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'The Being that is in a Manner Equal with God' (Phil. 2:6c): A Self-Transforming, Incarnational, Divine Ontology

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Abstract

The article challenges the consensus that τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ (Phil. 2:6c) means 'equality with God' and denotes a status. Linguistic analysis, contextual considerations and a thorough investigation of an inventory of a hundred and forty-nine extant Greek references to divine equality (ἴσος /ἴσα + θεός) show that Phil. 2:6c means 'being (that is) in a manner equal with God'. Although it evokes well known language for the status of rulers who received 'honours equal to the gods', it has a distinct, rarely attested, but Homeric, syntax (cf. *Iliad* 5:441–2; 21:315), for which the closest parallel is Homeric Hymns 5, line 214. As such, it denotes a dynamic ontology, a mode of being expressed, or actualised, in Christ's incarnational self-transformation (vv. 7–8). The words also serve a creative affirmation and subversion of the middle Platonic distinction between 'being' and 'becoming' (as that was expressed in Plutarch and Philo): Christ exists and acts from 'being' (ὑπάρχων … τὸ εἶναι v. 6) and is misperceived in the realm of 'becoming' (γενόμενος … γενόμενος vv. 7–8). But, against the Platonists, he has a divine 'being' that 'becomes'.

The purpose of this article is to bring new linguistic and historical data to the interpretation of the words τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ in Phil. 2:6c, and in so doing show that the current consensus that they denote a status—'equality with God'—is untenable. The words denote rather '*a, or the, being in a manner equal with God*'; a particular kind, or way of being, or of living—a dynamic, incarnational, divine ontology.

Philippians 2:6c and its immediate literary context present many contested interpretative issues. In our judgements about v. 6c—and in the presentation of the argument which follows—we presume three points about the context that can be merely stated, without a full defence, at the outset.

Firstly, verses 6–11 are a poetic and hymnic piece praising Christ as a divine being. As such Paul is probably quoting a para-Philippians piece (that is, one composed by Paul or somebody else prior to the writing of this letter). These points are currently disputed and the argument that follows does not rest on their being true. However, they represent the view that the majority have held since Ernst Lohmeyer's seminal *Kyrios Jesus* and are defended in several recent discussions.[1] The findings of this article add some new support for the para-Pauline hymn thesis.

Secondly, whilst the second half of the passage (vv. 9–11) is built up around a creative, Christological, interpretation of a prophetic scripture (Isa. 45:23), the first half (vv. 6–8) employs Greco-Roman, not Jewish, language to describe Christ's pre-incarnate state, his earthly life and death. In particular, it uses the quasi-technical terminology of age-old stories of gods and goddesses transforming

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[1] E. Lohmeyer, *Kyrios Jesus: eine Untersuchung zu Phil. 2, 5-11* (C. Winter: Heidelberg, 1928); M. W. Martin and B. A. Nash, 'Philippians 2:6–11 as Subversive *Hymnos*: A Study in the Light of Ancient Rhetorical Theory', *JTS* 66 (2015), pp. 90–138; M. E. Gordley, *New Testament Christological hymns: exploring texts, contexts, and significance* (Academic: Downers Grove, Illinois, 2018) esp. pp. 79–110. For representative criticism of the para- or pre-Pauline hymn thesis see B. Edsall and J. R. Strawbridge, 'The Songs We Used to Sing? Hymn 'Traditions' and Reception in Pauline Letters', *JSNT* 37 (2015), pp. 290–311.

themselves when they visit the earth to engage in human affairs.[2] Christ has his own, proper divine 'form' (v. 6a ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων), which is hidden from mortal sight in heaven.[3] From that place and identity he ventures into human history by 'taking the (new) form (μορφήν) (of a slave)', 'becoming (γενόμενος)', 'in the likeness (ἐν ὁμοιώματι) of humans', and being found 'in figure (σχήματι) as a human'. All these terms, especially the repeated μορφή (vv. 6–7) and γενόμενος (vv. 7–8), are the stock in trade of Greek tales of divine self-transformation.[4]

There are obvious ways in which Christ's becoming a man is unlike the pagan gods' self-transformations: he fully empties himself (v. 7a), lives a whole human life, and dies on a cross (v. 8). But the hymn presents the incarnation using the language of the culture to which Paul's letter is addressed (a communication strategy that, in its own way, may be said to be 'incarnational,' such that literary form reflects theological content). In so doing, it also sets the pre-incarnate Christ firmly on the divine side of the divine-human relationship. *In the Greek and Roman transformation texts it is the gods and goddesses who transform themselves; mortals can only be transformed by the gods*.

Thirdly, the hymn expresses an imperial Christology. In multiple ways, which come to clearest expression in the second half (vv. 9–11) and in the two verses at the end of chapter 3 that are somehow literarily connected to the hymn in 3:20–21, Christ is presented as the ultimate divine-human

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[2] For the Greek texts see R. G. A. Buxton, *Forms of Astonishment: Greek Myths of Metamorphosis* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2009).

[3] On the proper 'form' of God or the gods see e.g. Plato *Rep*. 2.381c; Moschus *Eur.* 163–64; Cicero *De Nat. Deo.* 1.14, 17–18; Dio Chrysostom *The Twelfth, or Olympic Discourse* 12.52.

[4] D. Zeller, 'Die Menschwerdung des Sohnes Gottes im Neuen Testament und die antike Religionsgeschichte', in, *Menschwerdung Gottes —Vergöttlichung von Menschen* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen), pp. 141–76; P. A. Holloway, *Philippians: A Commentary* (Hermeneia, Fortress: Minneapolis, 2017), pp. 117–24. In addition to the linguistic data in these two publications, note the use of the Latin loanword *schema* (= σχῆμα) in Plautus's dramatization of Mercury's divine self-transformation in his play *Amphitryon* (line 117).

ruler.[5] The words κύριος (2:11) and σωτήρ (3:20) are epithets that befit his position as ruler over all, rivalling Caesar. The acclamation of him (2:10–11), the receiving of a new supreme name, and the exaltation after death all echo the conventions of Greek ruler cults and their reflexes in patterns of emperor worship. Caligula claimed a divine form (μορφή)[6] and the hymnic praise of Christ can be compared with the hymns to divine rulers. Even the application to him of the motif of the self-transforming god has precedent in the imperial praise of the Augustan poets (esp. Horace *Odes* 1.2.41–42 on Octavian as Mercury come to earth). And, as we shall see, the divine equality language of v. 6c echoes the semi-technical terminology of the Greek ruler cult.[7]

1. The consensus: Phil. 2:6c is a status

[5] The secondary literature is now extensive. Notable treatments are A. Y. Collins, 'The Worship of Jesus and the Imperial Cult', in C. C. Newman, J. R. Davila, and G. S. Lewis (eds), *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus* (JSJSupp 63; Brill: Leiden), pp. 234–57; P. Oakes, *Philippians: From People to Letter* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2001), pp. 147–210; D. Litwa, *Iesus Deus: The Early Christian Depiction of Jesus as a Mediterranean God* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2014), pp. 181–214; N. T. Wright, *Paul and the faithfulness of God* (SPCK: London, 2013), pp. 1293–95 (with a response to criticisms of the imperial reading); H. Wojtkowiak, *Christologie und Ethik im Philipperbrief: Studien zur Handlungsorientierung einer frühchristlichen Gemeinde in paganer Umwelt* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 2012), pp. 83–94.

[6] According to Philo (*Embassy* 80, compare 95, 97, 110–111; Suetonius *Caligula* 52; Cassius Dio 59.26.5–10).

[7] The language of the gods' self-transformations (that dominates the first half) and the multiple connections to the themes of emperor worship and ideal kingship are far more prominent than any comparison between Christ and Adam, which, in agreement with most recent commentators, I judge to be lacking in verse 6.

In the history of Christian theology Phil. 2:6c has been treated as a statement about Christ's nature; an interpretation that has had a few advocates in modern scholarship.[8] Occasionally it is seen as a state.[9] However, in the twentieth century most took τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ to mean a status, or rank, or a position of dignity; a position in virtue of function, rather than being, and a treatment of the subject, presumably Christ, by others, rather than an innate nature or essence.[10] This is now sometimes presented as a settled position.[11]

There appear to be sound reasons why linguistically and in the context of Paul's letter to first-century Philippi this must be so. In the first place, ἴσα is a form of the adjective ἴσος, a word that typically denotes 'an external objectively measurable … likeness and correspondence'.[12] For a statement of equal

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[8] For the nature view see C. J. Ellicott, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Philippians, the Colossians, and Philemon: with a critical and grammatical commentary, and a revised translation* (3rd ed. Longman: London, 1865), p. 42; G. Stählin in *TDNT* 3.353.

[9] Holloway, *Philippians,* p. 120.

[10] Lohmeyer, *Kyrios Jesus*, 27 'niemals um Gleichheit der Substanz, sondern der Funktion, niemals des Wesens, sondern der Macht'; Feuillet, A., 'L'Homme-Deiu considéré dans sa condition terrestre de serviteur et de rédempteur (Phil. II, 5ss et texts parallès)', *Vivre et Penser* 2 (1942), p. 62: v. 6c express only 'l'égalité d'honneur et de traitement'; P. Grelot, 'Deux expressions difficiles de Philippiens 2,6–7', *Bib* 53 (1972), p. 500: v. 6 does not relate to 'une speculation sur la nature divine du Christ' and p. 501 'on fera donc bien de la paraphraser légèrement en la traduisant: 'le statut (ou la condition) d'égalité avec Dieu''. Cf. J. Gnilka, *Der Philipperbrief: Auslegung* (HTKNT 10; Herder: Freiburg, 1968), p. 117 and C. Spicq, *Notes de lexicographie néo-testamentaire* (OBO, 22; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1978), vol. 3, p. 357 (= C. Spicq and J. D. Ernest, *Theological lexicon of the New Testament,* [Hendrickson: Peabody, ass., 1994], vol. 3, p 229).

[11] C. Osiek, *Philippians, Philemon* (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 2000), p. 71; J. H. Hellerman, *Philippians* (Broadman and Holman: Nashville, 2015), pp. 111–12.

[12] E. Beyreuther, 'Like, equal', *NIDNTT* 2 (1976), p. 496, cf. Spicq, *Theological Lexicon*, vol. 3, pp. 223, 226–7.

nature or essence we would expect a construction with words such as φύσις 'nature', οὐσία 'being, essence, nature', ὄν 'being', or ὤν 'being' (cf. Exod. 3:14).

Secondly, Paul is writing to a highly status conscious context. Joseph Hellerman in particular has shown that, as a typical first-century Roman colony, life in Philippi was characterised by a competitive pursuit of honours and status.[13] And as Carolyn Osiek observes in a now often-cited comment on the word ἴσος in Phil. 2:6, 'when applied to persons in this very status-conscious culture, it is more likely to mean equality of status or importance in a hierarchical order. It is not likely to mean what modern interpreters would want to read into the hymn, namely, equality of nature or substance with God. In other words, it is not a metaphysical but a social statement.'[14]

In his seminal monograph, Hellerman argues that the rest of the hymnic piece uses status language to challenge Paul's readers' inherited assumptions and habits. It challenges the competitive upward striving for honour that defined all levels of Philippian culture and society. The hymn opens with the language of the highest possible honour: equality with God. Jesus then makes a journey to the lowest possible positions of shame and dishonour: slavery and death on a cross. It is a *cursus pudorum* that subverts the *cursus honorum*—the course of honours and offices that defined public life in Rome and its cities. In a subsequent article Hellerman has further marshalled evidence to treat the first line of the verse—'who being in the form of God' (v. 6a)—as a status statement.[15] Certainly, the language of honour and status, of striving for martial and athletic glory and of praiseworthy conduct, is prominent in other parts of the letter (2:19–30; 3:4–8, 12–14, 19–4:1).

