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This article was originally published in

## **Platonism and its Legacy**

*Selected Papers from the Fifteenth Annual Conference  
of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies*

Edited John F. Finamore and Tomáš Nejeschleba

ISBN 978 1 898910 886

**Published in 2019 by**

**The Prometheus Trust, Lydney.**

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# “Our concern, though, is not to be out of sin, but to be god”: assimilation to god according to Plotinus

Thomas Vidart

When Plato portrays the philosopher in the *Theaetetus*, he formulates the following precept:

*Theaetetus* 176a8-b3

Therefore we ought to try to escape from earth to the dwelling of the gods as quickly as we can; and to escape is to become like God, so far as this is possible; and to become like God is to become righteous and holy and wise.<sup>1</sup> (tr. North Fowler)

Plato makes assimilation to god (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ) a goal for human beings.<sup>2</sup> The reservation “so far as this is possible” (κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν) means that they cannot become completely godlike precisely because they are and remain human. Since god is righteous at the highest level, human beings can only try to be as righteous as possible. The reservation thus hints at the fact that the hierarchy between human beings and god cannot be totally abolished.

It has to be noticed that at the beginning of the treatise *On virtues* Plotinus quotes the passage from the *Theaetetus* which invites to become godlike without the reservation “so far as this is possible” which is present in Plato's dialogue:

Treatise 19 (I, 2), 1, 1-5

Since it is here that evils are, and “they must necessarily haunt this region,” and the soul wants to escape from evils, we must escape from here. What, then, is this escape? “Being made like god,” Plato says. And we become godlike “if we become

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<sup>1</sup> διὸ καὶ πειρᾶσθαι χρὴ ἐνθένδε ἐκεῖσε φεύγειν ὅτι τάχιστα. φυγὴ δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν· ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὄσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι.

<sup>2</sup> On the signification of Plato's precept, see Pradeau (2012) and van Riel (2016) 19-24.

righteous and holy with the help of wisdom,” and are altogether in virtue.<sup>3</sup> (tr. Armstrong)

It is not obvious at all that the lack of reservation is significant. Indeed, Plotinus quotes only a part of the sentence that can be read in the *Theaetetus* and the reservation may seem important to us only because it is echoed by other philosophers and in particular by Aristotle. The latter underlines the necessity for the human to become immortal to the extent possible thanks to the intellect which is divine:<sup>4</sup>

*Nicomachean Ethics* X, 7, 1177b32-1178a2

Nor ought we to obey those who enjoy that a man should have man's thoughts and a mortal the thoughts of mortality, but we ought so far as possible to achieve immortality, and do all that man may to live in accordance with the highest thing in him; for though this be small in bulk, in power and value it far surpasses all the rest.<sup>5</sup> (tr. Rackham)

Nevertheless, if the lack of reservation is not only a trivial detail, it means that the emphasis must not be put on the difference between human beings and god because human beings are able to become gods themselves. What could account for this ability? In this paper, I would like to show that, according to Plotinus, assimilation to god implies identification with the intelligible realities: one becomes indeed god when one identifies with the intelligible realities. What is at stake is the status of the human being: does the assimilation to god involve a process of renouncing humanity? Plotinus maintains that those who want to reach assimilation to god have not to be human any more. The reservation thus disappears because the difference between them and gods does not exist any more on condition that they identify with the intelligible realities. What is difficult is the fact of ceasing to be a human. The reservation “as far as possible” (κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν)

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<sup>3</sup> Ἐπειδὴ τὰ κακὰ ἐνταῦθα καὶ τόνδε τὸν τόπον περιπολεῖ ἐξ ἀνάγκης, βούλεται δὲ ἡ ψυχὴ φυγεῖν τὰ κακά, φευκτέον ἐντεῦθεν. Τίς οὖν ἡ φυγὴ; θεῶ, φησιν, ὁμοιωθῆναι. Τοῦτο δέ, εἰ δίκαιοι καὶ ὄσιοι μετὰ φρονήσεως γενοίμεθα καὶ ὅλως ἐν ἀρετῇ.

<sup>4</sup> On the meaning of Aristotle's tenet, and in particular of the reservation “so far as possible”, see Aubenque (2014) 169-174.

