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 76.2 (1994): 151–67. An early survey by Samuel Sambursky, “Place and Space in Late Neoplatonism,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 8 (1977): 173–87, sets out Proclus' position in its Aristotelian context, and is followed by *The Concept of Place in Late Neoplatonism* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy, 1982), which includes the often-cited suggestion that the movement of bodies by place corresponds to Albert Einstein's twentieth-century theory of relativity. The later Neoplatonic tradition on a closely related theme is discussed by John Finamore, “Iamblichus on Light and the Transparent,” in *The Divine Iamblichus*, ed. H.J. Blumenthal and E.G. Clark (London: Duckworth, 1993), 55–65, especially 63, n. 12; on the theory of the luminous vehicle, see also J. Opsomer, “Was sind irrationale Seelen?,” in *Proklos: Methode, Seelenlehre, Metaphysik = Philosophia Antiqua* 98, ed. M. Perkams and R.M. Piccione (Brill, 2006), 136–66; Lucas Siorvanes embarks on a full analysis of Proclus' physics, including this theory, in chapter 4 of his *Proclus: Neo-Platonic Philosophy and Science* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996). Philoponus' related theory of space has recently been treated in detail by David Sedley in “Philoponus' Conception of Space,” in *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science*, ed. R.R.K. Sorabji (London, 2010), 181–94.

I regret that I have been able to make only limited use of the excellent survey of Proclus' thought in R. Chlup, *Proclus: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 2012) and the collection of articles in *Neoplatonism and the Philosophy of Nature*, ed. J. Wilberding and C. Horn (Oxford, 2012), but I have gratefully incorporated reference to their conclusions where possible.

4. On the disciplinary division, see, for example, A. Smith, “The Significance of ‘Physics’ in Porphyry,” in *Neoplatonism and the Philosophy of Nature*, 32–33.

5. On the theories of the “vehicles” in Proclus and later Neoplatonism, see, for example, Opsomer, “Was sind irrationale Seelen?,” and J. Finamore, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul* (Scholars Press, 1985; 2nd ed., Oxford, 2000).

tion in later Neoplatonism by providing a physical mechanism for theurgy, and this function, I suggest, is primarily responsible for his innovation in referring to place as a “body.”

PROCLUS ON PLACE

In a long excerpt furnished by Simplicius (in *Phys.* 611–13), Proclus establishes his theory of place within an Aristotelian framework.⁶ He begins his account from the fourfold division that is familiar to us from Aristotle, *Physics* 4.4, 211b5–9. The place of a body must be either shape (*morphê*) or matter (*hulê*) or the extension between the extremities (*diastêma to metaxu tôn eskhatôn*) or the extremities (*ta eskhata*). Aristotle settles for the view that place is the limit of the containing body (212a20), as for instance a body can be “in” the limiting air, and the air can be “in” the cosmos. In the same way, Aristotle reasons, the cosmos itself must be “in” place (211b24). Proclus, on the other hand, reasons that my “place” is the extension (*diastêma*) between the limits of my spatial container (*to metaxu tôn peratôn tou periekhontos*, 611,28–30).⁷ Because place must be equal to what it contains, and place contains bodies, this interval must also be a body (*sôma*, 612,1). Thus Proclus differs from Aristotle’s argument that place cannot be a body lest two bodies coexist in one place (*Physics* 4.4, 211b6). By “body,” however, Proclus means only three-dimensional extension, that is, something that can be called quantitatively “equal” to a solid,⁸ yet might still lack materiality (he later describes place as *aûlos*, 612,25) and resistance. “Equality (*to ison*),” he writes, “is found in quantities, especially in kindred quantities, as lines with lines, surfaces with surfaces, and bodies with bodies. Therefore a place is a body if it is an interval” (611,37–612,1).

Like Aristotle (*Phys.* 208b9) Proclus adopts a theory of natural place. Proclan place conveys bodies to their ‘appropriate places’ (*oikeioi topoi*). Fire, for instance, belongs at the extremities of the cosmos, while earth belongs at the middle. In this sense, place “moves bodies.” But place itself, which Proclus conceives in Aristotelian terms as the place embracing the cosmos,

6. For Proclus’ use of Aristotelian physics in general and “kinematics” in particular, see J. Opsomer, “The Integration of Aristotelian Physics in a Neoplatonic Context: Proclus on Movers and Divisibility,” in *Physics and Philosophy of Nature in Greek Neoplatonism = Philosophia Antiqua* 115, ed. R. Chiaradonna and F. Trabattini (Brill, 2009), 189–229. For an account of Proclus’ theory considered against the background of *Physics* 4 as well as more recent speculation about the nature of space, see Sorabji, *Matter, Space and Motion*, especially chapter 7.

7. While retaining Aristotle’s fourfold framework for considering *topos* (either shape, matter, extension, or limit, *Physics* 4.4, 211b5), Proclus selects *diastêma* in place of *peras*.

8. On body as extension more generally in Simplicius, see Sorabji, *Matter, Space and Motion*, part I, chapter 1, and on body as extension in Philoponus, see chapter 2. Aristotle argues that place has size, but not body (4.1, 209a5 and a16).

is *immobile*. If it were to move, it would require some place in which to move, and place would in turn require a place. Since this is impossible, as Theophrastus and Aristotle agree, place must not move (612,7). And if it is immobile, it must be *indivisible* (612,16): otherwise, if place were divided by an intruding body, that body would need another extension as its place. If it is indivisible, then it follows that it must be *immaterial* (*aülos*); after all, to be “divided in association with bodies” is a hallmark of the domain of *phusis* (*Timaeus* 35A). To sum up, then, place is a body, which is immobile, indivisible, and immaterial (613,25). What kind of body is this? Light, Proclus explains, is the simplest of bodies, more rarified even than Fire (28). “Place,” therefore, must be a body of *light*, the purest of all bodies (29).

The account raises many questions, and for our purposes here, I would like to focus on three. First, why is place described as a “light” that mediates between soul and body? Second, comparing the views of Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus, why does Proclus identify this entity as a kind of “body”? Third, and finally, why does place “move bodies,” and why does this function identify it as analogous to Porphyry’s luminous vehicle of the soul?

I. LIGHT AS AN INTERMEDIARY

Simplicius tells us that Proclus appeals to two authorities, Plato and the Chaldaean Oracles, for confirmation of his position. The Platonic text is *Republic* X. In the Myth of Er (*Republic* X, 616B), the souls perceive a great shaft of light turning the heavenly spheres. Proclus maintains that Plato here identifies light with the place of the whole cosmos. In Proclus’ commentary on this passage (*in Remp.* 2.193–201), he inquires into the nature of this light (193,22–23). It must be bodily (195,8–11), and it must bind together the cosmos. It must be visible only to less material and purer eyes (196,11–13); for instance, to the eyes of “our luminous vehicle.” Hence, Proclus explains, Porphyry was right to liken the “first vehicle of the cosmic soul” to our luminous vehicle (196,21–30), since the cosmic vehicle is in reality a “vehicle of light” (197,12–14). The place (*topos*) of the whole cosmos is its vehicle (197,25–198,8), which is bodily (198,14–15), unmoving (16–18), indivisible (19–21) and superlatively immaterial and divine (21–29). Place is the *hedra* or “seat” of the cosmos, and so should be regarded as superior to it (*in Remp.* 197,21–23, etc.).

The word *hedra* is Platonic. Plato describes “space” (*khôra*) as the *hedra* of the cosmos at *Timaeus* 52B1. There he discusses three kinds of being. First is *eidōs*; second is the visible copy; and

the third type is space (*khôra*), which exists always and cannot be destroyed. It provides a fixed state (*hedra*) for all things that come to be. It is itself apprehended by a kind of bastard reasoning that does not involve sense perception, and it is hardly even an object of conviction (*mōgis piston*). We look at it as in a dream ... (tr. Zeyl).

