

John Opsopaus, PhD

THE ART OF NEOPLATONIC THEURGY



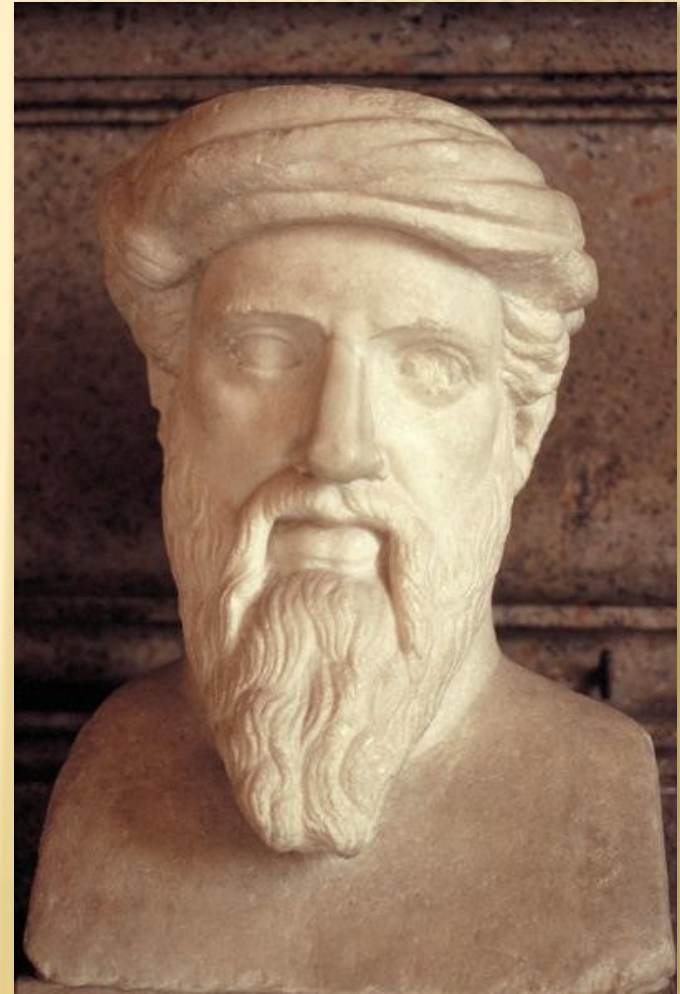
OUTLINE

- I. Introduction
- II. Neoplatonic Cosmology
- III. Basics of Theurgy
- IV. Theurgic Symbols and Materials
- V. Constructing an Invocation
- VI. Complete Systasis Ritual

I. INTRODUCTION

PYTHAGORAS

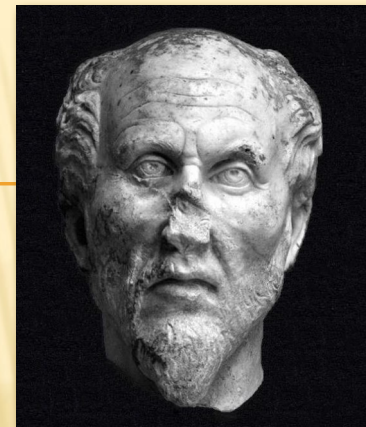
- ✖ Born in Samos, mid 6th century BCE
- ✖ Traveled and studied widely
- ✖ Founded Pythagorean Order
- ✖ Practiced a kind of shamanism
- ✖ Important influence on Plato



PYTHAGOREANS CELEBRATE THE SUNRISE



— Fyodor Bronnikov (1869)



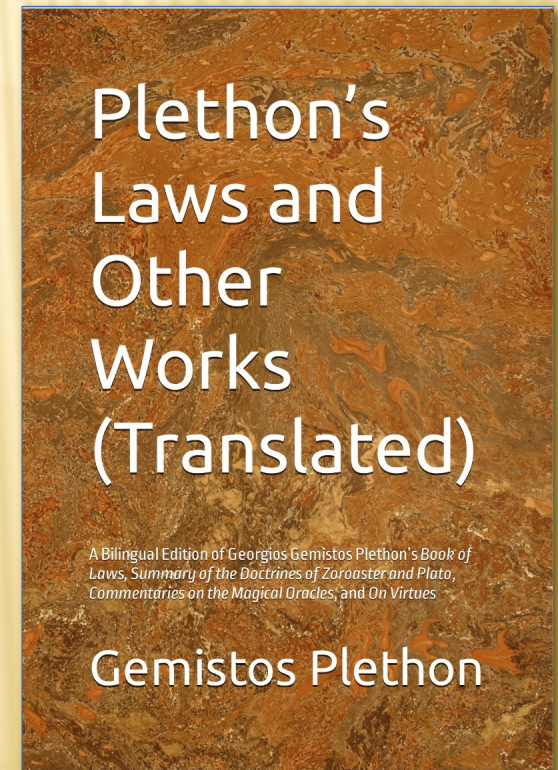
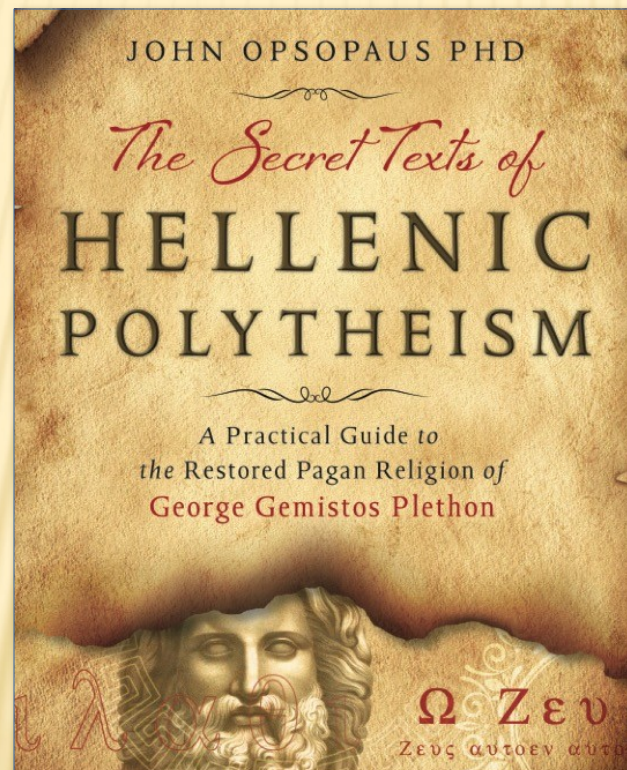
NEOPLATONISM

- ✗ Pythagoras (c.570–c.495 BCE)
- ✗ Plato (427–437 BCE)
- ✗ Platonism: many of Plato's ideas grew out of Pythagoreanism
- ✗ Neoplatonism (or “Late Platonism”): the stage of Platonic thought beginning with Plotinus (205–270 CE) and continuing through the end of Pagan antiquity

