



AFTER THE ASCENT: PLATO ON BECOMING LIKE GOD

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SEVERAL Platonic dialogues indicate that humans should strive to become like god. Until recent work by Julia Annas and David Sedley, this had gone largely unnoticed in contemporary Plato scholarship.¹ In this article I explore the idea further by arguing that Plato's later conception of god made a difference to how he conceived of becoming like god. In particular, I argue that Plato's identification of god with *νοῦς* or intelligence in the *Timaeus*, *Philebus*, and *Laws* influences his conception of assimilation to god. Rather than fleeing from the sensible world, becoming like this god commits one to improving it. In the *Laws* especially, following god requires an effort to unify the city under intelligent law and to educate the citizens

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¹ Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New* (Ithaca, NY, 1999), ch. 3; Sedley, "Becoming like God" in the *Timaeus* and Aristotle', in T. Calvo and L. Brisson (eds.), *Interpreting the Timaeus-Critias: Proceedings of the IV Symposium Platonicum* (Sankt Augustin, 1997), 327–39, and 'The Ideal of Godlikeness', in G. Fine (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Philosophy: Plato* (2 vols.; Oxford, 1999), ii, 309–28. For other discussions see J. Duerlinger, 'Ethics and the Divine Life in Plato's Philosophy', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 13 (1985), 312–31; H. Merki, 'Ομοίωσις Θεῷ: Von der platonischen Angleichung an Gott zur Gottähnlichkeit bei Gregor von Nyssa (Freiburg, 1952); and C. G. Rutenber, *The Doctrine of the Imitation of God in Plato* (New York, 1946). The idea of godlikeness in Greek literature and philosophy prior to Plato is treated in D. Roloff, *Gottähnlichkeit, Vergöttlichung und Erhöhung zu seligem Leben: Untersuchungen zur Herkunft der platonischen Angleichung an Gott* (Berlin, 1970).

in virtue. Plato's otherworldliness is therefore tempered by—of all things—his theology.

Ever since ancient Platonists such as Eudorus, Philo, and Alcinous, Plato's notion of 'becoming like god' (*ὁμοίωσις θεῶν*) or 'following god' (*ἀκόλουθος θεῶν*) has been understood to be a flight from this world to a higher one.² This is due partly to the ancients' heavy reliance on this *Theaetetus* passage:

But bad things cannot be destroyed, Theodorus, for there must always be something opposed to the good. Nor can they gain a place among gods. Rather, by necessity they haunt mortal nature and this place here. That's why one must try to flee from here to there as quickly as possible. Fleeing is becoming like god so far as one can, and to become like god is to become just and pious with wisdom. (176 A 5–B 2)

Socrates says that we should escape from this world and its affairs by trying to fit ourselves for dwelling where there is no evil, by trying to become fully virtuous, by trying to become like god. We will otherwise be forever stuck here, continually reborn to a life of misery, folly, and injustice (176 E–177 A).

This conception of the soul's predicament—of an immortal being confined to the surface and depths of the earth unless it escapes to the heavens through moral virtue and philosophic wisdom—is common in Plato.³ In the *Phaedo* Socrates calls philosophy a 'practice of dying' (64 A) by which philosophers purify their souls of the body's influence while seeking knowledge of 'what is pure, ever existing, immortal, and changeless' (79 D 1–2).⁴ If one practises philosophy correctly, then after death one's soul 'arrives at that which is invisible, which is similar to it, and that which is divine and immortal and wise, and arriving there it falls to it to be happy . . . [and] truly to spend the rest of time with gods' (81 A; cf. 69 C,

² Eudorus ap. Stob. *Ecl.* ii. 49. 8–50. 10 Wachsmuth; Philo, *Fug.* 62–3, and *Opif.* 69–71; Alcinous, *Did.* 28, in J. Whittaker (ed.), *Alcinoos: Enseignement des doctrines de Platon* (Paris, 1990). Cf. Plut. 550 D–E (*De sera numinis vindicta*); Apul. *Plat.* 23; Anon. on Plato's *Theaetetus*, vii. 14–20, in *Corpus dei papiri filosofici greci e latini*, iii (Florence, 1995), 278; Hipp. *Ref.*, i. 19. 17=H. Diels, *Doxographi Graeci* (Berlin, 1879), 569. 13–16.

