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Next to Godliness: Pleasure and Assimilation to God in the *Philebus*
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1 Introduction

Plato's description of the philosopher in the *Theaetetus* confirms, for many, the suspicion that philosophers are an incompetent breed (172c4-6a1). The philosopher doesn't know how to make his bed or cook a decent meal, isn't sure whether his neighbor is a man or a beast, and is so caught up in heavenly speculation that he finds himself falling into wells. One of Plato's depictions of the philosopher's otherworldly nature stands in an intriguing contrast to the *Philebus*. The philosopher, he writes, does not know his way to the marketplace (173c9-d2); compare this to the concession in the *Philebus* that the inexact sciences ought to be included in the best human life, lest we not know our way home (62b8-9). The otherworldly focus of the *Theaetetus* appears opposed to the decidedly this-worldly, pragmatic focus of the *Philebus*. While the *Theaetetus* urges us to flee this world so that we can reside among the gods, the *Philebus* repeatedly eschews a life which it describes as god-like, the life of pure knowledge, devoid of pleasure. In the *Theaetetus*, Plato identifies the escape from this world to the divine realm with *homoiōsis theōi* (assimilation to god); this passage serves as the basis for middle Platonists' claims that *homoiōsis theōi* was the *telos* (end) of the Platonic system.¹ Plato, in fact,

¹ E.g., Alcinous, *Didaskalikos*, 28 1. To be precise, Alcinous describes the *telos* as *homoiōsis theōi kata to dunaton*; as I shall argue in the concluding section of this paper, this caveat is significant. Perhaps a few preliminary words are in order on my understanding of *homoiōsis theōi*. As I argue in the final section of this paper, the word, *homoiōsis*, and Plato's use of it, are ambiguous between the process of becoming like and the end-state of likeness. This ambiguity is telling: since Plato does not think that we can succeed in becoming fully like god, the best we can do is to try to be as like god as possible, an aim whose realization lies in our pursuing processes of becoming like

urges us to emulate the divine in dialogues ranging from the *Symposium* through the *Laws*.² Following Annas' and Sedley's³ seminal papers, *homoiōsis theōi* has received increasing attention among Plato scholars; none, however, takes up the puzzling inconsistency with the *Philebus*.⁴ Why should Plato set up a divine ideal in this dialogue, then reject it as an end worth pursuing?

Plato refers to the purely rational, ahedonic life four times in the *Philebus*; in the first two passages, he ties it explicitly to the divine. The first passage is at 20e1-2c6: after establishing that the lives of knowledge and pleasure must be examined in isolation from one another, Socrates and Protarchus agree that it is the mixed life of pleasure and knowledge which is most choice-worthy. Since it is not sufficient on its own, pleasure does not turn out to be the good; neither, Protarchus points out, does *nous* (reason). This is perhaps true of *his nous*, Socrates retorts, but the true and divine *nous* is otherwise (22c5-6). Socrates' point is that, though our human natures render the life of reason imperfect for us, the case of the gods may turn out otherwise. In the second passage, at 32d9-3b11, Socrates argues that if deterioration is pain and restitution pleasure, then at some points, living beings will be in a third state, of neither pleasure

god (learning and becoming virtuous). In that case, both descriptions of our aim—being as like god as possible, and becoming like god—turn out to be apposite.

² The primary passages which accord an important ethical role to following or imitating god are *Alc* 1 133c1-6; *Lg* 716b8-d4, 792c8-d5, 906a7-b3; *Phd* 80e2-1a10, 82b10-c1; *Phdr* 248a1-c5, 249c4-d3, 252d1-3c2; *R* 500c9-d1, 501b1-7, 613a4-b1; *Smp* 207c9-8b4; *Tht* 176a8-b3; *Ti* 47b5-c4, 90b1-d7.

³ J. Annas (1999); D. N. Sedley (1999)

⁴ Note that the apparent inconsistency between the two dialogues requires that we assume that Plato takes the philosophical life described in the digression of the *Theaetetus* to be the best human life; this assumption is supported by Plato's comments at, e.g., *Tht* 176a8-b3.

nor pain. Nothing prevents one who has chosen the life of pure reason from living in this state, and it would not be surprising if this life turned out to be the most divine, *theiotatos*, since it would be unseemly for gods to experience pleasure or pain (33a8-b11). We might, then, wonder why *this* is not the best life, why, at the conclusion of the dialogue, Socrates agrees with Protarchus that the life of pure knowledge falls short of the good, not being perfect, sufficient or choice-worthy, and that the mixed life—a life which falls short of the divine—is to be given first honours (61a1-2, 67a2-12).⁵

Addressing this puzzle, Frede has suggested that ‘the paradox that the most godlike state is not the best one attainable for human beings’ is dissolved by the fact that ‘our needy natures

⁵ The remaining two passages are at 43b1-c6 and 54d4-5a8. These four passages might give rise to the following question: though Plato maintains that no one would choose the ahedonic life, is his view that no one *could* choose such a life and, further, that, even if one could choose it, no one could live it? As I maintain in the conclusion of this paper, Plato is committed to the view that humans are, by nature, motivated by pleasure, and, further, cannot avoid undergoing pleasurable restitutive processes such as being heated and cooled; in that case, while he might allow that certain deviant or ignorant humans might choose the ahedonic life, they certainly could not live it. However, the passage at 32d9-3b11 might seem to suggest otherwise; Plato writes that nothing prevents the one who chooses the life of wisdom from living in the ahedonic state. R. Hackforth (1945), 63, n. 2 and R. A. H. Waterfield (1982), 88, n. 1 have suggested that the one choosing such a life must be a god, since it is not possible for humans to live without experiencing pleasure or pain. An alternate response is to note that Plato justifies his claim concerning the possibility of the ahedonic life in terms of the original conditions of the investigation into the choice of lives, the requirement that each life be considered on its own (33b2-4). However, when Plato discusses the life of pure pleasure, he makes clear that it is not a human life (21c6-8); surely it is not possible for humans to live without ever having beliefs (21b6-9). In that case, the pure life of reason should similarly be taken to be hypothetical, and not to represent a livable possibility for human beings; compare Socrates’ comment at 42e1-8 that whether or not the ahedonic life is possible is irrelevant to determining what it would consist in.

do not permit us to live that way.⁶ Even if we chose to avoid pleasure, our merely human constitutions would not permit us to attain the fully ahedonic state. We are creatures who are incomplete and subject to change; for us, being in a state of static perfection is not a realistic goal.⁷ We are inevitably going to encounter hunger, thirst, heat and cold and the pleasures and pains that go along with them (31e6-2a4). In support of this interpretation, we might note that Plato repeatedly states that the search is for the *human* good: thus, Socrates seeks to show that *nous* can render life happy *for all men* (11d4-6), and is corrected by Protarchus, who reveals that the life of pure reason is not sufficient or desirable *for man or animal* (22b1-2).

Though Frede's proposal is not without merit, it is somewhat unsatisfying. In other dialogues as well, Plato recognizes that we may not be able to become fully divine, but exhorts us to become as divine *as possible*; why, then, does he shy from this in the *Philebus*? Again, the second proposal amounts to the claim that assimilation to god is a flight from our human natures,⁸ which the *Philebus*, a dialogue grounded in an acute awareness of our human capacities, eschews. But other dialogues suggest that it is possible for us to at least partially

⁶ D. Frede (1993), 33, n. 2. See also D. C. Russell (2005), 148; Russell argues that for us, assimilation to god must involve pleasure because we are meant to assimilate to god as the humans we are, and humans are necessarily hedonic creatures.

⁷ Note that, while Frede (1993), lxix claims that we cannot attain the divine, ahedonic state, she does allow for the possibility that we should aspire to it, nonetheless. However, the overall thrust of Frede's interpretation emphasizes that the good life for man is to be found in this world, not in flight from our human natures (lxi-ii). In what follows, I focus on this aspect of Frede's interpretation.

⁸ A complication: though *homoīōsis theōi* is, in a sense, a flight from our merely mortal natures, it is at the same time a recovery of our real selves. In the *Phaedrus* (24a6-7), as in *Republic X* (588c7-e1), Plato depicts the rational element of the soul as a human; this suggests that to identify solely with reason is, paradoxically, to become truly human. See S. Lovibond (1991), 54-5.

transcend our human natures; why, then, does Plato not urge us in the *Philebus* to seek out the divine, ahedonic life to the highest degree possible? Though Plato lets necessary pleasures—such as those due to eating and drinking when needed—into the good mixture (62e8-9), he also admits non-necessary pleasures, those of learning and of perceiving pure colours and shapes (63e3-4, 51b2-5, 51e7-2a1).⁹ If these pleasures are not necessary for human life, and if they separate us from the divine, then why include them at all?

One way out of this quandary would be to maintain that these two ideals—the life of god and the mixed life of pleasure and knowledge—are in conflict, and that in opting for the latter in the *Philebus*, Plato temporarily abandons the former.¹⁰ But what if we could develop an

⁹ Frede (1993), 76 n. 2; J. C. B. Gosling (1975), 133; and Hackforth (1945), 128 all take the necessary pleasures to be confined to the those attendant upon the satisfaction of physical needs required for survival, such as the pleasures of alleviating hunger and thirst. Of course, even these pleasures, for humans, involve an intellectual component: awareness of the process of replenishment which one is undergoing (21a14-c8). Thus, my point is not that reason plays no role in necessary pleasures but, rather, that certain purely intellectual pleasures—say, the pleasure of mathematical enquiry—are to be included in the best life, though they are non-necessary.