THE GOLDEN CHAIN

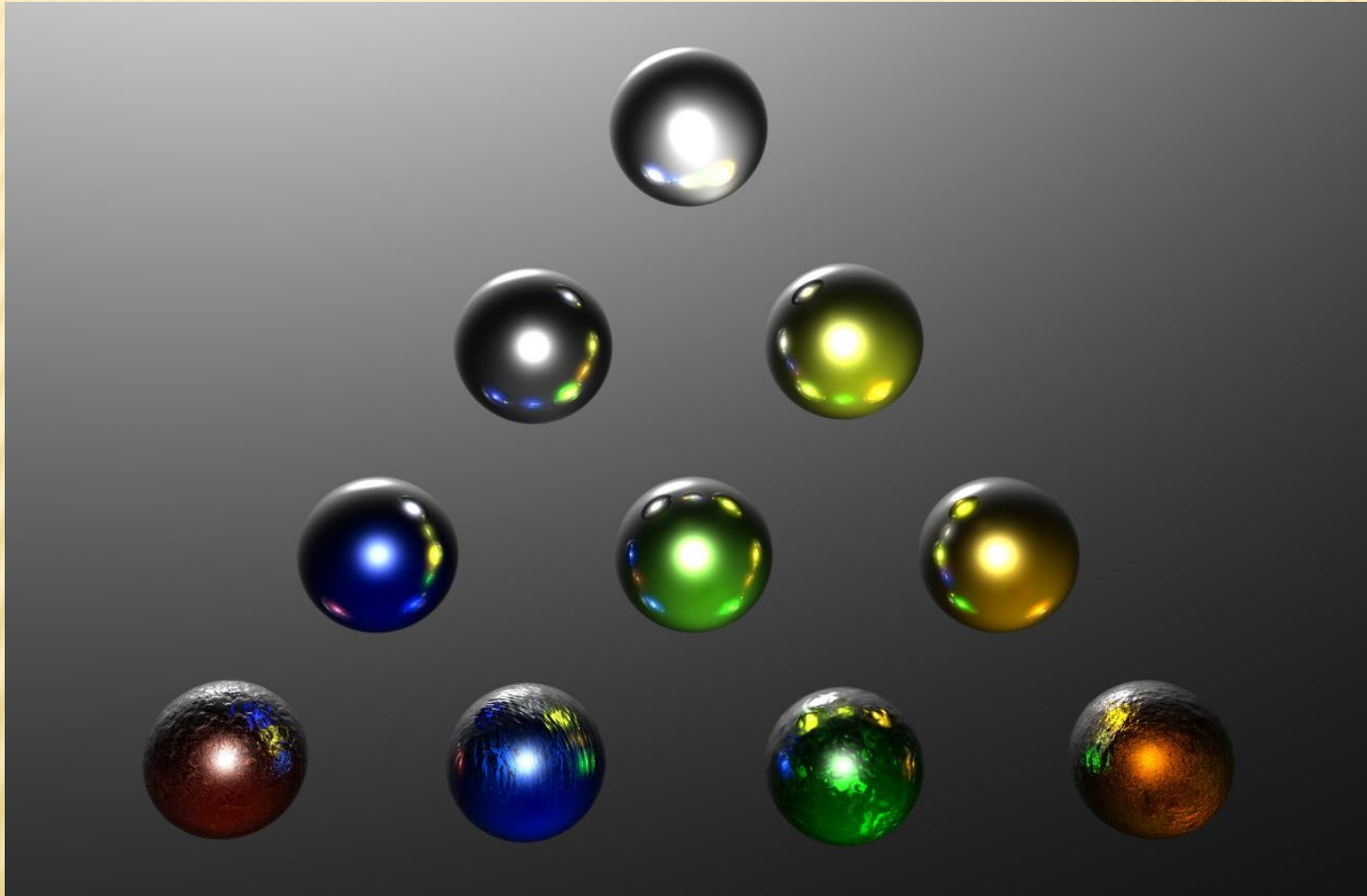
- ✕ Pythagoras (c.570–c.495 BCE)
- ✕ Plato (427–437 BCE)
- ✕ Philo Judaeus (fl. c.40 CE)
- ✕ Julian the Chaldean and Julian the Theurgist (late 2nd cent.)
- ✕ Plotinus (205–270 CE)
- ✕ Porphyry (233–c.309)
- ✕ Iamblichus (c.245–c.325)
- ✕ Hypatia (c.365–415)
- ✕ Synesius (c.373–c.414)
- ✕ Hierocles (fl. 430)
- ✕ Proclus (c.411–486)
- ✕ Damascius (fl. 529)
- ✕ pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (6th cent.)
- ✕ Psellus (1018–c.1081)
- ✕ Suhrawardi (1152/3–1190/1)
- ✕ Ishrâqî Sufis (13th cent.)
- ✕ Qabalah (13th cent.)
- ✕ George Gemistos “Plethon” (c.1360–1452)
- ✕ Cosimo de’ Medici (1389–1464)
- ✕ Marsilio Ficino (1433–99)
- ✕ Thomas Taylor (1758–1835)
- ✕ Romanticism & Transcendentalism (c.1800–c.1850)