³ Cf. *Gorg.* 523 A–527 E; *Phaedo* 113 D–115 A; *Rep.* 614 A–621 D; *Phdr.* 248 C–249 C; *Tim.* 90 A–92 C; *Laws* 904 C–905 C.

⁴ 'Wisdom' here translates *φρόνησις* (79 D 7). Alcinous seems to quote from this passage when he writes, "The soul engaged in contemplation of the divine and the thoughts of the divine is said to be in a good state, and this state of the soul is called "wisdom [*φρόνησις*]", which may be asserted to be no other than likeness to the divine [*τῆς πρὸς τὸ θεῖον ὁμοιώσεως*]" (*Did.* 153. 5–9, trans. Dillon).

111 A–C). In *Republic* 6 Socrates says that ‘by consorting with what is divine and ordered [i.e. the Forms], the philosopher becomes as ordered and divine as is possible for a human being’ (500 C–D). After knowing the Forms, the guardians think that ordinary human affairs are trivial and must be compelled to rule the city (519 C ff.). In the *Phaedrus* our pre-mortal souls are said to have seen the Forms ‘because we were pure and unmarked by this thing we are carrying around now, which we call a body, imprisoned like an oyster in its shell’ (250 C 4–6). The philosopher’s thought takes flight, remaining aloof of ordinary human pursuits and recollecting the realities that his soul once beheld when following a god around heaven’s circuit (249 C–D).

These are powerful images, and their influence upon Plato’s ancient interpreters and subsequent philosophical and theological traditions has been profound. To take just one example from the first century AD, Philo of Alexandria claimed that ‘what is good is upward-moving [*ἀνώφοιτον*], and if it should ever come to us—for its father is fond of giving—it rightly urges us to follow in its path. The bad, however, remains here below, dwelling as far away as possible from the divine chorus’ (*Fug.* 62). He cites our *Theaetetus* passage as proof, but any of the others could have served as well. What is unfortunate is that these images of flight and purification do not properly capture Plato’s valuation of the earth and the human body even in the *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*. The closing myth of the *Phaedo* describes a beautiful ‘true’ earth as it appears from above, adorned with colourful seas, plants, and precious stones ‘so that it is a sight for blessed onlookers to behold’ (109 A–111 A).⁵ In the *Phaedrus* seeing a beautiful face or body can cause a soul to recollect the Beauty it once saw, and this recollection can result in the soul’s trying to make the beloved’s soul become as like a god as possible (250 B ff., esp. 252 D–253 C). Beautiful bodies and souls—things in the changing world—can therefore help a soul return to following its god around the rim of heaven. Moreover, the return process might involve studious attention to another soul and so also help it re-enter the winged entourage of its god. Plato’s emphasis on escaping this world need not, then, entail his complete devaluation of it.

⁵ For an insightful account of the myth’s connection to the teleology of the *Phaedo*’s ‘autobiographical’ passage and the *Timaeus*, see D. Sedley, ‘Teleology and Myth in the *Phaedo*’, *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 5 (1989), 359–83.

Still, we might wonder whether the notion of becoming like god was very well formed in these influential dialogues, for in them the nature of the god to whom one is to assimilate oneself is not presented very clearly. The *Republic* sometimes speaks of becoming like morally upright Olympians, but at other times of becoming like the Forms (*Rep.* 383 C, 500 B–C; cf. *Phaedo* 65 D). The *Theaetetus* mentions god as the ideal, but says nothing about god's properties except that he 'is never and in no way unjust, but is as just as possible' (176 B 8–C 1), leaving it open as to whether god is a soul, a Form, or something else. In the *Phaedrus* we follow the well-ordered Olympians around heaven, but our souls are most amazed and nourished by the Forms in the plain beyond (246 A–248 C). If Plato would have us assimilate ourselves to god, he should provide a clearer notion of what god is and what it is about god that we should follow or emulate.