¹⁰ Note that if there is a shift in Plato's position, it cannot be accounted for on chronological grounds, since Plato advocates *homoiōsis theōi* in the *Laws* and *Timaeus*, dialogues widely assumed to be from the same period as the *Philebus*. At this point, it will be helpful to state my assumptions concerning the chronology of Plato's dialogues. I believe the *Philebus* to be a late dialogue, of the same period as the *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Timaeus*, *Critias* and *Laws*. I therefore make use of Plato's claims in these dialogues, especially the *Timaeus* and *Laws*, to shed light on his views of divine nature and pleasure in the *Philebus*. I take the *Phaedrus* and *Theaetetus* to most likely post-date the *Republic* but pre-date the *Philebus*. In this paper, I assume that some of Plato's positions remain relatively unchanged across his *corpus*, such as his view of human nature as inherently imperfect and divine nature as perfect, and his elevation of *homoiōsis theōi* as our *telos* (note the range of works advocating *homoiōsis theōi* in n. 2, above). At the same time, I believe that Plato's position shifts significantly in certain areas: for example, his hostility towards bodily pleasure in the *Phaedo* is significantly tempered by the time we get to the *Laws*. For a defense of the

interpretation on which these two ideals converge? In this paper, I attempt to do exactly that. Following Frede, I concede that our mortal natures are such that we cannot live without pleasure or, for that matter, pain. However, I argue that pleasure also plays an integral role in the very processes by which we seek to transcend our merely human natures and become like god. In the first section of my paper, I offer an explanation of why Platonic gods do not experience pleasure: for Plato, all pleasure depends upon the restitution of a lack, and Platonic gods are perfect, and so lack nothing. This implies that it is not pleasure *per se* which is the source of our inferiority to god, but, rather, the state of prior imperfection and lack which it reveals. What, then, is involved in our becoming like god? In the second part of my paper, I propose that there are two broad models of assimilation to god in the dialogues—becoming virtuous and seeking knowledge. Both of these are processes which bring with them pleasure—the former because becoming virtuous is a process of harmonization, the latter, because gaining knowledge is the filling of a lack.¹¹ In the third part of my paper, I respond to the objection that Phileban gods are not beings beyond pleasure; in the process, I introduce a distinction between pleasure, which is involved in the process of assimilating to god, and fulfillment, which characterizes the divine state. With this analysis in place of the role of pleasure in assimilation to god, we are now in a position to

late dating of the *Philebus*, see Frede (1996), 213-16; for a contrary view, see Waterfield (1980). For a more general discussion of the chronology of the dialogues, see, e.g., L. Brandwood (1992) and R. Kraut (1992).

¹¹ M. Evans (2007) offers a helpful contrast between final goods and subsidiaries, which allows for an intellectualist interpretation of the *Philebus*, according to which knowledge is a final good, pleasure a subsidiary which necessarily accompanies human (though not divine) intellectual activity. Frede (1992), 440 develops a similar position, calling pleasure a remedial good. Frede's position in this piece resembles my own, to the extent that she proposes that certain pleasures are part of the good human life as they amount to restitutions needed to bring us close to a state of perfection (455-6); Frede, however, does not pursue this thesis in relation to *homoiōsis theōi*.

appreciate that the gap between the *Philebus* and other dialogues is not as deep as it might appear. In the *Philebus*, too, Plato urges us to become knowledgeable and virtuous, and thereby assimilate to god; however, he also recognizes that the human pursuit of divine perfection requires that we learn and acquire virtue, restitutive processes which are inherently pleasant. Paradoxically, then, in the very process of assimilating to god, we inevitably experience pleasure, and, in this regard, fall short of the fully divine state.

Understanding the connexion of pleasure to *homoīōsis theōi* in the *Philebus* is of obvious importance for appreciating the internal coherence of the dialogue and its relation to the rest of Plato's *corpus*. However, I believe that this project has broader significance as well. It will enable us to develop a better sense of Plato's views on the nature of the gods—why are the gods beings beyond pleasure? Furthermore, insofar as the gods are beings in the best possible state, and so, in a sense, constitute a normative ideal for us humans, Plato's conception of divine nature has implications for his view of the human good, of what we ought to aspire to.¹² At the same

¹² As I emphasize in the final section of this paper, Plato is committed to a conception of human nature as necessarily imperfect; consequently, we are incapable of becoming fully like god. What we aim at is therefore becoming as like god as possible. Nonetheless, this aim implies that we take the gods to be beings in the best possible condition; it is in this sense that they constitute a normative ideal for us humans. For Plato, it is an essential part of human nature that we strive to be more than human. This relates to an intriguing aspect of the psychology of aspiration. It is ordinarily assumed that I cannot desire what I take to be impossible for myself to achieve. However, certain cases are ambiguous on this issue (for a general defense of the view that I can desire what I know I cannot achieve, see T. Schroeder [2004], 16-20). For example, it seems that I might desire to be perfectly virtuous, while recognizing that this is a goal which I can never fully realize. This is importantly different from merely desiring to be as virtuous as I can be; solely desiring the latter might risk miring me in complacency, while desiring the former, though it leaves me susceptible to frustration, might enable me to achieve a degree of perfection which would have been unachievable to me had I not wished for this unattainable end. Thus while, strictly speaking, what

time, consideration of the role of pleasure in assimilation to god reveals the difficulties inherent in our human condition, as mortals striving, unsuccessfully, to transcend our merely mortal natures.

2 Why are Phileban gods ahedonic?

Why are Phileban gods beyond pleasure? Plato never tells us, only commenting that it would be *aschēmon*, unseemly (33b10). In what follows, I propose that the reason is that to experience pleasure would be at odds with their natures as perfect beings. In order to argue for this claim, however, I must first sketch out what I take to be Plato's view of pleasure in the dialogue. The topic has been the subject of great controversy; given the constraints of space, my treatment can only be cursory. As I understand Plato in the *Philebus*, he takes all pleasure to either consist in or depend upon the restitution of a lack.¹³ Thus, at 31d4-10, Plato offers a preliminary account of pain as the disruption of harmony, pleasure as its restitution: 'When we find the harmony of animals destroyed, there is at the same time a destruction of their nature and the generation of pain ... but if the harmony is restored and there is a return to the animal's nature, then we must say that pleasure comes to be.' This account is reinforced later in the dialogue, when Plato makes quite general statements about pleasure, which indicate that he takes it all to be restitutive. At 53c4-4d7, he repeats, with praise, the view of the sophisticates, that all pleasure is a process of becoming for the sake of some being, and hence does not belong in the class of the good. To

we desire is to becoming as like god as possible, given that we do not know how far we can come to resemble god, and that we take the gods to be beings in the best possible condition, there is also a looser sense in which we can be said to desire, or at least wish for, being fully like god.

¹³ For arguments in favour of this view see, e.g., Frede (1992), C. Hampton (1999) and G. Van Riel (1999); for arguments *contra*, see, e.g., G.R. Carone (2000), Gosling (1975), J.C.B. Gosling and C.C.W. Taylor (1982), and Hackforth (1945).

claim that pleasure is a generative process for the sake of some good is tantamount to calling it restitutive. Some scholars insist that Plato does not take all pleasures to be restitutive, and therefore places this account in the mouths of the sophisticates to distance himself from their view.¹⁴ But Plato never rebuts nor supplants the sophisticates' account, and, in fact, emphasizes his indebtedness to them (54d6). Earlier, at 43c3-6, Socrates refers, *in propria persona*, to pleasures as *metabolai* (changes), which prefigures the sophisticates' analysis of them as *geneseis* (generations). In building upon his analysis of pleasures as *metabolai* and responding to the anti-hedonists, Socrates appears to offer a biconditional analysis of pleasure: he states that when perceptible restoration occurs, there is pleasure (42d5-7, 43b1-c6), and elicits from Protarchus the admission that there is no pleasure without restoration (42d9-e12). He goes on to offer a tripartite analysis which suggests a thorough disjunction between depletion/pain, repletion/pleasure and the neutral state which is neither (44a12-b3); this analysis does not leave room for non-restitutive pleasures.¹⁵ Finally, as Van Riel points out, Plato offers a virtually identical account of pleasure—as the perceptible removal of a disturbance—at *Timaeus* 64c7-d3.¹⁶ This analysis is prefigured at *Republic* 585d11, where Plato states that being filled with

¹⁴ Carone (2000), 264-6; Gosling (1975), 210; Hackforth (1945), 105-7. Note, though, that Plato frequently assigns arguments he endorses to other, unnamed sources. For example, the anti-hedonist position in the *Gorgias* is attributed to an unnamed *sophos* (493a1-2). Carone argues that the pure pleasures cannot be *geneseis*, since they are included in the final ranking of the good (269). However, the fifth class of the good includes the pure pleasure of learning, which Plato clearly states is restitutive, though it proceeds from an unfelt lack (51a7-2a3).

¹⁵ Though Socrates does not explicitly state at 44a12-b3 that pleasure and pain are repletion and depletion, he presents his tripartite analysis as the conclusion of his argument from 42c5 to 44c5, that pleasure is not merely the absence of pain, but involves perceptible repletion (for the stronger identity claim, see, e.g., 42d5-7).

¹⁶ Van Riel (1999), 300, n. 4

what is appropriate to one's nature is pleasure.¹⁷ This implies that the account of pleasure as restitution-based in the *Philebus* should be taken to be Plato's own considered view.

Interpreters who deny that Plato views all pleasure as restitutive typically concede that this is how he understands most bodily pleasures, but maintain that anticipatory pleasures and the pure pleasures of perception cannot be subsumed under this model.¹⁸ However, if Plato did not take such pleasures to be restitutive, then it would be odd for him to approvingly restate the sophisticates' account of all pleasure as restitution-dependent at 53c4-4d7, after he has introduced these two kinds of pleasure. Furthermore, it is not the case that these pleasures cannot be subsumed under the restitutive model. When Plato initially introduces anticipatory pleasures, he presents them as the anticipations of restitutive pleasures (32b9-c2). At the very least, then, they are dependent upon pleasures of restitution; Frede has argued that the anticipatory pleasures themselves may involve some form of psychic restitution.¹⁹ In the case of the pure pleasures of perception, Plato's phrasing allows for the possibility that these are restitutive. He lists the pure pleasures as 'those related to colours said to be beautiful, to shapes and smells and sounds, καὶ ὅσα τὰς ἐνδείας ἀναισθήτους ἔχοντα καὶ ἀλύπους τὰς πληρώσεις αἰσθητὰς καὶ ἡδείας παραδίδωσιν' (the ones which have imperceptible and painless lacks and which provide perceptible and pleasurable fillings, 51b5-7); the last phrase can be taken to be epexegetical, revealing the entire category of pure pleasures to be preceded by imperceptible and painless lacks.²⁰ *Timaeus* 46e7-7c6 reveals that Plato does hold that certain perceptual processes

¹⁷ Cf. *R* 583e9-10, where Plato claims that the generation of pleasure is a *kinēsis*.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Carone (2000), 267-9; Gosling (1975) 122, 210-11; and Gosling and Taylor (1982), 136, 140.