SOME OF MY BOOKS



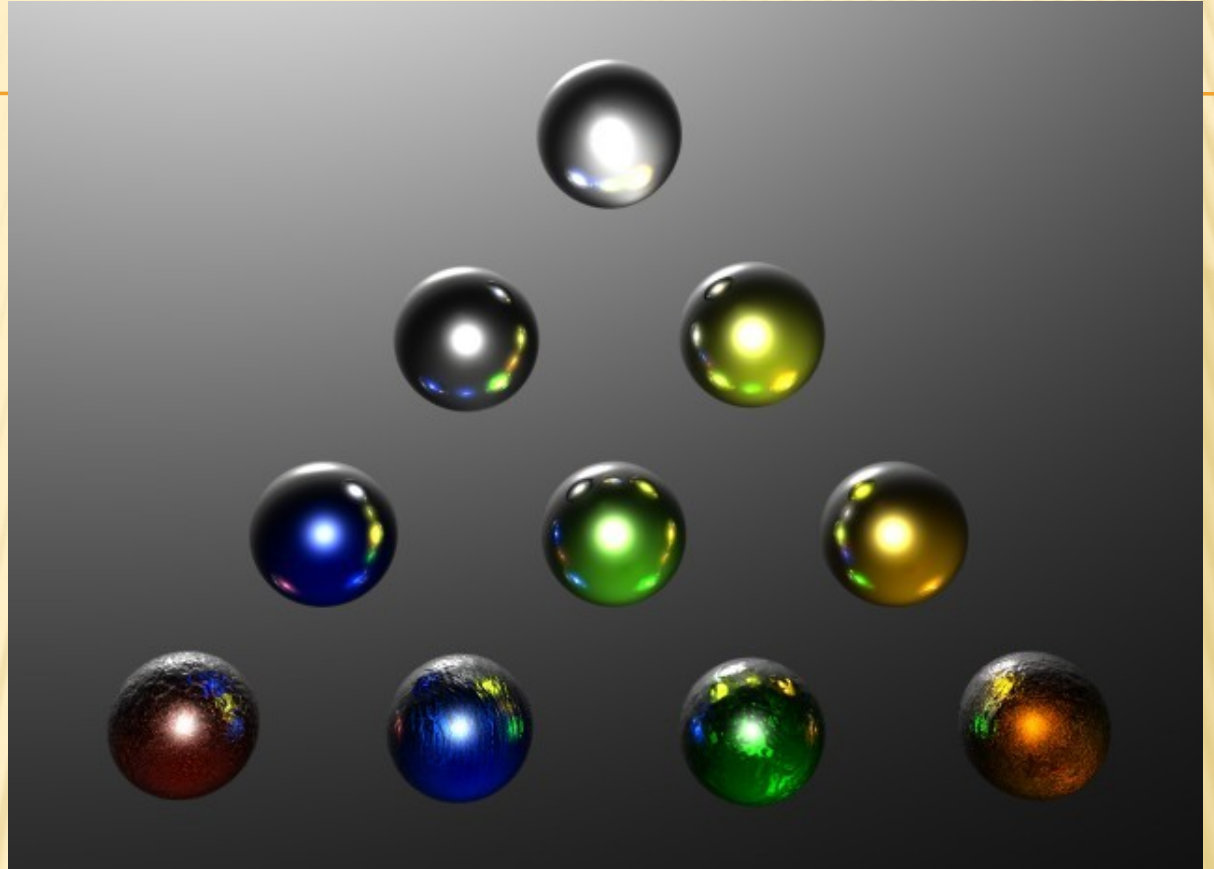
II. NEOPLATONIC COSMOLOGY

THE TETRACTYS



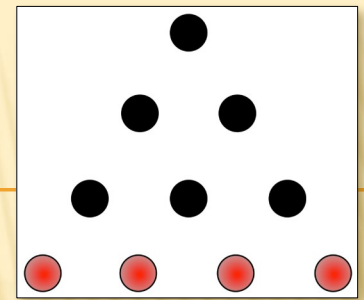
THE PYTHAGOREAN OATH

Swear! by him that gave our family
the Tetractys,
which holds the fount and root
of ever-flowing Nature.



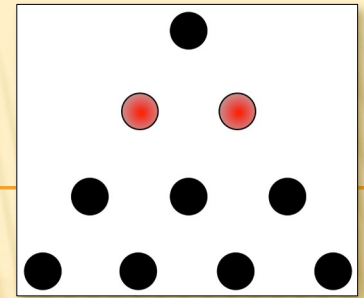
THE MACROCOSM

The *Tetractys*, a Pythagorean symbol, is a map of the Neoplatonic *Macrocosm*, that is, of the whole of reality.



THE WORLD BODY

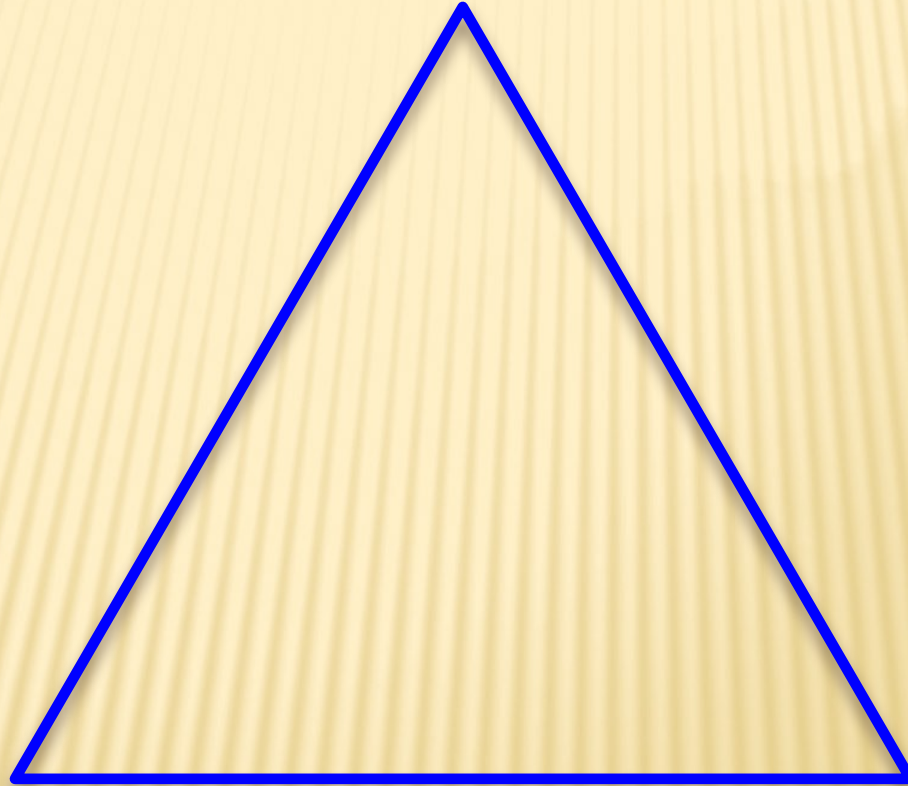
- ✗ Neoplatonists analyze reality into several levels or *hypostases*
- ✗ The simplest analysis has four levels, corresponding to the Tetractys
- ✗ Lowest is the *World Body*
- ✗ This is the ordinary physical world
- ✗ The realm of *Becoming* (motion and change)
- ✗ Traditionally associated with the four elements (fire, air, water, earth)