We find more clarity in the *Timaeus*, *Philebus*, and *Laws*, where Plato embraces a conception of god as *νοῦς* or intelligence.⁶ As an ethical virtue, intelligence appears throughout the dialogues, especially if one understands it to be identical or closely similar to wisdom (*φρόνησις*, *σοφία*).⁷ In these late dialogues, however, Plato conceives of intelligence as both the highest virtue of the soul and the supreme efficient cause of order in the cosmos. By understanding what intelligence does in individuals, societies, and the world, we can better explain why assimilation to god takes on new meaning in the *Laws*, involving concern for the order of human affairs rather than a dismissive flight from them.⁸

Plato mentions intelligence as a cosmic causal principle in the so-called autobiographical passage of the *Phaedo* (95 E ff.). The appearance of intelligence there is short-lived, however, for Socrates says that he did not find in Anaxagoras' book the account he wanted of intelligence's responsibility for the world and its arrangement. We do find such an account, though, in the *Philebus*, where Socrates himself posits intelligence as one of four fundamental categories

⁶ See R. Hackforth, 'Plato's Theism', *Classical Quarterly*, 30 (1936), 4–9, repr. in R. E. Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics* (London, 1965), 439–47; S. Menn, 'Aristotle and Plato on God as *Nous* and as the Good', *Review of Metaphysics*, 45 (1992), 543–73; and S. Menn, *Plato on God as Nous* (Carbondale, Ill., 1995).

⁷ See e.g. *Ap.* 27 E 6; *Crito* 51 B 2; *Lys.* 210 B 6; *Gorg.* 466 E 11; *Meno* 88 B 5.

⁸ The divine craftsman makes an appearance at *Rep.* 530 A–B as the arranger of celestial movements, but this seems to have no impact upon the *Republic's* conception of assimilation to the divine.

of being (23 C–D). Intelligence’s role in this new ontology is to mix limit with the unlimited to produce harmonious and well-proportioned things such as the most perfect forms of music, the seasons, health in the body, and virtues in the soul (25 D–26 B).⁹

There are several points to note about Plato’s conception of intelligence in the *Philebus*. First, intelligence is presented as an efficient cause that always causes for the best (*Phileb.* 26 E 6, 27 B 1, 28 D–E, 30 D 10–E 1; cf. *Phaedo* 97 C). Second, intelligence is held to be god. Socrates says that his account agrees with the ancient view that ‘intelligence forever rules the universe’ (30 D 5) and that ‘all the wise agree . . . that intelligence is our king, both of heaven and of earth’ (28 C 7–8; cf. 28 A 4–6, 33 B 7). Related to both points, Socrates calls this cause ‘the thing that constructs or fashions’ (τὸ δημιουργοῦν, 27 B 1), a description applied in the *Timaeus* to the divine craftsman of the universe. Third, Socrates argues that the intelligence we use to produce health and other forms of order on a small scale is but part of the intelligence that orders the universe as a whole (30 A–C). We acquire intelligence, however, only by avoiding the strongest and most intense pleasures, for these impede understanding of ‘what is naturally good in a human being and in the universe and . . . what the Form [of the Good] itself is’ (64 A 1–3). Fourth, intelligence (νοῦς) and wisdom (φρόνησις) are identical as evidenced by Plato’s synonymous treatment of the terms (cf. 28 A 4, 59 D 1, 66 B 5–6).

This conception of god opens the way to a new understanding of imitating the divine. Like god, we are agents: efficient causes of change in the world (cf. *Tim.* 89 A). Unlike god, however, we can be more or less intelligent and thus more or less effective at creating order in the world and in ourselves. To become like god, then, is not only to have goodness, beauty, or proportion feature more prominently in our own souls; it is to effect order in the world of change. We should become like god, then, because we, like god, are efficient causes and because god is the exemplary efficient cause.¹⁰ If this is right, we can see that becoming like god need not involve unremitting flight from the world. As with the ideal

⁹ See J. M. Cooper, ‘Plato’s Theory of Human Good in the *Philebus*’, *Journal of Philosophy*, 74 (1977), 713–30, repr. in id., *Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory* (Princeton, 1999), 151–64.

