"Pauline Christology, ancient religion and Philosophy, and the doctrine of the Incarnation."
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1. Introduction

2. Greco-Roman language

3. The gods' and Christ's divine self-transformation

§1. I have exchanged my divine *form* for a mortal one (μορφὴν δ' ἀμείψας ἐκ θεοῦ βροτησίαν) and have come to the waters of Dirce and Ismenus (Euripides *Bacchae* 4–5, cf. 54, LCL).

§2. The god Proteus "… effortlessly assumed (μετελάμβανεν) every kind of *form* (ἅπασαν ἰδέαν μορφῆς) being either a god or superhuman, with the power to deceive eyes …" (Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Demosthenes* 8:23, LCL)

§3. On Aphrodite: " … surely *she takes on* all sorts of *forms* (μορφὰς … παντοίας εἴληφε)[1] which are even, in a way, unlike each other." (Plato *Philebus* 12c, LCL)

§4. "Chiron, therefore, having advised Peleus to seize her [the goddess Thetis] and hold her fast in spite of her *metamorphosing* (αὐτὴν μεταμορφουμένην), he watched for his chance and carried her off (συναρπάζει), and though *she became* (γινομένην), now fire, now water, and now a beast, he did not let her go till he saw that she had resumed her former shape (τὴν ἀρχαίαν μορφήν)" (Apollodorus *Library* 3:13:5, LCL).

§5. "… Zeus, lord of all, reveals his power in all else, but deigns to approach beauty in humble guise (ταπεινὸς γιγνόμενος). For in the likeness of [the Theban general] Amphitryon (Ἀμφιτρύωνι μὲν γὰρ εἰκασθεὶς) he came to Alcmene [Amphitryon's wife], and as a shower of gold he united (συνεγένετο) with Danae [by whom he conceived Perseus], and in the guise of a swan (κύκνος δὲ γενόμενος) he took refuge in the bosom of Nemesis, and again in this form (τούτῳ δὲ πάλιν ὁμοιωθείς) he espoused Leda (Isocrates *Helen* 59, LCL).

§6. Zeus seduces and abducts Europa: "willing at once to escape the jealous Hera's wrath and beguile the maiden's gentle heart, [Zeus] hid the god, shifted his frame and *became* a bull (κρύψε θεὸν καὶ τρέψε δέμας καὶ γείνετο ταῦρος)" (Moschus *Europa* 77–79).

§7. "'the gods *in the likeness of men* (ὁμοιωθέντες ἀνθρώποις) have come down to us!' Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker" (Acts 14:11–12).

§8. "many cases of metamorphosis involve not just a change of appearance but a process or a moment of 'becoming'. The most indicative word in these cases is usually γίγνομαι (*gignomai*), "I become".' (Richard Buxton, *Forms,* 23).

§9. "At this same time, the myths relate, Dionysus showed himself (ἐπιφανέντα) on the island, and because of the beauty of Ariadne he took the maiden away from Theseus and

[1] The word εἴληφε is the 3rd sing perf. indic. act. of λαμβάνω.

kept her as his lawful wife, loving her exceedingly. Indeed, after her death he considered her worthy of immortal honours (ἀθανάτων καταξιῶσαι τιμῶν) because of the tender affection (διὰ τὴν φιλοστοργίαν) he had for her, and placed her among the stars (καταστερίσαντα) of heaven …" (Diodorus 4.61.5, LCL)

The divine self-transformation language in v. 7 is encased in statements have no parallel in the pagan texts:

[7a] but (rather) emptied (ἐκένωσεν) himself,
[7b] taking the form of a slave,
[7c] becoming in the likeness of men
[7d] and being found in the figure of a man,
[8a] he humbled himself,
[8b] becoming obedient all the way to death,
even death on a cross.

4. τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ "the being that is in a manner equal with God"

§10. 'Verily wise Zeus carried off golden-haired Ganymede because of his beauty, to be amongst the Deathless Ones (ἵν' ἀθανάτοισι μετείη) and pour drink for the gods in the house of Zeus — [205] a wonder to see—honoured by all the immortals as he draws the red nectar from the golden bowl. But grief that could not be soothed filled the heart of Tros (Ganymede's father); for he knew not whither the heaven-sent whirlwind had caught up his dear son, so that he mourned him always, unceasingly, [210] until Zeus pitied him and gave him high-stepping horses such as carry the immortals (τ' ἀθανάτους) as recompense for his son. These he gave him as a gift. And at the command of Zeus, the Guide, the slayer of Argus, told him all, and that his son *would be immortal and unageing equally with the gods* (ὡς ἔοι ἀθάνατος καὶ ἀγήρως ἶσα θεοῖσιν). [215] So when Tros heard these tidings from Zeus, he no longer kept mourning but rejoiced in his heart and rode joyfully with his storm-footed horses'. (Homeric Hymns 5 [*To Aphrodite*] 202–217 (late C7th and mid-C6th B.C.E., LCL)