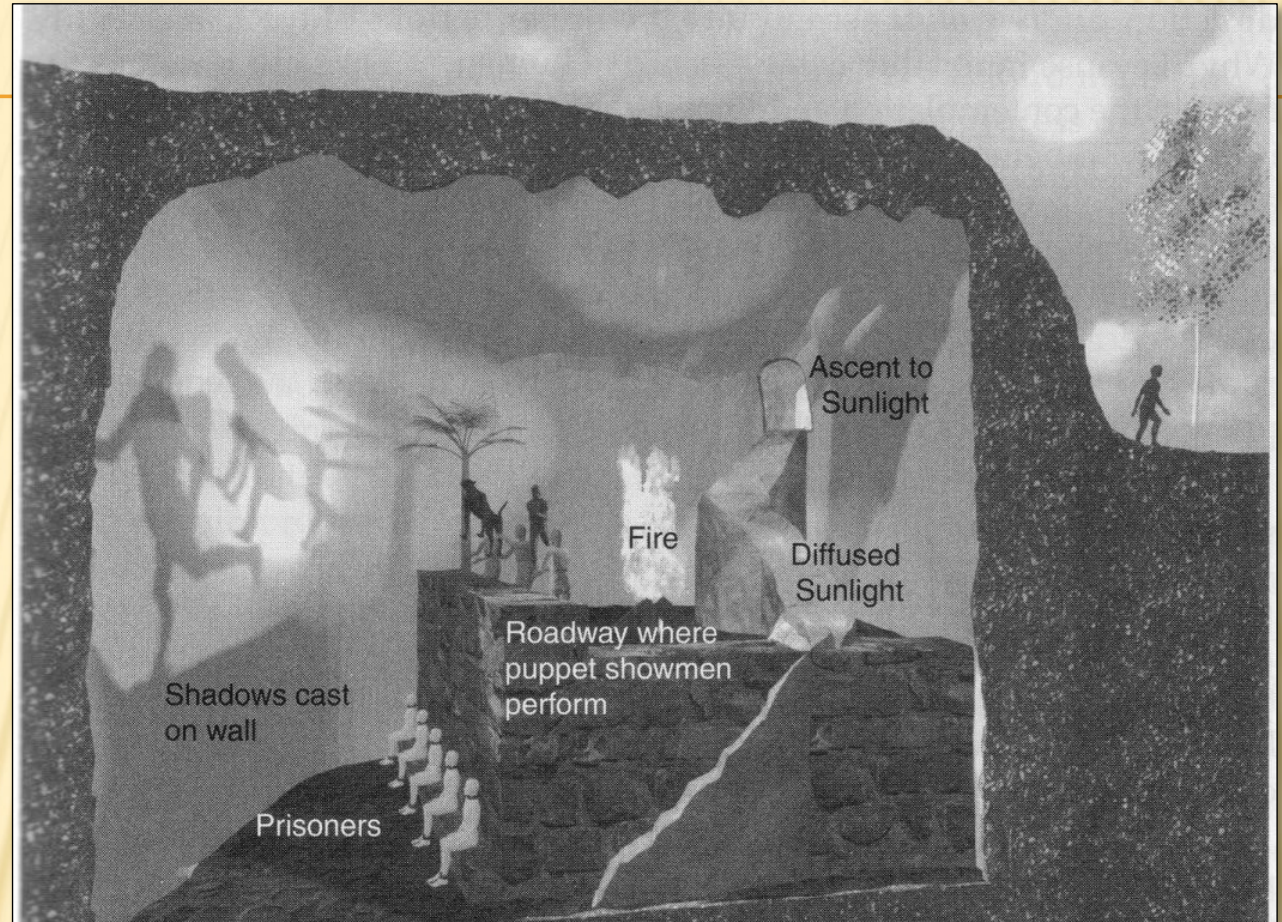


THE WORLD *NOUS* (MIND)

- ✗ The realm of the Platonic Forms or Ideas
 - + eternal & perfect principles of certain classes of objects
- ✗ Realm of *Being*: outside of time and space
- ✗ Characterized by *duality* (what *is* and *is not*)
- ✗ Greek “nous” (often translated “mind” or “intellect”) refers to the intuitive mind, which apprehends the Ideas directly
- ✗ It is not ordinary discursive reason
- ✗ Pagan Neoplatonists often located the eternal gods (Zeus, Athena, Apollo, Aphrodite, et al.) here

THE EQUILATERAL TRIANGLE

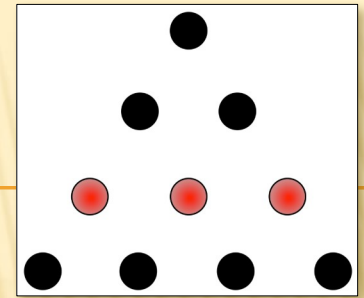




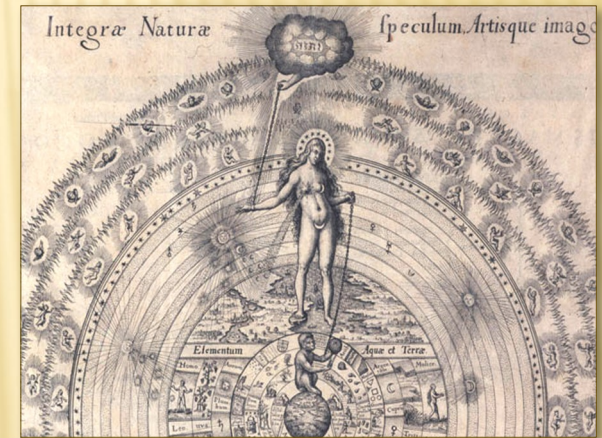
PLATO'S CAVE

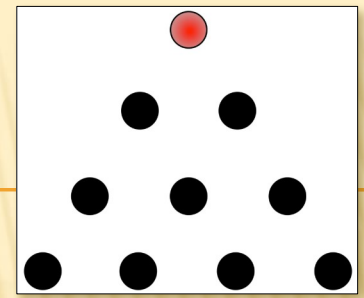
The Republic (514a–520a)

THE WORLD SOUL



- ✗ Mediates between:
 - + The World Mind: timeless/spaceless realm of Being
 - + The World Body: change/motion in realm of Becoming
- ✗ Brings Forms into manifestation in space and time in World Body — brings world to life
- ✗ Creates 3 spatial dimensions and time (past-present-future)
- ✗ Pagan Neoplatonists often put the celestial gods (sun, moon, planets) and *daimons* (angels, spirits mediating between gods and humans) here