The copy, “invariably borne along to picture something else,” must “come to be in something else, somehow clinging to being, or else be nothing at all” (52C), requiring a medium in which it may appear and disappear, like a mirror image.⁹

As such, Proclus understands “place,” the *hedra* of the visible cosmos, to be superior to it, and in this, so Simplicius informs us (618,27) he follows the example of his master Syrianus.¹⁰ Syrianus (in *Met.* 84,27–86,7) also ascribes to certain Platonists (perhaps Porphyry, as Kroll suggests) a theory that *diastêma* penetrates the cosmos, as an immobile, impassive, immaterial and unresistant entity, which may be regarded as analogous to “our luminous vehicle.” For these Platonists as for Proclus, place serves as the intermediary between soul and body.

Plato originally proposed that the body of the cosmos is a sphere, penetrated and surrounded by the soul.¹¹ Proclus, in his turn, proposes that the cosmic body is a sphere penetrated and surrounded, not only by soul, but also by place, acting as an intermediary to soul (ap. Simplicium 612,29–34):

Let us now think of two spheres, the one made of a single light, the other made out of many bodies, both equal to one another in mass (*kata ton onkon*). Now situate (*hedrason*) the first sphere coincident with the centre (*homou tõi kentrôi*), and when you implant (*embibasas*) the second sphere into it, you will then see the whole cosmos existing in place (*en topôi*), that is, moving in the unmoved light. And this light is unmoved as to the whole of itself (*kath' holon heauton*), so as to represent place, but it moves as to its parts (*kata meros*), so as to be inferior to place.

We may notice two selections of Platonic vocabulary here. First, from *hedra* at *Timaeus* 52B (cited above) Proclus draws the verbal imperative *hedrason* to describe the relationship of the bodily sphere to the luminous sphere. Second, he uses the participle *embibasas* (“implant” or “sow”) to describe the immersion of the bodily sphere in its luminous place. Similarly Plato

9. So F.M. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1937), writes in explaining the passage.

10. We shall turn to Syrianus' view in detail later; for now, we might note that Syrianus, in a long excursus in the *Metaphysics* commentary (84,27–86,7), ascribes to certain people a theory that *diastêma* penetrates the cosmos, as an immobile, impassive, immaterial and unresistant entity, spherical in form, and resembling light, which may be regarded as analogous to “our luminous vehicle.” In part, then, Proclus' theory might be traced back before Syrianus, perhaps to Porphyry, whom Proclus credits for the notion of a “luminous vehicle” of the cosmos at *in Remp.* 2.196,21–30.

11. *Tim.* 34B: “According to this plan [the Demiurge] made [the body of the cosmos] smooth and uniform, everywhere equidistant from its centre, a body whole and complete, with complete bodies for its parts. And in the centre he set a soul and caused it to extend throughout the whole and further wrapped its body round with soul on the outside; and so he established one world alone, round and revolving in a circle ...” (tr. Cornford).

describes a demiurgic “implantation” of souls into stars “as though into vehicles” (*embibasas hōs eis okhēmata*) at *Timaeus* 41E, which Iamblichus and Proclus take to represent the sowing of souls into their vehicles (e.g., Iamblichus *De An.* 1.377, 16^o29).¹²

In describing place as “light” in this passage, Proclus may be inspired by Plotinus, who presents us with a strikingly similar image in describing “the omnipresence of being” (6.4.7, 22–35, tr. Armstrong):

Suppose you made a small luminous bulk (*onkos*) a kind of centre (*kentron*), and put a larger transparent spherical body around it, so that the light of what was inside shone in the whole of what was around it, and no ray of light from anywhere else came to the outside bulk ... it is not *qua* body that it has the light, but *qua* luminous body, by another power which is not bodily.

Plotinus is describing the hypostasis of Soul, which is certainly not a body. Indeed, Plotinus regards the radiation of sensible light as merely a dim analogy for the utterly incorporeal procession from soul to soul.¹³ (At *Enn.* 2.1.7, 26–31, Plotinus explicitly distinguishes between the source of light, which is a body, and the asomatic activity (*energeia*) which is light itself, the “flower and splendour” shining out from the source). Proclus speaks of light as a “body” in a particular way, as I shall show in the conclusion of this paper. In the interim, we may observe that Proclus refers to the imagery of the *Chaldaean Oracles* to support his position. As Hans Lewy pointed out, the Oracles present the “place” of the Cosmic Soul as a noetic power, “the girdling flower of fire,” which “envelops” the cosmos from without, a membrane between soul and body.¹⁴ According to Simplicius (616,1), Proclus’ second source of confirmation, which he also adduces in the *Republic* commentary (201,10–202,2), is a Chaldaean Oracle stating that Soul “gives life from on high to light, fire, ether, and the worlds.”¹⁵

Proclus understands this Oracle to mean that light supersedes the sphere of fire, which is the height of bodily existence, and mediates between soul and subordinate bodies, thus furnishing form (*eidos*) to formless things. He contends that light or place (*topos*) is ensouled, and possesses a kind of life

12. Cf. J. Finamore, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul*, 60.

13. For which see F.M. Schroeder, *Form and Transformation* (McGill-Queens, 1992), chapter 1: “Form.”

14. *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy*, 2nd ed. by Michel Tardieu (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1978), 91. On the Oracles, see E. Des Places, *Oracles chaldaïques* (3rd ed. revised by A. Segonds, Paris, 1996); R. Majercik, *The Chaldaean Oracles: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Brill, 1989); and P. Athanassiadi, “The Chaldaean Oracles: Theology and Thurgy,” in *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, ed. P. Athanassiadi and M. Frede (Oxford, 1999), 149–83, with references.

15. The complete version of the oracle is found at *in Remp.* 2.201,14–16 (fr. 51 des Places). Its interpretation by Proclus and Simplicius is discussed by Lewy on page 89, n. 84.

and motion. He writes (28–32): “And if you wish to contemplate the motion of place with respect to its activity (*kat’ energeian*), you will see it as capable of moving those bodies which unfold the parts of place over an extension (*diastêmatikôs*), because those bodies are not able to exist in every place, and place is not able to be present to all of them with respect to each part of itself. And this is how [place] is an intermediary in relation to soul, which [by contrast] causes motion without extension (*adiastatôs*).”¹⁶

For Proclus, soul, which is unextended, and body, which is extended, must be joined by an intermediary principle. This is an example of the “triadic” principle of later Neoplatonism, which Schrenk¹⁷ has already put forward as a motivation for Proclus’ theory of place. How, the Neoplatonists inquire, can an intelligible being affect a sensible body which it utterly transcends? There must, as a rule, be an intermediate entity that shares in some properties of both extreme terms, as the Platonic *daimôn* Eros participates in properties of both the divine and the human. This theory of “participation” was thoroughly and systematically explored in later Neoplatonism as examined by Lucas Siorvanes in a study of “Proclus on Transcendence,”¹⁸ and Radek Chlup has recently investigated the notion and functioning of participation in very useful detail.¹⁹ The three members of the canonical triad are (1) the unparticipated, (2) the participated, and (3) the participant. The tripartition arises from a traditional puzzle about the relationship between the objects of intellect and those of sense, classically formulated in the *Parmenides* (131A–E): how can (1) unchanging beings like Forms and Intellect, which are naturally unities, be participated by (3) a fluctuating multiplicity of particulars? Platonists drew inspiration from the *Timaeus*, *Symposium*, and other sources to develop a systematic account of (2) the medium that could constitute a bridge between the two worlds. That medium is Soul (e.g., Proclus *ET* 190), not in its essential reality (*ousia*) incorporeal, indestructible (*ET* 186–7) and eternal (*aiônios*)

16. My translation. Proclus finds in the Oracles a description of this motion which light imparts to the heavenly spheres (*in Tim.* 3.14.3, fr. 27 Kroll):

And this is why the Oracles say that [Aion] is “Light, father-generated”: because he is indeed the unifying light which illumines all things. “For he alone has plucked from the Father’s strength / the abounding flower of Mind, and is therefore able to think (*noein*) the Father’s Mind / and to give light to all sources (*pêgai*) and origins (*arkhai*) / and to whirl them round (*dinein*), to keep them in incessant circular motion.”