<sup>5</sup> οὐ χρὴ δὲ κατὰ τοὺς παραινούντας ἀνθρώπινα φρονεῖν ἄνθρωπον ὄντα οὐδὲ θνητὰ τὸν θνητόν, ἀλλ' ἐφ' ὅσον ἐνδέχεται ἀθανατίζειν καὶ πάντα ποιεῖν πρὸς τὸ ζῆν κατὰ τὸ κράτιστον τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ· εἰ γὰρ καὶ τῷ ὄγκῳ μικρόν ἐστι, δυνάμει καὶ τιμότητι πολὺ μᾶλλον πάντων ὑπερέχει.

which can actually be found in another passage from the treatise *On virtues* precisely underlines this difficulty:

Treatise 19 (I, 2), 7, 19-28

Perhaps the possessor of the virtues will know them, and how much he can get from them, and will act according to some of them as circumstances require. But when he reaches higher principles and different measures he will act according to these. For instance, he will not make self-control consist in that former observance of measure and limit, but will altogether separate himself, as far as possible, from his lower nature and will not live the life of the good man which civic virtue requires. He will leave that behind, and choose another, the life of the gods: for it is to them, not to good men, that we are to be made like.<sup>6</sup> (tr. Armstrong)

In this extract, Plotinus stresses the fact that we have to leave the human life in order to adopt the life of the gods.<sup>7</sup> The aim of this paper is then to study Plotinus' interpretation of the precept that Plato formulates in the *Theaetetus* and therefore to understand what this life of the gods is. This interpretation deals with metaphysical and ethical concerns: the assimilation to god is understood in Plotinus' thought as an identification with the intelligible realities, which enables to become virtuous.

### I. The process of moral imitation

The efforts that one makes in order to resemble god are, according to Plato in the *Theaetetus*, the form that the escape from here to there takes. This escape is due to the necessary existence of evils in the sensible place. In the treatise *On virtues*, Plotinus insists on the fact that the human being, and also the leading principle of the soul that the

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<sup>6</sup> Ἡ εἰδήσει γε αὐτὰς καὶ ὅσον παρ' αὐτῶν ἔξει; τάχα δέ ποτε περιστατικῶς ἐνεργήσει κατὰ τινὰς αὐτῶν. Ἐπὶ μείζους δὲ ἀρχὰς ἤκων καὶ ἄλλα μέτρα κατ' ἐκεῖνα πράξει: οἷον τὸ σωφρονεῖν οὐκ ἐν μέτρῳ ἐκείνῳ τιθεῖς, ἀλλ' ὄλως κατὰ τὸ δυνατὸν χωρίζων καὶ ὄλως ζῶν οὐχὶ τὸν ἀνθρώπου βίον τὸν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ὃν ἀξιοῖ ἢ πολιτικὴ ἀρετὴ, ἀλλὰ τοῦτον μὲν καταλιπὼν, ἄλλον δὲ ἐλόμενος τὸν τῶν θεῶν· πρὸς γὰρ τούτους, οὐ πρὸς ἀνθρώπους ἀγαθοὺς ἢ ὁμοίους.

<sup>7</sup> We have to notice that Plotinus generally uses the word θεός in the singular when he accounts for Plato's precept that one has to become godlike. It is for instance the case in the treatise 19 (I, 2), 1, 2. But he resorts to the plural form when he contrasts the life of the gods with the life of the good men in the treatise 19 (I, 2), 7, 27. The singular refers to the intelligible realm and the plural to the different intelligible realities. The intelligible realm is the whole made by the different intelligible realities.

sensible universe has, imitate the intelligible world because desire leads them to do so: the movement of assimilation is due to the desire for the intelligible realities.<sup>8</sup> This imitation enables them to possess wisdom. In this way, wisdom lies on the desire for the intelligible realities. Human beings possess the virtues and the order because they contemplate the intelligible world, but this does not imply that these qualities, which are the result of imitation, are present in the model itself. In order to account for this problem, Plotinus uses an analogy:

Treatise 19 (I, 2), 1, 33-35

And if something is made hot by the presence of fire, must the fire itself be heated by the presence of fire?<sup>9</sup> (tr. Armstrong)

As the fire makes an object hot without being itself heated by a fire, the intelligible enables people to be virtuous and it does not depend on a source which makes it virtuous. But this analogy has an important limit: in so far as the fire possesses itself the heat, it suggests that the intelligible is itself virtuous. It shows that virtue has not the same status for the human soul and for the intelligible world but it does not establish that the intelligible world is not itself virtuous: this analogy has thus to be corrected. That is the function of a second analogy:

