

In the present paper, I shall examine a Neo-Platonic physical theory which is constructed, as I shall argue, from a treatment of two Platonic dialogues within the framework of the Hellenistic “Chaldaean Oracles.” Through this case study, I hope to shed light on the anatomy of late antique Neo-Platonism, and to draw some conclusions about the role of the scholastic tradition in mediating Plato to posterity.

The influential Platonist Proclus of Athens (411-485 CE) expounded a unique doctrine about the nature of place. “Alone among those known to us,” writes Simplicius, “he elected to say that place (*topos*) is a body” (*in Phys.* 611.10-13) composed of light (612.27), which imparts motion to moving bodies (613.27). This “luminous body” of spatial extension Proclus elsewhere identifies with the immortal vehicle of the soul, both cosmic (*in Remp.* 2.198-199) and personal (*merikê psukhê, El. Theol.* prop. 208). In this way, I shall contend, Proclus marries a Platonic and Aristotelian tradition of physical speculation with a Hellenistic blend of religion and magic.

While the physics of this hypothesis have recently been surveyed by Richard Sorabji (*Matter, Space, and Motion*, 1988, ch. 7) and by Lawrence Schrenk (*AGPh* 1994, 151-67), the rationale and the textual sources of Proclus’ exceptional contention that “space is a body of light which moves bodies” remain obscure. I shall suggest that this conclusion is most accurately understood as an attempt to explain a central passage of the Myth of Er (*Republic X*) in the terms of the elemental physics of the *Timaeus*, and to combine this interpretation with the “light theology” of the Hellenistic Chaldaean Oracles. Proclus’ objective is to formulate a consistent solution to the problem of the soul’s relationship to the body.

Having reconstructed Proclus’ conclusion from these sources, I shall ask what value this particular investigation may hold for our understanding of the exegetical practice of scholastic Neoplatonism in general, and so for the interpretation of Plato which was transmitted to the Byzantine, Western European, and Islamic worlds.