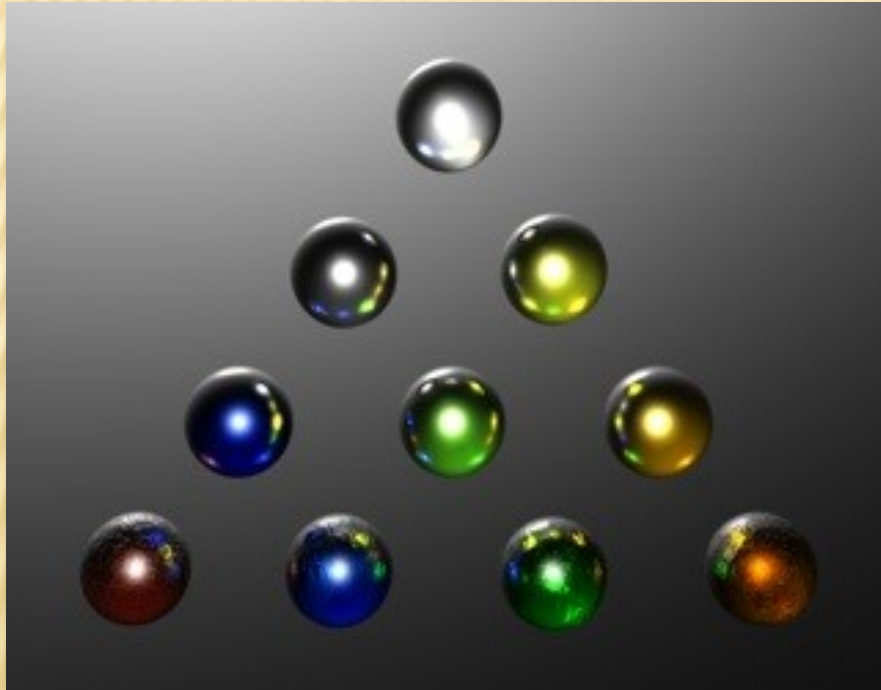




THE INEXPRESSIBLE ONE

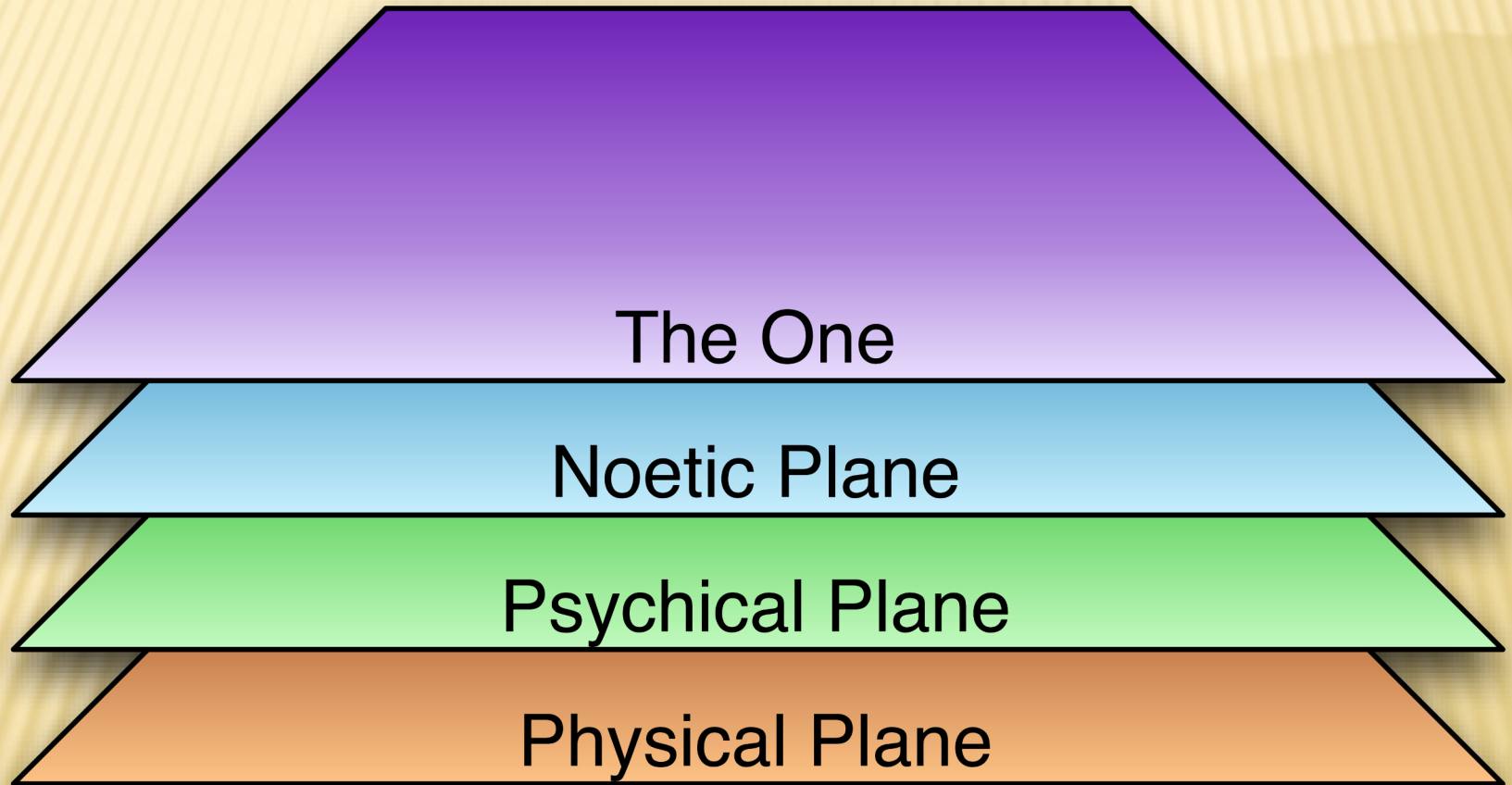
- ✗ The ultimate principal of unity
 - + necessary for anything to be something
- ✗ It unifies all the opposites, transcending duality
 - + it is paradoxical
- ✗ Since it cannot be described in words, it is called “inexpressible” or “ineffable”
- ✗ It can be known only through union (*henôsis*)
- ✗ Sometimes misleadingly called “God,” “the Good,” etc.

THE MACROCOSM



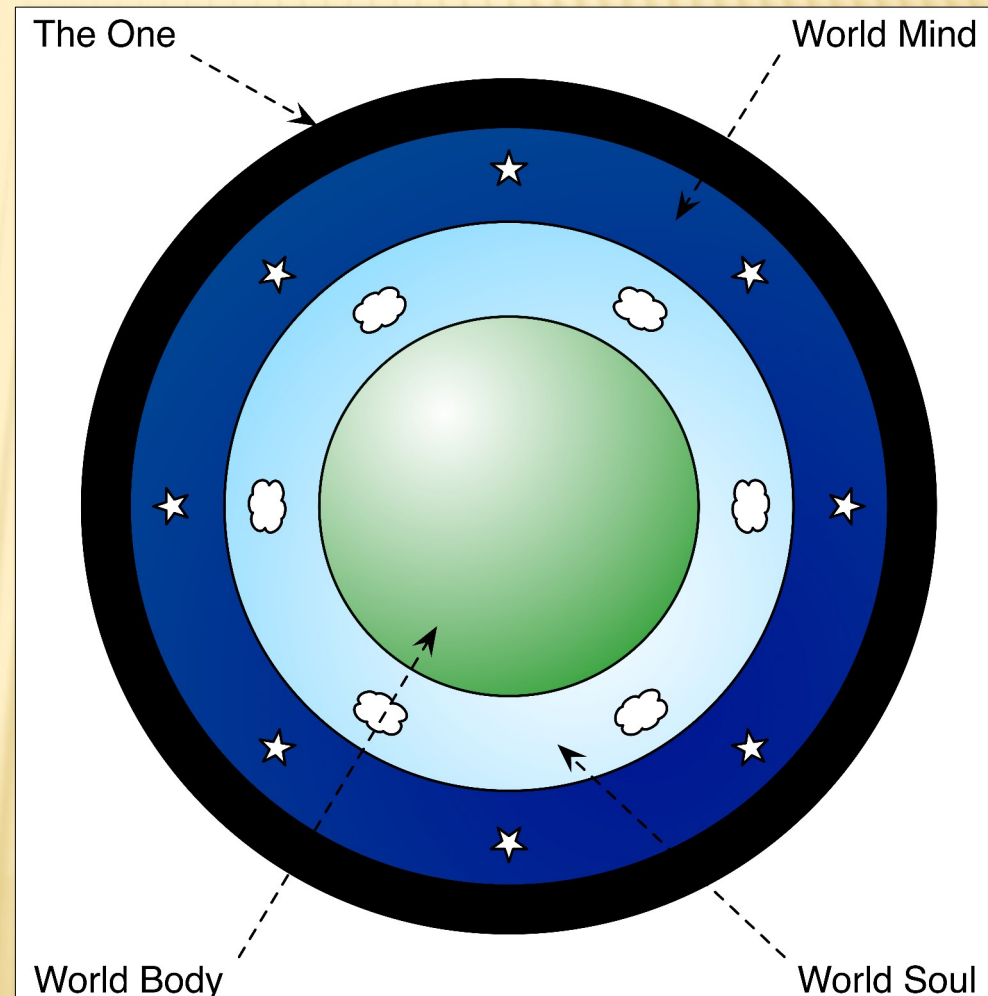
- I. The Ineffable One
- II. The World Mind
- III. The World Soul
- III. The World Body