Treatise 19 (I, 2), 1, 42-50

The perceptible house is not the same thing as the intelligible house, though it is made in its likeness; the perceptible house participates in arrangement and order, but There, in its formative principle, there is no arrangement or order or proportion. So then, if we participate in order and arrangement and harmony which come from There, and these constitute virtue here, and if the principles There have no need of harmony or order or arrangement, they will have no need of virtue either, and we shall all the same be made like them by the presence of virtue.<sup>10</sup> (tr. Armstrong)

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<sup>8</sup> On Plotinus' interpretation of the precept formulated by Plato that one has to become godlike, see Pradeau (2003) 115-125.

<sup>9</sup> Καὶ εἴ τι πυρὸς παρουσία θερμὸν ἐστίν, ἀνάγκη καὶ τὸ πῦρ αὐτὸ πυρὸς παρουσία θερμαίνεσθαι;

<sup>10</sup> Οὐδὲ γὰρ οἰκία ἢ αἰσθητὴ τὸ αὐτὸ τῆ νοητῆ, καίτοι ὁμοίωται· καὶ τάξεως δὲ καὶ κόσμου μεταλαμβάνει ἢ οἰκία ἢ αἰσθητὴ κάκει ἐν τῷ λόγῳ οὐκ ἔστι τάξις οὐδὲ κόσμος οὐδὲ συμμετρία. Οὕτως οὖν κόσμος καὶ τάξεως καὶ ὁμολογίας μεταλαμβάνοντες ἐκεῖθεν καὶ τούτων ὄντων τῆς ἀρετῆς ἐνθάδε, οὐ δεομένων δὲ τῶν ἐκεῖ ὁμολογίας οὐδὲ κόσμου οὐδὲ τάξεως, οὐδ' ἂν ἀρετῆς εἶη χρεῖα, καὶ ὁμοιούμεθα οὐδὲν ἦττον τοῖς ἐκεῖ δι' ἀρετῆς παρουσίαν.

The qualities of the sensible house come from a source which is itself deprived of those qualities. The connection between the sensible house and the intelligible one is moreover closer to the one that Plotinus evokes in order to account for moral imitation since in both cases it is the link between the sensible realm and the intelligible one.

## II. The paradox of resemblance

We have to face a paradox: the object which is imitated, that is to say god or the intelligible realm, does not possess the virtues that human beings have thanks to imitation. It is necessary in this way to know how we have to think this very particular imitation which makes the image resemble a model which is deprived of the characteristics that the image acquires by means of the imitation. Indeed, whereas one becomes virtuous when one identifies with the intelligible, the latter is not itself virtuous.

Plotinus tries to identify the quality which appears at the same time as virtue when it is in the image and as source of virtue when it is in the model:

Treatise 19 (I, 2), 2, 1-10

First then we must consider the virtues by which we assert that we are made like, in order that we may discover this one and the same reality which when we possess it as an imitation is virtue, but There, where it exists as an archetype, is not virtue. We should note that there are two kinds of likeness; one requires that there should be something the same in the things which are alike; this applies to things which derive their likeness equally from the same principle. But in the case of two things of which one is like the other, but the other is primary, not reciprocally related to the thing in its likeness and not said to be like it, likeness must be understood in a different sense; we must not require the same form in both, but rather a different one, since likeness has come about in this different way.<sup>11</sup> (tr. Armstrong)

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<sup>11</sup> Πρῶτον τοίνυν τὰς ἀρετὰς ληπτέον καθ' ἃς φαμεν ὁμοιοῦσθαι, ἴν' αὖ τὸ αὐτὸ εὔρωμεν ὃ παρ' ἡμῖν μὲν μίμημα ὄν ἀρετὴ ἐστίν, ἐκεῖ δὲ οἷον ἀρχέτυπον ὄν οὐκ ἀρετὴ, ἐπισημηνάμενοι ὡς ἡ ὁμοίωσις διττὴ· καὶ ἡ μὲν τις ταυτὸν ἐν τοῖς ὁμοίοις ἀπαιτεῖ, ὅσα ἐπίσης ὁμοίωται ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτοῦ· ἐν οἷς δὲ τὸ μὲν ὁμοίωται πρὸς ἕτερον, τὸ δὲ ἕτερον ἐστὶ πρῶτον, οὐκ ἀντιστρέφον πρὸς ἐκεῖνο οὐδὲ ὅμοιον αὐτοῦ λεγόμενον, ἐνταῦθα τὴν ὁμοίωσιν ἄλλον τρόπον ληπτέον οὐ ταυτὸν εἶδος ἀπαιτοῦντας, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον ἕτερον, εἴπερ κατὰ τὸν ἕτερον τρόπον ὁμοίωται.