¹⁹ Frede (1992), 445-6. Note that at *Republic* 584c9-11, Plato appears to treat the pleasure of anticipating bodily pleasure as itself a relief from pain.

²⁰ See Frede (1993), 60. Carone (2000), 267, n. 19, opposes this reading.

play a restitutive role in returning the revolutions of our souls to harmony; furthermore, at 65a1-6, he gives smell as a paradigmatic example of the sort of pleasure which involves perceptible repletion but imperceptible depletion.

With this analysis in place, let us return to the question of why Phileban gods cannot be pleased. Pleasure, according to Plato, is a process whereby some need—felt or unfelt—is satisfied; should the gods experience pleasure, they would reveal themselves to have been lacking, and so less than divine. In this regard, it will be helpful to take a closer look at the sophisticates' analysis of pleasure. On this analysis, pleasure does not belong to the category of the good, because it is always a process of generation for the sake of some being. Thus, pleasures such as eating, drinking and learning are always for the sake of some end state: being in a sound bodily condition and possessing knowledge. Platonic gods, however, do not lack any goods; consequently, they do not undergo the restitutive processes of gaining these goods, and do not experience pleasure. At *Republic* 381b1-c9, Plato objects to poetic depictions of divine transmogrification,²¹ since the gods are in the best possible state and this would imply that they voluntarily enter into a worse state. Similarly, in the *Symposium*, Plato argues that Eros cannot be a god, since he is the desire for beautiful and good things; the gods are happy, and so, by definition, eternally possess the beautiful and good and lack nothing (202c6-11); he later adds that none of the gods *philosophei* (philosophizes), because they are already wise (204a1-2), a claim echoed at *Phaedrus* 278d3-6. This view of divine nature as self-sufficient is also present in the *Timaeus*: Plato specifies that the universe is a happy god because it lacks nothing and is fully satisfied by its knowledge of and friendship with itself (34a8-b9).

²¹ Cf. *Plt* 269d5-6.

Even if Platonic gods do not experience pleasure, one might wonder whether they are incapable of it. The evidence is unclear. Plato's discussion in the *Symposium* suggests that he views it as a necessary condition of being a god that one possess beautiful and good things and hence be beyond restitution. Again, in the *Third Letter*, Plato claims that to experience pleasure would be *para phusin* (against nature) for god (315c1-3). Though Plato's argument in the *Republic* appears motivationally based—no one, let alone a god, would choose to enter into a worse condition—his statement that gods are best in every way (381b4) supports the claim that being in the best possible condition is part of divine nature. Perhaps, then, should the gods ever enter a worse state, they would cease to be divine.

For our purposes, the upshot of this discussion is as follows. Gods do not experience pleasure because pleasure consists in or depends upon the restitution of a lack, and gods are beings who lack nothing.²² Humans, by contrast, are hedonic beings. However, it is not pleasure *per se* which is the source of our inferiority; rather, it is what pleasure implies, that we have lacks which need to be filled. Pleasure, then, turns out to be a consequential good, since it consists in perceptible restitutions which enable us to approximate the divine state of completion.²³ We are

²² If one allows that a distinction is made in the *Philebus* between two classes of deity, en-uranean and transcendent, then, in the case of the latter, a further reason can be adduced for why it cannot experience pleasure. (Interpreters who grant this distinction include R. Hackforth (1936), 8-9; S. P. Menn (1995), 6-13; R. D. Mohr (1985), 173; and T. M. Robinson (1995), 143. Those who oppose it include Carone (2005), 90-9; Frede (1993), 26-8; Gosling (1975), 98-9; E. N. Ostenfeld (1982), 238; and H. Teloh (1981), 187-8. Given the extent of the interpretive controversy, it would be beyond the scope of this paper to enter into this debate.) Transcendent *nous* is not in a soul, but is the cause of *nous* coming to inhere in the world-soul. Given that pleasure is a psychic state, it would therefore be conceptually incoherent for transcendent *nous* to experience pleasure.

²³ See Frede (1992), 440.

inferior to gods, because we cannot live lives exempt from pleasure and pain, and hence from lacks which require replenishment.

3 Why is assimilation to god pleasurable in the *Philebus*?

Though our susceptibility to pleasure highlights our inferiority to the gods, as I shall argue in the following section, Plato's view of pleasure is not unqualifiedly negative. In fact, it is precisely through undergoing certain pleasant restitutive processes that we come to approximate the divine state. Before explaining why our assimilation to the divine state is necessarily pleasant, however, I must first offer a brief analysis of what Plato means by *homoiōsis theōi*. In the dialogues, we can uncover five models of *homoiōsis theōi*, which I shall call the isolationist, mimetic-contemplative, direct-contemplative, ruling, and aretaic models.²⁴

As the digression in the *Theaetetus* demonstrates, one way that Plato understands *homoiōsis theōi* is as flight from this world. Specifically, it is the philosopher's intellect (*dianoia*) which flees to a realm of pure philosophical activity (173e2-4a2). Call this the *isolationist model*, the model in which we come to resemble god by isolating our intellect from earthly concerns, and thereby from the body and the lower parts of the soul. Sedley maintains that this causes us to resemble god insofar as we solely identify with and isolate our intellect, the divine element within us.²⁵ The isolationist model is present in the *Phaedo*, when Plato claims that the soul is akin to the divine and can come to live with the gods by gathering itself by itself and doing philosophy (80e2-1a9). Similarly, in the *Timaeus*, Plato calls reason the divine part within us and states that we can partake of immortality as much as humanly possible by ignoring

²⁴ J. Duerlinger (1985), 321 distinguishes three paths of assimilation to god: moral training, dialectic and contemplation. However, I see no reason for distinguishing the latter two.

²⁵ Sedley (1999), 320. See also Annas (1999), 58. For the claim that reason is the faculty in us most resembling god, see, e.g., *Alc* 1 133c4.

mortal concerns and devoting ourselves to philosophy (90a2-c6). In devoting ourselves to philosophy, we come to resemble the gods in another way as well, by engaging in the same activity as them; call this the *mimetic-contemplative model*. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato presents the gods as contemplating the forms, then states that the soul which imitates god best contemplates the forms as well (248a1-5); our grasp of the forms is what enables us to avoid incarnation. On the third model, the *direct-contemplative model*, we resemble the gods not simply because we share in their contemplative activity, but because *they* are what we contemplate. Beholding the divine affects our souls such that they become similar to the gods'. At *Timaeus* 90c6-d5, Plato writes that we should redirect the revolutions of our heads which were thrown off course at birth, by learning the harmonies and revolutions of the universe and so bringing our understanding into conformity with its objects. The idea seems to be that our intellects can come to assume the perfect motions of the heavens as a direct result of observing them.²⁶

The first three models of *homoiōsis theōi* focus on intellectual activity as a means to approaching the divine but, in fact, Plato predominantly presents the gods as engaged in ordering the universe and as contemplating the forms for the sake of ruling (*Phdr* 246e4-6, *Ti* 29a2-b1, *Lg* 900d2-3 etc.). In the *Timaeus* (42d5-3a6, 69c3-6), Plato describes the subsidiary gods as imitating the demiurge in the activity of crafting mortal beings, signaling that ordering reality is a mode of imitating the divine.²⁷ Like the subsidiary gods, we, too, can imitate god through

²⁶ Sedley (1999), 316-18, provides a particularly helpful discussion of this mode of *homoiōsis theōi* in the *Timaeus*. See also C. G. Rutenber (1946), 62-3, for a more general discussion of the relation of contemplation to assimilation to god.

²⁷ Of course, this specific form of ordering is not one in which we can imitate god. As Plato states at *Ti* 68d2-7, god alone has the ability to mix the colours and make a unity out of a plurality, and anyone ignorant of this is ignorant of the difference between human and divine nature; cf. *Sph* 265b4-e6. Note that in the *Sophist* passage, Plato *does*

ordering and ruling—hence my fourth model, the *ruling model*. In particular, we can govern our cities, our fellow-citizens and, most importantly, ourselves. Thus, at *Phaedo* 79e8-80a9, Plato claims that the soul is like the divine because it rules over the body, and at *Timaeus* 41c6-8, that the rational part of the soul deserves the name ‘immortal’ because it is divine and rules within those willing to follow justice. Finally, there is the most significant and frequently emphasized model of *homoiōsis theōi* in Plato, the *aretaic model*. It is closely related to its predecessor; through ruling ourselves, we not only mimic the ordering activity of god, but we also make our souls resemble his in virtue. In the *Republic*, Plato claims that the gods favour those who make themselves as like god as a human can be through adopting a virtuous way of life (613a7-b1). We see a similar sentiment in the *Laws*, where Plato claims that sensible men ought to follow god, making their characters resemble his through becoming moderate (716c1-d4).²⁸

allow for a human form of production, only specifying that we cannot be credited with producing living beings and elemental bodies. See Russell (2005), 149 and T. A. Mahoney (2005), 81.

²⁸ My discussion of the aretaic model of *homoiōsis theōi* might raise a worry: perhaps it does not even make sense to treat the cultivation of virtue as a mode of assimilation to god, since gods are beings beyond virtue. Perhaps, then, when Plato exhorts us to imitate god in virtue, what he has in mind are not the moral virtues *per se*, but rather intellectualized abstractions of these. In that case, the aretaic model could be collapsed into the first three models, which center on intellectual activity. To this, I would respond, first, by allowing that the gods may have virtues in a radically different way than ourselves. Perhaps, following Plotinus, we should allow that our relation to divine virtue is not one of copy to copy, but rather of copy to paradigm (1 2 2 1-10). Divine *nous*, in particular, may just be what it is to be rational; we imitate *nous* by coming to possess rationality ourselves. Alternately, the gods may be virtuous in the sense of causes of virtue, through their role in ordering the universe and making it good. We can come to resemble them by becoming good, as well as by being causes of goodness in ourselves and others.