17. Schrenk, “Proclus on Space as Light” and “Proclus on Corporeal Space,” posits the triadic principle as Proclus’ primary motivation for ranking place in this intermediate role.

18. For detailed discussion see, for example, L. Siorvanes, “Proclus on Transcendence,” *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 9 (1998): 1–19; R. Chlup, *Proclus: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 2012), 99–111; and C. Steel, “Proclus,” in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, vol. 2, ed. L.P. Gerson (Cambridge, 2010), 630–53.

19. Chlup, *Proclus: An Introduction*, 99–111.

(*ET* 191), but in its activity (*energeia*) temporal and engaged with division, a “one in the many” (*en pollois*) or “whole in the parts.”

Yet there still seems to be some tension within such a picture of Soul, conceived as essentially formlike and transcendent and incorporeal, yet capable of engaging fully with particulars in this time and this place.²⁰ To finally resolve the tension, Proclus offers two distinct but intertwined perspectives: the now-traditional image of a “vehicle” (*okhêma*) enabling the soul to “descend” to act on particulars (e.g., *ET* 108) and to “ascend” again to the intelligible world, which we will discuss further below, and the further notion that place or space (*khôra*) itself might serve as a kind of bridge between the essentially incorporeal soul and spatially divided bodies. Proclus can arrive at a textual support for this view by applying the triadic principle to Plato’s account of three distinct entities at *Timaeus* 51E–52B, cited above: “space” (*khôra*) becomes the “participated” medium term between soul and body (as soul itself is the medium term between the intelligible and the sensible). On Proclus’ account, which follows the Plotinian tradition,²¹ the sensible body (*sôma*) is inseparable from matter, located in place and time, and extended, while the intelligible soul is separable and immaterial, eternal, and unextended. Platonic space or “place,” then, must be a principle that participates partly in both of these two groups of characteristics. It is separable and everlasting, on the one hand, but extended in three dimensions on the other, so that we might measure it as equal to body.

So far, we can see that Proclus means to identify place as an intermediary between soul and body. But this does not explain why Proclus chooses to identify this entity with light, except perhaps for the inspiration of Plotinus and the Chaldaean Oracles.²² We may gain some insight into Proclus’ conception of light by asking why he describes it as a “body.” This is the aspect of his theory that Simplicius finds most unique.

20. This tension emerges in the Platonic tradition, for example, in the respective positions of Plotinus, who stressed the transcendence of the soul, and Iamblichus, who stressed its full providential engagement with the world of particulars; on Proclus’s engagement with this tension, see for example Chlup, *Proclus*, 29 and A. Lernould, “Nature in Proclus,” in Wilberding and Horn (2012), 68–102.

21. Porphyry (*Sent.* 34–38), expands on Plotinus (6.4–5) in describing physical bodies as extended, located and sensible.

22. It has been suggested that this hypothesis is directly derived from the Chaldaean Oracles. Proclus identifies his light as Aion, the “father-begotten light” of the Oracles, as we have seen in *in Tim.* 3.14.3 (above, n. 13). According to Lewy (409), Aion, the “eternal light” which is created by the Father and in which he dwells, is called “location” or “place” in an Avestan cosmology.

II. A BODY OF LIGHT: PLOTINUS, IAMBlichUS, AND PROCLUS

Plotinus holds that light is not a body (*sôma*). By asserting that light is somehow a body, Proclus is staking out a position in a nuanced continuum of Platonist views on the corporeality of light.²³ I shall argue that Proclus builds on a Plotinian and Iamblichean tradition. He posits a graded scale of light, stretched on a continuum from incorporeality to corporeality, following the example of Iamblichean works such as Julian's *Hymn to King Helios*, where we hear of a hierarchy of light descending from the One to the noetic, the noeric, and finally to the sensible. At each level of being, light represents the emanation or "activity" of the world above in the world below. When Proclus speaks of a "body of light," he refers to the light that emanates from Soul into the sensible world.

Plato suggests that the fire of daylight joins with the pure fire emanating from our eyes (*Tim.* 45B5–C3), producing a single *sôma* which leads to vision (C4). This light, then, appears to be intertwined with the nature of bodies. But for Aristotle, at *De Anima* 418b9–10, light is the activity of the transparent qua transparent (*energeia tou diaphanous hêi diaphanês*), and is therefore incorporeal. Aristotle goes on to argue against philosophers like Empedocles and Plato who think that vision occurs by an emanation from a body (b14–15). The Neoplatonist programme to harmonise Plato and Aristotle therefore led to a close examination of the corporeality of light in the Neoplatonic tradition.

Plotinus

Plotinus,²⁴ like Aristotle, holds that light is a kind of activity (4.5.7, 33–37, 41–42). For Plotinus, it is the activity of the source: "the light from luminous bodies is the external activity (*energeia*) of a luminous body." The light that inheres *in* the source, on Plotinus' view, is altogether Being (*ousia*) and Form (*eidos*); but the light that proceeds *from* the source is activity (*energeia*). The luminous source radiates by simply being itself; its external activity is the natural and inevitable result of its overflowing existence.

Although the source of the light may be a body, the light itself is purely incorporeal. Plotinus applies this idea to the image of the luminous sphere of

23. See J. Finamore, "Iamblichus on Light and the Transparent," in *The Divine Iamblichus*, ed. H.J. Blumenthal and E.G. Clark (Bristol Classical Press, 1993), 55–64, for a summary of perspectives from Plotinus to Proclus on the corporeality of light.

24. For what follows I am indebted to F.M. Schroeder, *Form and Transformation in Plotinus* (McGill-Queens, 1992), chapter 1: "Form" and chapter 2: "Light." Schroeder also points out the relationship between Plotinus' account of light and that of Alexander, for whom light comes about in the "transparent" by the presence of fire or "the divine body": "For light comes about in accordance with the relationship of that which is able to illumine to those objects which are capable of being illumined" (*DA* 42, 19–43).

the cosmos. Although this luminous sphere may be bodily, it “possesses light not *qua* body, but *qua* luminous body, that is, by another power (*dunamis*) which is *not* bodily” (6.4.7). Behind this statement lies the theory that there are two kinds of activity for any entity. On the one hand there is its abiding *ousia* or being, its “internal activity.” On the other, there is its *energeia* or “external activity,” which proceeds or irradiates. For example, it is the external or “second” activity of Nous that illuminates Psyche, and similarly, it is the external activity of the One that illuminates Nous. So Plotinus writes (5.4.2, tr. MacKenna, lightly modified):

There is in everything the Act (*energeia*) of the Being (*ousia*) and the Act going out from the Being: the first Act is the thing itself in its realized identity, the second Act is an inevitably following outgoing from the first, an emanation distinct from the thing itself. Thus even in fire there is the warmth comported by its essential nature and there is the warmth going instantaneously outward from that characterizing heat by the fact that the fire, remaining unchangeably fire, utters the Act native to its essential reality.

Again, citing *Timaeus* 58C, Plotinus describes the sun: “the light is a body, but a light of like nature shines from it, which we say is incorporeal” (2.1.7, 26–28). At 1.6.3, Plotinus says that light is altogether incorporeal, but fire, although a body, is nonetheless “the most subtle of bodies” (*leptotatos*) and “almost incorporeal” (17–23).

As Frederic Schroeder has stressed, the world of true being is the primary object of experience for Plotinus, who is prepared to use the noetic to illustrate the sensible. Visible luminosity is but a dim reflection of the intelligible procession from soul to soul. Sensible light is an image of the procession of powers from the intelligible world to the sensible world, as the intelligible “acts” on the sensible. The powers of the intelligible world proceed to this world “as light from light” (6.4.9, 26–27). Although they may be diminished or weakened in their descent,²⁵ in comparison with the intelligible powers from which they proceed, they are still tied to intelligible being, and that being remains unaffected, just as the Sun is undiminished by its luminosity.