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[13] J. H. Hellerman, *Reconstructing honor in Roman Philippi: Carmen Christi as cursus pudorum* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2005). For the importance of honour and status at Philippi see also Wojtkowiak, *Christologie und Ethik,* pp. 54–58, 149–157, 179–181.

[14] Osiek, *Philippians*, p. 61.

[15] J. H. Hellerman, 'Μορφη Θεου as a Signifier of Social Status in Philippians 2:6', *JETS* 52 (2009), pp. 779–97.

Thirdly, the language of equality *with God* evokes centuries-old technical terminology for the status of divine rulers who were placed at the pinnacle of the pyramid of honours in Greek cities.[16] In the various forms of ruler cult that developed in the centuries after Alexander the Great, kings and then the Roman emperor received *isotheoi timai*, literally 'god-equal honours' or 'honours equal to those given to the gods'.[17] That and similar expressions were used in literary texts, papyri and inscribed honorific decrees to say that communities treated a ruler as if they were a god. Such language was formulaic, common, and well known in the Jewish world.[18] With the demise of the Republic the divine honours that had, in previous centuries, been accorded kings in the Greek-speaking East were transferred to, and concentrated in, the worship of the Caesars (and their households). So, at some point in the hymn—either in pre-existence or after resurrection and exaltation (vv. 9–11)—the 'status claimed for the emperor (*to einai isa theō*) in the civic religions of the Greek cities of the East has been reassigned to Jesus.'[19]

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[16] S. Lösch, *Deitas Jesu und antike Apotheose; ein Beitrag zur Exegese und Religionsgeschichte,* (Rottenburg: Bader, 1933), p. 125; P. Grelot, 'Deux expressions', p. 501; Spicq, *Notes de lexicographie,* vol. 3, pp. 357–8 (= Spicq, *Theological Lexicon,* vol. 3, pp. 229–30) and especially E. M. Heen, 'Phil. 2:6-11 and Resistance to Local Timocratic Rule: *Isa theō* and the Cult of the Emperor in the East', in Horsley, R.A. (ed), *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order* (Trinity Press International: Harrisburg, PA, 2004), pp. 125–53, cf. *LSJ* 837–8.

[17] Noteworthy discussions are D. Fishwick, *The Imperial Cult in the Latin West: Studies in the Ruler Cult of the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire* (Brill: Leiden, 1987–), vol. I.1, pp. 21–33; S. F. R. Price, 'Gods and Emperors: The Greek Language of the Roman Imperial Cult', *JHS* 104 (1984) pp. 79–95, esp. p. 88.

[18] 2 Macc. 9:12; Artapanus Frag. 3, §6; Philo *Embassy* 149; *Decal.* 7; *Moses* 2.194; *Special Laws* 1.25; *Virt.* 219; John 5:18; *Sib. Or.* 5:34, 138. So, we should not conclude, as does Heen, 'Phil. 2:6–11', p. 148, that the presence of such language in our passage means it must have been composed by a gentile not a Jewish Christian.

[19] Heen, 'Phil. 2:6–11', p. 148.

Advocates of the ruler cult interpretation of τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ have stressed that, in the pagan parallels, 'the ruler-to-god comparison relates to status, honor, and/or the exercise of authority—not to substance or essential nature'.[20] The expression *isotheoi timai* denotes the diverse cultic activities by which communities *treated* their rulers in the same way that they treated their gods: festivals, sacrifices, altars and images in temples—in private homes and in public places—processions, prostration, hymns, acclamations, games in their honour, divine names, epithets and titles, and the like. The fact that the language of god-equal honours denotes a relative status, not a nature or essence, has often been pointed out by specialists in the study of ancient patterns of ruler cult.[21] Indeed, Ittai Gradel has gone further, arguing that in every respect the worship of the emperor was purely a matter of relative divine status, not absolute identity or the *nature* of the recipient of honours.[22]

Fourthly, first-century readers would hear at the end of the passage a scene in which Christ is given a God-equal status. In verses 9–11 the superexaltation, the gift of the supreme name, the universal prostration (v. 10) and acclamation (v. 11) would all be viewed as tantamount to saying that, at this stage of his life-story, Christ is fully equal with God and the recipient of *isotheoi* (or, we might say, '*isopateres*') *timai*.[23] And the way Christ's exaltation is given as a response to his life of service and

[20] Hellerman, 'Social Status', pp. 788–89, cf. idem, *Philippians* (Broadman and Holman: Nashville, 2015), pp. 111–112 'substance or essential nature are generally not in view'.

[21] Fishwick, *Imperial Cult,* vol. 1, p. 39 with a few exceptions (notably from Egypt), 'it is plain that godhead of the kind we are discussing must be understood as a sort of rank or status achieved through merit, with no implication whatsoever of divine nature'.

[22] I. Gradel, *Emperor worship and Roman religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), pp. 26, 28–29, 35, 46, 48–49, 52, 69, 72, 101–2, 148, 267–8, 270, 321–324, 327–336.

[23] Divine equality and the bestowal of a new or divine name: Plutarch *Theseus* 33:2, *1.Kyme* 19, lines 14–17, cf. Cassius Dio 44.6.4; 51.20.6–8. For divine equality and prostration see Philostratus *Vit. Apol.* 7:21; Ps.-Callisthenes *Alex.* 2:22, cf. Arrian *Alexander* 4.11.4–5. For acclamation see Germanicus Caesar's rejection of Egyptian ἰσόθεοι ἐκφωνήσεις in A. S.

obedience (διό, v. 9) accords with the common view that divine equality is a status granted *in response* to great deeds, benefactions to the worshipping community, and virtuous conduct.

2. Reasons to reject the status interpretation of Phil. 2:6c

In the heated debate about our passage's many interpretative issues and possibilities, the meaning of v. 6c has been largely overlooked. Attention has focused on the rare word ἁρπαγμός, the import of 'being in the form of God' (v. 6a), and the possibility that there is an Adam Christology in v. 6. However, although there is a consensus on the status, non-substantialist, interpretation of v. 6c, linguistic objections have occasionally been lodged.[24]

If we grant that τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ evokes ancient Greek expressions of a human divine equality, there are seven reasons to doubt or reject the view that v. 6c is a statement about *status*. Whilst the following objections to that view do not all have the same weight, in combination they are, I contend, fatal to the current consensus.

Firstly, the word ἴσος does not have to describe only shared external relations. It is sometimes used for equality of character, nature or composition (see below). Secondly, it is surely inappropriate to say that what Christ has in heavenly pre-existence is a '(social) status'. Verse 6 sets talk of τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ in the heavenly phase of Christ's biography, before he takes on human form and is 'found' by other

Hunt, C. C. Edgar, and D. L. Page, *Select papyri* (LCL 282; Heinemann: London, 1932), §211 (vol. 2, pp. 76–78). For divine equality a matter of acquiring a worldwide fame or name see Isocrates *To Philip* 145.

[24] H. A. W. Meyer, *Kritisch exegetisches Handbuch über den Brief an die Philipper (an die Kolosser und an Philemon)* (Kritisch exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament, Abth. 9, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1847), pp. 103–4; J. Gewiess, 'Die Philipperbriefstelle 2, 6b', in J. Blinzler, O. Kuss, and F. Mußner (eds), *Neutestamentliche Aufsätze. Festschrift für Prof. Josef Schmid zum 70. Geburtstag* (Friedrich Pustet: Regensburg), pp. 69–85 (81–83), cf. J. Habermann, *Präexistensaussagen im Neuen Testament* (P. Lang: Frankfurt am Main, 1990), pp. 125–26.

humans. It is true that on the *res rapienda* interpretation of the previous clause, τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ can be taken to refer to that which Christ does not grasp after but only receives posthumously (in vv. 9–11).[25] However, on other grounds, most today reject the *res rapienda* view and think that, in some way, τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ describes something that Christ already possesses in pre-existence. So, it is surely not insignificant that *in the first phase of Christ's existence there is no society within which Christ can have a status*. There is just the one 'in the form of God' and there is 'God' (the Father?), with whom there is equality. There are no human beings in heaven to give Christ the kind of divine honours that were given to great men in Greek-speaking parts of the Mediterranean (see below). There is no mention either of any angels among whom we might, hypothetically, imagine Christ being granted a particular status.[26] So, although, it is true that 'God/god equal' language was typically used to define an individual's status in a humanly constructed hierarchy of honours, it may be a mistake to insist that those conceptual implications carry over *to this specific text*, given that god-equal language is used in a heavenly, pre-existent, setting where social status is an out-of-place, if not impossible, reality.

Thirdly, virtually all translators and commentators take τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ to mean 'to be equal to God' or 'equality with God'; a translation that accords with the view that τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ is a social status. However, this translation is problematic. It treats ἴσα θεῷ as an adjectival expression ('equal with God') modifying τὸ εἶναι ('being'). But, as a minority point out, this cannot be what τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ

[25] The *res rapienda* interpretation takes v. 6b–c to be a statement to the effect that Christ rejected the proposition that τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ is something (*res*) to be grasped after (*rapienda*).

[26] Although at the end of the passage 'God' is identified as 'Father', the first verse does not exhibit any interest in a *relational distinction* between the one who is revealed as the Lord Jesus Christ and a divine 'Father'. So it is not likely that v. 6 is interested in a 'status' of the divine 'Son' in relation to the divine 'Father'. Divine equality language is never used to define the relationship between actors (whether they be angelic or exalted humans) in heavenly scenes in either Jewish apocalypses or in Greco-Roman literature.

means, since ἴσα is the neuter plural adverbial form of ἴσος ('equally, in equal manner').[27] The pair ἴσα θεῷ is an adnominal adverbial phrase modifying the articular infinitive τὸ εἶναι, two words that function much like an English gerund ('being') or as an existential, absolute, 'Being'.[28] So, as several in the nineteenth century and a few in the twentieth have pointed out, τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ has some sense of a, or the, *'being (that is) in a manner equal to God'*.[29] It denotes a particular way, manner, or mode of being, or of living, or an existence characterised by equality with God's own manner of being, *but not a status*.[30]

[27] This is the principal reason that the likes of Meyer (*Philipper*, p. 103), M. R. Vincent (*A Critical and exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon* [T. & T. Clark: Edinburgh, 1897], pp. 58–59), Gewiess ('Die Philipperbriefstelle 2, 6b', pp. 81–83) and Habermann (*Präexistensaussagen,* pp. 125–26) have rejected the status view of 'equality with God'. Recent contributions that reckon with the problem are R. L. Brawley, 'From Reflex to Reflection? Identity in Philippians 2.6–11 and Its Context', in K. Ehrensperger and J. B. Tucker (eds), *Reading Paul in Context: Explorations in Identity Formation: Essays In Honour Of William S. Campbell* (Bloomsbury: London, 2013), pp. 139–140; G. M. Ellis, *Grammar as Theology: A Linguistic Rereading of Philippians 2:6-7a* (PhD, Otago, NZ, 2013)*,* pp. 194–5, 278–83.