One might further object that, setting aside the *Phaedrus*, it seems inapt to view divine soul as partite (see *R* 611b5-7); much of Plato’s analysis of virtue, however, treats it as the harmonization of the parts of the soul.

Broadly speaking, within these five models of *homoiōsis theōi*, we can detect two strands: models centered on virtue and models centered on contemplation. Though Plato does not explicitly refer to either the aretaic or the intellectual forms of *homoiōsis theōi* in the *Philebus* as such, he does link the acquisition of virtue and knowledge to the divine. Since these inevitably involve pleasure, the processes whereby we imitate god turn out to separate us from a fully divine, ahedonic existence.

We can uncover a reference to the aretaic model of *homoiōsis theōi* in a parallel developed between human and cosmic *nous* (30a3-8). The core function of cosmic *nous* is to order the universe; in that case, we come to resemble *nous* by ordering ourselves. Thus, at 59d10-e3, Socrates likens himself and Protarchus to *dēmiourgoi* (craftsmen), creating the best possible mixture of pleasure and knowledge; presumably each of us is to engage in this demiurgic function in crafting a good life for himself. The connexion to the divine is further established at 61b11-c2, when Socrates prays to Hephaestus, Dionysus, or whichever god presides over mixtures, for assistance in mixing together the good life. Finally, at 39e10-11, Plato claims that the man who is just, pious and good in all respects is *theophilēs* (god-loved);

Granting this, I would maintain that Plato retains a role for external, non-structural virtues, virtues manifest in excellent conduct. If we look at how Plato characterizes divine virtue, it is primarily in these terms. In the *Critias*, Plato writes that the gods received their due portions of the earth without strife, and objects to the notion that the gods might try to seize what belongs to others (109b1-5). In the *Laws*, while arguing that the gods providentially care for everything in the universe, the stranger asks what it means to say that the gods are good (900d5-6). He replies that it means that they are moderate, rational and courageous, then argues that if they failed to care for all creation, this would be a sign of ignorance, laziness and cowardice (902d7-3a3). He later adds that the gods cannot be corrupted through bribes to flout justice, since they are not the moral inferiors of the average man or of dogs (906c8-7a9). In this passage, the gods are depicted as just in an entirely conventional manner and, in fact, in exactly the same manner as humans.

compare this to the *Republic* and *Laws*, where Plato maintains that the gods love those who resemble them in virtue (612e5-13b1, 716c1-d4). What about knowledge? At 16c5, Plato calls the method of *diairesis* (division) a gift from the gods, and describes the men of old with knowledge of the one and the many as closer to the gods than ourselves. At the conclusion of the dialogue, he refers to knowledge of the forms as a *theia epistēmē* (divine knowledge, 62b3-4).

So the two models of *homoiōsis theōi* we have uncovered—focused on knowledge and virtue—appear at least compatible with the *Philebus*. At the same time, each of these is explicitly linked to pleasure. In the case of virtue, Plato writes that the pleasures which serve virtue and follow it everywhere are included in the mixture of the good life (63e4-7). In the case of knowledge, Plato assigns the fifth rank of the good to the pure pleasures associated with knowledge and perception (66c4-6).

Why does Plato take knowledge and virtue to be tied to pleasure? In his discussion of pure pleasures, Plato proposes that there is a pleasure of learning, which results from being filled with knowledge (51e7-2b8); the pleasure is pure because there is no corresponding pain due to the depletion of knowledge. This analysis bears a strong resemblance to *Republic* 585a8-e4, where Plato claims that knowledge produces the truest pleasure because it fills an emptiness in the soul matching hunger in the body, but the sustenance it provides is not mere food, but true being.²⁹ For us, then, the process by which we gain knowledge and come to resemble the gods is

²⁹ It might appear that there is a strong disanalogy between the *Philebus* and *Republic* passages, since in the former Plato stipulates that the pleasure of learning is not preceded by a hunger for learning, while in the latter, Plato compares the emptiness of the soul which lacks knowledge to hunger. However, in the *Philebus* passage, Plato explicitly treats the pleasure of learning as one of being filled with knowledge (52a5), and even allows that one can be pained by a loss of knowledge, though he insists that the pain caused by one's awareness of his lack of knowledge be considered extraneous to the pleasure of learning itself (52b2-3). (Plato's caveat strikes me as

a pleasurable filling. The gods do not experience such pleasure because, as Plato tells us in the *Symposium*, they are in a state of perpetual knowledge and so do not *philosophein* (philosophize/love wisdom, 204a1-2);³⁰ we, by contrast, must constantly maintain our knowledge through study (207e1-8a7).

On my analysis, it is significant that Plato never describes contemplation as pleasant in the *Philebus*; for him, pleasure is only associated with the process of *gaining* knowledge.³¹ In opposition to my position, Gosling and Taylor have argued that the *Philebus* represents an advance in Plato's analysis of pleasure, since he admits pleasures of knowing, as well as of learning; they further speculate that the pleasures of knowing cannot be subsumed into the replenishment model.³² However, as I have argued above, there is no evidence that Plato allows

arbitrary, and as solely motivated by the desire to treat the pleasure of learning as pure and hence unmixed with pain.) Furthermore, in the *Republic* passage, Plato never explicitly states that the pleasure of learning is preceded by pain, only that it is preceded by lack; it is therefore open to him to maintain, as in the *Philebus*, that the lack is unfelt. Note that Plato appears to claim in the *Republic* that the pleasure of learning is pure and therefore unmixed with pain, or felt depletion: he specifies at 583b3-4 that only the pleasures of the wise are pure, at 585b12 that the pleasure of learning participates in pure being, and at 586a1-6 that only those who possess reason and virtue experience pure pleasure.

³⁰ Gosling and Taylor (1982), 122-5 propose that Plato does not see this in the *Symposium*, since he does not properly distinguish between processes of repletion and states of replenishment in his middle period; they appear to view the consequence, that the gods, being fully wise, do not take pleasure in knowledge, as a weakness of Plato's view.

³¹ See Frede (1992), 453.

³² Gosling and Taylor (1982), 139; they cite 66c4-6, which I discuss in what follows, in support. They do not invoke 12c8-d4, though it might appear to further support their interpretation. Here, Socrates argues, *contra* Protarchus, that pleasures vary in kind: the *debauché* takes pleasure in his debauchery, the moderate man in his moderation, the ignorant, in his ignorant hopes and beliefs, the wise in his wisdom. One might take this to imply that *being*

for non-restitutive pleasures in the *Philebus*. Furthermore, Plato's primary references to intellectual pleasure, at 51e7-2b8 and 66c4-6, both link it to learning and hence restitution. The first passage does so explicitly; it occurs in the context of Plato's discussion of the pure pleasures, and in it, he speaks of *tas peri ta mathēmata hēdonas* (the pleasures related to learning). In this passage, Plato treats the pleasures of learning as restitutive, since they consist in one's ignorance being displaced by knowledge. Though Plato describes pleasure as following knowledge (*epistēmais*) in the second passage, his phrasing clearly refers back to the earlier discussion of the pure pleasures of learning: he calls this pleasure one of 'the pleasures we set

moderate or wise, and not just *becoming* these, is a source of pleasure. However, this passage occurs very early in the dialogue, its purpose to convince Protarchus that pleasures vary in kind and are not all good *per se*. In that case, Socrates' description of the pleasures of moderation and wisdom needn't be taken to represent his considered view; this statement precedes his subtle and complex analysis of pleasure as restitution-based. Furthermore, the two contrasts Plato develops, between the pleasures of the moderate and the immoderate and those of the wise and the fool, clearly look forward to passages later in the dialogue, where Plato analyses each pleasure in terms of restitution. At 45d3-e7, arguing that the strongest pleasures are felt by the debauched, Socrates develops a contrast between the *sōphrōn bios* (moderate life) and the life of excess (*hubris*). The immoderate man is driven to madness by his intense pleasures, while the moderate man is governed by the maxim, 'nothing in excess'. Plato is not opposing the pleasures of having one's soul in an orderly or disorderly condition, so much as the pleasures pertaining to the characteristic activities of each type; he goes on to describe the immoderate as one given to the pleasure of scratching and its ilk. Thus, the pleasures of the moderate will include eating and drinking in moderation and pursuing lawful sexual acts, pleasures forced upon him by the exigencies of corporeal existence, and which he pursues under the governance of a moderate, well-ordered soul. To turn to the second opposition, Plato characterizes the pleasures of the ignorant as those taken in his ignorant hopes and beliefs (*anoētōn doxōn kai elpidōn*). This looks forward to Plato's discussion of true and false anticipatory pleasures at 40a3-d5. Thus, the corresponding pleasures of the wise must be true anticipatory pleasures (cf. 40b2-4); for Plato, these pleasures are the anticipations of restitutive pleasures (32b6-c2), and arise due to a current state of neediness (35e9-6b9).

apart and defined as painless, calling them the pure pleasures of the soul itself.’ Given that in the passage on pure pleasures, the only intellectual pleasure proposed is that of learning, and that it is classified as restitutive, when Plato speaks here of pleasure following knowledge, he must mean the pleasure which results from the acquisition of knowledge.³³

To turn to our second mode of *homoiōsis theōi*, Plato never explains why the acquisition of virtue should be pleasurable. However, in mentioning the pleasures pertaining to virtue, Plato distinguishes them from the pure pleasures (63e4); this indicates that they must be impure pleasures, pleasures that consist in the replenishment of a felt lack.³⁴ What sort of replenishment might Plato have in mind? Throughout the dialogues, Plato treats virtue as a harmonious state of the soul;³⁵ correspondingly, to become virtuous is to have psychic discord replaced with order. In the *Philebus*, Plato writes that the imposition of limit on the unlimited and the consequent establishment of harmony produce many beautiful things in the soul, presumably virtues (26b6-7), and he later develops a link between *symmetria* (symmetry) and virtue (64e6-7). At 31d4-9, Plato claims that the disintegration of harmony is pain, its reestablishment pleasure. If to

³³ This passage in fact echoes *Lg* 667c5-6, where Plato writes that pleasure follows (*parakolouthein*) learning.