¹⁰ This claim is supported by the view that the applied sciences, in order to be included in the good human life, must be directed by the divine sciences, e.g. knowledge of justice itself (*Phileb.* 62 A–D).

life in the *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, and *Republic*, becoming like the god of intelligence involves knowledge of the Good itself, but unlike that ideal, the good human life involves the application of one's knowledge to the world of change, creating harmonious mixtures of limit and unlimited as an intelligent craftsman.

The cosmic role of intelligence in the *Timaeus* is similar to that in the *Philebus*, but Timaeus' account of becoming like god raises a question about the object to which we are to assimilate ourselves. Like the *Philebus*, the *Timaeus* identifies the highest god with a cosmic demiurge (ὁ δημιουργός, 28 A 6). The demiurge desires all created things to become as much like him as possible, imposing order on what would otherwise be chaos (29 E–30 A, 69 B). To bring order to the world, the demiurge put intelligence in soul and soul in body, thereby making it possible for intelligence to order the perceptible world through the agency of the world soul (29 E–30 B, 69 B).¹¹ As for our individual souls, the rectilinear motions of corporeal nature that we experience upon embodiment disrupt the intelligent, circular motions of the immortal part (42 A, 43 A–B, 69 B–D).¹² The immortal soul recovers its natural condition by disciplining the body and its passions (44 B, 86 B–89 C) and by devoting itself 'to the love of learning and to true wisdom' (90 B 6–7). As Timaeus explains,

We should redirect the revolutions in our heads that were thrown off course at our birth,¹³ by coming to learn the harmonies and revolutions of the universe, and so assimilate with its objects our faculty of understanding, as it was in its original condition. And when this assimilation is complete, we

¹¹ For arguments against the view that νοῦς exists, as opposed to comes-to-be, only in soul, see Menn, *Plato on God as Nous*, ch. 4; and R. Mohr, 'The Relation of Reason to Soul in the Platonic Cosmology: *Sophist* 248e–249d', in id., *The Platonic Cosmology* (Leiden, 1985), 178–83.

¹² See T. Johansen, 'Body, Soul, and Tripartition in Plato's *Timaeus*', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 19 (2000), 87–111, on the interrelations of intelligence, soul, and body. E. N. Lee, 'Reason and Rotation: Circular Movement as the Model of Mind (*Nous*) in Later Plato', in W. H. Werkmeister (ed.), *Facets of Plato's Philosophy* (Assen, 1976), 70–102, suggests that intelligence's circular movement involves a comprehensive or non-perspectival apprehension of the object of thought.

¹³ Sedley translates *περὶ τὴν γένεσιν* as 'concerned with becoming' to suggest that corrupted thoughts are about becoming rather than being ('The Ideal of Godlikeness', 323). I adopt Zeyl's 'at our birth' because the passage seems to echo the account of the soul's embodiment at 43 A–44 A and because learning 'the harmonies and revolutions of the universe' would seem to involve thinking about the movements of celestial bodies and the world soul, as well as investigating the mathematical relations underlying their movements.

shall have achieved our end: that most excellent life offered to humankind by the gods, both now and forevermore. (90 D 1–7, trans. Zeyl, adapted)

Those who do not achieve this state are reincarnated as lower forms of life, including birds, snakes, and fish. They can eventually escape the cycle of reincarnation only by recovering fully their original intelligence (92 C).

This account of assimilation differs from the one inspired by the *Philebus*' conception of god. Rather than imitating god's causal activity by producing well-proportioned mixtures ourselves, the immortal part of the soul is to imitate the motions of the world soul by coming to understand them. Trying to understand the principles of cosmic order is different from applying them to the world of becoming. Hence, the *Timaeus* emphasizes contemplating the cosmos as our end—perhaps in lieu of trying to improve it. Was Plato an escapist after all?