[28] For the absolute sense in Platonic discourse see below. τὸ εἶναι can sometimes function as a predicative copula. However, in Phil. 2:6, where τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ is the direct object of the verb ἡγήσατο, τὸ εἶναι is used non-predicatively.

[29] Meyer, *Philipper*, pp. 103–4: 'das Sein auf gottgleiche Weise, die gottgleiche Existenz'; Vincent, *Philippians*, p. 59: 'existence in the way or manner of equality with God'; H. Schumacher, *Christus in seiner Präexistenz und Kenose nach Phil. 2. 5-8, etc,* (2 vols., Verlag des Päpstl. Bibelinstituts: Rome, 1914, 1921), vol. 2, p. 318: 'auf gleiche Weise sein, existieren, wie Gott' citing older German commentators (and quoted approvingly by Habermann, *Präexistensaussagen,* p. 126); Gewiess, 'Die Philipperbriefstelle 2, 6b', p. 82: 'τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ … kennzeichnet die Art and Weise seines Verhaltens'; Ellis, *Grammar as Theology*, pp. 93, 281: 'to be as one divine'.

[30] The semantics and syntax of the Greek verb εἶναι do not equate straightforwardly to those of their modern counterparts, as Charles Kahn's studies have shown (esp. C. H. Kahn, *The verb 'be' in Ancient Greek*, (Reidel: Dordrecht, 1973) and idem, *Essays on being* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2009). Greek εἶναι can mean 'to live, be alive, to dwell, be present, be available' (see Kahn, *Essays*, 28–29, 126–7, 135–136, cf. F. Montanari, M. Goh, C. M. Schroeder, G. Nagy

This much is evident from the basic rules of Greek grammar. Indeed, this modification of the verb 'to be' with the adverbial ἴσα θεῷ has a precedent in one ancient Greek text that has not, until now, figured in the discussion of Phil. 2:6c. Homeric Hymns 5 (*To Aphrodite*) 214 says that Ganymede has been taken to be with the gods ὡς ἔοι ἀθάνατος καὶ ἀγήρως ἴσα θεοῖσιν 'that he might be immortal and unageing the way the gods are'; a clause that uses the adverbial phrase ἴσα θεοῖσιν to modify a form of the verb 'to be' (ἔοι: opt. 3rd pers. sing.). Ganymede has been taken to Olympus to be, or to live, or exist, 'in a manner equal to the gods' (see further below).

Whether we can define more precisely the meaning of τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ is one concern of the rest of this article. For now, we can say with confidence that, if the author had wanted to speak of 'equality with God', their words are misleading. The expression τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ is not a state, since the adverbial ἴσα θεῷ brings out the active potential of the Greek εἶναι (that can mean 'to be alive, dwell, be present, exist').[31] If it was a status that the author had in mind, they would have written τὴν ἰσότην θεῷ, τὸν ἰσότιμον θεῷ,[32] τὰς ἰσοθέους τιμάς,[33] or some such.

and L. C. Muellner, *The Brill dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Brill: Leiden, 2015), pp. 603, 605. For εἶναι modified by adverbs of manner see e.g. Homer *Il.* 4.22 ἀκὴν ἔσαν 'they were silent'; Plato *Prot.* 331d ἔστιν ὅπῃ 'is in a certain way'; Jer 7:9 τοῦ κακῶς εἶναι ὑμῖν 'so that it will be bad for you'; 2 Macc. 3:38 διὰ τὸ περὶ τὸν τόπον ἀληθῶς εἶναί τινα θεοῦ δύναμιν 'because there is truly some power of God about the place'.

[31] See the previous note.

[32] Cf. Philo *Abel* 8 τὸν σοφὸν ἰσότιμον κόσμῳ ὁ θεὸς ἡγεῖται 'God reckons the wise person of equal honour with the cosmos' and *Embassy* 98 on the gods 'with whom he (i.e. Caligula) purposed to be equal in honour (οἷς ἰσότιμος εἶναι προαιρεῖται)'.

[33] For the common word ἰσόθεος see *LSJ* 837–8 and texts cited below under Type 1.

Commentaries, grammars and handbooks reassure readers that in this text there are legitimate reasons to treat ἴσα θεῷ as an adjectival.[34] The most common reason given is that sometimes an adverb can be used adjectivally.[35] There are cases where adverbs of time and of place are used as predicate adjectives, typically with the verb 'to be' (or with an ellipsis of the copula). In Phil 4:5b the adverb ἐγγύς functions as a predicative adjective: ὁ κύριος ἐγγύς 'the Lord (is) near.'[36] The adverb οὕτως can also function this way (LXX Gen. 1:6, 9, 11; Matt. 1:18; 19:10; Mark 2:12; Rom. 4:18; 9:20; 1 Pet. 2:15). Examples are then adduced for ἴσα as an adjective, not an adverb.

But the phrase τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ is the direct object of the verb ἡγήσατο so ἴσα θεῷ cannot function predicatively within that phrase. Also, there is no precedent for taking ἴσα θεῷ as adjectival and the alleged examples of an adjectival ἴσα are unpersuasive.

An adjectival expression ('god-equal', 'equal with God') would require the adjective and nominal to agree in gender, number and case. For that v. 6c would have had τὸ εἶναι ἴσον θεῷ (cf. John 5:18) or τὸ εἶναι ἰσόθεον.[37] That there can be an exceptional adjectival use of the adverb is a long-established feature of ancient Greek, *for adverbs of place and of time* and when the adjective is placed *in*

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[34] Following especially J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians: a revised text with introduction, notes, and dissertations* (Eighth edn., Macmillan: London, [1868] 1888), p. 111: 'to be on an equality with God'.

[35] A. T. Robertson, *A grammar of the Greek New Testament in the light of historical research* (2nd edn., Hodder & Stoughton: New York, 1915), pp. 545–6; J. H. Moulton and N. Turner, *A grammar of New Testament Greek. Vol. 3, Syntax* (T. & T. Clark: Edinburgh, 1963), p. 226; F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk, *A Greek grammar of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1961), (=BDF) §434 p. 224; G. Stählin *TDNT* vol. 3, p. 353 n. 52, cf. Lightfoot, *Philippians* 111.

[36] Cf. Mark 11:19 ὀψέ; John 18:28 πρωΐ; Eph. 2:13 μακράν and ἐγγύς.

[37] Compare the rephrasing of Paul's words in Isidore of Pelusium *Epistles* 4.22 (*MPG* 78.1072) εἰ ἕρμαιον ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσον, οὐκ ἂν ἑαυτὸν ἐταπείνωσεν 'if he considered being equal a windfall, he would not have humbled himself'.

the attributive position.[38] Neither exception applies in the case of v. 6c. (For the adverb in the attributive position Phil. 2:6c would have had τὸ ἴσα θεῷ εἶναι).

Whilst there is a special adjectival use of the adverb οὕτως, there is no evidence for an equivalent sense of the adverb ἴσα (+ dative). In the Septuagint ἴσα + dative functions adverbially, in the way we would expect: Job 24:20 συντριβείη δὲ πᾶς ἄδικος ἴσα ξύλῳ ἀνιάτῳ 'may every unjust person be crushed like an incurable tree!' Job 28:2b χαλκὸς δὲ ἴσα λίθῳ λατομεῖται 'copper is quarried like stone'. Job 30:19 ἥγησαι δέ με ἴσα πηλῷ 'and you have treated me like clay' (cf. Wis 7:3).[39] In such cases, ἴσα is an adverb of manner: unjust persons are to be crushed *the way a tree is crushed*, copper is to be quarried *in like manner to the quarrying of stone*, and Job complains that he is regarded *the way one would regard clay*.

There are no indisputable examples of ἴσα + dative used adjectivally. Appeal has been made to Job 11:12:[40]

ἄνθρωπος δὲ ἄλλως νήχεται λόγοις, βροτὸς δὲ γεννητὸς γυναικὸς ἴσα ὄνῳ ἐρημίτῃ.

The case is hardly compelling. Some take the ἴσα here as an adjective and the words ἴσα ὄνῳ ἐρημίτῃ as an adjectival 'equal with a desert ass':

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[38] For the adverbial adjective in the attributive position see H. W. Smyth and G. M. Messing, *Greek grammar* (Rev. edn., Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1956), §1096. See e.g. Matt. 14:35 τοὺς κακῶς ἔχοντας, cf. OG Jer. 7:9: τοῦ κακῶς εἶναι ὑμῖν 'so that it be bad for you'.

[39] Translations are those of NETS.

[40] Following Lightfoot, *Philippians*, 111.

On the other hand, a human keeps afloat with words, and a mortal, born of woman, *is like*

a desert ass. (NETS)[41]

However, the ellipsis in v. 12b should not necessarily be filled with the verb 'to be'. It is just as likely that νήχεται, 'swim, keeps afloat', serves as the verb for both parts of the verse:

On the other hand, a human swims with words, and a mortal, born of a woman, (swims)

like a desert ass.

In view of the usual sense of ἴσα + dative this translation of ἴσα ὄνῳ ἐρημίτῃ is the more likely. Even if νήχεται does not serve both parts of the verse, the Greek translator may assume some verb ('lives, exists') that is appropriately modified by the adverbial ἴσα ὄνῳ ἐρημίτῃ in the usual way.[42]

Appeal has also been made to a passage in Thucydides for an alleged adjectival 'old usage' of ἴσα θεῷ.[43] 'Reverencing, then, not only the hopes which the Hellenes place in you, but also that Olympian Zeus in whose temple we are even as suppliants (ἐν οὗ τῷ ἱερῷ ἴσα καὶ ἱκέται ἐσμέν)' (Thucydides *The Peloponnesian War* 3.14, LCL). In this text the form is not ἴσα + dative, but ἴσα καί. But, in any case, the word ἴσα functions adverbially and Thucydides' Greek illustrates the point (evident also in Homeric Hymns 5, line 214, above) that the Greek verb εἰμί can have an active sense (appropriately modified by an adverb) that is lacking in normal English uses of the verb 'to be'.[44]

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[41] Cf. C. L. Seow, *Job 1-21: interpretation and commentary* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2013), p. 613: '… and a mortal, born of a woman, *(is) like an ass of the desert*'.

[42] Cf. Gewiess, 'Die Philipperbriefstelle 2, 6b,' 82 who supplies the verb 'to be' (ἐστίν) but thinks that ἴσα ὄνῳ ἐρημίτῃ denotes a characterization of the *behavior* of the mortal man.

[43] *BDF* §434, p. 224.

[44] For ἴσα καί adverbial here see E. C. Marchant, *Thucydides book iii* (Macmillan: London, 1909), p. 123. For the active potential of Greek εἶναι see n. 30 (above).

Fourthly, as a reason to doubt the status interpretation of τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ, there is the problem that, to date, the comparison of τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ with contemporary texts describing divine rulers who are ascribed the language of divine equality has tended to lump together a variety of Greek expressions, making generalisations that have not been adequately demonstrated from the primary sources. Scholarship has also worked with a limited set of texts.