³⁴ Plato’s reference to pleasure following (*sunakolouthein*) virtue in this passage directly parallels his description of intellectual pleasure as following (*hepesthai*) knowledge at 66c4-6; the idea is that the pleasure results from gaining virtue. Frede (1993), 78, n.1, has an additional, helpful observation on this passage. Plato writes that the best human life should include the pleasures ‘which, becoming attendants (*opadoi*) to complete virtue, as if it were a god, follow it everywhere.’ As Frede notes, this calls to mind the image in the *Phaedrus*, where those who were once attendants (*opadoi*) of Zeus strive to become as like the god as they can (252c3-3c2). This suggests that the pleasures which follow the goddess, virtue, are those involved in seeking to become as virtuous as possible.

³⁵ E.g., *Grg* 506d2-e2; *Phd* 93c3-8; *R* 443d3-4a2, 444d3-e2.

become virtuous is to become harmonized, then, so long as this process is perceptible, it will inevitably be pleasant.

4 Pleasure *versus* fulfillment

Before concluding, I would like to turn to a very significant objection to my interpretation. What if Platonic gods *can* experience pleasure?³⁶ In that case, the tension which I have been attempting to resolve between the *Philebus* and other dialogues would be entirely diffused. The pursuit of pleasure which Plato advocates in the *Philebus* would not, after all, be opposed to assimilation to god, since gods, too, would be hedonic beings. There are, in fact, four passages in the Platonic corpus which can be taken to imply that gods can experience pleasure. The first passage is at *Phaedrus* 247d1-4, where Plato describes the gods as feasting upon their vision of the forms, rejoicing (*agapan*) and feeling wonderful (*eupathein*). The second is at *Timaeus* 37c6-7: the demiurge, upon seeing his creation set in motion is delighted (*agasthai*) and rejoices (*euphrainesthai*).³⁷ At *Laws* 739d6-e1, Plato uses the same term as in the *Timaeus* passage, *euphrainesthai*, to describe the condition gods would be in if they inhabited a city with communal ownership, as he does at 796b6-c2, when he describes Athena as rejoicing in the play of the chorus.³⁸

³⁶ This line of argument is best developed in Carone (2000).

³⁷ Plato also uses *agasthai* at *Symposium* 180b1, when Phaedrus claims that the gods are more delighted when a beloved loves his lover than the opposite. Since this claim is put in the mouth of Phaedrus, and not Socrates or Diotima, I do not include it in my list of passages, though my later comments on the use of *agasthai*, to the effect that it can mean ‘admire,’ as well as ‘delight in,’ apply here as well.

³⁸ One might also include *Lg* 896e8-7b5, where Plato, describing the motions by which soul moves the heavens, earth and sea, includes rejoicing (*chairein*). If soul here is identical to world-soul, then Plato is claiming that world-soul can experience pleasure. However, if we look at the passage in its entirety, it seems utterly implausible that

There is a simple solution to this objection: while Plato may countenance hedonic gods in other dialogues, he quite explicitly excludes this possibility in the *Philebus*. Plato states at 22c5-6 and at 33a8-b11 that the life of the gods is not one of pleasure, but consists solely of reason; in the second of these two passages, he claims that it would be unseemly for gods to be pleased. Thus, whatever Plato's view of divine nature in other dialogues, in the *Philebus*, he takes the gods to be ahedonic, and this is all I need to generate my problematic. Furthermore, this view of divine nature is not unique to the *Philebus*. In the *Laws*, Plato claims that god is in a state between pleasure and pain, and that those who wish to live like god should aspire to such a state (792c8-d7).³⁹ In the *Third Letter*,⁴⁰ he states that to wish pleasure unto god is to enjoin him

Plato could have world-soul in mind. He writes, 'So soul, through its own motions, drives everything in the heavens and on earth and in the sea. The names of its motions are wish, reflection, forethought, counsel, opinion true and false, joy and grief, confidence and fear, hate and love.' Given Plato's characterization of divine nature throughout his *corpus*, it seems inconceivable that world-soul, a god, could experience many of the motions on this list, such as grief, fear and false belief. When taken in conjunction with passages such as 903e3-4c9, it seems most plausible to understand Plato as describing the motions by which *all* kinds of soul—cosmic, human, animal—can initiate motion. Those who wish to identify soul in this passage with world-soul must rely on the contested phrase at 897b1-2. However, the major manuscripts give '... οἷς ψυχῇ χρωμένη, νοῦν μὲν προσλαβοῦσα ἀεὶ θεὸν ὀρθῶς θεοῖς;' though its meaning is obscure, T. L. Pangle (1979) attempts to do it justice, rendering it, soul 'takes as a helper intelligence—god, in the correct sense, for the gods.' In order to extract the claim that soul here is a god, one would have to follow T. J. Saunders (in J. M. Cooper, ed. [1997]) and A. Diès (1956) in adopting the marginal emendation of θεοῖς to θεὸς οὐσα, so that θεὸς would refer back to ψυχῇ; given that soul's motions include pain, fear and false belief, this option strikes me as unattractive.

³⁹ Rutenber (1946), 71-3 advances a highly unusual reading of this passage, taking it to advocate moderation, rather than the elimination of pleasure and pain. Rutenber's analysis depends upon taking *to meson* to signify *the mean*. However, comparison to *R* 583c7-8 and *Phlb* 43e8-9 indicate that *to meson* must be taken here to mean *the middle state*, i.e. the state between pleasure and pain, which is ahedonic (for further discussion of the *Republic* passage, see

contrary to his nature, since the divine is far removed from pleasure and pain (315c1-3).^{41, 42} In the *Timaeus*, in describing the process whereby the gods craft mortal soul, Plato writes that they mix in pleasure, a terrible but necessary affectation and evil's most potent lure (69c5-d1); this implies that pleasure is not a feature of divine soul, since divine soul lacks a mortal component. Plato's proscription of pleasure in these passages appears more deliberate than his passing references to the gods as pleased in the passages I adduced earlier; it occurs in the context of explicit statements about divine nature. It is therefore open to me to maintain that in the earlier passages, Plato is being sloppy, and that his considered view is that gods are beings beyond pleasure.

J. Butler [1999] 293-7). This passage presents me with a separate interpretive difficulty: why does Plato urge us here to pursue the ahedonic state, a goal which he rejects in the *Philebus*? This is particularly odd, since throughout the *Laws*, Plato is extremely realistic about human nature and its tendency to be motivated by pleasure and pain (732e4-7), and, in fact, assigns a crucial role to pleasure in moral education (e.g., 653a5-c4).

⁴⁰ Obviously there are doubts about the authenticity of the letters; at the very least, this passage indicates what some of Plato's followers took his position to be on divine nature.

⁴¹ There is a potential tension between the passages in the *Laws* and the *Third Letter*. According to the former, the gods are between pleasure and pain, while according to the latter, they are far from them. While the middle state is defined in terms of the absence of pleasure and pain, and so is, in a sense, located within the pleasure/pain continuum, to be far from pleasure and pain suggests that one exists completely outside of this continuum. Perhaps these can be made consistent by allowing that the middle state could itself be viewed as far from either extreme; whatever we make of Plato's spatial metaphors, the important upshot for my purposes is that, according to both passages, the gods are not subject to pleasure or pain.

⁴² The *Epinomis* contains a similar sentiment, claiming that god is far removed from pleasure and pain, and is only concerned with knowing and thinking (985a5-7). Though this dialogue is presumed to be spurious, it can at least be taken to reflect how near neo-Platonists understood Plato.

Rather than adopting this solution, I intend to investigate whether these passages can be made consistent. My reasons for this are twofold. First, Plato does not tend to be a sloppy writer; we should therefore be troubled by the seeming inconsistency between his claims. This inconsistency cannot be resolved along chronological lines, for the apparently contradictory statements occur within works assumed to be from the same period⁴³ and even within the same works: thus, while Plato describes gods as beings beyond pleasure in the *Laws*, he also apparently twice refers to them as pleased. How can this be? My second motive for exploring this tension is more philosophically-based, and more pertinent to the central aim of this paper. My proposed solution shall be that in the passages where Plato appears to describe the gods as pleased, he actually has another state in mind—fulfillment. This distinction between pleasure and fulfillment is philosophically rich, and it shall prove crucial, in the conclusion of this paper, to developing a nuanced understanding of exactly what we aim at when we seek to approximate the divine state.

How might we go about reinterpreting the passages which appear to describe the gods as pleased? The first thing to note is that Plato never actually puts it in these terms. In none of these passages does Plato actually use the word, *hēdesthai* (to be pleased), to describe the state of the gods. In the *Philebus*, Plato typically uses *hēdonē* and its cognates for pleasure, coupled with *terpsis* and *chara* and their cognates (e.g., 11b4-5, 19c7). The words used in the passages under discussion are *agapan*, *eupathein*, *agasthai* and *euphrainesthai*. This provides *prima facie* evidence that in these passages, Plato may not be referring to the same psychic state, *hēdonē*, which he denies the gods in the *Philebus*.

⁴³ With the exception of the *Phaedrus*, which I take to be middle-late; this may account for a difficulty it presents for my interpretation—see n. 44, below.