5. τὸ εἶναι: divine 'being' (that 'becomes')—a dynamic ontology

§11. Plato *Rep.* 2:380d …"Do you think that God is a wizard and capable of manifesting himself by design, now in one aspect, now in another, at one time himself changing (τοτὲ μὲν αὐτὸν γιγνόμενον) and altering his shape in many transformations (πολλὰς μορφάς) and at another deceiving us and causing us to believe such things about him; or that he is simple and less likely than anything else to depart from his own form?" … [382e] … "From every point of view the divine and the divinity are free from falsehood." "By all means." "Then God is altogether simple and true in deed and word, and neither changes himself nor deceives others by visions or words or the sending of signs [383a] in waking or in dreams." (LCL

§12. Plato *Tim.* 27d … "Now first of all we must, in my judgement, make the following distinction. What is that which is Existent (τὸ ὂν) always [28a] and has no Becoming (γένεσιν)? And what is that which is Becoming (τὸ γιγνόμενον) always and never is Existent (ὂν)? Now the one of these is apprehensible by thought with the aid of reasoning, since it is

ever uniformly existent; whereas the other is an object of opinion with the aid of unreasoning sensation, since it becomes and perishes and is never really existent." (LCL)

§13. Plato *Phaedo* 78d "Is the absolute essence (αὐτὴ ἡ οὐσία), which we … call *true being* (ἧς λόγον δίδομεν τοῦ εἶναι), always the same or is it liable to change? Absolute equality, absolute beauty, any absolute existence, true being—do they ever admit of any change whatsoever? Or does each absolute essence, since it is uniform and exists by itself, remain the same and never in any way admit of any change?" "It must," said Cebes, "necessarily remain the same, [78e] Socrates". (LCL)

§14. 'For the god (Apollo) addresses each one of us … with the words, 'Know Thyself', as a form of welcome, … and we in turn reply to him 'Thou art (εἶ)', as rending unto him a form of address which is truthful, free from deception, and the only one befitting him only, *the proper address of Being* (τὴν τοῦ εἶναι προσαγόρευσιν). The fact is that *we really have no share in Being* (Ἡμῖν μὲν γὰρ ὄντως τοῦ εἶναι μέτεστιν οὐδέν), but every mortal nature is between *becoming* and corruption (πᾶσα θνητὴ φύσις ἐν μέσῳ γενέσεως καὶ φθορᾶς γενομένη), and presents only a dim and uncertain semblance and appearance of itself and if you apply the whole force of your mind in your desire to apprehend it, it is like unto the violent grasping of water, which, by squeezing and compression, loses the handful enclosed, as it spurts through the fingers; even so Reason, pursuing the exceedingly clear appearance of every one of those things that are susceptible to modification and change, is baffled by the one aspect of its coming into being (τῇ … εἰς τὸ γιγνόμενον αὐτοῦ), and by the other of its passing away; and thus it is unable to apprehend a single thing that is abiding or really existent (ὄντος ὄντως).

…

Wherefore *its becoming never accomplishes Being* (εἰς τὸ εἶναι περαίνει τὸ γιγνόμενον αὐτῆς) because of the unceasing and unstaying process of *generation* (τὴν γένεσιν), which, ever bringing change, produces from the seed an embryo, then a babe, then a child, and in due course a boy, a young man, a mature man, an elderly man, an old man, causing the first generations and ages to pass away by those which succeed them. But we have a ridiculous fear of one death, we who have already died so many deaths, and still are dying!' (Plutarch *The E at Delphi* §§17–18 [*Mor.* 392a–c], LCL, cf. §19 [*Mor.* 392e–393a] and Plutarch's *Reply to Colotes* 14–16 [*Mor.* 1116b–d]).

§14. Of this tent he says that it has received the title of 'Tent of Testimony,' using his words advisedly, in order that it (the tent) might be *of the one who IS* (ἵν' ἡ τοῦ ὄντος ὑπάρχῃ), and not merely receive the title. For among the virtues, the virtue of God is according to truth, constituted according to *being* (κατὰ τὸ εἶναι συνεστῶσα), since God alone subsists in *being* (ὁ θεὸς μόνος ἐν τῷ εἶναι ὑφέστηκεν). This is why, of necessity, he will say of himself, 'I am He that is' (ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν) (Exod 3:14) implying that others after Him are not of that which IS, *according* to *being* (οὐκ ὄντων κατὰ τὸ εἶναι), but are reckoned to subsist only by opinion. (Philo *The Worse Attacks the Better* 160).