THE PLANES OF REALITY



GEOCENTRIC IMAGE

- ✖ Earth symbolizes the World Body
- ✖ Air symbolizes the *spirit* that animates the natural world
- ✖ Stars symbolize the eternal perfect Ideas
- ✖ Black void symbolizes the Ineffable One



LINE OF PROJECTION & SYMBOLS

- ✘ Each level timelessly projects images to the level below
- ✘ Therefore everything exists in lines, chains, or lineages (*seirai*) descending from the One
- ✘ Things at lower level are actualization (*enérgeia*) of potential (*dynamis*) at higher
- ✘ Therefore, lower things can be used as *symbols* of their principles at the higher levels

THE MICROCOSM

A reflection of the
Macrocosm

- iiii. Individual body
- iii. Individual soul
- ii. Individual nous
- i. The One within



INDIVIDUAL BODY AND SOUL

- ✗ Outermost is the individual body
- ✗ It is animated from within by the individual soul, which governs physiological processes
- ✗ Lower soul comprises:
 - + vegetative soul: governs growth & nutrition
 - + animate soul: governs perception & movement
- ✗ Upper soul: language & discursive reason

THE INDIVIDUAL NOUS



- ✗ Innate unconscious psychological structure
 - + innate Ideas and Forms of human behavior
 - + universal and unchanging
- ✗ Archetypes (Jung)
 - + unconscious psychological structures common to all humans
 - + regulate perception, affect, motivation, and behavior for biological ends
 - + constitute the collective unconscious
 - + may be personified (e.g., in mythology)

THE GODS WITHIN



DAIMONS & COMPLEXES

- ✗ Peculiar to each person
- ✗ Reside in personal unconscious
- ✗ Mediating: adapt archetypes to individual lives
- ✗ Behave as autonomous subpersonalities
 - + Socrates' *daimonion*
 - + the Shadow
 - + normal components of a healthy psyche
- ✗ Possession and projection



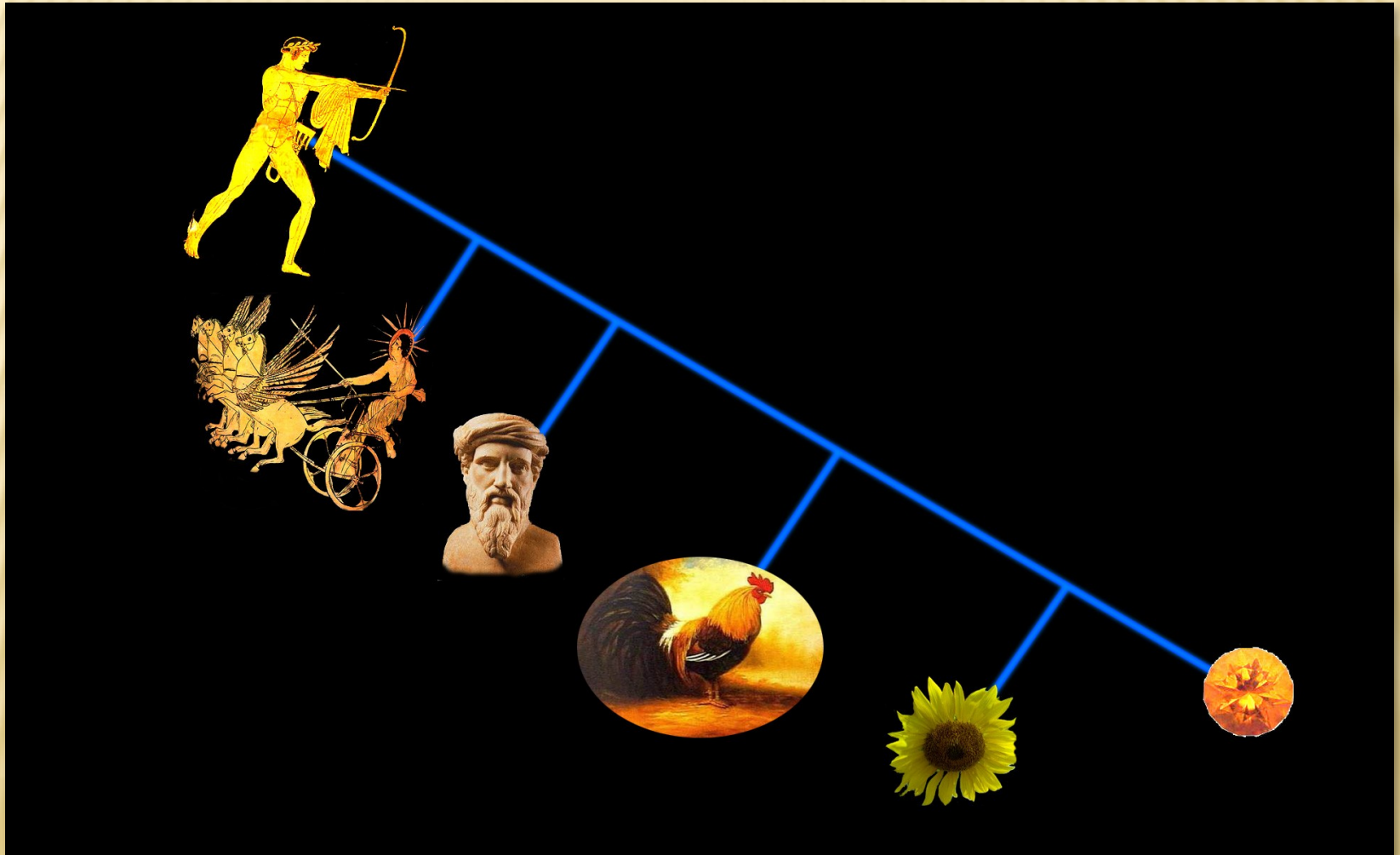
THE INDIVIDUAL ONE

- ✘ Unifying principle of the unconscious
- ✘ Root of individuality
- ✘ “Highest” or “true” self
- ✘ Governs unconscious psychological development
- ✘ God-image within
- ✘ Paradoxical, like the Ineffable One