In fact, Plato draws an explicit distinction between *hēdesthai* and *euphrainesthai* on two occasions. As early as the *Gorgias*, he has Prodicus distinguish the two, suggesting that *euphrainesthai* is the superior state, connected to wisdom, while *hēdesthai* pertains to bodily urges (337c1-4). In the *Timaeus*, Plato contrasts the *hēdonē* harmonious sounds produce in fools with the *euphrosunē* they engender in the wise by creating divine harmonies in their souls (80b5-8); *euphrosunē* is, again, superior to *hēdonē*, and is linked to wisdom and psychic harmony. Significantly, *euphrainesthai* is the exact term used in three of our problematic passages: *Timaeus* 37c6-7, and *Laws* 739d6-e1 and 796b6-c2. In the *Timaeus* passage, Plato also uses the expression *agasthai* to describe the reaction of the demiurge upon beholding the universe in motion. The central sense of *agasthai* is *to admire*; given that the demiurge is observing the universe, this seems a reasonable translation. Our remaining passage, *Phaedrus* 247d1-4, uses the terms *agapan* and *eupathein*; while these can signify *to be pleased*, they can also carry the milder senses of *to be content* and *to be well off*.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ See Liddell, Scott and Jones s.v. *agapaō* and *eupatheō*. G. J. De Vries (1969), 137, in his commentary on the *Phaedrus*, objects to Hackforth's translation of *eupathein* as *prosper*, citing *Republic* 347c7 as evidence that in Plato, *eupathein* means *to enjoy*. However, it strikes me that both passages can be read either way. In the *Republic* passage, after all, Plato's point is that good men do not rule for the sake of benefits, such as honour or wealth; this is strongly compatible with taking *eupathein* to mean *to prosper*.

To my mind, the more serious concern with the *Phaedrus* passage is not that it uses words which must be taken as synonymous with *hēdesthai*, but, rather, that its depiction of the gods suggests that they undergo restitution. The gods in the *Phaedrus* do not contemplate perpetually, but only sporadically. Plato twice states that the gods feed upon (*trephontai*) the forms; this calls to mind the analysis of the pleasure of learning as the filling of a psychic hunger in the *Republic* (585a8-e4). Even if what the gods experience here is not identical to pleasure, this passage still challenges my overall argument: I claim that the gods cannot experience pleasure because this would imply that they suffer from a prior lack, but here the gods are depicted as subject to sporadic intellectual replenishment.

My proposal, then, is that the reason Plato does not use *hēdonē* in these passages is that *hēdonē* is always the restitution of some lack; the state attributed to the gods, described as *euphrainesthai*, *eupathein* and *agapan*, is something different. What could it be, if not pleasure? Here, we see an intriguing parallel to the *Symposium*. In the *Symposium*, Plato is adamant that the gods, as perfect beings, do not experience desire, since desire implies lack. At the same time, given that they necessarily are in stable and unending possession of all that is good, he describes them as happy (*eudaimones*, 202c6-d7).⁴⁵ This implies that there is a state befitting beings who are perfect, and hence impervious to restitutive processes: happiness or, as I shall refer to it, fulfillment. All pleasure either consists in or depends upon a process of replenishment, and is therefore at odds with divine perfection. Fulfillment, on the other hand, might be thought of as a state of well-being in which one lacks nothing, a state which would be perfectly appropriate for the gods. We see the contrast between pleasure and happiness brought out in the *Gorgias*, for example, where Plato contrasts the life of the man whose jars are full with that of the man whose jars are leaky (493a1-4a5). The former is devoid of restitutive pleasure, but is also happiest,

Hackforth (1985), 80 responds to this by proposing that this aspect of Plato's account should be taken as merely allegorical. One would wish to know more about why Plato resorts to an allegory so at odds with the rest of his theology. My conjecture is that in the *Phaedrus*, Plato presents the gods as exemplars for how we ought to live our lives as mortals, balancing contemplation with care of the soul, and that this passage should not be taken to represent his considered view of divine nature. The defense of such a claim is, of course, far beyond the scope of this paper (but see my 2012). At the very least, these considerations suggest that Plato's presentation of the gods as undergoing restitution in the *Phaedrus* is not of a piece with his late theology, and should not be taken to apply to the *Philebus*.

⁴⁵ This parallels an implicit distinction between *erōs* and *philia*: though gods, lacking in nothing, are immune to *erōs*, they feel *philia* towards the truly virtuous (212a5-6). While *erōs* is a state of neediness and desire, *philia*, perhaps, should be understood as a state of appreciation and affection.

since it is self-sufficient and satisfied with itself (*hikanōs kai exarkountōs echonta*, 493c7); Plato goes on to maintain that being pleased and doing well (*eu prattein*) are distinct (497a3-4).⁴⁶ Plato maintains this distinction in the *Philebus* when, at 11d4-6, he centers the dialogue on the question of whether knowledge or pleasure is best able to render life happy for all: *hēdonē* is treated as conceptually distinct from *eudaimonia*.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Gosling and Taylor (1982), 70-1 maintain that in the *Gorgias*, Plato solely responds to Callicles' conception of pleasure as the repletion of a bodily lack, and that his criticism of hedonism need not apply to the form of enlightened hedonism which he defends in the *Protagoras*. While it would be beyond the scope of this paper to fully address Gosling and Taylor's reading of the *Gorgias*, I should emphasize that if in the *Gorgias*, Plato takes enlightened hedonism to be a correct account of the good, then it is odd that he does not mention it. Though one might maintain that the reason for this is that the dialogue is aporetic, it is striking that Socrates repeatedly affirms that pleasure is not to be identified with the happiness and the good—see, e.g., 495d2-e1, 497a3-5, 497d5-6 and 500d6-8. Furthermore, Socrates' criticism of pleasure at 492e7-4b7 focuses on its connexion to filling; if all pleasures are, as I contend, processes of replenishment, then Socrates would not allow that even intellectual pleasures are intrinsically good. Later, when Socrates does draw a distinction between good and bad pleasures, he does not treat good pleasures as intrinsically good, but rather as instrumental means to other goods, such as bodily health (499c6-500a6). Finally, it is worth noting that at 507b8-d1, Socrates does appear to offer an account *in propria persona* of what makes a life go well—having one's soul be well-ordered and hence virtuous. At any rate, what is significant for my purposes is that in the passage I cite, Plato introduces a state of repletion and satisfaction, a state which makes a life happiest, and which does not explicitly involve pleasure.

⁴⁷ An anonymous referee has suggested that this passage need not imply that happiness and pleasure are distinct if we allow that Plato's question is whether knowledge or pleasure causes a life to be happier; this is compatible with a life's happiness consisting in its overall pleasantness. Though I am intrigued by this proposal, it is important to note that at the conclusion of the dialogue, when Socrates asks Protarchus whether knowledge or pleasure is more responsible for the goodness of the well-mixed life, he specifies three features which account for the goodness of mixtures: beauty, proportion and truth (64e5-5a5). He does not mention pleasantness as a feature which renders a life well-mixed and hence good; he goes on to assign pleasure to the fifth and last rank of the good, after intelligence

Apart from the *Symposium*, there are two further passages where Plato seems to characterize the gods in terms of fulfillment. First, at *Timaeus* 34a8-b9, Plato writes that the demiurge made the *kosmos* complete and self-sufficient, in need of nothing apart from itself, its own knowledge of and friendship with itself sufficing, a happy god. This is of a piece with my proposal that Platonic gods, lacking nothing, exist in a perpetual state of well-being, blessedness and fulfillment, though not of pleasure. Second, at *Laws* 792c8-d5, when Plato writes that, in our attempt to assimilate to god, we must become aloof from pleasure and pain and pursue the insensate state, he writes that we must ‘αὐτὸ ἀσπάζεσθαι τὸ μέσον, ὃ νυνδὴ προσεῖπον ὡς ἕλεον ὀνομάσας’ (we must joyfully embrace the middle state, which just now I said was called gentle). It is significant that we enter this state of joyfulness precisely in the process of eschewing pleasure and assimilating to god.

In sum, then, since the evidence from other dialogues suggesting that the gods experience pleasure is mixed, at best, and given that on the most natural reading of the *Philebus*, Plato claims that the gods do not experience pleasure, in the absence of overriding evidence to the contrary, it seems reasonable to take Plato at his word and allow that, in the *Philebus* at least, the gods are ahedonic. In discussing the passages which appear to suggest that Platonic gods can experience pleasure, we have uncovered an intriguing refinement to Plato’s position. Though gods cannot experience pleasure, they are fulfilled. While pleasure is the filling of a lack, fulfillment is a state of well-being and blessedness in which one lacks nothing; as it were, fulfillment is what pleasure is for. But if we are to aspire to the state of fulfillment, then we must

(66c4-6). Thus, while there is no direct evidence that Plato identifies happiness with pleasantness in the dialogue, there is at least some evidence suggesting that he takes them to be distinct.

accept pleasure as its necessary precursor, for pleasure resides in the very processes by which we become fulfilled.⁴⁸

5 Is *homoiōsis theōi* a coherent *telos* for man?

I began this paper with a puzzle: how can Plato characterize the ahedonic life as divine in the *Philebus*, while simultaneously claiming that the best life for man is pleasurable? Has he temporarily rejected *homoiōsis theōi* as man's *telos* or, worse yet, fallen into inadvertent self-contradiction? My goal was to provide an interpretation of the *Philebus* which would render it of a piece with the rest of his *corpus*. My solution was to propose that the two modes of assimilation to god—learning and moral cultivation—are processes which necessarily involve pleasure. It is precisely because Plato wishes for us to strive to become as like god as possible in these regards, and because he recognizes that the processes of our assimilation are pleasurable, that he includes pleasure as a constituent of the best human life.⁴⁹ In aspiring to the condition of the gods, we aim at achieving, as far as possible, a state of perfection and completeness, in which

⁴⁸ One might maintain that perhaps the gods can be pleased in a radically different way than ourselves; even if, for humans, pleasure always implies restitution, perhaps the gods are capable of some non-restitutive form of pleasure (I owe this suggestion to an anonymous referee). In fact, this proposal comes very close to my own; however, rather than contrasting human and divine forms of pleasure, I treat the divine state as distinct from pleasure, referring to it as fulfillment. I believe that this better reflects Plato's usage, since Plato only uses *hēdonē* to refer to restitutive pleasures, and that it captures the fact that the two states are importantly distinct: fulfillment is what pleasurable restitutive processes aim at.