This is the nature of the procession that Plotinus presents as the relationship between the luminous and the bodily spheres of the cosmos described in 6.4.7. Light, as an external activity (*energeia*), is an intermediary between two planes, the activity of the higher directed towards the lower. This process of illumination may be compared to a luminous object causing a reflection

25. Something descending from its principal source becomes metaphysically more “distant” and thus slackens in definition. This loss of wholeness or integrity was thus described as “diminishing” or “weakening,” which was thought to explain the transition from eternity to the modern world, and from the intelligible to the sense-perceived in space and time. I am grateful to Lucas Siorvanes for this summary.

in a mirror (4.5.7, 44–51).²⁶ So long as the prior soul is present (*paresti*), the subsequent activity is reflected. “Therefore,” Plotinus writes, “‘it has gone away’ or ‘it is present’ (*paresti*) are not used of [light] in their proper sense, but in a different way, and its real existence is an activity.” Thus light serves as the image for the procession from soul to body. The activity (*energeia*) or “reflection” (*eidolon*) of soul in body remains just so long as the soul itself abides, and shines in the mirror of sensible being.

Porphiry played a key role in the transmission of these ideas to the subsequent Neoplatonic tradition.²⁷ He tells us that he questioned Plotinus repeatedly on the relationship of the soul to the body (*pôs hê psukhê sunesti tõi sômati*, *Vita Plotini* 13). In his own writings, Porphyry advances the theory that soul is “present” (*paresti*) in body not in existence or being (*hupostasei or ousiâi*) but by the projection of a certain power (*dunamis*, *Sent.* 4) or activity (*energeia*).²⁸ It is this immanent activity of soul that engages bodies. It is not strictly correct to speak of soul itself in local terms: rather, it is the activity of soul that may be spatially located. We should say “soul is active there” (*ekei energei*) rather than “soul is there” (*ekei esti*, *Nemesius* 136.11,12). The “presence” (*parousia*) of soul to body does not lie in a place (*topikê*) but in a complete likeness (*exomoiôtikê*, *Sent.* 35.29,18). Soul’s activity, on the other hand, can be located in *topos*.

Again, Porphyry writes that “body receives in parts (*meristôs*) the outflowings of the activities (*endoseis tôn energeiôn*) of the undivided soul, which is divisible into parts only through the presence of its *external power* in body” (*ap.* Stob. 1.354, 4f.). For Plotinus, too, Body reflects Soul in parts, just as Soul reflects Nous in parts (5.9.9), and Nous the One (5.1.7, 17–18). Plotinus presents the “day and sail” argument of the *Parmenides* as a paradigm. Soul can be regarded in two ways: on the one hand, it remains essentially undivided above (like the “daylight,” on Plotinus’ interpretation at 6.4.7) or it proceeds to be actively present to the particulars in parts (*merê*), as the sail covers many sailors by presenting a different part of itself to each one of them.

26. The full passage reads as follows (tr. Armstrong): “Therefore ‘it has gone away’ or ‘it is present’ (*paresti*) are not used of [light] in their proper sense, but in a different way, and its real existence is an activity. For the image in a mirror must also be called an activity: that which is reflected in it acts on what is capable of being affected without flowing into it; but if the object reflected is there (*paresti*), the reflection too appears in the mirror ... and if the object goes away, the mirror-surface no longer has what it had before, when the object seen in it offered itself to it for its activity.”

27. For this discussion I am indebted to Andrew Smith’s analysis in *Porphyry’s Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974).

28. Smith suggests that Porphyry’s use of *dunamis* and *energeia* in this context are almost, but not quite, interchangeable (pages 2–3). *Dunamis* stresses the existence of a faculty, while *energeia* stresses its activity (see Stob. 1.352, 11).

Thus Porphyry presents a systematic account of a twofold soul in Plotinian terms of *ousia* and *energeia*.²⁹ Soul itself remains undivided “above” in *ousia*, while its activity proceeds into bodies, taking on spatial extension (*Nem.* 136.11.12) and partition (*Stob.* 1.354, 4f.). In this way body, itself a plurality, participates in soul but does not divide the unity (*henôsis*) of all souls in Soul (*Sent.* 37.33, 3). This mediating *energeia* is the reality for which “light” is the appropriate Plotinian image. Porphyry, while fully adopting this imagery of light, also describes the intermediary as a kind of semi-incorporeal *pneuma*,³⁰ which constitutes a substrate (*hulê*) within which the lower soul—understood to be the Aristotelian *eidos* or “enmattered form”—can exist and endure the death of the body.³¹

We have seen that Plotinus describes the mediating activity of Soul as an outflowing light. It seems reasonable to infer that this Plotinian vision underlies Proclus’ thesis that light is the medium between the soul and the body, and the “vehicle of the soul,” especially in light of Porphyry’s description of this intermediate entity as “pneumatic.” Precisely how much Porphyry influenced Proclus in this matter is unclear. We are told (by Proclus, in *Remp.* 2.196) that Porphyry posited something like a “luminous vehicle” of the soul, and Syrianus, as we have noticed, ascribes to certain earlier Platonists—and perhaps, as Kroll suggests, to Porphyry himself—the view that the luminous vehicle of the soul is its “place.” But these ideas do not yet explain why Proclus would refer to this light as a “body,” and in order to shed light on this issue we turn to Iamblichus, whose development of the theory of the vehicle was especially influential in later Neoplatonism.

29. While rejecting Numenius’ doctrine of the “double soul” (cf. *Stob.* 1.350, 25f.).

30. Cf. Smith, who also studies Porphyry’s adoption of Plotinus’ imagery of light (page 7). This notion of *pneuma* was an essential aspect of the later Neoplatonic doctrine of the vehicle of the soul. Indeed, although the luminous vehicle was later distinguished from the pneumatic vehicle, we find Iamblichus speaking of a god purifying and inspiring “our luminous *pneuma*” (*tou en hêmin augoeidous pneumatos*, *De Myst.* 125, 4–6).

31. For Porphyry as for Plotinus (1.1.4) the lower “activity” of soul is the Aristotelian *eidos* or the “enmattered form,” while soul itself, considered in its being (*ousia*), is the Platonic *eidos* or the transcendent form. As Siorvanes has pointed out (“Proclus on Transcendence,” page 2), this distinction can already be detected in Middle Platonism. Considered as a transcendent entity, *eidos* is the Platonic Form, the intrinsically valuable, beautiful entity often eulogized in the dialogues. Considered as an entity immanent in *hulê*, *eidos* is the “universal” familiar from Aristotle, which is a property of each subject, the “whole in the parts.” In the view of Porphyry and Plotinus, both drawing on Aristotle, this lower, immanent *eidos* will cease to exist if there is no *hulê* to receive it (Plotinus 1.1.4, 29). The existence of *pneuma*, which serves as the immortal substrate of the immanent soul, is therefore crucial to Porphyry’s eschatology. If *pneuma* is immortal, then the lower soul is immortal, and can survive death and be judged. If there is no immortal substrate, then the lower soul will not endure to be judged. See Smith on Porphyry’s eschatology (page 14), and also Smith (page 61) on the three realms to which the immortal soul can travel.

Iamblichus

Julian, in his *Hymn to King Helios*, presents views on light that may be attributed to Iamblichus.³² One passage of this oration is particularly pertinent to our study (134AB, tr. Finamore, slightly modified):

Light itself is incorporeal. The solar rays (*aktines*) are the acme and flower (*anthos*) of light.³³ It is the opinion of the Phoenicians, who are wise and knowing in divine matters, that the sunlight which proceeds everywhere is the pure activity of pure *nous* itself (*energeia tou katharou nou*) ... and the pure activity of *nous* shines forth into its own domain. (It is allotted the middle of the entire heaven). Whence shining, it fills the heavenly spheres with all its vigour (*eutonia*) and illuminates everything with divine and pure light.