In the *Laws* we find the contemplative and the active aspects of godlikeness, suggesting that both appealed to Plato in his late years. To begin, we notice that the *Laws*, like other dialogues, advocates becoming like god or becoming divine. For example, the Athenian Stranger assumes that becoming divine is what people in fact desire when he says that 'the one intending to become divine' should not recklessly pursue pleasures with the belief that this will make one free from pain (792 D 4–7). In book 12 he says that no one should be appointed as a guardian of the laws who is not divine and has not laboured over the arguments concerning the existence and nature of the gods (966 C–D). The guardians must know how virtue, the beautiful, and the good are each one and many and be able to demonstrate this in argument (965 C–966 B). The Athenian says, 'Those who are to be real [ὄντως] guardians of the laws must truly [ὄντως] understand the things concerning the truth of [all serious matters], and must be capable of interpreting it in speech and of following it in deed' (966 B 5–7).¹⁴ Understanding, articulating, and acting according to the truth about virtue, beauty, and goodness are, of course, extremely high standards. The guardians grasp the highest objects of knowledge and know how to apply and explain what they understand. Both sides of godlikeness are manifest in their lives.

¹⁴ In the *Philebus* intelligence and wisdom (*νοῦς* and *φρόνησις*) are said to be terms most appropriately and accurately applied to 'thoughts about what truly is [*ταῖς περὶ τὸ ὄν ὄντως ἐννοίαις*]' (59 D 1–5).

Cosmology also has a role. The Athenian says that the guardians should study the nature of soul and the orderly motion of the stars ‘and of all other things of which intelligence [*νοῦς*] is master, having set in order the entire universe’ (966 D 9–E 4). If one studies astronomy in the right way, one will see that the heavens are purposefully and precisely ordered and therefore are guided by soul and intelligence (967 A–B). This recalls the theology of book 10, where the Athenian counters various views he considers impious. He argues that the sun, moon, and stars have souls which move them across the heavens and that these souls, because they are completely virtuous, are to be called gods (899 B). This is meant to establish, against the atheist, that gods exist. What makes a soul good is being guided by intelligence, and the Athenian identifies intelligence as the highest god (897 B).¹⁵ The gods take care of us as their property (902 B). They attend to the smallest details of human life and cannot be swayed by bribes to overlook our crimes (902 E, 905 D).¹⁶ Far from being aloof, then, the gods are highly concerned about human affairs and seek to order the world in the best way possible. The world has its own disorderly tendencies, however, which compete with the gods’ efforts. The Athenian says that in this ‘immortal battle’ between good and evil we have a part: to fight—with gods and spirits as allies (*σύμμαχοι*, 906 A 6)—against personal and civic injustice (906 A–C).

The guardians play a special role in the struggle. The law against impiety requires them to persuade those with impious beliefs to accept a correct conception of the gods (909 A). More generally, the guardians must apply their knowledge of cosmic intelligence and soul to civic life.¹⁷ In book 12 the Athenian says:

After [a guardian] has considered the way in which these matters relate to the Muse, he should apply them harmoniously to customs and to the practices of character. He should be able to give an account of as many of these customs and practices as have an account. The one incapable of acquiring these abilities in addition to the popular virtues [*δημοσίαις*

¹⁵ See E. B. England (ed.), *The Laws of Plato* (2 vols.; Manchester, 1921), ad loc., for discussion of textual variants of *θεὸν ὁρθῶς θεοῖς*, and Hackforth, ‘Plato’s Theism’, for a persuasive argument that *νοῦς* is the same supreme god in *Laws* 10 as it is in the *Philebus* and *Timaeus*.

¹⁶ The attentiveness of the gods is emphasized at e.g. 892 B, 896 D, 897 A, 897 C, 900 D, 902 C, 903 A.

¹⁷ Cf. Cic. *Rep.* 6. 16. 24–9, where civic duty is portrayed as important but none the less instrumental to the soul’s flight to heaven.

ἀρεταῖς] would hardly ever become a competent ruler of an entire city, but would be an assistant to other rulers. (967 E 2–968 A 4)

The Muse, i.e. the songs and dances that play a large role in the social and educational life of the city, should reflect the heavenly order by encouraging the rule of intelligence in the citizens' souls.¹⁸ The guardians will supervise these and all other practices, sometimes modifying or supplementing the laws set by the Athenian and his companions (769 D ff.).¹⁹ In this passage we notice the seamlessness with which the Athenian shifts from the guardian's theoretical studies to their application. The explanation is apparent: the divine men of the *Laws* imitate on the social level what god does at the cosmic level. As the demiurge of the *Timaeus* looked to an eternal model before creating our world (*Tim.* 29 A), the guardians too combine knowledge and practice. Contemplation and action are harmonious aspects of the ideal life.