The expression “this one and the same reality” (τὸ αὐτό) underlines the fact that there is only one quality: it takes different aspects depending on its substratum. The identification of this quality is difficult because the image and the model are connected with each other by participation. Indeed, two things which come from the same source have qualities in common in an obvious way. As for things which belong to different degrees in an ontological hierarchy, they have a similarity but we do not easily grasp what they have in common. We have thus to distinguish two kinds of resemblance. The common quality is identified in chapter 6:

Treatise 19 (I, 2), 6, 11-16

What, then, is each particular virtue when a man is in this state? Wisdom, theoretical and practical, consists in the contemplation of that which intellect contains; but intellect has it by immediate contact. There are two kinds of wisdom, one in intellect, one in soul. That which is There [in intellect] is not virtue, that in the soul is virtue. What is it, then, There? The act of the self, what it really is; virtue is what comes Thence and exists here in another.<sup>12</sup> (tr. Armstrong)

Wisdom appears in the behavior of a human being as a virtue but it does not take the form of virtue in the intelligible realm: it is according to Plotinus the activity of the Intellect itself, understood as the second principle. As a result, this activity is the model of the virtue that we can observe in the acts of a human being. This accounts for the importance that the contemplation of the intelligible realities has: it enables human beings to imitate the intelligible realities and therefore to acquire virtue.

### III. The inner unification

Virtue requires a kind of unity which is precisely provided by the contemplation of the intelligible. Indeed, the imitation of the latter enables one to become unified because the intelligible world possesses a higher level of unity. Those who contemplate the intelligible realities do not withdraw from themselves: they become more unified.

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<sup>12</sup> Τίς οὖν ἐκάστη ἀρετὴ τῷ τοιούτῳ; Ἡ σοφία μὲν καὶ φρόνησις ἐν θεωρίᾳ ὧν νοῦς ἔχει· νοῦς δὲ τῇ ἐπαφῇ. Διττὴ δὲ ἐκατέρα, ἡ μὲν ἐν νῶ οὔσα, ἡ δὲ ἐν ψυχῇ. Κάκει μὲν οὐκ ἀρετὴ, ἐν δὲ ψυχῇ ἀρετὴ. Ἐκεῖ οὖν τί; Ἐνέργεια αὐτοῦ καὶ ὁ ἔστιν· ἐνταῦθα δὲ τὸ ἐν ἄλλῳ ἐκεῖθεν ἀρετὴ.

Because human beings belong at the same time to the sensible world and to the intelligible universe, they are in a position to leave the first one and to turn towards the second one. We even have to deal with a moral requirement: one has to escape in order to go there, that is to say in the intelligible realm. This precept is precisely the one which is established in the *Theaetetus*. The escape is indeed a unification for the soul, as underlined in the first treatise *On difficulties about the soul*:

Treatise 27 (IV, 3), 32, 19-20

For the higher soul also flies from multiplicity, and gathers multiplicity into one and abandons the indefinite [...].<sup>13</sup> (tr. Armstrong)

The human being is indeed characterized by multiplicity: besides what Plotinus considers as the true human there are in particular desires. The fact that there are several components in the human is evoked by the description of the different human beings: the inner multiplicity is underlined by the outer plurality. According to the treatise *How the multitude of the Forms came into being, and on the Good*, a kind of human being corresponds to each power of the soul. As there is a vegetative soul, a sensory one and a rational one, there is a vegetative human, a sensory one and a rational one. The unity in diversity which is the specific feature of the intelligible world constitutes the model that one has to imitate in order to unify the various elements that one has within oneself. The unity of the intelligible is indeed all-inclusive.