There are some verbal echoes here of Plotinus' vision of the luminous sphere of the cosmos, established in the middle of the sensible heaven. In short we have an account of light as an activity, following both Aristotle and Plotinus. Aristotle's suggestion that light is 'the activity of the transparent' is also reflected in this passage. At 133D1–3, Julian remarks that light is the "incorporeal divine *eidos* of the actualized transparent": the transparent (*diaphanês*) itself, he explains, is a kind of matter underlying bodies, and light is its *eidos* (134A3–5).

Iamblichus holds that light is incorporeal because it properly belongs to the world of intellect: it is "the pure activity of pure nous." In Iamblichus' worldview, expressed in the terminology of the Chaldaean Oracles, there exist several levels of being, to which several rulers, and several levels of light, respectively correspond. The ruler of the noetic (intelligible) realm is Aion, who truly belongs to the world of the One, but is participated by the noetic. This noetic realm corresponds to the fixed stars, in that both remain fixed in position. The ruler of the noeric (intelligent) realm is Helios, who truly belongs to the noetic world, but is participated by the noeric. The ethereal realm of Helios and the planets exists between the noetic and the visible. And the ruler of the sensible realm is the visible Sun, who truly belongs to the noeric realm, but is participated by the sensible. "Light" in each world is the manifestation of the world above. Sensible light, therefore, is a mediator lying in between the noeric and the sensible, and does not share in all of the properties of sensible being.³⁴

32. John Finamore (*Iamblichus*, 159, n. 29, and also "Iamblichus on Light," 56) cites scholarship by Witt, Nock, Lewy and Wright for the position that Iamblichus is the source of Julian's writings, including the fourth oration which is cited here (the *Hymn to King Helios*), where Julian praises Iamblichus frequently (146A, 150D, 157D–158A).

33. Compare Simplicius, in the Corollary on Place, 616: "it may be that [the Oracles] called this unit light as being the flower of the empyrean firmament."

34. For this summary, see Lewy and the fourth chapter of Finamore, *Iamblichus*.

In his *De Mysteriis*, Iamblichus presents a nuanced view about the corporeality of light. Light travels down the scale of being, or extends itself, unfolding from purer incorporeality into corporeality, and taking on a more bodily shape as it descends. In *De Myst.* 2.4, 63–79, discussing divine epiphanies wrought by theurgy, he explains that gods, archangels and angels experience incorporeal light, while the daimons, heroes, and particular souls experience corporeal light. He suggests that we demarcate “the degrees of vividness of self-revelatory (*autophanês*) images,” which he perceives on a scale reaching from gods to souls.³⁵ This scale derives from the degrees of “light” that are proper to each level of being (tr. Clarke et al.):³⁶

The images of the gods flash forth brighter than light, while those of the archangels are full of supernatural light (*phôtos hyperphuous plêrê*), and those of the angels are bright (*phôteina*). But daimons glow with smouldering fire (*tholôdes pur*). The heroes have a fire blended of diverse elements, and of the archons those that are cosmic reveal a comparatively pure fire, while those that are material show a fire mixed from disparate and opposed elements. Souls produce a fitfully visible light, soiled by the many compounds in the realm of generation.

These levels of light, in turn, correspond to levels of *motion* (*De Myst.* 2.4, 79–85):

The fire of the gods is wholly stable (*statheron*) when beheld, that of the archangels has a degree of stability, but that of the angels is set permanently in motion. That of the daimons is unstable (*astaton*), and that of the heroes has still more unstable movement (*oxurropon*).³⁷ Stillness is characteristic of primary archons, but turmoil of the lowest. That of souls changes according to multiple movements (*en kinêsesi pollais*).

There is an important connection here between constitution, visibility, and motion. Light, in its purest form as “the fire of the gods” has a most incorporeal constitution, is self-revealing, and is stable “to behold.” At this level, it is a reliable, immutable object of being and knowledge. In its most extended form, light has a corporeal and materially blended constitution, which is “fitfully visible,” and changes according to multiple movements. In general, light serves as the “connective” (*sunochê*) from one level to the next throughout Iamblichus’ system, the particular soul’s link to the One, comprising the illuminating hierarchy of gods, angels, daimons and heroes.³⁸

35. It is interesting to note that *autophanês* is also the adjective applied to the “self-revealing light,” Aion, in the Chaldaean Oracles. Cf. Lewy, page 99.

36. Trans. E.C. Clarke, J. Dillon, J.P. Hershbell, *Iamblichus: De mysteriis* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

37. Lucas Siorvanes points out to me that (per LSJ on Arist. *Metaph.* 1073a31) *astatos* can mean “never standing still” of a body moving in a circle, while *oksurropos* for LSJ means “turning quickly.”

38. Cf. Finamore, *Iamblichus*, 47.

For Iamblichus, the soul rides upon a “body-like vehicle (*sômatoeides okhêma*) that is subordinate to daimons,” and, “is not composed from *hulê*, elements, or any other body known to us” (*De Myst.* 5.12, 8–11). The vehicle is, in fact, composed from the whole of ether, *pantos tou aitheros*. It belongs to the intermediate realm of Helios and the planets, beyond the sensible Sun but beneath the empyrean realm. As the vehicle descends from the realm of Ether, following the Chaldaean Oracles,³⁹ it takes on increasingly material envelopes in the realm of the visible Sun, the Moon, and the Air. But the vehicle itself, being ethereal, is not only immaterial (1.18, 9–10), but it is *in a certain way* not “bodily” at all (1.17, 12–13, 16–17). Its role is to unite the material to the immaterial. Seen from one point of view, in its relation to soul, it is unextended; seen from another, in its relation to bodies, it is the cause of extension. It adapts from one to the other. As Iamblichus puts it (*De Myst.* 1.54, 6–11), it “participates the asomatic somatically.”⁴⁰

When the vehicle ascends, by means of theurgy,⁴¹ it is Helios who draws it to himself, through the sublunary realm and the realm of the visible Sun into the realm of ether. Helios’ uplifting (*anagôgoi*) rays are appropriate to (*ekhein oikeiôs*) souls who desire to be freed from the realm of generation (Julian, *Or.* 5.172A–C). But for Iamblichus, the rational soul may progress still further, beyond the empyrean realm and beyond the sphere of the heavens. For within the rational soul is a kind of One, who corresponds to the “governor” of the soul mentioned in Plato’s *Phaedrus* myth (247c7). This “governor,” on Iamblichus’ interpretation, rules over the “charioteer,” who represents *nous* (see in *Phaedrum* fr. 6). The One in the soul is capable of being united to the One that exists beyond the sphere of the cosmos altogether, which Plato’s *Phaedrus* describes (247c3–d1). When the rational soul ascends in this way, to join the hypercosmic gods (*De Myst.* 5.20, 228, 2–12) it leaves the ethereal vehicle behind it, united to the ethereal vehicle of the god, namely Helios or the “leader-god” of that particular soul (see also Proclus in *Tim.* 3.276, 19–22).⁴² Helios is able to “uplift” the vehicle because his rays are appropriate to (*ekhein oikeiôs*) the soul, precisely because his rays are ‘like’ the vehicle, both of which are ethereal (for which see again Julian’s *Hymn to Helios* 152AB).

39. Cf. Lewy, 182. The “raiments” which the soul gathers as it descends constitute the vehicle.

40. Compare the diagram drawn from Simplicius on page 00, where for Damascius and Iamblichus, place, being non-bodily and unextended, provides the perfect order of bodies.

41. On the soteriological role of theurgy in the ascent of the vehicle (following the Chaldaean Oracles), see P. Athanassiadi, “The Chaldaean Oracles: Theology and Thurgy,” in *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, ed. P. Athanassiadi and M. Frede (Oxford, 1999), 149–83, e.g., 160–61. See also A.-J. Festugière, “Contemplation philosophique et Art théurgique chez Proclus,” *Studi di Storia Religiosa della Tarda Antichità* (Messina, 1968): 7–18 (who distinguishes between a theurgical and contemplative means of ascent).