Few are guardians, however. Magnesia's ordinary citizen, although not expected to understand the good itself and the details of intelligence's ordering of the cosmos, is expected to acquire virtue and to study some mathematics and astronomy.²⁰ To an extent, then, the ordinary citizen becomes like god by ordering his or her own soul. Virtue is acquired by disciplining one's emotions and appetites—one's 'human nature'²¹—in accordance with the value judgements of the city's laws. The laws, because they are good laws, embody intelligence (cf. 714 A 1–2, 890 D, 957 C 3–7). Intelligence is the leading virtue (631 B–D). Hence, obeying and studying the law improve the citizens' souls. Obeying the law does this by controlling and guiding pleasures and pains so that the citizens experience the correct feelings in response to various sorts of action and character, especially as portrayed in drama, song, and dance (cf. 653 A ff.). Studying the law, moreover, gives the citizens a bet-

¹⁸ 653 A ff., 700 D ff., 775 B, 829 D; cf. *Rep.* 401 D–402 A.

¹⁹ See G. R. Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City: A Historical Interpretation of the Laws* (Princeton, 1960), 195–215, on the guardians' roles.

²⁰ Cf. 747 B 1–6, 809 C–D, 818 C 3–8. In the *Timaeus* the study of number helps in the recovery of a soul's original intelligence (47 A–C). The Athenian of the *Epinomis* agrees: 'If number should ever be taken away from human nature, we would never become wise in anything' (977 C 1–3). The idea might be, to put it in the *Philebus*' terms, that without number we would not understand limit or quantity, and so not understand measure and proportion and, hence, the good.

²¹ For the *Laws*' identification of human nature with the soul's passional side, see e.g. 713 C, 732 E 4–5, 782 D 10–B 1, 937 D 8–E 2, 947 E 7–8.

ter understanding of intelligence's value judgements. Until one acquires the full virtue of intelligence for oneself, the law should serve as a surrogate intelligence. In this way, the divine can come to rule over the human in all citizens.²²

In a key passage of book 4, the Athenian imagines that the future citizens of Magnesia are present, and he addresses them with words that will open the law code's preamble. Here again we find emphasis upon following god and some clues about god's nature. The Athenian declares:

The god, just as the ancient saying goes, holding the beginning, the end, and the middle of all things, accomplishes his end in an undeviating course by revolving according to nature. Justice follows him always, avenger of those who abandon the divine law. The one intending to be happy follows her [Justice] with deference and order. But anyone who is puffed up by arrogance, or exalted by money, honours, or a nice shape of the body together with youthful impetuosity and a lack of intelligence, his soul inflamed with insolence, thinking that he needs neither a ruler nor some other leader but is capable of leading others, he is forsaken, bereft of god.²³
(715 E 7–716 B 1)

Justice follows god, and we, if we are to be happy, must follow justice. We know from other passages that justice entails courage and temperance and is the intelligent mastery of pleasures, pains, and desires (631 B–632 A, 644 C ff.; cf. *Tim.* 42 B). The unjust soul is 'bereft of god'—dominated by passion and devoid of intelligence. The emerging picture, then, is that misguided affections can prevent intelligence from taking its natural place in the soul (cf. 653 A ff.; 672 C) and that justice consists of having affections that readily follow right judgement about the good.

After the Athenian finishes his initial statement, Cleinias declares, 'One thing is clear: all men should aim to be among those following the god' (716 B 8–9). The Athenian then explains what it is that

²² For a masterful account of ordinary citizens' capacities for virtue in the *Laws*, see C. Bobonich, *Plato's Utopia Recast: His Later Ethics and Politics* (Oxford, 2002).