Inner unification and union with the divine are in this way two different aspects of the same process. In order to account for the latter, we have to lay the emphasis on the hierarchy among the different powers of the soul and therefore among the different sorts of human beings. Indeed, the unification implies that one makes the higher part prevail over the other ones. The analogy with the different parts which constitute a science helps us to understand how the movement of unification can be performed. Indeed, in chapter 2 of the treatise *Various considerations*, Plotinus draws a comparison between the human and a science which remains one when it is divided into parts. Each part of the science has potentially the whole in it. Human beings are in the same configuration: the different principles that they have in

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<sup>13</sup> ἐπεὶ καὶ φεύγει ἐκ τῶν πολλῶν, καὶ τὰ πολλὰ εἰς ἓν συνάγει τὸ ἄπειρον ἀφιεῖς.



themselves are not separate. They converge on the intelligible realm which is the object of contemplation. The fact that they possess the intellect which enables them to identify with the intelligible realities prevents human beings from being scattered. There is a coherence between the different elements which constitute the human being but it is insufficient. This unification has in fact to be a simplification: when one ascends towards the intelligible, one has to leave the different aspects which make one multiple.

#### IV. The nature of god according to Plotinus

The unification of the different aspects that the human being has leads to a higher level: the one of identification itself. Assimilation to god and identification with the intelligible realities are the same process: Plotinus maintains indeed that the gods are the intelligible realities themselves. The human is thus able to become god and not only to resemble god who contemplates the intelligible realities.

In this respect, the difference between Plotinus and Plato has to be stressed. It is necessary to distinguish, when we evoke Plato's thought, the gods and the intelligible realities: the latter are higher than gods.<sup>14</sup> The divinities who are usually honored or the world are for instance gods and they are inferior to the intelligible realities. The human being and god thus contemplate the same objects, that is to say the intelligible realities. Plato applies the term "divine" (θεῖον) to the intelligible (as it is for instance the case in the *Phaedo* 81a5) but this means that it is perfect and not that it is god.

Plotinus also considers the intelligible or the Intellect as divine in the treatise *On virtues*, when he evokes the soul which is virtuous, but according to him it is due to the fact that it is itself god:

Treatise 19 (I, 2), 3, 19-22

One would not be wrong in calling this state of the soul likeness to God, in which its activity is intellectual, and it is free in this way from bodily affections. For the Divine too is pure, and its activity is of such a kind that that which imitates it has wisdom.<sup>15</sup> (tr. Armstrong)

<sup>14</sup> On the distinction between the gods and the divine realities according to Plato, see Brisson (2012) 14-15.

<sup>15</sup> Τὴν δὲ τοιαύτην διάθεσιν τῆς ψυχῆς καθ' ἣν νοεῖ τε καὶ ἀπαθῆς οὕτως ἐστίν, εἴ τις ὁμοίωσιν λέγοι πρὸς θεόν, οὐκ ἂν ἁμαρτάνοι· καθαρὸν γὰρ καὶ τὸ θεῖον καὶ ἡ ἐνέργεια τοιαύτη, ὡς τὸ μιμούμενον ἔχειν φρόνησιν.

Assimilation to god is identification with the divine that is to say the intelligible or the Intellect. When we succeed in making our life coincide with the life of the Intellect which is a perfect one, we identify with the intelligible realities. The intellectual aspect of assimilation is thus more important than the moral one in Plotinus' reading of Plato's precept that one has to become godlike or, more exactly, the moral aspect of assimilation depends on the intellectual one: virtue has to be understood as intellectual identification with the intelligible realities. In his study on "The ideal of godlikeness", D. Sedley contrasts Plotinus' interpretation with the moral one developed by Xenocrates which influenced Middle Platonist philosophers such as Alcinous in chapter 28 of the *Didaskalikos*: "At the other extreme, Plotinus (*Enneads* 1. 2) reads the *homoiōsis theōi* doctrine as describing a purely intellectual assimilation to a higher being. The moral virtues of justice, temperance, etc. described as states of psychic harmony in *Republic* 4 are on his reading of Plato barely more than quasi-virtues, drummed in by habituation, a mere political expedient in the interests of a well-run society. True virtue consists in the soul's release from the body's concerns and into the realm of pure intelligibles".<sup>16</sup>

Since assimilation to god is identification with the intelligible realities, the life of the gods is precisely the life which consists in identifying with the higher realities.

#### V. The necessity to renounce humanity

Plotinus maintains that we have to renounce the usual characteristics of the human life in order to become the intelligible realm itself. In the case of the identification with the intelligible, we cease being a part of the sensible universe in order to be the entire intelligible world. This coincidence implies that we abandon our former life which is a human one and adopt the life of the gods.