42. See Finamore, *Iamblichus*, 151.

Proclus

Proclus also describes light as the activity of one hypostasis directed into the next. A passage of the *Platonic Theology* (2.7.48) is helpful here. For Proclus, the One is “the brightest of all realities” (cf. *Resp.* 518C9) because it is “the cause of light everywhere (*pantakhou*)” (*Th. Pl.* 2.7.48, 9–14). At each level of being there is a kind of mediating light.⁴³ Light itself, at all levels of being, is “nothing other than participation in divine existence” (*ouden gar allo esti to phôs ê metousia tês theias huparxeôs*, 2.7.48, 14^o15).⁴⁴

Proclus, like Iamblichus, holds that there is a scale of light. In this world, for example, there is a “hierarchy” (*huphesis*) of fire (in *Tim.* 2.8, 22–5):

For light and flame (*phlox*) are not the same, nor are flame and charcoal, but there is a hierarchy (*huphesis*) of fire from up above down to the earth. Fire advances from the more immaterial (*auloterou*), more pure (*katharôterou*), and more incorporeal (*asômatôterou*) to the most material (*enulotatôn*) and most dense (*pakhutatôn*) bodies. In fact, there are even streams of fire under the earth, as Empedocles says somewhere. [B52 DK]

This statement is made in the context of a discussion of “visibility,” with reference to the contention of the *Timaeus* (31B) that the generated world must be visible and tangible, and that the Demiurge created Fire and Earth respectively for this reason. Fire, Proclus suggests, brings about visibility for three reasons (2.7.33–8,7). First, light is each visible thing (*horaton*), due to the inherence of colour. Second, light is vision itself (*opsis*), as it proceeds from ethereal being (*ap’ousias proïousa aitherôdous*). Third, light must bind together the visible (*horaton*) with vision (*opsis*), as Socrates observes at *Republic* VI (507D–E), for it is each of these in actuality (*kat’energeian*). Thus light gives visibility to the cosmos, which “needs fire to come to be” (2.8,7–8). Our eye, the highest of the senses, is analogous to this fire, the highest element (2.8.10–11, citing “Pythagoras”).

At this point in the text Proclus presents the “hierarchy” as it appears on the following page. The sensible light which facilitates vision and visibility, discussed in this passage of the *Timaeus* commentary, “proceeds from ethereal being.” It “holds together” the visible cosmos, by serving as *sunagôgon* of vision and visibility. Compare Proclus’ observations on the light of the Myth of Er (in *Remp.* 2.201,21–29, tr. Siorvanes):

43. This is clear for instance from *Th. Pl.* 2.7.44,17–45,13. Each monad exists both in the realm before its realm and in its own realm, and illuminates the entities below it with light.

44. H.-D. Saffrey and L.G. Westerink, *Proclus: Théologie Platonicienne* (vol. 2, page 108, n. 6), point out that light can be called “participation” throughout Proclus’ system. In this context, it may be relevant to Proclus’ theory that, on Aristotle’s report, Plato held that “place is the participant,” to *metalêptikon: Physics* 4.2, 209b14.

For light is different from all the others, and is superior and prior to all others which are said to be animated by the primal source-soul. This shows, I believe, that light is a body different from the worlds, ether, and fire . . . but if the empyrean is the first-most of the *moved* [i.e., the celestial bodies], clearly light is *unmoved* by being given an order above fire; and as the ether holds together (*sunekhei*) the material worlds, and the empyrean embraces both the material worlds and the ether, so light holds all (*panta*).

The sensible “fire”-light which Proclus had been discussing in the *Timaeus* commentary, that which proceeds from “ethereal being” and holds together the visible cosmos, seems to correspond to this “ether” which “holds together” the material worlds. Above it is the empyrean light, which “holds together” the material worlds and the ether. And the light of the Myth of Er now under discussion is greater still, binding the empyrean, the ethereal, and the material. This *diairesis* of light, as Simplicius has told us (616,1, cited above), derives from a Chaldaean Oracle stating that Soul acts upon light, fire, ether, and the worlds, in that order.

| | |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| <i>Iamblichus</i> | <i>Proclus</i> |
| Ether } | Luminous Empyrean Ethereal |

We can now see that Proclus has subdivided Iamblichus’ “bodylike” but immaterial body of ether, itself an intermediary between soul and body (*De Myst.* 5.12, 8–11) into three subdivisions—luminous, empyrean, and ethereal—thus bringing the traditional theory of the luminous vehicle into agreement terminologically with the Chaldaean Oracles, and creating a triad. The light which binds Soul to Body is not only ether, as Iamblichus had it. Or rather, this ether is threefold, and we can call its three divisions (1) “light” or “luminous” (*phôs*, used properly), (2) the “empyrean,” and (3) “ethereal” (*aithêr*, used properly), beneath which is the hylic, sublunary realm. Thus the levels of light correspond to levels of the Chaldaean cosmos. In this way Proclus presents us with the precise division quoted on the preceding page (in *Remp.* 2.201, 21–29), and elsewhere suggests (in *Tim.* 2.57,10–17: cf. Simplic. in *Phys.* 616,25–29) that these Chaldaean divisions refer to more immaterial firmaments which interpenetrate the sensible cosmos of the *Timaeus*. The light that constitutes the luminous vehicle is something finer than the ethereal being that constitutes the lower vehicle.

Whether light is incorporeal or corporeal, then, is a matter of one’s point of view, and what kind of light one is talking about. Thus in his *Cratylus* commentary (32,12–14) Proclus writes: “The Gods tell us to consider the extended shape of light (*morphên phôtos*). For although it is without shape above (*anô amorphôtos*) it becomes shaped (*memorphômenê*) through the

procession (*proodos*).⁴⁵ At the final, three-dimensional stage of this shaping, light takes on a spherical form, as Proclus tells us in the image of the two spheres (612,29–34). According to Iamblichus, the pneumatic vehicle is given shape (*morphoumenon*) by the “divine lives” as it descends (in *Tim.* fr. 84), and this shape is spherical (in *Tim.* fr. 49).⁴⁶

III. MOVING BODIES: LIGHT AS THE VEHICLE

Proclus’ luminous body, like Iamblichus’ ethereal body, is “bodylike but immaterial.” In general, Proclus’ spherical “body of light” possesses the characteristics of the Iamblichean vehicle. Thus Proclus refers to the nature of “our luminous vehicle” to describe it, and suggests that our luminous vehicle is alone capable of perceiving the kind of light he is discussing.

But there is a distinction between Proclus’ “body of light” and Iamblichus’ ethereal vehicle; or rather, Proclus is suggesting that the ethereal body may be subdivided into more types, and the “luminous body,” following the division of the Chaldaean Oracles, is to be regarded as a loftier entity than the merely ethereal body. Of course, this reflects Proclus’ position that there are *two* vehicles, a luminous vehicle for the rational soul, and a pneumatic vehicle for the irrational soul. The distinction is, I think, clearest in terms of motion. We will recall that Iamblichus assigns different kinds of motion to different levels of light: stability to the light of the gods, multiple motion to the light of souls, an intermediate motion to the light of daimons, and so on (*De Myst.* 2.4.79). The *ethereal* body, for Iamblichus, possesses a kind of circular motion that never departs from itself (*De Myst.* 5.4):

It is external to any opposition, is freed from any change (*tropes*), is free from the possibility of changing (*metaballein*) into anything else [cp. 2.4, 79, cited above: the light of souls *changes* in *many* motions], is completely without tendency towards or from the middle, because it lacks any such tendency or is carried about in a circle (*kata kuklon peripheretai*) ... For, these ethereal bodies, being ungenerated, do not have any power of receiving into themselves change from generated things.