Eric Heen has undertaken the most extensive study of the sources.[45] He recognises that there were a variety of ways of speaking about divine equality, sometimes with an adjective (ἰσόθεος) or an adjectival expression (ἴσος θεῷ), and sometimes with an adverbial one (ἴσον θεῷ, ἴσα θεῷ/θεοῖς). However, he judged that 'the syntactic boundaries between the expressions … blurred in actual usage.'[46]

Unfortunately, Heen did not explain or justify this judgement and it is not obvious what basis there can be for it. Furthermore, he worked with a limited number of sources, referring to just twenty-four comparative texts that speak of divine equality, and just one text with an adverbial ἴσα θεῷ equivalent to the ἴσα θεῷ of Phil. 2:6c (Homer *Od.* 15.520).

To date, no discussion of the parallels to v. 6c has considered the possibility that there were a variety of ways of thinking and speaking about divine equality, so that, with v. 6c the author attempts to position a particular 'being equal with God' in closer proximity to one kind of divine equality than to other kinds. Neither has anyone considered the possibility that v. 6c echoes but also challenges or subverts contemporary ways of understanding divine equality. Nor has anyone considered the possibility that, recognising that ἴσα θεῷ is adverbial and by comparing v. 6c with the variety of ways in which Greek speakers articulated the notion of divine equality it might be possible to clarify what is meant by τὸ εἶναι ('[the/a] being') that is ἴσα θεῷ ('equally with God').

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[45] Heen, 'Phil. 2:6-11'.

[46] Heen, 'Phil. 2:6–11', p. 147.

A comprehensive search of texts from Homer down to the third centuries C.E. reveals a variety of ways to speak of divine equality that would likely inform the expected audience's appreciation of Phil. 2:6. Among them, there are five comparative examples for the ἴσα θεῷ of Phil. 2:6c besides others that adopt a plural form of the adverbial expression (ἴσα θεοῖσ(ι)/(ιν) –'equally with gods'). Given the flaws to the status interpretation a comprehensive study of the linguistic environment in general and these texts in particular is now necessary.

Fifthly, there is need for a fresh examination of Phil. 2:6c because the relative status interpretation of ancient patterns of ruler cult is by no means straightforward or uncontested. Whilst some phenomena, including the common talk of human communities giving a ruler *isotheoi timai*, are self-evidently expressions of humanly-constructed status, there is other data to which specialists have appealed as warrant for thinking that sometimes ancient rulers were regarded as 'divine' in identity, nature and conduct, not just in status.[47] Some of that evidence turns up where the language of divine equality is used.

This last observation leads to a sixth question mark against the status interpretation of Phil. 2:6c. It is true that, as Heen pointed out, in a majority of those Greek texts that speak of a human divine equality there is the language of 'honour'. We have many examples of the stereotypical expression ἰσόθεοι τιμαί denoting 'god equal honours' or 'honours that are equal to those given the gods'; honours given to a human being, whether in this life or after death and heavenly exaltation (see below). Similarly, there are a few texts that use the verb τιμάω with god-equal language to describe a community that honours an individual the way it honours the gods. However, neither the words τιμάω or τιμή appear in

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[47] See the evidence set out in a critique of Gradel's relative status view of the divinity of rulers in D. S. Levene, 'Defining the Divine in Rome: In Memoriam S. R. F. Price', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 142 (2012), pp. 41–81 and M. D. Litwa, *We Are Being Transformed: Deification in Paul's Soteriology* (BZNW, 187, De Gruyter: Berlin, 2012), pp. 39–41, 65–93.

Phil. 2:6 and there is nothing in the description of the pre-existent phase of Christ's biography that demands that the divine equality spoken of there be one that is constituted by the giving of honours.

Finally, there is nothing in the rest of Paul's letter that means v. 6c has to be a status statement. The words 'form of God' in v. 6a need not be taken that way, as most commentators recognise. For first-century Jewish readers, and with most recent commentators, it can be taken as a way of talking about the manifest, visible, heavenly glory of God.[48] And for Greco-Roman readers the expression would most likely conjure the image of a god's proper, anthropomorphic, shape.[49] It has sometimes been claimed that there is a parallel between the character of Christ's self-emptying in 6:7–8 and Paul's description of his surrendering of his national and religious privileges in 3:4–11. Since the latter certainly entails a surrender of ascribed and inherited honours,[50] a strong parallel between the two passages would imply that what Christ gave up was also a status. However, the parallels should not be pressed.[51]

There is encouragement to think that v. 6c would both echo but also challenge prevailing Greco-Roman statements about divine equality because, in other respects, Paul's letter challenges normative attitudes to status and honour. As Hellerman himself has demonstrated, the story of Christ up-ends conventional status expectations and presents a new basis for understanding true honour and

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[48] E.g. M. N. A. Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (Hendrickson Publishers: Peabody, Mass., 1998), pp. 127–29.

[49] See the texts in n. 3 (above).

[50] see Hellerman, *Reconstructing*, pp. 121–127, cf. P. Pilhofer, *Philippi* (2 vols., WUNT 87, 119, Mohr Siebeck: Tübingen, 1995), vol. 1, pp. 123–127; Wojtkowiak, *Christologie und Ethik,* pp. 179–181.

[51] B. J. Dodd, 'The Story of Christ and the Imitation of Paul in Philippians 2–3', in R. P. Martin and B. J. Dodd (eds.), *Where Christology Began. Essays on Philippians 2* (Westminster John Knox: Louisville, KY), pp. 155–57; J. H. P. Reumann, *Philippians: a new Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2008), p. 258 and D. Bertschmann, 'Is There a Kenosis in This Text? Rereading Philippians 3:2-11 in the Light of the Christ Hymn', *JBL* 137 (2018), pp. 235–54 (esp. pp. 242–47).

shame.[52] If, on purely linguistic grounds, τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ denotes *a god-equal manner of being* then it may still be that, in keeping with Hellerman's seminal insights, the phrase contributes in some way to a new Christologically-reconfigured understanding of true honour and shame.

3. Divine equality in the Greek language environment

If we include works from the late second and early third centuries C.E., a search through the secondary literature, and literary, epigraphical, and papyri databases turns up one hundred and forty-nine texts that speak of equality with God or the gods in ways that inform the interpretation of Phil. 2:6c.

There are at least half a dozen phrases, compounds or verbal forms that recur in the sources (with minor variants).[53] Two are adjectival: ἴσος (τῷ) θεῷ/θέοισιν 'equal with God/gods' and ἰσόθεος 'god-equal, equal to God/a god'. Three are adverbial: ἴσα (τῷ) θεῷ/ θεοῖς/ θεοῖσι(ν) 'equally with God/the gods, in a manner equal to God/the gods',[54] ἴσα καί + θεός as direct object of a verb expressing honour 'even as a god, in a manner equal to a god', and ἐξ ἴσου τοῖς θεοῖς 'equally with, in the same manner as the gods'. In addition, there were verbs and verbal phrases for the act of creating divine equality: ἰσόω +

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[52] Hellerman, *Reconstructing*, cf. M. W. Martin and B. A. Nash, 'Philippians 2:6–11 as Subversive *Hymnos*: A Study in the Light of Ancient Rhetorical Theory', *JTS* 66 (2015), p. 112.

[53] The analysis that follows includes cases that are sufficiently near to τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ as to be relevant to the analysis (e.g. ἰσόρροπος … τοῖς Ὀλυμπίοις θεοῖς Pseudo-Callisthenes 2.22; σεβίζω σ᾿ ἴσα καὶ μάκαρας Euripedes *Electra* 994). A fuller survey might include ἰσότιμος '*held in equal honour*' + θεός, ἰσοδαίμων 'god-like'; δαίμονι ἴσος 'equal to a god', ἰσοδαίμων 'equal to a god', ἰσαθάνατος 'equal to the immortals', and Latin expressions that are cognate to the principal Greek ones.

[54] There is one case of an adverbial neuter singular ἴσον θεοῖς (Menander *One Verse Maxims* line 270) and one that employs the adverbial compound ἰσόθεα (2 Macc 9:12, discussed below).

divine name or title in dative 'make or deem equal with a god'; ἰσοθεόω 'make equal to God/the gods', ἐξισόω + divine name 'make equal with a god', and ἰσάζω + θεῷ 'make equal with God/a god'.

These words and phrases are employed in six types of syntactical construction, each of which helps to locate Phil. 2:6c in its language environment, to define its meaning and its relation to the rest of the passage. The τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ of Phil. 2:6c has no exact parallel in preserved texts, however it should be categorised as an example of the Type 5 syntax.

The first three types of syntax employ an adjectival phrase or compound (either ἰσόθεος or, occasionally, ἴσος [τῷ] θεῷ/θέοισιν). The fourth and fifth types employ an adverbial construction ἴσα (τῷ) θεῷ/θεοῖς/θεοῖσι(ν), ἴσα καί + θεός or ἐξ ἴσου τοῖς θεοῖς, and in one (rather important) case ἰσόθεα. The sixth type is the only one to employ a verbal construction. Some statistical analysis of the occurrence of the types is set out in an Appendix.

(i) Type 1: Attributive statements

In the majority of cases (in eighty-one texts, 54% of all divine equality texts) an adjectival phrase or compound is used attributively. This happens in several ways. Most often (in thirty-nine cases) the word ἰσόθεος modifies τιμή in the expression ἰσόθεοι τιμαί 'honours equal to those given to the gods', to describe divine honours paid to a human being.[55] The form is exemplified by Diodorus Siculus'

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[55] Ἰσόθεοι τιμαί: *IG* 12.7.506, lines 27–30 (for Ptolemy I Soter, c. 280 B.C.E., for his benefactions); *SEG* 41.75 (for Antigonos II Gonatas (c. 261–239 B.C.E., 'Saviour of the people' and for his benefactions); *IG* 5(2).432 (= *SIG* §624) (for Philopoemen 183/182 B.C.E., for his virtue and benefactions, city of Megalopolis); *MAMA* IV 151 II (for Menelaus son of Menestheus, second cent. B.C.E.); Lycurgus *Leoc.* 88 (ancient kings); Polybius 10.10.1 (for Aletes, discoverer of silver mines); 12.12b (on honours for Alexander); Artapanus frag. 3 (for Moses by the Egyptian priests); *IGR* IV 293 col. ii line 39 (for Diodorus Pasparos, Pergamum's ambassador); Menander frag. 805 (honours to parents); Diodorus Siculus 3.57.6 (for Helius and Selene); 4.48.6 (for the Tyndaridae); 37.6 (for Quintus Mucius Scaevola, Roman governor of Asia, 97 B.C.E., for

description of the fate of Philopoemen, the famous general of the Achaean League ('the last of the Greeks', d. 183 B.C.E.):

> After his death, … as if by some divine Providence *he obtained honours equal to those paid the gods* (τὰς ἰσοθέους τιμάς), in compensation for the misfortunes that attended his demise. *In addition to the decrees in his honour voted by the Achaeans jointly, his native city (Megalopolis) set up an altar, (instituted) an annual sacrifice to him, and appointed hymns and praises of his exploits to be sung by the young men of the city.*[56]

Rulers and other great men and women receive 'god-equal honours' inasmuch as they receive such expressions of veneration or worship that are otherwise reserved for the immortal gods. Because there was a sliding scale of honours in the Greek and Roman worlds, the Greek adjective ἰσόθεος distinguishes those honours that are reserved for the gods from those lesser honours given to other exalted people.