It is necessary, according to Plotinus, that we regain a connection with the intelligible realities which has been partially lost because of our presence in the sensible universe. The highest power of our soul (that is the intellect) remains permanently in the intelligible realm, but before our birth, we used to be entirely in the intelligible world.

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<sup>16</sup> Sedley (1999) 322.

Since the different Forms are altogether one in the intelligible, the human being as a Form is not an independent part of the intelligible: the part is not different from the whole. When we identify with the intelligible during our incarnate life, we precisely regain this identity. Indeed, identification with the intelligible is not mere contemplation of the intelligible world, in which the subject remains distinct from the object. The assimilation to god consists in being the intelligible itself and not only in resembling it. In chapter 7 of the second treatise *On the presence of being, one and the same, everywhere as a whole*, Plotinus insists on this point:

Treatise 23 (VI, 5), 7, 4-11

If then we have a part in true knowledge, we are those; we do not apprehend them as distinct within ourselves, but we are within them. For, since the others, and not only ourselves, are those, we are all those. So then, being together with all things, we are those: so then, we are all and one. So therefore when we look outside that on which we depend we do not know that we are one, like faces which are many on the outside but have one head inside.<sup>17</sup> (tr. Armstrong)

We can find in this chapter a description of the condition reached by those who succeed in identifying with the intelligible realities. This identification with the intelligible realities abolishes any kind of difference between human beings and higher realities.

In order to reach this condition, it is necessary to abandon all things which belong to the sensible world. The goal of this process is to make one with the intelligible. This process has to be understood as opposite to the particularization which leads one to be a human being. According to Plotinus, the rational soul goes down at the birth and meets the irrational soul which comes from the vegetative soul of the world and which is already present in the body. In order to identify with the intelligible realm, one has to leave behind all the elements which are not the intellect itself. The latter is the only power which could enable one to identify with the intelligible. This identity is thus at the same time an original state and the result of a demanding task

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<sup>17</sup> εἰ οὖν ἀληθινῆς ἐπιστήμης μετέχομεν, ἐκεῖνά ἐσμεν οὐκ ἀπολαβόντες αὐτὰ ἐν ἡμῖν, ἀλλ' ἡμεῖς ἐν ἐκείνοις ὄντες. ὄντων δὲ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων, οὐ μόνον ἡμῶν, ἐκεῖνα, πάντες ἐσμεν ἐκεῖνα. ὁμοῦ ἄρα ὄντες μετὰ πάντων ἐσμεν ἐκεῖνα: πάντα ἄρα ἐσμεν ἓν. ἔξω μὲν οὖν ὀρώντες ἢ ὄθεν ἐξήμμεθα ἀγνοοῦμεν ἓν ὄντες, οἷον πρόσωπα [πολλὰ] εἰς τὸ ἔξω πολλά, κορυφὴν ἔχοντα εἰς τὸ εἶσω μίαν.

which consists in separating from all the elements which are in connection with the body. In order to adopt the life of the Intellect, one has to cease being a human. The treatise *On the intelligible beauty* stresses this necessity:

Treatise 31 (V, 8), 7, 31-35

And even now, man also is a craftsman, of a form other than himself since he has become something else, what he is; for he has ceased to be the All now that he has become man; but when he ceases to be man he “walks on high and directs the whole universe”; for when he comes to belong to the whole he makes the whole.<sup>18</sup> (tr. Armstrong)

The expression “when he ceases to be man” means that the identification with the intelligible realities occurs on condition that a radical change is made. The latter enables one to find back one's rank among the intelligibles and to run the sensible world, which is suggested by the quotation from the *Phaedrus* (246c1-2).

Those who renounce humanity become gods. In the treatise *On virtues*, Plotinus describes the process of purification which leads to this result: it consists for the soul in separating from the affections which are due to the body and especially from the involuntary impulses which prevent one from being only god because they are due to a demon (δαίμων). But when the soul succeeds in freeing itself from the involuntary impulses, one is only god. One is then described with words which are inspired by the *Phaedrus* (246e4-6) as one of the gods who follow Zeus:

Treatise 19 (I, 2), 6, 1-11

There is no sin in anything of this sort for a man, but only right action. Our concern, though, is not to be out of sin, but to be god. If, then, there is still any element of involuntary impulse of this sort, a man in this state will be a god or spirit who is double, or rather who has with him someone else who possesses a different kind of virtue: if there is nothing, he will be simply god, and one of those gods who follow the First. For he himself is the god who came Thence, and his own real nature, if he