6. The incarnation expresses God's desire for humanity, but is not an *harpagmos*.

On the meaning of ἁρπαγμός:

1. The word is related to the verb ἁρπάζω "to seize, snatch, plunder" and cognates.
2. **As a noun ending in –μός for which there is a cognate noun ending in —μα we expect** ἁρπαγμός **to have an active sense of *seizing*.**

3. **That ἁρπαγμός has an active sense *in this text* is confirmed by its role in a double accusative construction, where the equation of "being in a manner equal with God" with ἁρπαγμός is denied**.
4. Because there is another noun, ἁρπαγή, which can have the active sense of "robbery, seizure, rapine," **ἁρπαγμός probably does not simply mean "robbery" or "seizure".**
5. **Three non-Christian texts all use the word ἁρπαγμός to mean "marriage by abduction" or "abduction for conjugal relations".**

§15. Pausanias *Description of Greece* (written c. 150 C.E.) 1.20.3 (on Corinth) "The oldest sanctuary of Dionysus is near the theatre. Within the precincts are two temples and two statues of Dionysus, the Eleuthereus and the one Alcamenes made of ivory and gold. There are paintings here—Dionysus bringing Hephaestus up to heaven. One of the Greek legends is that Hephaestus, when he was born, was thrown down by Hera. In revenge he sent as a gift a golden chair with invisible fetters. When Hera sat down she was held fast, and Hephaestus refused to listen to any other of the gods save Dionysus—in him he reposed the fullest trust—and after making him drunk Dionysus brought him to heaven. Besides this picture there are also represented Pentheus and Lycurgus paying the penalty of their insolence to Dionysus, *Ariadne asleep, Theseus putting out to sea, and Dionysus arriving for the conjugal abduction of Ariadne* (ἥκων ἐς τον ἀριάδνης ἁρπαγμόν).[2]

§16. (Pseudo-)Plutarch *On the Education of Children* 15 (*Moralia* 12A): "For when I have regard to those uncompromising fathers, harsh and surly in their manner, who think the society of admirers an intolerable outrage to their sons, I feel cautious about standing as its sponsor and advocate. But again, when I think of Socrates, Plato, Xenophon, Aeschines, Cebes, and that whole band of men who sanctioned affection between men, and thus guided the youth onward to learning, leadership, and virtuous conduct, I am of a different mind again, and am inclined to emulate their example. Euripides gives testimony in their favour when he says: Among mankind another love exists, That of an upright, chaste, and noble soul. Nor may we omit the remark of Plato wherein jest and seriousness are combined. For he says that those who have acquitted themselves nobly ought to have the right to kiss any fair one they please. Now we ought indeed to drive away those whose desire is for mere outward beauty, but to admit without reserve those who are lovers of the soul. And while the sort of love prevailing at Thebes and in Elis is to be avoided, *as well as the so-called kidnapping in Crete* (τὸν ἐν Κρήτῃ καλούμενον ἁρπαγμόν), that which is found at Athens and in Lacedaemon is to be emulated".

§17. Vettius Valens' astronomical *Anthology* (c. 150–175 C.E.) 2.38: "If the moon rules the Lot of Fortune and Mars the Marriage-bringer, and if they are in aspect with each other, the marriage will be (ὁ γάμος ἔσται) by force, by kidnapping (δι' ἁρπαγῆς), or by war and captivity. If Jupiter is also in aspect, later the marriage will be legitimized. If Mars is in opposition to the moon, with Saturn and the sun in aspect, the husband will be an acknowledged homosexual. … Venus is the houseruler, Mercury holds the Place of Marriage, and Saturn is in aspect with both, the native will be promiscuous and live in brothels—but if Jupiter is also in aspect, she will be purchased and become a loving wife. If Jupiter is not in aspect, she will live shamelessly, in misery. If in the preceding configuration, Venus is found in Pisces or Capricorn, she will also be

[2] Ms Va. All other mss: ἥκων ἐς τῆς Ἀριάδνης τὴν ἁρπαγήν "Dionysus arriving for Ariadne's carrying off".

> depraved. If Mars holds Daimon and the moon holds the Marriage-bringer, *the marriage will be an abduction* (ἁρπαγμὸς ὁ γάμος ἔσται). If the two are in opposition and have Saturn or the sun in aspect, the perpetrator will be recognized and caught. If Venus rules the Marriage-bringer and Mars the Lot of Fortune, the marriage will be the result of seduction. If in addition Saturn is in aspect with Mercury, and Jupiter is absent, the native will be convicted of adultery. As for the rest of the configurations, whatever has been said of the masculine nativities should be applied to the feminine as well. Even if this exposition seems quite complicated, it will become most clear to these who read.

In view of these linguistic points, Phil 2:6 should be translated:

> "who, being in the form of God, reckoned the being that is a manner equal with God—*the divine modus operandi*—(to be) not abducting for marriage".

(i) Polemic against the gods' erotic abductions

(ii) Polemic against the sex lives of divine rulers

§18. "… when Drusilla (Caligula's sister) was married to the ex-consul Lucius Cassius Longinus, Caligula abducted (*abduxit*) her and openly treated her as if she were his lawful wife" (Suetonius *Calig.* 24:1).

§19. On Caligula's self-claims: "… he was formed to be Jupiter and because of this he also had pretext to be united with many other women, especially with his sisters (Ζεύς τε εἶναι ἐπλάττετο, καὶ κατὰ τοῦτο καὶ γυναιξὶν ἄλλαις τε πολλαῖς καὶ ταῖς ἀδελφαῖς μάλιστα συνεῖναι προεφασίσατο) (Cassius Dio *Roman History* 59.26.5)

(iii) Christ reveals a true divine desire for humanity

7. Conclusion

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