his benefactions); 1.2.4 (for men like Heracles); 1.22.6 (for the genitals of Osiris); 1.24.7–8 (for Heracles); 1.90.2 (for sacred animals); 1.97.6 (for Daedalus, for his genius and benefactions); 3.64.2 (for Dionysus); 4.58.6 (for Alcmene, mother of Heracles); 4.62.4 (for Hippolytus, for his prudence); 4.67.1 (for Teiresias); 4.81.2–3 (for Aristaeus, for his discoveries and benefactions); 20.102 for Demetrius I, Poliorcetes (for his military protection); 29.18.1 (for Philopoemen); Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Ant. Rom.* 1.44.1–2 (for Hercules); *I. Knidos* I.59, line 19 (for Gaius Julius Artemidoros); Philo *Moses* 2.194 (of Egyptian worship of the earth); *Special Laws* 1.25 (of divine honours for wealth); *Virtues* 219 (of pagan idolatry); Plutarch *Theseus* 33.1–2 (for the Tyndaridae); *Pyrrhus* 1.2 (for Achilles); Appian *Civil Wars* 2.148 (for Julius Caesar); Cassius Dio 51.20.8 (for the emperors); Pseudo-Callisthenes *Alex.* 2.10.7 (for the family of Darius); 2:22 (for Alexander). See also 'God-equal *acclamations* (ἐκφωνήσεις)' (for Germanicus Caesar) in A. S. Hunt, C. C. Edgar, and D. L. Page, *Select papyri* (LCL; London: Heinemann, 1932), §211, vol. 2, pp. 76–78; 'God-equal *sacrifices*' (for good men for their benefactions) in Diodorus 4.1.4, and the 'honours equal to the Olympic gods (ἰσολύμπιοι τιμαί)' (for Augustus and for man-made images, in Philo *Embassy* 149–150 and *Decalogue* 8).

[56] Diodorus Siculus 29.18.1 (LCL). All other translations are the author's, unless otherwise stated.

In other texts the adjective is used to qualify a person's attributes: 'your god-like power',[57] 'a god-equal disposition',[58] 'his god-like grac[es]'[59] and a woman's 'god-equal beauty' (of Helen).[60] Used this way, as a stative, the adjective can also describe a person. Frequently in Homer there is the expression ἰσόθεος φώς 'a god-equal man'.[61] We read also of a 'god-equal king,'[62] the beneficent rule of 'godlike Darius',[63] the benefaction of the 'god-equal Alexander (the Great)', and similar expressions.[64] These texts illustrate the truth in G. Stählin's claim that prior to its use in Phil. 2:6 and John 5:18 equality with God language 'had already taken on qualitative significance'.[65]

[57] Pseudo-Callisthenes *Alex*. 1.46a.4: τὸ σὸν ἰσόθεον κράτος (of Alexander the Great).

[58] Plutarch *Stoicos* 4: ἰσόθεον διάθεσιν.

[59] *OGIS* 666 line 21 (Egypt, 55–59 C.E.): τὰς ἰσοθέους αὐτοῦ χάρι[τας] (of Nero). For god-equal qualities see also Isocrates *Helen* 61 'god-equal power'; Alcidamas *On the Sophists* 9 ('a god-equal intellect'). For equality language applied to character or capability see Stählin *TDNT* 3:351. See also Speusippus frag. 87b; Pseudo-Callisthenes *Alex*. 2.20.33 'a god-like work (ἔργον ἰσόθεον)'; Vettius Valens *Anth*. 9.1 'god-equal works (ἔργα ἰσόθεα)'.

[60] Gorgias Hel. 4: ἔσχε τὸ ἰσόθεον κάλλος, cf. Timaeus (in Athenaeus *Deip*. 13.589a) and Epicurus frag. 165.

[61] Homer *Il*. 2.565; 3.31; 4.212; 7.136; 9.211; 11.428, 472, 644; 16.632; 23.569, 677; *Od*. 1:324, cf. Aeschylus *Pers*. 80: Certamen *Contest of Homer and Hesiod* 296; *Sib. Or*. 5:138 (of Nero).

[62] Aesop *Fables* 116 recensions G and W (B. E. Perry, *Aesopica: a series of texts relating to Aesop or ascribed to him or closely connected with the literary tradition that bears his name. Volume 1: Greek and Latin Texts* (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, 1952), pp. 71, 103: ἰσοθέῳ βασιλεῖ.

[63] Aeschylus *Persians* 857: ἰσόθεος Δαρεῖος.

[64] Pseudo-Callisthenes *Alex*. 2.22 διὰ τοῦ ἰσοθέου Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ εὐεργέτου, cf. Hesiod *Cat*. 18.4 Ἀ]γήνο[ρ]ος ἰσοθέοι[ο; Euripides *IA* Νηρῇδος ἰσόθεον γένος 'a god-like son of the Nereid'; *IA* 1169 τῆς ἰσοθέου τυραννίδος 'A god-equal kingly power'; *Electra* 67 ἐγώ σ' ἴσον θεοῖσιν ἡγοῦμαι φίλον 'I count you an equal-to-the-gods friend'; Bacchylides *Odes* 13.64 ἃ τὸ[ν ἰσ]ό[θε]ον ἔτι[κτεν Πηλέα]; Apollonius of Rhodes *Argon*. 4.483 [1514] ἰσόθεος Περσεύς ; Pausanias 6.17.6 ἰσοθέων … Μελαμποδιδᾶν 'of god-like Melampodidae'.

[65] G. Stählin *TDNT* 3:353.

(ii)   Type 2: Predicative statements

Sometimes (in twenty-eight, that is 19% of extant texts), the compound adjective or an adjectival phrase is used predicatively. Sappho's poem *phainetai moi* begins 'That man seems to me to be equal to the gods (ἴσος θέοισιν ἔμμεν)'.[66] A Stoic treatise *On Marriage* by Antipater of Tarsus (d. 130/129 B.C.E.) records the view that some 'consider the bachelor's life, since it gives them license for whoring and enjoying various sordid and cheap pleasures, god-equal (τὸν δ' ἤθεον <βίον> ... ἰσόθεον νομίζουσι).'[67] The oft-cited second century C.E. papyrus *P. Heid*. 1716 has the pithy questions and answers: τὶ θεός; τὸ κρατοῦν. Τὶ βασιλεύς; ἰσόθεος 'What is a god? Exercising power. What is a king? One who is equal with a god'.[68] And it is with a predicative construction that Jesus is accused in John 5:18d of 'making himself equal with God (ἴσον ἑαυτὸν ποιῶν τῷ θεῷ)'.[69]

There are no predicative, Type 2, texts that clearly and unequivocally describe a status. In the one by the Stoic Antipater humans have a divine equality if they share the gods' life-style, namely one free of marital and other ordinary human social constraints.[70] The gods were supremely powerful and not bound by mortal customs and laws; free to do as they please and to have sex with whomever they

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[66] Sappho *Poem* 31, lines 1–2. Catullus' Latin version begins *Ille mi par esse deo videtur* (Catullus 51).

[67] *On Marriage* frag. 63, lines 47–48 following the translation of W. Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: the Hellenistic Background of 1 Corinthians 7* (SNTSMS, 83, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1995), p. 228. The words in the angled brackets are a proposed addition (Deming, *Paul on Marriage*, p. 228 n. 15).

[68] *P. Heid* 1716 verso lines 1–2. For text and analysis see H. G. Ingenkamp, 'Τὸ ἅμα? Zu einem Papyrus mit Fragen und Antworten', *Rheinisches Museum für philologie* 112 (1969), pp. 48–53.

[69] One syntactically distinct example of god-equal predication appears in Plato *Rep.* 2:360b–c.

[70] So too Plato *Rep.* 2.360b–c.

wished. Stories of the gods' aggressive seizure of women (and men) for sexual union were as old as Homer and much celebrated in the first century.[71]

The man whom Sappho thinks is equal to the gods perhaps has a divine beauty—a quality.[72] *P. Heid.* 1716 says that a king is equal to god by virtue of his supreme power—an attribute.[73] The meaning of John 5:18d is debated, but it is far from obvious that Jesus' accusers think he is only guilty of asserting a status. Other Type 2 texts are ambiguous or uncertain, but just as likely describe a god-like lifestyle, attribute or quality, as they do a status.[74]

(iii) Type 3: The substantival adjective: 'the god-equal'

In four texts the adjective is used substantively. Plato says the beloved receives service from his lover 'as one equal to a god (ὡς ἰσόθεος)' (*Phaedrus* 255c) and Pseudo-Longinus refers to Plato and Lysias as 'those god-equal men (οἱ ἰσόθεοι ἐκεῖνοι)'.[75] Such substantive cases are all, in a way that is not clearly defined in the extant examples, statements about human identity. They define an identity that could be

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[71] E.g. Isocrates *Helen* 59; Moschus *Europa*; Apollodorus *Library* 2.4.8; Plautus *Amphitryon*.

[72] So too in Philaenis [On Flattery]: 'while he says that she... is equal to a goddess (ὡς ἰσόθεον [… οὖσαν)'.

[73] In Plato *Phaed.* 258c divine equality describes a kind of immortality (see Appendix A: Type 2).

[74] Other Type 2 texts: Hippocrates *On Honorable Conduct* 5 (of the philosopher physician); Isocrates *Busiris* 13; *Nicocles* 5 (of kings in general); *Philip* 145; Plato *Rep.* 8:568b; *Phaedr.* 258c (of successful kings); Antiphanes the Comic Poet frag. 174; Epicurus in Diogenes of Oinoanda frag. 125; Philo *Allegorical Interpretation* 1:49; John 5:18; (Pseudo-)Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Ars Rhetorica* 7.7.7; Plutarch *A Pleasant Life Impossible* 7 (*Mor.* 1091C); Epictetus *Discourses* 1.12.27; Chariton *Callirhoe* 7.5.15; Cassius Dio 52.35.5; 53.9.5; Philostratus *Life of Apollonius* 7:21; *Letters of Apollonius* 44:1; Pseudo-Callisthenes *Alex.* 2.22 (α-recension) (of Alexander the Great); Lucian *Cataplus* 16 (of a tyrant); Lucian *Anarchasis* 10; *Dialogue of the Courtesans* 10.4.

[75] Pseudo-Longinus *On the Sublime* 35:2. See also Isocrates *Antigone* 834–38; *I Kyme* 19 (*SEG* 27.791) lines 13–20.

either a relative, constructed or given, status, but that, alternatively, could be an identity that is somehow innate or that inheres in the subject (as a quality or attribute).

(iv) Type 4: Adverbial statements for which the honourer is the acting subject

Type 4 is the first of two types of adverbial construction, for which there are twenty-two known examples (15% of all cases). In this type a divine equality phrase qualifies a verb for which the acting subject is the human community that gives the highest possible honours to some other individual. Passages in Homer's *Odyssey* establish the linguistic pattern.