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<sup>18</sup> καίτοι καὶ ἄνθρωπος δημιουργεῖ εἶδος αὐτοῦ ἄλλο ὃ ἐστι γενόμενος· ἀπέστη γὰρ τοῦ εἶναι τὸ πᾶν νῦν ἄνθρωπος γενόμενος· παυσάμενος δὲ τοῦ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι μετεωροπορεῖ φησι καὶ πάντα τὸν κόσμον διοικεῖ· γενόμενος γὰρ τοῦ ὄλου τὸ ὄλον ποιεῖ.

becomes what he was when he came, is There. When he came here he took up his dwelling with someone else, whom he will make like himself to the best of the powers of his real nature, so that if possible this someone else will be free from disturbance or will do nothing of which his master does not approve.<sup>19</sup> (tr. Armstrong)

Plotinus mentions in this passage the demons who follow Zeus with the other gods according to the myth of the *Phaedrus*. When one gets rid of the involuntary impulses, one does not have any more a demon in oneself. Since the human being becomes god, it is legitimate to evoke divinization more than godlikeness.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, one identifies with the intelligible realities and as a result one becomes god since the gods are themselves the intelligibles. The literal reading of the reference to the myth of the *Phaedrus* and the allegorical interpretation converge: according to the first one, the human beings become gods who follow Zeus and according to the second one, they become intelligible realities.<sup>21</sup>

The reservation “as far as possible” (κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν) is applied not to assimilation to god but to separation from the human body because when one succeeds in leaving the bodily affections, one becomes actually god. Thanks to purification, those who coincide with the divine realities become gods. As a result, on condition that they cease being human, there is no difference between the life that they have and the one that gods themselves possess: the difficulty lies in the process

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<sup>19</sup> Ἔστι μὲν οὖν οὐδὲν τῶν τοιούτων ἀμαρτία, ἀλλὰ κατόρθωσις ἀνθρώπων· ἀλλ’ ἡ σπουδὴ οὐκ ἔξω ἀμαρτίας εἶναι, ἀλλὰ θεὸν εἶναι. Εἰ μὲν οὖν τι τῶν τοιούτων ἀπροαίρετον γίνοιτο, θεὸς ἂν εἴη ὁ τοιοῦτος καὶ δαίμων διπλοῦς ὢν, μᾶλλον δὲ ἔχων σὺν αὐτῷ ἄλλον ἄλλην ἀρετὴν ἔχοντα· εἰ δὲ μηδέν, θεὸς μόνον· θεὸς δὲ τῶν ἐπομένων τῷ πρώτῳ. Αὐτὸς μὲν γὰρ ἐστὶν ὃς ἦλθεν ἐκεῖθεν καὶ τὸ καθ’ αὐτόν, εἰ γένοιτο οἷος ἦλθεν, ἐκεῖ ἐστὶν· ὃ δὲ συνφύκησθαι ἐνθάδε ἤκων, καὶ τοῦτον αὐτῷ ὁμοιώσει κατὰ δύναμιν τὴν ἐκείνου, ὥστε, εἰ δυνατόν, ἀπληκτον εἶναι ἢ ἀπρακτόν γε τῶν μὴ δοκούντων τῷ δεσπότη.

<sup>20</sup> The shift occurs in the course of the treatise *On virtues*: in line 2 of chapter 5, Plotinus successively evokes assimilation (ἡ ὁμοίωσις) and identity (ἡ ταυτότης). See J.-M. Flamand (2003) 458 (note 107).

<sup>21</sup> On the allegorical interpretation, see Armstrong (1966) 143 (note 1): “The allusion is to the procession of the gods in *Phaedrus* 246E4 ff. In Plato those who follow the first god, Zeus the leader of the procession, are the philosophical souls (250B7, 252E1); but Plotinus is probably using Plato’s language to express his own thought and means by the First his own First Principle, the Good, and by the gods who follow, the divinities of the realm of Intellect”.

which enables them to separate from the affections linked to the body.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> I would like to thank very much John Finamore and Tomáš Nejeschleba who organized the Olomouc Conference, Crystal Addey and Robert Berchman who set up the panel "Divine Power and Presence in Later Platonism: Theurgy, Ritual, Epistemology, Aesthetics, and Metaphysics", the Conference participants, the referee and finally Virginie Thomas who agreed to read over this paper in order to check its English.