Proclus holds that the motion of ether is the finest kind of motion. If we follow the Oracles, and posit a kind of “light” superior to ether, then this

45. This procession is geometrical, stretching from the point to the line to the plane to the body; when it reaches its final extreme, light has become commensurate with the three-dimensionally extended. On this see also L.P. Schrenk, “Proclus on Corporeal Space,” 164. Lucas Siorvanes surveys this image in his introduction to Urmson’s translation of Simplicius’ *Corollaries on Place and Time*. The procession resembles the pyramid or the “light-cone,” the shape in which Proclus observed light radiating, and on which he comments. The same intuitive result was incidentally drawn by Newton, who posited that light falls off as the inverse square of the distance from the source, producing a pyramidal model of electromagnetic radiation.

46. These fragments are combined in Finamore’s discussion of the vehicle’s composition in Iamblichus (*Iamblichus and the Vehicle*, 13).

light must be immobile (*in Remp.* 2.201, 21–29):

If the empyrean is the first-most of the *moved*, clearly light is *unmoved* by being given an order above fire; and as the ether embraces (*sunekhei*) the material worlds, and the empyrean embraces both the material worlds and the ether, so light embraces all (*panta*).

Earlier, Proclus explains why such a light must be described as superior to the heavens (2.196, 5–8):

Then if this light embraces all rotation (*pasan sunekhei tèn periphoran*) and binds together all things to one another (*ta hola pros allêla*) ... it is altogether clear, that it is not inferior to that which it embraces.

Because light embraces (*sunekhei*) the heaven, as a kind of *hedra*, it must be the *place* (*topos*) of the body (197,25–198,3).

And if this [*sc.* that things change into one another] is true, then it is also necessary that the heaven must be imagined as remaining whole in its own seat (*hedra*), or else as being moved in regard to its own parts, by changing the seats of its parts, [the seats] in which each comes to be—to have one seat of the parts, and a different seat of the whole. For that which remains or is moved is something different from that *in which* it stands or *from which* it is moved, and *into which* it moves. It is quite clear, then, that this “seat” of the heaven is the place (*topos*) of the body.⁴⁷

Aristotle would concur that the surface surrounding the cosmos should be regarded as the “place” of the cosmic body. But this is only one way in which light, for Proclus, “holds together” (*sunekhei*) the body. This is crucial to Proclus’ meaning. On the one hand, light “embraces” the body as its seat of motion and movement, its *topos*. On the other hand, it “embraces” the body in that it is ontologically superior to it; indeed, the highest form of unmoved light “embraces all” the world, and so is superior even to the empyrean and ethereal light. One sense is physical, the other metaphysical.⁴⁸ Proclus is drawing Aristotelian physics together with Chaldaean cosmology.

47. My translation. The text reads as follows: τούτου δὲ ἀληθοῦς ὄντος ἀνάγκη καὶ τὸν οὐρανόν, εἴτε ὡς ἐστὼς ὅλος ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ ἔδρᾳ νοοῖτο εἴτε ὡς κινούμενος τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μέρεσιν μεταβαλὼν τὰς τῶν μερῶν ἔδρας ἐν αἷς ἕκαστον γίνεται, ἔδραν τινὰ ἔχειν ἑτέραν τῶν τε μερῶν καὶ τοῦ ὅλου· τὸ γὰρ ἐν τῷ ἢ μένον ἢ κινούμενον <ἑτερόν> ἐστὶν ἐκείνου, ἐν ᾧ ἔστηκεν ἢ ἐξ οὗ κινεῖται καὶ εἰς ὃ κινεῖται. ταύτην οὖν τὴν ἔδραν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, ἐν ᾗ ἐστίν, τὸν τόπον δηλονότι χρὴ φάναι τὸν τοῦ σώματος·

48. Sorabji points out, citing Philippe Hoffmann, that when Proclus’ place is described as “superior” this ontological statement does not imply that it is also spatially “further out” (page 111). Indeed, as Proclus’ image of “two spheres” shows, the body of light is equal in extension to what it contains.

Simplicius' quotation of Proclus offers us an insight to the idea that there is "one seat of the whole, and one seat of the parts." Compare the argument ascribed by Simplicius to Proclus' master Syrianus (618,27–619,3):

[Syrianus] in his commentaries on the tenth book of Plato's *Laws* has written the following concerning place. That is, in speaking of an interval (*diastêma*), he says, "[the interval] itself is that which, by its appropriate segments and divisions (*oikeiais tomâs kai diairesin*)—which it obtained from the differing reason-principles (*logoi*) of the soul, and from the illumination of the demiurgic forms—apportions (*oikeiounenon*) different types of bodies and makes itself, in respect of some of its parts, the appropriate space (*oikeian khôran*) of Fire (towards which fire is said in the *Timaeus* [63B] to move by its nature); but in respect of others, the appropriate space of Earth, towards which earth naturally moves, and rests when present in it. That is, he says, why in fact now all that moves and all that is stationary is, by nature, stable in its place. But neither the motion nor the rest that belongs to the interval is subservient to the nature of bodies, nor is either an endowment derived from that nature."

Place "moves bodies to the places appropriate (*oikeios*) to them" within its own divisions. This is a reflection of Aristotle's doctrine of natural place, presented at *Physics* 4.4. For Proclus, too, bodies move in a characteristic way in their appropriate (*oikeios*) places, or into their appropriate places if they are not yet there. "Every simple body (*sôma haploun*)," he explains elsewhere (in *Tim.* 2.11,27–31), "which is in its own proper place (*oikeiôi topôi*), either remains stationary, or is moved in a circle; for if it moves in an alien manner, either it is no longer in its own place (*en tôi autôi topôi*), or it is not yet in it (*oupô estin en autôi*)." Fire, for example, when it is in an "alien place" below, rises towards the heavens; upon reaching its proper place above, it begins to circle with its proper motion.⁴⁹

Proclus says that the luminous vehicle of the world that he has been describing, which performs this active function, is "analogous to our luminous vehicle" (in *Remp.* 2.196,21–30). In fact, "our luminous vehicle" is the only entity that can see it, because of its "rarer and purer" eyes (2.196,11–13). We might compare Proclus' observation that there is interpenetration of our immaterial bodies (in *Tim.* 3.297, 25) with the celestial body (in *Remp.* 2.162,26–28). We have already discussed how the spherical shape and luminous conception with which Proclus works is drawn partly from the Iamblichean tradition of the individual soul-vehicle, its constitution, its visibility, and its mode of motion. At this stage, I believe we can also make clear why Proclus has combined the theory of the luminous vehicle with the physical doctrine of place as he has.

49. So Proclus explains (in *Tim.* 2.12.3–8). Lucas Siorvanes comments: "heat and upwards motion are not essentially characteristic of fire, for such properties are not evident in the heavenly domain ... they are characteristic of Fire only in its sublunary mode. Similarly weight and downward movement are not essentially characteristic of Earth" (238).

We have seen that, for Iamblichus, the soul is drawn upwards by Helios, whose rays are ethereal and so “appropriate to” (*ekhein oikeiôs*, *Julian* 5.172AB, 172C) the ethereal vehicle. The ethereal vehicle then rests with Helios’ ethereal vehicle, or with that of its leader-god, in its appropriate place. “Whenever the partial soul,” as Proclus explains (in *Tim.* 3.276,19–22), “attaches itself to the whole, its vehicle also follows the vehicle of the divine soul, and just as the soul imitates the intellection of the divine soul, so also its body imitates the movement of the divine body.” But the rational soul may rise further. Drawing on the *Phaedrus* myth, Iamblichus suggests that the rational soul may rise to contemplate the hyperouranic realm, beyond the “back” (*nôtos*) of the spherical cosmos, with its “head” (*têi heautou kephalêi ton hyperouranion topon horôn*, in *Tim.* fr. 87). Before the rational soul rises beyond the cosmos, and puts its “head” into the realm of immobile, hyperouranic light (*phôs*) where Aion rules, it leaves the ethereal vehicle behind.