During his visit to the underworld, Odysseus addresses the departed Achilles:

'Achilleus, no man before has been more blessed than you, nor ever will be. Before, when you were alive, *we Argives honoured you as we did the gods* (σε … ἐτίομεν ἶσα θεοῖσιν Ἀργεῖοι), and now in this place you have great authority over the dead'.[76]

In Dionysius of Byzantium's second century C.E. description of the geography of the Bosporus we are told there is

a temple of Ptolemy Philadelphus (d. 246 B.C.E.), *whom the Byzantines honoured in the manner of a god* (τοῦτον ἐτίμησαν ἶσα θεῷ Βυζάντιοι), having enjoyed the benefit of his greatness of mind and an honour (he) paid their city, for he granted them lands in Asia and a great quantity of grain and missiles and goods.[77]

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[76] Homer, *Od.* 11.482–486, trans. R. Lattimore, *The Odyssey of Homer* (Harper & Row: New York, 1967), p. 180. Cf. Homer *Od.* 15.518–520.

[77] Dionysius of Byzantium *Voyage through the Bosporus* 41.

In the forms ἴσα (τῷ) θεῷ/θεοῖ/θεοῖσιν or ἴσον θεῷ/θεοῖς this construction occurs thirteen times (six times with a singular ἴσα [τῷ] θεῷ).[78] There are a few others which have an adverbial ἐξ ἴσου or ἴσα καί.[79]

In these texts it is the *actions* by which other human beings honour an individual that are 'equal' in relation to similar actions directed to the gods. The adverbial ἴσα (τῷ) θεῳ/θεοῖς or ἴσον θεοῖς modifies the verb τιμάω ('to honour') or some other verb of human perception or treatment of the individual.

Semantically, this type of adverbial construction says what the more common adjectival construction with ἰσόθεοι τιμαί (and its variants) says. Both Types 1 and 4 syntax are used to describe honorific actions directed to an exalted individual such that they have a status equal to that of the gods. This adverbial type allows a slightly sharper focus on the state of, the circumstances of, and the particular actions undertaken by, the community than do the ἰσόθεοι τιμαί Type 1 texts.

(v) Type 5: Adverbial statements for which the god-equal human is the subject of the verb

The second type of adverbial construction focuses on the individual who stands in a relationship of equality to the gods (or to God), in a way that is semantically quite different to the Type 4 adverbial

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[78] Homer *Il.* 9.603; *Od.* 11.484-85; 15.519–20 (ἴσα θεῷ); Menander *One Verse Maxims* line 270; Diodorus Siculus 1.10.8 (Hecataeus of Abdera); 10.9.9; Philodemus of Gadara (*P. Herc*. 1428, frag. 51, line 1473–7); *SEG* 15:853 lines 14–16; Pausanius 2.2.7 (ἴσα τῷ θεῷ); Philostratus *Life of Apollonius* 5:24 (θεῷ ἴσα); SEG 15.853, lines 9–12; *I Erythrai* 145 (Asia Minor, imperial). Passive verbs express a similar sense in Diodorus Siculus 10.9.9 (ἴσα [τῷ] θεῷ) and Dionysus of Byzantium *Voyage through the Bosporus* 24 (ἴσα θεῷ); 41 (ἴσα θεῷ).

[79] For ἐξ ἴσου and ἴσα καί see *LSJ* 839. For ἐξ ἴσου: Cassius Dio 44.5.3–6.4; 51.20.1; Demosthenes 19 (*On the False Assembly*) 280; Aeschines *Against Timarchus* 28; Chares *Sententiae* I.7; Aelius Aristides *To Plato: In Defense of the Four* (*Oration* 3) 423. For ἴσα καί: Euripides *Electra* 994; Nicolaus of Damascus *Life of Augustus* 130:97 (§26); 130:117 (§29).

construction. In the Type 4 construction an adverbial phrase (ἴσα [τῷ] θεῳ/θεοῖς or ἴσον θεοῖς) modifies a verb of which the community that honours and perceives the individual as god-equal is the subject. The Argives honoured Achilles *the way they honoured* the gods (*Od.* 15.484–85). In Type 4 constructions those worshipped are passive recipients of the action of others. By contrast, *in Type 5 constructions an adverbial phrase or compound (ἶσα θεῷ, ἶσα θεοῖσι[v], or ἰσόθεα) modifies a verb of which the would-be divine human individual is the subject.*

There are six, semantically similar, instances of this type of construction that have the verb in the active voice.[80] Three—Homeric Hymn 5 (*To Aphrodite*) 214, a line in a work by Philodemus of Gadara, and one in Pseudo-Perictione's *On the Harmony of Women*—have not figured in previous discussions of Phil. 2:6.[81] I begin with the four oldest, which are the most straightforward.

Homer's *Iliad* book 5 recounts the best achievements (*aristeia*) of the Achaean hero Diomedes, son of Tydeus, focusing on the occasions when he attacks the gods. At Athena's behest he successfully strikes at Aphrodite (5.124–132, 318–351), Aeneas' protectress, and later attacks Ares (5.846–63). Between those two scenes, at *Il.* 5.431–442, Diomedes thinks he can take on Apollo who, in Aphrodite's stead, had come to the wounded Aeneas's rescue:

Now as these were talking in this way with each other Diomedes of the great war cry

made for Aeneas. Though he saw how Apollo himself held his hands over him he did not

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[80] One example (*Od.* 11.300–304) of a passive verb Type 5 syntax is semantically equivalent to the Type 4 constructions.

[81] The two passages in Homer have occasionally been noted (e.g. G. Stählin *TDNT* 3:352 n. 44; Heen, 'Phil. 2:6-11', p. 142 n. 71), but commentators have ignored their import and syntactic proximity to Phil. 2:6. The exception is Gerard M. Ellis who, in his unpublished dissertation on Phil. 2:6–7, discusses *Il.* 21:315 and concludes the language of Phil. 2:6c is Homeric (*Grammar as Theology*, pp. 281–3). 2 Macc. 9:12 has often been brought to bear on the interpretation of Phil. 2:6 (see below).

shrink even from the great god, but forever forward drove, to kill Aeneas and strip his glorious armour. Three times, furious to cut him down, he drove forward, and three times Apollo battered aside the bright shield, but as a fourth time, like more than a man (δαίμονι ἶσος), he charged, Apollo who strikes from afar cried out to him in the voice of terror: 'Take care, give back, son of Tydeus. *You do not want to think the way the gods do* (μηδὲ θεοῖσιν ἶσ᾽ ἔθελε φρονέειν), since never the same is the breed of gods, who are immortal, and men who walk groundling (ἐπεὶ οὔ ποτε φῦλον ὁμοῖον ἀθανάτων τε θεῶν χαμαὶ ἐρχομένων τ᾽ ἀνθρώπων)'.[82]

In combat, Diomedes is as good as a god (438: δαίμονι ἶσος). But Apollo warns him not to aspire to *think (and therefore act) in the manner of the gods* (441–42 θεοῖσιν ἶσ᾽ … φρονέειν), but to remember his mortal limitations and the species distinction between humans and gods (441–42). There is a similar passage at Homer *Il.* 21.308–315 where Achilles, strengthened by Athene, attacks Scamander, the divine river. Scamander rallies his forces against Achilles, who is 'now in his strength and *rages in fury like the gods* (μέμονεν δ᾽ ὅ γε ἶσα θεοῖσι)'.[83]

The third example of the Type 5 construction (noted above) appears towards the end of Homeric Hymns 5 (*To Aphrodite*). There we hear that Zeus snatched away Ganymede because of his beauty, to be with the immortals, as wine butler in the house of Zeus, pouring out the red nectar from a golden bowl and as one now honoured by all along with the immortals (202–6). But, back on earth, Ganymede's father, Tros, is grief stricken at his inexplicable loss, until Zeus sends Hermes to him with a consolatory gift of horses and the message that his son had been taken so 'that he would be immortal

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[82] *Il.* 5.436–442, translation R. Lattimore, *The Iliad of Homer* (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1951), pp. 139–140 (modified).

[83] *Il.* 21.315, translation Lattimore, *Iliad*, p. 426 (modified).

and unageing equally with the gods (ἔοι ἀθάνατος καὶ ἀγήρως ἶσα θεοῖσιν)' (214).[84] Here ἶσα θεοῖσιν modifies the optative third person singular of εἰμί (ἔοι) and means 'in a manner equal with the gods'. Ganymede now 'lives' on Olympus enjoying a god-equal manner of existence (ἔοι … ἶσα θεοῖσιν). He exists in a manner ἶσα θεοῖσιν because he is himself 'immortal'. Probably, also, the words ἶσα θεοῖσιν are meant to bring to mind all that the gods enjoy and that distinguishes them from mortals (cf. 202–6).

A fourth Type 5 example appears in the third or fourth century B.C.E. text attributed to Perictione, the mother of Plato. Parents, we read, behave towards their children in a manner equal to the gods. Other texts show that the topic of divine equality was often applied to the relations between children and parents, usually to say that parents should receive 'god-equal honours' from their children.[85] However, in Pseudo-Perictione *it is the conduct of parents that is god-equal* (and that warrants a proper reverence of them):

> One must revere the gods in the confident hope of happiness, obeying both ancestral laws and institutions. After these, I say to honour and to revere one's parents, *for they are and effect everything equally to the gods for their offspring* (οὗτοι γὰρ ἶσα θεοῖσι πάντα πέλουσι καὶ πρήσσουσι τοῖς ἐγγόνοισι).[86]

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[84] The *Hymn to Aphrodite* was composed sometime between the late seventh and mid-sixth centuries B.C.E. (A. Faulkner, *The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite: Introduction, Text, and Commentary* [Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2008], pp. 47–48).

[85] Chares *Sententiae* I.17; Menander frag. 805; Aeschines *Against Timarchus* 28 and Philodemus of Gadara *On Piety* frag. 51, lines 1473–4.

[86] Pseudo-Perictione *On the Harmony of Women* 1. Translation: Mary E. Waithe, *Ancient women philosophers, 600 B.C.-500 A.D* (Nijhoff: Dordrecht, 1987), p. 33.

Whilst authors typically use a Type 1 or 4 construction for god-equal honours *directed to parents*, Pseudo-Perictione employs a Type 5 construction to ascribe to ideal parents a god-equal *administration and manner of existence* (πάντα πέλουσι καὶ πρήσσουσι).

Philippians 2:6c should now be categorised as a Type 5 statement of divine equality: the adverbial phrase ἴσα θεῷ modifies the articular infinitive τὸ εἶναι. The implied subject of the infinitive τὸ εἶναι is Christ. Christ reckons on the matter of '(the/a) being (τὸ εἶναι) (that is) in a manner equal to God (ἴσα θεῷ)' which, as all agree, is a kind of being that Christ himself either already has, or that he expresses, or that he will have after his resurrection and exaltation in vv. 9–11.

Before we reflect further on the place of Phil. 2:6c in the Type 5 category, we should consider two Hellenistic-era Type 5 texts that each merit careful scrutiny, not just because they are close in time to Paul's letter. The first, 2 Maccabees 9:12, is the only Type 5 text that has had a bearing on the modern discussion of Phil. 2:6c. Along with a line in a badly preserved portion of a treatise by the epicurean Philodemus of Gadara (below), 2 Macc 9:12 shows that, although Type 5 texts are rare, because they appear in Homer whose works were educationally foundational for Greek speakers and culturally canonical for both Greeks and Romans, their syntax and meaning would be readily recognised.