III. THEURGICAL SYMBOLS

THE SEIRA (LINEAGE) OF APOLLO



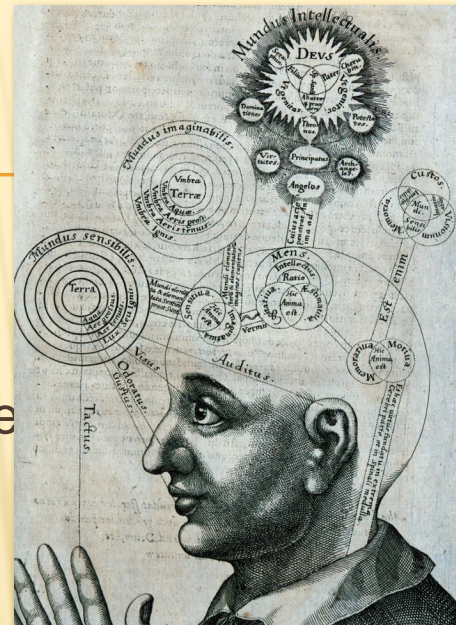
SYMBOLS

- ✘ Symbols “tune” soul to particular divine energy
- ✘ Should also resonate with theurgist’s psyche
- ✘ Allow soul to ascend a seira
- ✘ Activate images of gods and daimons in imagination (*phantasia*)



TRUE IMAGINATION (PHANTASIA)

- **Nature**
 - In aetherial body, which connects immortal higher soul to physical body
 - Highest part of lower (non-rational) soul
 - All perception passes through it
 - **Medium of divine communication**
 - Celestial gods and daimons have only aetherial bodies
 - Therefore they most easily interact through imagination
 - **Training the True Imagination**
 - Increase *imaginative power* (in all sensory modalities) by practicing vivid imagination
 - Practice *imaginative receptivity* by clearing mind and allowing images to arise and to follow their own course without conscious guidance
- 



KINDS OF SYMBOLS

✕ Material symbols

- Substances: gems, plants, metals, incense, etc.
- Objects: icons, *characteres* (sigils)

✕ Immaterial symbols

- Expressed: prayers, hymns, occult names, *voces magicae*
- Imagined: inner prayers, visualizations

IV. BASICS OF THEURGY

PRINCIPAL THEURGICAL OPERATIONS



- ✕ Liaison (*Systasis*)
 - + engages gods and daimons in communication
- ✕ Dream incubation
 - + facilitates having a significant dream
- ✕ Icon animation
 - + prepares a divine image as medium of communication
- ✕ Binding & release
 - + uses another person as medium of communication
- ✕ Deification
 - + union with daimon, god, or The One to achieve spiritual insight, empowerment, etc.

THEURGICAL LIAISON (SYSTASIS)

- ✦ Goals
 - + divine guidance
 - + inspiration
 - + negotiation
 - + pacts
- ✦ Technique
 - + set and setting
 - + (1) invitation
 - + (2) negotiation
 - + (3) pact (ethics)
 - + (4) enactment
- ✦ Outcomes
 - + improved psychological integration
 - + accessing divine power
 - + visionary experience

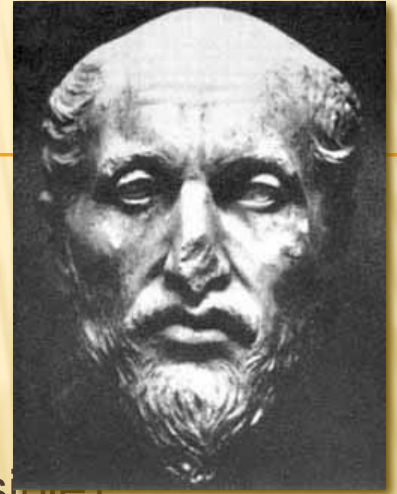


TELESTIKÊ (ANIMATION)



V. NEOPLATONIC INVOCATION

NEOPLATONIC PRAYER



- Purpose:
 - To progressively tune your soul to the omnipresent *energeia* of the god so they can communicate with you
 - Does not compel deity to do anything (which is impossible)
- Parts:
 - *Klêsis* (Invocation)
 - *Aretalogia* (Narration or Aretalogy)
 - *Entychia* (Petition)
- Example:
 - For a *systasis* (meeting) with Athena
 - Based on Proclus' Theurgical Hymn VII "To Athena"
 - You can construct rituals similarly for other deities or pantheons

KLÊSIS (INVOCATION)

- Get deity's attention by calling by name, epithet, or short descriptive phrases
- Use names from ancient ritual and mythology, but also esoteric names
- Example:

*Hear! Athena, child of aegis-bearing Zeus, who sprang
from the paternal fount and summit of your line!
Hear me, thou with manly mind, shield-bearing,
daughter of a mighty parent, Pallas, Tritogeneia,
exceeding strong, lance-wielding, golden-helmed,
attend!*



ARETALOGIA (NARRATION)

- Narrates excellences (*aretai*) of deity
- Guided evocation in theurgist's mind of circumstances in which the god acted beneficially
- Connects with these aspects of the god
- Brief prayer that goddess accepts narration:
*Welcome thou this prayer with gracious heart, O Mistress,
and do not abandon ever my words to the winds*

NARRATION: WISDOM & PURITY

- Goddess of wisdom (perfection) and war (protection):



you, who opened wide god-trodden gates of wisdom, and subdued the earth-born Giants' tribe, who fought the gods

- Immaterial purity of eternal Platonic Ideas:

you, who fleeing longing of lust-filled Hephaistos have preserved th' unyielding belt of your virginity

NARRATION: ELEVATION OF HIGHEST SELF

- Orphic myth of Dionysos torn apart by Titans
- Athena saves his “heart”
- Brings to Zeus for rebirth as a god

you, who saved the uncut heart of Bacchus, lord in vaults of aether, carved up by the Titan's hands, and brought and gave it to his father, so that by the sire's unspeakable designs, renewed from Semele, throughout the cosmos Dionysos was reborn



NARRATION: SELF-CONTROL AND VIRTUE



- Subduing the Hounds of Hekate:

you, whose ax cuts off at root the heads of beasts, travails of seeing-all Hekáte, putting us to sleep

- Athena loves the virtues or excellences (*aretai*), with the power to wake us up:

you, who love the virtues' holy strength that mortals wakes

- Her *nous* holds fiery eternal Ideas:

you, who flash out from your face the pure and holy light

NARRATION: GODDESS OF CRAFTS

- Traditionally Athena is a goddess of crafts (*technai*)
- By “intellective craftsmanship” (noeric demiurgy) we imitate creative powers of Demiurge and bring Ideas into manifestation



*you, who order our whole life by arts of many forms,
implanting intellective craftsmanship in souls*

NARRATION: PATRON OF ATHENS

- Acropolis is a symbol of Athena as the apex of her lineage (*seira*)