⁴⁹ In referring to pleasure as a constituent of the best human life, I do not mean to suggest that it makes a non-causal contribution to the best life in the way that, say, a healthy foot is a constituent of a healthy body (for this example and discussion of the way in which certain constituents of the good can have non-instrumental value, see T. Irwin [1995], 193). Pleasure is a constituent of the good life, not because it possesses intrinsic value, but because we are the sorts of beings who must undergo pleasure in order to secure whatever intrinsic goods we are capable of.

we no longer experience pleasure, but rather fulfillment. Thus, while pleasure is not an intrinsic good—after all, in some sense, we wish to transcend it—it does have consequential value in bringing us closer to the divine.⁵⁰ Of course, insofar as we can never fully and stably achieve the

⁵⁰ In maintaining that, in the *Philebus*, Plato does not treat pleasure as an intrinsic, but solely as a consequential good, I am obviously entering an area of vigorous interpretive controversy. Those who share my view include Evans (2007); Frede (1992), 440, 454; (1993), xliii, lvi, (1996), 236; C. Hampton (1990), 74; Van Riel (1999), 308; and Waterfield (1982), 86, n.1. Opponents include Carone (2000); Cooper (1999), 160-1; and Irwin (1995), 336. Though constraints of space prevent me from fully engaging with this debate, I believe that, in arguing that Plato endorses the sophisticates' analysis of all pleasure as a process of becoming for the sake of being, I have provided significant support for my position. Furthermore, my arguments concerning the role of pleasure in assimilation to god offer new evidence for this reading of Plato. If the gods are beings in the best possible condition, and constitute a normative ideal towards which we should aspire, and if they are in an ahedonic state, then this suggests that we ought not to aim at pleasure *per se*. Furthermore, if pleasure characterizes the processes by which we approximate the divine condition, then this implies that it has consequential value. While I do not take Plato to be a hedonist, it is important not to diminish the value which Plato places on pleasure—after all, at 44c5-d2 he criticizes the anti-hedonists for their refusal to acknowledge anything healthy about pleasure. Pleasure does have consequential value for Plato; furthermore, as I argue in what follows, since humans can never stably attain the state of perfect knowledge and virtue which characterizes the gods, pleasures of replenishment will always play a key role in the best human life.

One might object to my position on the grounds that other dialogues suggest that Plato does not view pleasure as having solely consequential value. In particular, according to the three-fold classification of goods in the *Republic*, pleasure belongs to the class of things desired for their own sakes (357b4-8). However, this classification of pleasure is Glaucon's, and is not explicitly endorsed by Socrates (see Ferrari [2003], 15-19). Furthermore, Glaucon's claim is that pleasure is something we choose for its own sake; this can be taken as a statement about what humans desire, rather than about the objective goodness of pleasure. We are hedonic creatures who are driven by pleasure and pain and are inclined to desire pleasure for its own sake; this is compatible with pleasure only being objectively choiceworthy insofar as it constitutes a process of replenishment. Plato's views on the relation of

divine state of fulfillment, we will never cease to undergo pleasant restitutive processes—there is always more knowledge and virtue to be gained.⁵¹

Ultimately, the *Philebus* strikes me as not so much opposed to the dialogues enjoining us to pursue *homoiōsis theōi* as differing in focus. In dialogues such as the *Theaetetus*, where Plato exhorts us to imitate the gods, he highlights the ways in which we can come to resemble them. The *Philebus*, of course, is a dialogue about pleasure, and here, Plato's eye is on how we are incapable of the ahedonic state of the gods. Another way of thinking of the issue is to note, following Russell,⁵² that when Plato urges us to emulate god, he typically adds the rider, 'to the degree possible'.⁵³ We see such a qualification in the *Philebus*, when the sophisticates refer to the superiority of the ahedonic life of wisdom, *hōs hoion te katharōtata*, as free from pleasure and pain as we can make it (55a7-8). Perhaps part of the gap between the *Philebus* and other dialogues lies in which side of this caveat is emphasized: while in the *Theaetetus*, *Republic* and *Laws*, Plato emphasizes how much we can come to resemble god, in the *Philebus*, Plato's focus is on how far we fall short—after all, if we were gods, we would not have to strive to be like them. Surprisingly, though the *Philebus* appears to be an optimistic dialogue, focused on the happy human life, it contains a pessimistic tinge. Of course, for many of us, the fact that

pleasure to the good in the *Republic* are complex, but it is worth noting that at 581e6-8, he distinguishes a life's being pleasantest from its being best (see also Rowe [1984], 105-6, and White [1979], 226, 233-4).

⁵¹ Note that even if the best human life is largely made up of pleasant restitutive processes, insofar as we are rational, these are not themselves our *telos*: what we aim at is knowing, not learning. To aim at learning for its own sake would be, on Plato's view, perverse. I discuss this and related issues further in what follows.

⁵² Russell (2005), 148; see also Rutenber (1946), 38-9.

⁵³ E.g., *R* 613b1, *Tht* 176b1-2, *Ti* 90c2-3. See also *Phd* 65e7-a5, 67a3-4; *R* 383c4-5, 500d1; *Phdr* 253a3-5; *Lg* 716c6-d1.

knowledge and virtue can be gained at all, and that they are to be gained with pleasure, as well as hard work, turns out to be occasion for relief and delight, and hardly a cause for regret.

In the final section of this paper, I will attempt to draw out some broader implications of and problems with Plato's view. I will begin by considering the sense in which mortal beings can aim at assimilation to the divine, and conclude by raising concerns about the coherence and desirability of *homoiōsis theōi* as man's *telos*. Generally speaking, my interpretation relies on a conception of human nature as imperfect.⁵⁴ If we could become permanently and unchangingly virtuous and knowing, then, once we got past the initial generative pleasures, like the gods, we too would be in a pleasureless, albeit fulfilled, state. What precludes such a possibility, I believe, is that human nature is inherently unstable and imperfect. In the *Symposium*, Plato claims that we do not possess knowledge in the unchanging manner of the gods, but must constantly replenish it, through study (207e1-8a7).⁵⁵ In the *Phaedrus*, controlling our souls' horses and sustaining a vision of the forms is a precarious and arduous task, requiring constant vigilance (248a1-6). In the *Timaeus*, Plato writes that our souls are crafted by the en-uranian gods to ensure their inferiority (41c2-6); the orbits of our souls are liable to become askew, and require

⁵⁴ Here I concur with Frede (1992), 440, 453-4; see also Frede (1986). For an opposing view, see M. L. McPherran (1996), 292-7 and (2006), 246-7. I agree with McPherran that awareness of the separation between human ignorance and divine wisdom is central to Socratic humility, and, furthermore, that Plato urges us to become aware of the potential for divine wisdom within us. However, to my mind, McPherran (1996), 295 overstates Plato's optimism: while McPherran is correct that Plato raises the possibility of a philosophical grasp of the forms in the *Symposium* and *Republic*, Plato's guarded phrasings at *Smp* 209e5-10a2 and *R* 505c2-d8 suggest doubts concerning our prospects of attaining this state.

⁵⁵ See also *Tht.* 153b9-c1 for the same claim, though the attribution of the Heraclitean thesis to Plato is controversial—see M. Burnyeat (1990), 8-9.

adjustment (47b5-c4). Being human, we necessarily possess mortal as well as immortal souls (70e4-5); our mortal souls are the seats of pleasure and pain, which Plato calls terrible but necessary affectations (69c8-d2). All of this suggests that we are doomed to lives in which we must repeatedly ascend to the sight of the forms, if we are even able, and in which we must constantly attend to our psychic constitutions, struggling to regain and maintain inner harmony.

Given this view of human nature, we might wonder what to make of *homoiōsis theōi* as man's *telos*. How can a mortal being coherently aim at achieving the divine state, a goal he cannot realistically hope to achieve? In the *Timaeus*, Plato writes that, should a man become wholly absorbed in his appetites and ambitions, 'so far as it is possible for a man to become completely mortal, he will not fail in this;' conversely, if he devotes himself to knowledge, 'to the extent that human nature can partake of immortality, he will not fail in this' (90b1-c4). For Plato, humans occupy a sort of limbo between the mortal and the divine, incapable of being a full citizen of either realm. In what sense, then, can such a creature's *telos* be assimilation to god?

In order to untangle this difficulty, we should consider further what it is that Plato urges us to aim at. What, exactly, is meant by the phrase, *homoiōsis theōi*? As Chantraine observes, there is an ambiguity in the *-sis* suffix, which can be used to designate both process and end-state.⁵⁶ Thus, *homoiōsis* can mean both the process of assimilation and the resultant state of similarity.⁵⁷ This ambiguity is present in Plato; there are three instances of *homoiōsis* in his *corpus*, two in the former sense (*Epin* 990d3, *Tht* 176b1), one in the latter (*R* 454c9). Even when Plato uses *homoiōsis* and its cognates in the latter sense, at times, he appears to mean complete similarity, as in the *Republic* passage, while on other occasions, he has in mind a relation of

⁵⁶ P. Chantraine (1933), 286-8

⁵⁷ See Liddell, Scott and Jones, s.v. *homoiōsis*.

looser resemblance (e.g., *R* 510a9-10; *Lg* 964d5-7).⁵⁸ Thus, on the face of it, it is not clear whether, in enjoining us to assimilate to god, Plato intends that we aim at the process of becoming like god, the end-state of being similar to god, or the end-state of being identical to god.

If we consider the passages in which Plato discusses assimilating to god, it emerges that he focuses primarily on the first option. In the *Theaetetus*, Plato writes, ‘One must try to flee as quickly as possible from here to there. Flight is *homoiōsis theōi* as much as possible, for *homoiōsis theōi* is becoming (*genesthai*) just and pious with wisdom’(176a9-b2). Here, *homoiōsis theōi* is identified with *becoming* as like god as possible. In the *Laws*, he writes that one who wishes to become dear to god should do his best to become (*gignesthai*) like him (716c6-d1), and in the *Republic*, he states that the gods do not neglect those who, cultivating virtue in themselves, become just (*dikaios gignesthai*) and become as like god as possible (*homoioussthai theōi*, 613a7-b1). As these passages demonstrate, when Plato recommends that we emulate god, he typically qualifies this with the proviso that we do so to the degree possible. This partially resolves the tension I alluded to earlier; while it would be absurd for mortal creatures to aim at *being* gods, they can aim at *becoming* as divine as their natures permit.