(a) 2 Maccabees 9:12: Antiochus IV's confession

2 Maccabees is written in good Hellenistic Koiné, employing a rich and diverse vocabulary. Chapter 9 recounts God's judgement of Antiochus IV Epiphanes for his abusive treatment of the Jews in Judaea. The grizzly account of the Seleucid's sufferings climaxes when he 'comes to his senses under the divine scourge' (v. 11) and admits the folly of his divine self-pretentions (v. 12b), confessing:

'Δίκαιον ὑποτάσσεσθαι τῷ θεῷ καὶ μὴ θνητὸν ὄντα ἰσόθεα φρονεῖν.'[87]

This has been cited as a text in support of the status view of the divine equality clause in Phil 2: Antiochus confesses his guilt in seeking divine honours.[88] The standard translations provide support for that view:

'It is right to be subject to God; mortals should not think that they are equal to God'. (NRSV)

'(Es ist) recht, sich Gott unterzuordnen und als Sterblicher sich nicht für gottgleich zu halten'. (LXX.D)

However, the word ἰσόθεα is not a straightforward form of the compound ἰσόθεος and for such modern translations the author had, at his disposal, other ways of expressing himself. He perhaps should have written Δίκαιον … θνητὸν ὄντα οὐκ ἰσόθεον ἡγεῖσθαι αὐτόν.[89] As it is, ἰσόθεα is best explained as an adverbial neuter plural accusative modifying the verb φρονεῖν:

'It is right to be subject to God and, being mortal, to not think in a manner equal to God.'[90]

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[87] Some manuscripts have ὑπερήφανα for ἰσόθεα (W. Kappler and R. Hanhart, *Maccabaeorum liber I-IV* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1936], 86). Most recent commentators accept that ἰσόθεα is the original. Even if it is not, the manuscript tradition that has ἰσόθεα φρονεῖν has to be explained and is a valuable example of a Type 5 adverbial divine equality construction.

[88] E.g. Grelot, 'Deux Expressions', p. 501; Hellerman, 'Social Status,' p. 789.

[89] Cf. Philostratus *Letters of Apollonius* 44:1 'Why is it surprising that most of humanity thinks me equal to a god (ἰσόθεον ἡγουμένων)?' (LCL) and Plato *Phaedrus* 258c and Isocrates *Nicocles* 5.

[90] For this explanation of the unusual Greek, a defence of ἰσόθεα as the original and reasons to think that Antiochus' words are part of a series of conscious allusions to the theomachy theme in Diomedes' *aristeia* (*Il.* 5) see C. Fletcher-Louis, 'Antiochus' Confession in 2 Macc 9:12: Text, Translation and A Possible Homeric Allusion', (*forthcoming*).

The words μὴ … ἰσόθεα φρονεῖν make good sense as morphological adaptation of the μηδὲ θεοῖσιν ἶσ᾽ ἔθελε φρονέειν of *Iliad* 5:440–41, a passage which the author would have encountered, or memorised, at an early stage of his education. It is an adaptation of the common ἴσα + θεοῖς /θεοῖσι(ν) (of post-Homeric texts) that avoids the impression that Antiochus still believes in many gods. That is, by making an adverb out of the common compound ἰσόθεος Antiochus' words are a plausible confession of belief in one God ('… to not think in a manner equal to God').

The author's choice of a Type 5 syntax also fits the context. In the preceding verses (vv. 4–11) Antiochus' outrages and his divine punishments are relayed in graphic detail that echoes the both the boasts of the king Babylon who attempted to rival the Most High (Isaiah 14) and biblical claims for the unique transcendence of the one God:

> 5 … the all-seeing Lord, the God of Israel, *struck* him with an *incurable* and invisible *blow* (cf. Isa. 14:6). As soon as he stopped speaking, he was seized with a pain in his bowels for which there was no relief (ἔλαβεν αὐτὸν ἀνήκεστος τῶν σπλάγχνων ἀλγηδών, cf. *Il.* 5.394), and with sharp internal tortures—6 and that very justly, for he had tortured the bowels of others with many and strange inflictions. 7 Yet he did not in any way stop his insolence but was even more filled with arrogance, breathing fire in his rage against the Judaeans and giving orders to speed up the journey. And so it came about that he fell (cf. Isa. 14:12) out of his chariot as it was rushing along and that, through the grievous fall, all the limbs of the body were racked. 8 Thus he, who only a little while before had thought in his superhuman arrogance that he could command the waves of the sea (δοκῶν τοῖς τῆς θαλάσσης κύμασιν) and had imagined (οἰόμενος) that he could weigh the high mountains in a balance (Isa. 40:12) was brought down to earth (cf. Isa. 14:12, 15) and carried in a litter, making the power of God manifest to all (cf. Isa. 14:16), 9 so that worms (cf. Isa. 14:11) broke out of the ungodly man's eyes, and while he was still living in

anguish and pain, his flesh rotted away, and because of his stench the whole army felt revulsion at the decay. 10 Because of the unbearable oppressiveness of the stench no one was able to carry the man who a little while before had thought (δοκοῦντα) that he could touch the stars of heaven (cf. Isa. 14:13) 11 Then it was that, broken in spirit, he began to lose much of his arrogance and to come to his senses under the divine scourge, for he was tortured with pain every moment. 12 And when he could not endure his own stench, he uttered these words, 'It is right to be subject to God and, being a mortal, not to think in a God-equal manner.'[91]

Antiochus' crimes are that he '*thought* he could command the waves and had *imagined* that he could weigh the high mountains in a balance' (v. 8). He '*thought*' that he could touch the stars of heaven (v. 10)

Of course, only the one God can command the waves. Verse 8 recalls Ps. 107 [OG 106]:23–32, where those who 'went down to the sea in ships' (v. 23) are overwhelmed by a mighty storm and its threatening *waves* (v. 25: τὰ κύματα), from which the LORD rescues them when 'he *commanded* (ἐπέταξεν) the storm' and 'its waves (τὰ κύματα) were silent' (v. 29, cf. Pss. 29:3–4; 65:7; 89:9; Prov. 8:29; Amos 9:3; Job 38:11; Nah. 1:4; PrMan 3). Antiochus' aspiration to weigh the mountains recalls the rhetorical question about the unique activity of God the creator in Isa. 40:12: 'Who … weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?' When 2 Maccabees 9:10 says he thought he could touch the stars, that too is Isaianic language that implies that he thinks he can be, or that he can act like, the Most High (OG Isa. 14:14: ἔσομαι ὅμοιος τῷ ὑψίστῳ).

In multiple ways, then, for the reader of 2 Macc. 9:7–11 versed in Israel's scriptures, Antiochus is guilty of *thinking* and *planning* to act in a manner equal to the one true God. There is no

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[91] NETS translation (slightly modified).

interest in Antiochus' claim to a divine status or God-equal cultic honours. So, the last words of his confession in v. 12—it is wrong '*to think in a God-equal manner* (ἰσόθεα φρονεῖν)'—are a fitting back-reference to the preceding crimes.

Antiochus' confession is monotheistic, but also employs language that might be expected of a Hellenist. Besides his talk of divine equality, commentators have pointed out that his rejection of a divine identity *for those who are mortal* (θνητὸν ὄντα) echoes a proverbial critique of human hubris, especially of rulers and kings.[92]

It is also likely that Antiochus' confession is meant to be heard as an allusion to Diomedes' assaults on the gods.[93] Diomedes was the prime example of the *theomachos*—the 'god-fighter'. His *aristeia* recount three occasions when he attacks the gods and in between the first and second there is dialogue in heaven about other occasions when mortals attacked Gods. In 2 Maccabees 7, in a chapter that several times (vv. 17, 19, 31–36) looks forward to the coming judgement on Antiochus, one of the seven sons who dies at the hands of the king's torturers boldly chastises him for 'having tried to fight against God (θεομαχεῖν ἐπιχειρήσας)' (7:19). He thinks he is fighting mortals, but, in truth, he attempts an assault on God. It is, therefore, fitting that it says in 2 Macc. 9:5, when his punishments began, ἔλαβεν αὐτὸν ἀνήκεστος τῶν σπλάγχνων ἀλγηδών 'he was seized with a pain in his bowels for which there was no relief', since this is the language Homer *Il.* 5.394 where the goddess Dione retells the story of Hercules striking Hera (τότε καί μιν ἀνήκεστον λάβεν ἄλγος 'then also a pain without relief seized her').

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[92] In Aeschylus *Persians* 819–820 Darius, commenting on the failures of his son, Xerxes, says 'mortal man should not vaunt himself excessively (ὡς οὐχ ὑπέρφευ θνητὸν ὄντα χρὴ φρονεῖν)' (LCL). Cf. Aeschylus *Pers.* 749–50 and the texts from Greek drama in J. A. Goldstein, *II Maccabees: a new translation with introduction and commentary* (AB 41A; Doubleday: Garden City, 1983), p. 355.

[93] For what follows see the further details in Fletcher-Louis, 'Antiochus' Confession'.

As the author of 2 Maccabees tells the story of Antiochus' persecution of the Jews, he thinks of Homer's tales of theomachy. The confession he puts on Antiochus' lips echoes Apollo's warning to Diomedes: 'immortal gods' and 'humans' are different species (*Il.* 5:441–42) and mortals should not think in a god-equal manner. 2 Maccabees 9:12 shows that the Type 5 divine equality syntax was well known and readily evoked passages in Homer.

(b) Philodemus of Gadara *On the Good King according to Homer*

The Epicurean Philodemus of Gadara wrote a treatise *On the Good King according to Homer* for his patron L. Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus (Julius Caesar's father-in-law) in the mid-first century B.C.E.[108] A badly preserved papyrus copy of the treatise was stored in Piso's library in his villa at Herculaneum (*P. Herc*. 1507). The work gleans from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* exemplary conduct and advice for the virtuous and wise ruler, and for the private and public conduct of those in positions of authority.[109]

At several points *On the Good King* draws on Diomedes' *aristeia* (*Iliad* book 5) and Jeffrey Fish's scientific reconstruction of the text of the final columns shows this to be a prominent theme.[110] In

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[108] For a precise date and a Macedonian setting of *On the Good King* between 57 and 55 B.C.E. see Jeffrey Fish, 'The Closing Columns of Philodemus' *On the Good King according to Homer, Pherc.* 1507 Cols. 95–98 (= Cols. 40-43 Dorandi)', *Cronache Ercolanesi* 46 (2016), pp. 56–58 and *idem*, 'Some Critical Themes in Philodemus' *On the Good King According to Homer'*, in J. Klooste and Baukje van den Berg (eds), *Homer and the Good Ruler in Antiquity and Beyond* (Brill: Leiden), pp. 154–55.

[109] For discussion see E. Asmis, 'Philodemus' Poetic Theory and *On the Good King according to Homer*', *Classical Antiquity* 10 (1991), pp. 1–32; M. Gigante, *Philodemus in Italy: the books from Herculaneum* (University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, 1995), pp. 63–78 and Fish, 'Some Critical Themes'.