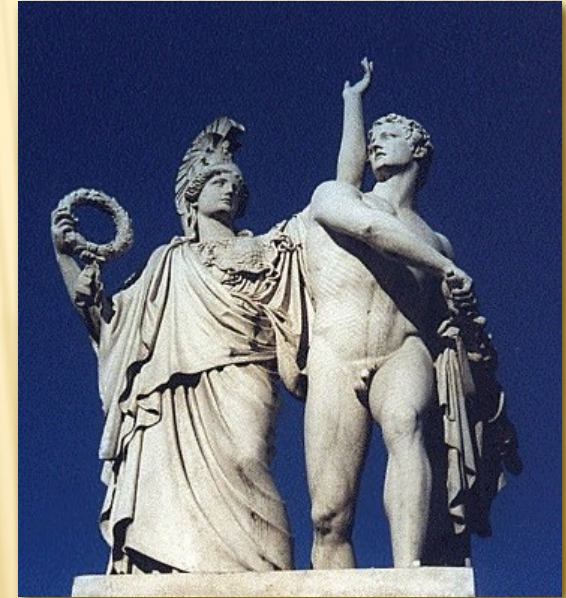
*you, who the Acropolis on th' crested hill obtained,
a symbol, Mistress, of your great and highest line*

- Athens is the home of philosophy

*you, who love the mortal-feeding land, O Mother of
the Books, who fought your uncle's holy love of it,
and gave the town your name and noble mind to have*

NARRATION: DISCERNMENT

- In the *Iliad* Athena gives Diomedes the ability to tell gods from mortals
- This discernment is important in theurgy



*you, who cleared the deadly mist from Diomedes' eyes,
revealing who was human, who was deathless god,
bestowing holy light from very sacred books*

NARRATION: BRINGING SAFELY HOME

- Athena comes to wandering Odysseus' aid
- In the Cave of the Nymphs, she aids him to regain sovereignty



*you, who always stood beside Odysseus, guarding him,
who joined your wit to his and kindly cheered his heart;
transforming, you dispelled the mists, revealed his home,
and hid his treasures in the Naiads' shady cave,
then sat in counsel 'neath the long-leaved olive tree.*

NARRATION: SECRET NAMES & SIGNS

- Invoke by any secret names you might know:
 - *Hear me, for I know and speak thy secret name: NN!*
- Display sacred symbols and secret signs:
 - *Look! Behold thy sacred symbols and thy secret signs!*

ΠΙΙ



⋈⋈̅̅̅

- Special incense and other offerings:
 - *Come to me, fair goddess, for I burn for thee sweet spice!*

ENTYCHIA (PETITION)

- Our goal is a meeting, but we can ask for other benefits (from Proclus' Hymn VII):

*Hearken, hearken, Mistress! Praying much, I come to thee
by force of need; but thou, attend with gentle ear.
Give me blessed mooring, for I wander o'er the earth.
Grant my soul the holy light from your own sacred myths,
your wisdom, and your love; inspire my love with strength
in quantity and kind to rise from earthly depths
toward Olympus in your noble sire's abodes.*

PETITION: THE MEETING

- Request the goddess' presence (but know you are tuning your soul to her *energeia*):

*Leave thy high acropolis, O glorious child of Zeus!
Come thou, come to me from thine abodes, O blesséd one!
Come in joy, thou goddess, and appear in thine own form.
Enter goddess and give answer with thy holy voice
so I hear clearly and can comprehend your words.
I beseech thee, gracious one, to grant the truth to me.
Nod assent, I pray, that you will guide and counsel me.*

PETITION: REPEAT AD LIBITUM

- Optionally repeat following in any order until deity arrives:

Hither come! Hither! Come hither! Appear!

Quickly quickly, hurry hurry!

Come to me! Come to me! Hither hither!

Now now! Quickly quickly!

- Then await quietly

VI. NEOPLATONIC SYSTASIS RITUAL

PERFORMING A SYSTASIS (LIAISON)

- ✕ Temenos (Sacred Space)
- ✕ Chrêmata Hierá (Sacred Equipment)
- ✕ Katharmoi (Purifications)
- ✕ Euchê (Prayer)
- ✕ Synousia (Meeting)
- ✕ Apolysis (Release)

TEMENOS (SACRED SPACE)

- Ritual Space
 - may be permanent or temporary
 - safe from disturbance
 - indoors dimly lit, or outside
- Equipment
 - spirit journal (*liber spirituum*) and pen
 - table and chair (optional)
 - image of deity
 - optional: incense (e.g., myrrh), candle, olive sprig or wand, olive wreath, or other symbols of deity (e.g., owl for Athena, *caractères*)

KATHARMOI (PURIFICATIONS)

- A process of separation (Plato)
- Ritual bath
- Ritual garb and symbolic accessories (e.g., Athena pendant)
- Unless you have permanently consecrated temple, purify temenos (e.g. by circumambulation)

EUCHÊ (PRAYER)

- Light candles or oil lamp (if used)
- Light incense (if used)
- If use olive wreath, place on head
- If use olive sprig or wand, pick up in right hand
- Recite the invocatory formulas
- Wait
 - quiet, attentive, and expectant mind
 - maintain a soft focus on the image or candle
 - optionally visualize yourself passing through a portal
- When arrival or quickening discerned, greet politely
- Put down olive sprig or wand (if used)

SYNOUSIA (MEETING)

- Meet with deity or daimon
- Discuss matters of mutual interest
- Negotiate to reach mutual agreements
- Perhaps accompany deity in various experiences
- Maintain your ordinary identity
- Maintain moral autonomy

APOLYSIS (RELEASE)

- When meeting ends, thank deity and ask to depart
- Remove olive wreath (if used)
- If olive sprig or wand used, pick up in left hand
- Optionally close eyes
- Recite dismissal
- Put down olive sprig or wand
- Extinguish incense and candle or lamp
- Exit temenos and remove ritual garb
- Ensure firm grounding again in mundane reality

TYPICAL DISMISSAL

*I give thanks to you, Athena, for your presence here,
for I rejoice that you have come to me today.
Hasten now, O Lady, hasten to your throne; return
to your acropolis, the heavens where you dwell;
depart, thou beautiful and holy light, depart!
Go in joy, farewell, but be forever kind to me,
and grant me strength, well-being, luck, and
health,
but most of all the right to meet with you again.*

SUMMARY

- ✕ Invocation
- ✕ Conversation
 - + Greeting
 - + Identification
 - + Negotiation
 - + Fixing in writing
- ✕ The Pact
- ✕ Blessings (when appropriate)
- ✕ Invocation into Magus (when appropriate)
- ✕ Dismissal
- ✕ Exit from Circle
- ✕ Beware residual Possession!
- ✕ Physical Enactment in mundane life

Thank you!

Email: Opsopaus@omphalos.org

Website: <http://opsopaus.com>: information on
books, resources, much more!

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