²³ The scholiast on this passage says that 'god is clearly the demiurge' (G. C. Greene (ed.), *Scholia Platonica* (Haverford, 1937), 317). His demiurge must be part of the created world, then, for god here seems to be the outermost sphere of the world soul as it moves in a perfect circle—either that or the outer sphere's intelligence. God's location is ethically significant because being in the world of change makes god, at least in this respect, like us. Alcinous seems to notice the difference when he says that we should become like the god *in* the heavens, not the god *above* the heavens (*Did.* 181. 42–5).

makes us like god, emphasizing, as Socrates does in the *Philebus*, the prominence of measure in the good life:

What action is dear to and follows god? One, as a single ancient saying has it: 'If it is measured, like is dear to like'; but unmeasured things are dear neither to each other nor to the measured. For us, the god would be the measure of all things, and much more so than any, as they say, human being. The one who would be dear to such a being must himself do everything in his power to become like that being. According to our argument, the temperate person among us is dear to god, for he is similar. The intemperate person, on the other hand, is dissimilar and different, and is unjust. (716 C 1–D 3)

The idea is not that temperance and justice make us like god because god is temperate and just. Rather, we become like god by becoming measured. For souls such as ours, becoming temperate and just constitutes the appropriate measure. God, and not a human being as Protagoras thought, serves as the measure of all things for us because god, as the intelligently moving soul of the cosmos, is the perfect instantiation of measure. If measure is the good, then the point is simply that we become like god as we instantiate the good. This instantiation, moreover, involves the development of the thoughts, feelings, and actions constitutive of virtue. To the ordinary citizen of Magnesia, this would require obedience to the laws and an ongoing effort to play one's part in a well-ordered city.

Becoming like god, then, involves attention to the city's virtue on the part of the guardian and the non-guardian, although in different ways. In an early dialogue such as the *Apology* or *Euthyphro*, Socrates would have explained caring for the citizens' virtue as service to the god. The connection between civic improvement and divine reverence continues in the later dialogues, but against a metaphysical backdrop that connects the ordering agent of the universe with that which orders individual souls and cities. As we saw in *Laws* 10, god, as the ultimate craftsman, attends to the smallest details of the world in order to achieve its salvation, virtue, and happiness (903 B–C). The lesson for the young atheist is that his life, like everything else in creation, is for the good of the universe. At the level of politics, the good statesman, as a good craftsman, attends to the good of the city by caring for its parts, i.e. the citizens (cf. 902 D 6 ff.). Magnesia does not have the equivalent of a statesman among its citizens—someone above the law who directs

the city's affairs though possession of the political art. Magnesia does have guardians, however, and they must understand, explain, and defend the city's laws. This, along with their obedience to the law, is their contribution to the good of the whole and is the way in which they become like god. Ordinary citizens do not supervise the city's institutions in the way that the guardians do. Their ordering activities are more focused on their own souls and so their assimilation to the divine is more limited. They none the less contribute to the city's order, and this contributes to the order of the universe, which is the aim of god's creative efforts.

This attention to the creation and maintenance of psychological and civic order might suggest that Plato had abandoned the conception of godlikeness that would have us flee from worldly affairs. Not so. That one's soul should seek separation from the body's influence finds an echo in the *Laws* when the Athenian remarks that soldiers should not fear Pluto, god of the underworld, but 'should honour him as being in reality always the best for the human race. As I would assert in all seriousness, communion is in no way better for soul and body than separation' (828 D 3–6). Moreover, the Athenian suggests that citizens of extraordinary virtue will escape this world after death and be transported to a better place where they presumably will dwell with the astral gods for ever (904 D 6–E 1).

Even in the *Laws*, then, flight from the world of becoming retains some appeal for Plato. But we have seen the metaphysical foundation for an alternative conception. When we consider the role of intelligence in Plato's cosmology and theory of virtue, we can see the deep and elegant connection between metaphysics and ethics in Plato's thought (cf. *Laws* 631 C–D). If Plato's ancient interpreters had built this into their accounts of becoming like god, Plato would no doubt have been understood to be less of an escapist than he has been reputed to be. Nothing prevents us from correcting that reputation now, however. And it seems best that we do so, for we can then see better the overall integrity of his later philosophy.

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