Of course, if we aim at becoming like god, this is because we ultimately aspire to the end-state, being as like god as possible. However, there is an added layer of complexity: since we can never achieve knowledge and virtue in a stable way, we must never cease to aim at becoming like god, i.e. knowledgeable and virtuous. Furthermore, while, in a sense, the ideal is

⁵⁸ See Rutenber (1946), 18-25.

a state of divine perfection, what we, as humans, pursue is a mortal proxy thereof.⁵⁹ Thus, in the *Phaedrus*, Plato writes that the philosopher, keeping his memory as close *as possible* (*kata dunamin*) to those objects, proximity to which makes the gods divine, and using these reminders correctly, becomes truly perfect (*teleos ontōs gignetai*, 249c4-8). Perfection, for us humans, falls short of full divinity—while the gods contemplate the forms directly and with ease, we must recollect them from a distance. Similarly, in the *Timaeus*, Plato calls bringing the human mind into conformity (*exomoiōsai*) with the movements of the universe the fulfillment of the best life offered by the gods to man for the present and future time (90d1-8). Even when our minds fully approximate the cosmic motions, we are still only granted a human sort of perfection, not a divine existence. Given these considerations, the human *telos* turns out to be bifurcated: we aim at becoming like god for the sake of being as similar to god as possible; this end-state falls short of full resemblance and, furthermore, requires that we constantly undergo processes of becoming, of acquiring and maintaining virtue and knowledge.

Suppose, then, that we aim at becoming for the sake of being. What motivational role does this imply for pleasure? Pleasure, I have argued, is to be identified with the restitutive processes by which we come to resemble god, fulfillment, with the state of completion and perfection which characterizes god. In that case, do we aim at pleasure or fulfillment? On the one hand, insofar as we are rational, we ought to aspire, as far as possible, to the state of fulfillment which characterizes god. In that case, our *telos* is a state of maximal fulfillment (though this will fall short of the state of complete fulfillment which characterizes god); pleasure

⁵⁹ This sort of distinction comes out most clearly at *Symposium* 207c9-8b4, where Plato treats reproduction as the mortal form of immortality, as well as in the *Timaeus*, where he writes that the demiurge created time as a moving image of eternity, in order to make the universe as everlasting as possible (37d1-7).

will thus have solely instrumental value for us. On the other hand, given Plato's belief in the imperfection of human nature, he must hold that we ought never to cease pursuing pleasurable restitutive processes. Furthermore, Plato's view of human motivation implies that we are motivated precisely by the pleasure inhering in these restitutive processes. In the *Laws*, he writes that our lives are all bound by nature between pleasure and pain, and that anyone who wishes for some existence beyond these is ignorant of actual lives (733d2-6).⁶⁰ This coincides with Plato's claims in the *Philebus* that the pleasureless life is not choiceworthy for man (22a9-b8, 61a1-2). This, however, reveals a deep tension in Plato's position. How can he espouse this view of motivation, while urging us to aspire, as far as possible, to a state of ahedonic perfection? If we are truly driven by pleasure, then, curiously, we will wish to avoid the stable, ahedonic state of the gods, to which we are supposedly drawn by the restitutive pleasures of becoming virtuous and wise. Our preference ought to be to repeatedly forget what we know and fall from virtue, so as to experience the restitutive pleasures of learning and becoming good all over again.⁶¹ But

⁶⁰ Cf. *Lg* 733a9-b3, where Plato states that humans do not want the pleasureless and painless state if it involves the loss of pleasure.

⁶¹ This statement requires refinement. As an anonymous referee has pointed out, Plato emphasizes at 21b6-c8 that without reason, memory and knowledge, we could never experience many forms of pleasure, nor could we calculate about how to obtain future pleasures; furthermore, if we were utterly lacking in moderation, we would be unable to deploy the self-control needed to maximize long-term pleasure. (Irwin's [1995], 333-5 discussion of this point is particularly helpful.) This is clearly correct—we do require a basic level of self-mastery, as well as some reasoning ability and know-how in order to be maximally efficient hedonists. However, this leaves much knowledge and virtue untouched. For example, imagine that one's sole aim in life were pleasure, and that one achieved one's moment of most intense pleasure while proving the Goldbach conjecture. One might reasonably regret that this moment cannot be repeated, and seek some way (perhaps by destroying one's notes) that one might forget the proof, so that one could repeat the ecstasy of discovery over and over.

such a brand of hedonism seems inherently unstable; surely part of what makes acquiring knowledge and virtue worthwhile is that we value these end-states for their own sakes. If we did not recognize the end-states to have value, to constitute our good and to be ends worth stably securing, then their pursuit would be meaningless. We would turn out to be exactly like the fools criticized by the sophisticates for preferring a life of becoming to one of being (54e1-5a8); we would be the equivalents of the stonecurlews of the *Gorgias*, except instead of filling our leaky buckets with pleasures of the body, we would pursue their epistemic and moral equivalents.⁶²

Perhaps in raising this difficulty, I am giving Plato short shrift. If the distinction I carved between pleasure and fulfillment holds, and if fulfillment is indeed the better of the two, then perhaps we can learn to aspire to the latter, and, as far as possible, eschew the former. While we might welcome restitutive pleasures for the sake of the state of repletion they offer, we could learn to value the state of repletion above all else, and to wish that it might persist to the extent possible, even at the expense of the pleasures of restitution.⁶³ However, it is not clear to me that Plato, at least in his late period, thinks it possible for us to shake off our hedonic natures in this manner. In that case, he leaves us in a difficult position. If we do not undergo the sort of conversion which I have described, in which we come to recognize that pleasure lacks intrinsic

⁶² Gosling (1975), 210-11, 220-1 raises a similar objection; he responds to it by taking Plato to distance himself from the view of the sophisticates, and to hold that their analysis does not apply to the pleasure of knowledge.

⁶³ MacIntyre (1984), 188-90 offers a helpful illustration of this sort of motivational conversion. A child might initially be bribed by candy into playing chess, and hence be motivated by a good external to chess, the pleasure of consuming the candy. However, eventually, through playing chess, the child might come to value chess for goods internal to it, such as its analytical rigour. MacIntyre's overall analysis, however, owes more to Aristotle than to Plato, since he holds that pleasure can reside in the excellent exercise of a capacity, and hence be internal to the activity (197).

value, we will risk pursuing it at the expense of the end-state, which constitutes our objective good. Furthermore, we will be in a state of deep delusion about what our good consists in. However, the best we can hope for, it seems, is to recognize that pleasure lacks true value, but to continue to be driven by it, nonetheless. On the one hand, this will be helpful—in seeking to be like god, we must constantly undergo the process of becoming like god, and pleasure can serve as a powerful motivator. On the other hand, the result might be alienating—though we would still find ourselves driven by the desire for pleasure, we would simultaneously experience a sense of detachment, viewing pleasure from the outside, as something that, though it has a hold on us, lacks intrinsic worth. We would exhibit a sort of motivational deviance, driven to act by pleasure, even though we do not recognize this as, in itself, constituting a normative reason for action. Moran has recently suggested that should such estrangement persistently characterize our relations to ourselves, we might even cease to count as agents.⁶⁴

Suppose, though, that it were possible for us to shake off our hedonic natures and, furthermore, to assimilate fully to god. Where would this leave us? Would this really be a goal worth pursuing? The ahedonic state of the gods, who possess permanent and complete knowledge and virtue, seems dull, alienating and unattractive. In discussing the Makropulos case, Williams raises a general problem for immortality: perhaps if our lives were infinitely long, we would eventually be left with no categorical desires, nothing to strive for; in that case, life

⁶⁴ R. Moran (2001), chs. 3-4, esp. 126-7. These issues of motivation are, of course, difficult to untangle, since pleasure just is restitution, and hence is identical to that which gives us a normative reason for action, the process of becoming like god. The worry is that we might be inclined to primarily pursue restitutive processes *qua* pleasurable; for our motivations to be fully rational and consistent, we ought to pursue restitution for the sake of the ensuing state of repletion.

would no longer be worth living.⁶⁵ So too, Nozick, in describing the transformation machine, proposes that some of us would choose not to enter it, because we would be left with nothing to try for: ‘Would there be anything left for us *to do*? Do some theological views place God outside of time because an omniscient omnipotent being couldn’t fill up his days?’⁶⁶ Could it be that if we succeeded in becoming fully like god, our lives would be utterly devoid of meaning? *We* are the sorts of creatures who need something to strive for to make life fulfilling. Granted, if we could become fully divine, then we could not possibly find our state of static perfection wanting (after all, that would imply a lack, leaving us with something to desire!). But should we become fully divine, then we would cease to be ourselves. Given that full apotheosis is not a goal which Plato thinks we can achieve, he urges us to aim at becoming as like god as possible, not at being god. However, we surely cannot be wholehearted about the former unless we see the latter as the best possible state, as a *telos* worth approximating to the highest degree possible. But it is difficult to imagine that being a Platonic god is an end any human would wish upon himself.⁶⁷

Department of Philosophy

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⁶⁵ B. Williams (1973). Williams is, of course, a desire-satisfaction theorist, not a hedonist, but since, for Plato, the ahedonic state is good precisely because it entails the complete absence of desire, Williams’ concern is to the point.

⁶⁶ R. Nozick (1974), 44. The transformation machine is a vamped-up experience machine, which not only produces in you the experience of living any life you please, but also makes you into whatever sort of person you wish to be.

⁶⁷ I am grateful to audiences at the Work in Progress Group of the Claremont Colleges and at the Eighth Symposium Platonicum at Trinity College in Dublin for the opportunity to present this paper; an earlier version appeared in the Symposium Platonicum proceedings. I would also like to thank Paul Hurly, Brad Inwood and Chuck Young for their generous and insightful comments on this paper.

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