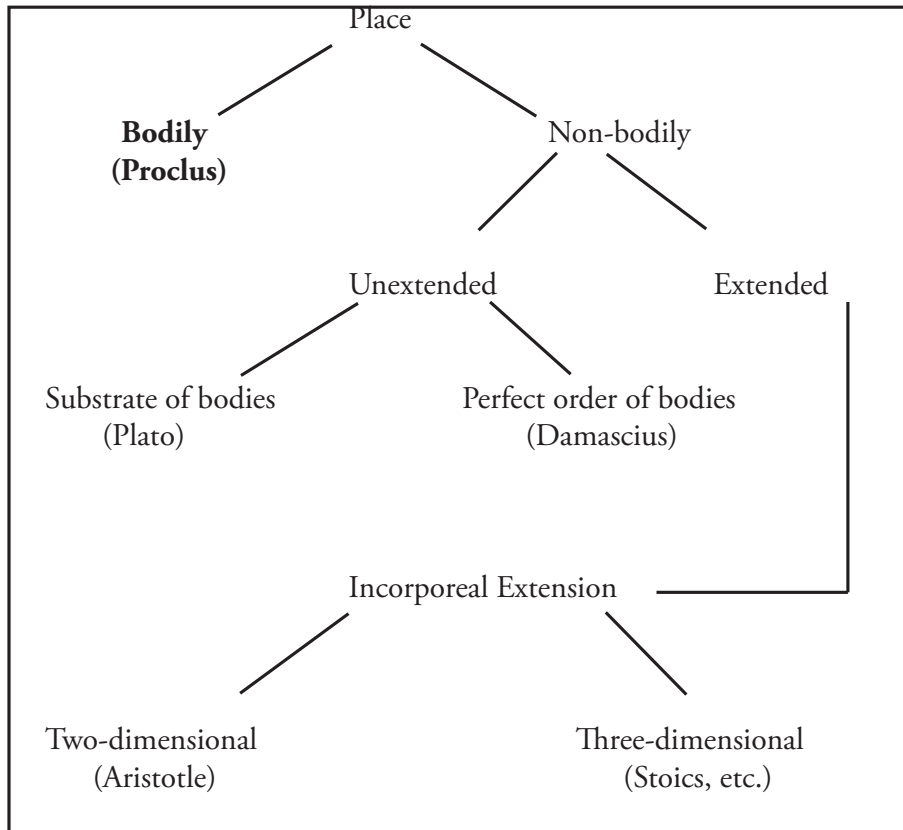
Proclus, however, held that there were two vehicles. Although the rational soul may abandon its lower, pneumatic or ethereal vehicle, it always rides upon its “luminous vehicle.” An analogous luminous vehicle, as we have seen, surrounds the cosmos beyond the limits of the heaven. Both vehicles are composed of the light of the Myth of Er. Thus, on the same principle by which the ethereal vehicle is drawn to Ether and remains to circle there, theurgy will draw the rational soul in its luminous vehicle upwards to this realm. And this ascent, already posited by Iamblichus, now has an underpinning in Aristotelian physics: the doctrine of natural place. As the body of sensible fire rises to its appropriate place (*oikeios topos*), likewise our loftiest and rarest body, namely “our luminous vehicle,” will rise to join the luminous vehicle of the cosmos, allowing us to “raise our head into the region outside” (*Phdr.* 248a2–3), and, on Iamblichus’ reading of this passage, to contemplate the One. This “place” surrounds the heavens, like the “back” of the cosmos in the *Phaedrus* myth. Thus it can also be equated with the Aristotelian “place of the cosmos,” that “innermost motionless boundary of what contains” the heaven. Proclus has introduced the Aristotelian doctrine of natural place as the mechanism of the theurgical ascent.⁵⁰ So long as this loftiest vehicle of the soul is regarded as a kind of “body,” however rarified, we may allow it to be moved by another, namely by the immobile vehicle of the whole, and posit Aristotelian physics as the mechanism of its ascent.

50. For another example of the idea of “ascending” from sensible being altogether, we might compare Proclus’ suggestion (in *Parm.* 879, 9–27) that we must “ascend” from the corporeal to the incorporeal in order to properly examine the qualities of bodies, which transcend sense-perception.

The active purpose of the vehicle in later Neoplatonism is to facilitate the descent of the soul and its reversion through theurgy. Here, I think, Proclus' chief concern is also with the immortal fate of the soul. In each part of the cosmos, there is an "appropriate" body for the soul, corresponding to a certain kind of light and motion. Such a notion of "appropriate places" recalls a more general principle, which A.C. Lloyd called "the golden rule of late Neoplatonic metaphysics,"⁵¹ that "all is in all, but appropriately (*oikeiôs*) in each." By refining Iamblichus' hierarchy of light, Proclus allows the action of "natural place" to move the rational soul, riding upon its luminous vehicle, to the realm which the Chaldaean Oracles, and the later Neoplatonists, locate beyond the heavens. This conclusion also reminds us that, for Proclus, Aristotelian physics and the Chaldaean Oracles are not opposed worldviews, but two rungs, the former lower and the latter higher, on a continuous, curricular and pedagogical ladder. By combining them, he establishes a crucial eschatological conclusion within the physical and metaphysical framework of later Neoplatonism, demonstrating that the rational soul rises beyond the fixed stars to unity in the realm of the One.

51. "Athenian and Alexandrian Neoplatonism," in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A.H. Armstrong, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 302–25.

APPENDIX I: VIEWS ON PLACE IN SIMPLICIUS' "COROLLARY" (IN *PHYS.*)



Adapted from *Simplicius: Corollaries on place and time*, trans. J.O. Urmson; annotated by Lucas Siorvanes (London : Duckworth, 1992), 18.

APPENDIX 2: THE HYPERCOSMIC PLACE IN THE CHALDAEAN ORACLES

An Oracle cited by Synesius (*De Insomniis* 9,7–8) reads as follows:

οὐδὲ τὸ τῆς ὕλης χρημνῶ σχύβαλον χαταλείψει,
ἀλλα χαὶ εἰδώλω μερίς εἰς τόπον ἀμφιφάοντα·

You will not abandon the dung (*skubalon*) of matter at the precipice (*krémnôî*). Rather, even for your image (*eidôlon*) is there a share in the place which is luminous all around (*eis topon amphiphaonta*).

This “*topos* which is luminous all around” is the realm of the cosmic soul (see Lewy 219 and ch. 2, n. 111). The soul of the (most pure) theurgist rises to this luminous place, where it abides “in the angelic space” (*angelikôi eni khôrôi*, *Ol. Phaed.* 64,2); that is, in the Empyrean sphere sometimes referred to as the “meadow” (*leimôn*) of Paradise (see Lewy, 219–20). Psellus (*Opusc. Psych.* 148 13–16) explains: “After the so-called death, the Chaldaeans—according to the extent (*metra*) of their appropriate (*oikeios*) purifications—reintegrate (*apokathistasi*) their souls in the whole parts of the cosmos. But some of them even ascend *above the cosmos* (*hyper ton kosmon*) and delimit the very mediums (*mesas*) of the unpartitioned and partitioned natures.”

This “hyper-cosmic” place is the Empyrean, as Lewy finds in “the question of a Chaldaean” (222 n. 188) at Proclus *in Tim.* 2.57,12: “What are we to call the solid bodies (*stereômata*) above the cosmos? ‘Olympus’? ‘Empyrean’? ‘Ether’?” This “place” envelops the visible world. As the cosmic soul, it is the “space” within which “Virtue [the moon], Wisdom [Mercury], and the thoughtful Truth [Sun] are manifest” (Lewy, 221, n. 183). “All things” meet in this “angelic space,” which is perhaps the “connective of all” to which the elder Julian the Chaldaean prayed (on Psellus’ testimony, Lewy, 224, n. 195).

It appears that in Iamblichean exegesis this Oracle offered proof for the immortality of the irrational soul and its vehicle. Lewy cites Julian *Or.* V, 178C: “The perishable envelope of bitter matter will be saved.” The vehicle of the theurgist circles immortally and is not dissolved in the highest place. The exegesis of Synesius is similar. After citing this oracle he identifies the “place” (*topos*) as ether, and the “image” (*eidôlon*) as the ethereal vehicle of the soul.