[110] J. Fish, 'Closing Columns', cf. *idem*, 'Philodemus' *On the Good King according to Homer*: columns 21–31', *Cronache Ercolanesi* 32 (2002), pp. 187–232.

columns 27 and 41 Philodemus refers to Zeus' rejection of Ares and the god of war's whining complaint when wounded by Diomedes in *Il.* 5.588–891.[111] In column 40 Philodemus finds an educative lesson in Zeus' handling of Hera's ridiculing of Aphrodite after her wounding by Diomedes (*Il.* 5.418–425).[112]

Between columns 27 and 41, the badly preserved columns 35–36 tackle issues of strife between men and between men and gods. For these topics, Philodemus quotes from a passage in the *Odyssey* where Odysseus refuses to compete with (ἐριζέμεν οὐκ ἐθελήσω) the heroes of previous generations (*On the Good King* col. 35, lines 25–26 cite *Od.* 8.223–224), such as Hercules and Eurytos of Oichalia who had fought with the gods with the bow (8:225: οἵ ῥα καὶ ἀθανάτοισιν ἐρίζεσκον περὶ τόξων). These verses are a parallel in the *Odyssey* to those in *Iliad* 5 that have mortals fighting and wounding gods.[113] Then, in the next column, there is an unmistakeable echo of Diomedes' attack on the gods (col. 36, lines 9–11). Lines 9–13 say:

ἀλλ᾽ οὐ[κ] ἴσα θε|[οῖς] ἐφρόνε[ι] καὶ τοῖς θεοῖς | [ἤρι]ζεν αὐτοῖς· καί που |[δοκῶν τῶ]ν κρειττόνων τις | [εἶ]ναί τε [...

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[111] See Fish, 'Columns 21–31', pp. 198–199, 222–223; *idem* 'Closing Columns', pp. 60–62, 67–9. I adopt the column numbering of T. Dorandi, *Il buon re secondo Omero* (La Scuola di Epicuro, 3, Bibliopolis: Napoli, 1982). In Fish's reconstruction Dorandi col. 41 is col. 96. Dorandi's text with notes and the standard English translation by Asmis ('Poetic Theory', pp. 28–34) lack the reference to the scene at the end of the *Iliad* Book 5 in *On the Good King* col. 41.

[112] Fish, 'Closing Columns', pp. 56, 60, 65–67 (= col. 40 Fish). There is also a quotation from *Il.* 5.5–6 (a description of Diomedes) at col. 38:8–11.

[113] The Greek of *Od.* 8.225 echoes *Il.* 6.131 (ὅς ῥα θεοῖσιν ἐπουρανίοισιν ἔριζεν) at the end of Diomedes' *aristeia*.

The syntax of lines 9–11a and the subject of its verbs have been unclear. A confident translation is difficult and the lines have received little scholarly comment.[114] Fish now restores the preceding lines so that Hektor (clearly mentioned at the start of the column) is the subject throughout. But he also notes difficulties and identifies at least one scribal error.[115] In any case, given all the other references to stories of mortals wounding gods and to *Iliad* book 5, *Il.* 5.441–42 must be the source of Philodemus' οὐκ ἴσα θεοῖς ἐφρόνει.

What contribution the Homeric idiom makes to Philodemus' argument is hard to tell. The οὐκ in line 9 is problematic. Whether Hektor is praised because he did not think the way gods do but did strive against them, or that he both thought the way the gods do and strove against them, is unclear.[117]

Whatever exactly these broken lines originally meant, they are further evidence for the formative influence of the *Iliad's* peculiar way of describing human god-equal conduct and thinking. What is not in doubt is that in Philodemus' treatise the divine equality language of *Il. 5.441–42 serves as a reflection on the conduct of Homer's characters and the ways in which they are instructive for rulers in his own time.*

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[114] Asmis translates: 'But he did not have wisdom equal to the gods and he quarrelled with the gods themselves' ('Poetic Theory', p. 32, cf. Fish, 'Some Critical Themes', p. 151 'thought himself equal to gods'). Both appear to miss the language of *Il.* 5.440–41.

[115] Fish, 'Some Critical Themes' pp. 150–151 esp. nn. 50–51.

[117] In the Homeric context striving against the gods is what Diomedes does when he thinks equally with the gods, so it would be surprising if the οὐκ only negates the three following words, not the rest of the sentence as well. The καί is puzzling: we expect an οὐδέ. Lines 9–10 could be an interrogative: 'did he not think the way the gods do and strive against them themselves?' Fish treats the οὐκ as a transposed negative and emends the text, placing the οὐκ in line 8. That creates a smoother text and one which respects the fact that 'thinking the way the gods think' and 'striving with the gods' are near equivalents in the Homeric context. But it produces a text that says Hektor ἴσα θεοῖς ἐφρόνει; something that only Diomedes and Achilles do in the *Iliad*.

Philodemus was not the only near contemporary of Paul to reflect on the stories in *Iliad* 5. Ovid, Vergil and Horace all cite or allude to Diomedes' wounding of the gods.[118] Diomedes was famous for fighting ἴσα θεοῖς. Although 2 Maccabees 9:12 and our passage in Philodemus' treatise are the clearest Hellenistic examples of the impact of the ἶσα θεοῖσι(ν) in *Il.* 5.441–42, they show that the two Homeric Type 5 divine equality statements were known and influential at the turn of the eras.

This frustratingly broken Philodemus passage and the one in 2 Macc. 9 show that, although a statistically rare form of divine equality expression, as a Type 5 construction the phrase τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ had an impressive poetic pedigree. Paul's words τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ would have sounded archaic, perhaps even Homeric.

(vi) Type 6: Verbal statements of divine equality

For the sake of completeness, there is one further kind of text, rarely attested, but noteworthy for an assessment of the Greek of Phil. 2:6c and its relation to the rest of Phil. 2:6–11. In a few texts a form of verb meaning 'make equal' is used.[119] Aesop's *Fables* 111 begins by setting the scene on Olympus: 'When Heracles had been made equal with the gods (ἰσοθεωθείς) and he was received by Zeus, he was warmly greeted by every one of the gods'.[120]

Whereas Heracles' deification is warmly received in heaven, in other cases an (attempted) act of self-deification provokes hostility. In the fifth book of the Jewish *Sibylline Oracles* the terrible, serpentine (5:29), Nero is prophesied to return ἰσάζων θεῷ αὐτόν 'making himself equal with God' (5:34,

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[118] Vergil: *Aen.* 10:28–30; 11:276–77; 12:797, cf. 243–95; Horace: *Odes* 1.6.13–16; Ovid: *Met.* 15.769–74, cf. 14.477–79; 15.803–6; *Amores* 1.7.31–34; *Rem. Am.* 1.5–6, 159–160; *Pont.* 2.2.13–14.

[119] In addition to the texts discussed here, there is also Plato *Tim.* 41c.

[120] For the text see Perry, *Aesopica*, p. 364.

cf. 12:86). In the *Library* of Apollodorus the legendary king Salmoneus of Elis 'wants to make himself equal with Zeus (τῷ Διὶ ἐξισοῦσθαι θέλων)' and, for his hubris, is struck by the god's thunderbolts.[121] Such passages reflect a common, Jewish and Greek, criticism of self-exalting and self-deifying mortals, especially rulers, which is often voiced without recourse to the formulaic language of divine equality. The sole example of this Type of construction in the Septuagint may also reflect that criticism: OG Ps. 88:7 (= Heb. 89:7) celebrates *Yhwh-Kyrios*' incomparable greatness with the rhetorical question 'who in the clouds will be deemed like unto the Lord (ἰσωθήσεται τῷ κυρίῳ)?'[122]

4. Implications of the linguistic data

In some respects, this survey of divine equality language confirms the judgements of modern commentators. In others it challenges them and directs our attention to new, or rarely considered, possibilities.

Divine equality terminology was pagan not biblical. So, Philippians 2:6c is one of the ways that Paul's letter is consciously orientated to the language of its gentile audience. Its appearance several times in Jewish texts reflects the fact that, after Alexander the Great, Jews were surrounded by a language and culture that took for granted the possibility of human equality with the gods.[123] So there is no reason

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[121] Apollodorus *Library* 1.9.7. On Salmoneus's divine self-pretensions and punishments see also Hesiod *Catalogue of Women* frag. 27; Vergil *Aen.* 6.585–94.

[122] For this type of construction see also Sophocles *OT* 32 and Plato *Tim.* 41c.

[123] Jewish authors conversant with the language: OG Ps. 88:7 (Heb. 89:7); 2 Macc. 9:12; Artapanus *frag.* 3, 6; Jesus' Jewish accusers in Jerusalem in John 5:18; *Sib. Or.* 5:138 (Nero is an ἰσόθεος φώς); 5:340: Nero will ἰσάζων θεῷ αὑτόν; Philo *Alleg. Interp.* 1:49; *Embassy* 149; *Decal.* 7; *Moses* 2:194; *Laws* 1.25; *Virt.* 219, cf. *Embassy* 98; *Conf.* 170. Note also (the possibly Jewish) Pseudo-Longinus *On the Sublime* 35.2: οἱ ἰσόθεοι ἐκεῖνοι.

to conclude from Phil. 2:6c that 2:6–11 was composed by a gentile, not a Jewish Christian,[124] nor that Paul would not understand its terminology. The expression may well have sounded Homeric, providing an affirmation of Greek culture at the start of the hymn that balances the citation from Israel's scriptures (Isa. 45:23) at its end (vv. 10–11).

Greek writers were aware of the different ways in which the adjective ἴσος and its adverbial form (ἴσα) could be used to speak of divine equality. Depending on the emphasis of a passage, the context or an author's style, they would choose between these Types 1 and 4 to write about honours given to an individual.[125] Type 1 and Type 2 constructions provided ways to ascribe god-like attributes to a human being or to kinds of behaviour. When they wanted to stress the idea that a particular individual thought or acted in a god-like way they could use Type 5 constructions. When speaking of those collectively deemed god-equal they would use a Type 3 syntax. To criticizing the arrogant attempts of rulers to deify themselves they could use a form of Type 6.

By the first century C.E. divine equality language was conventional and was typically used when speaking about discrete subjects or themes, and with other commonly used terms. It figures half-a-dozen times when praising a lover's beauty and to describe the esteem in which lovers hold each other.[126] It is common in descriptions of the relationship of parents with their children. Most of all it is used to describe heroes, powerful and highly esteemed rulers, including kings and emperors; contexts in which there often appears the stereotyped technical expression ἰσόθεοι τιμαί.

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[124] *Pace* Heen, 'Phil. 2:6–11', p. 148.

[125] Diodorus Siculus had a penchant for Type 1, using it fifteen times (including in quotations of others works). But he also used Type 4 a couple of times (1.10.89 [in a quotation from Hecataeus of Abdera]; 10:9:9).

[126] Sappho 31, lines 1–2; Gorgias *Encomium on Helen* 4; Plato *Phaedrus* 255a; Phileanis *Peri Aphrodision* (P. Oxy. 39.2891) frag. 3 col ii, 4; Timaeus in Athenaeus *Deip.* 13:589a; Lucian *Dial. Heter.* 10.4.

Whilst the royal associations of the language are present from the start—in Homer—the way it figures as the language of ruler cult and emperor worship is firmly established by the turn of the eras. The language is used for kings and rulers in 47% of the texts from the third century B.C.E. onwards (forty-three of the ninety-one) and, *of those texts in that period that use god-equal language for persons (sixty-seven cases)*, 66% (forty-four texts) have in view a king or ruler. So previous studies have been right to emphasise that the god-equal language of Phil. 2:6c contributes to the portrayal of Christ as a divine ruler. There should be no doubt that, *in the context of this first-century hymnic piece, τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ is language is fitting for one who is finally exalted, as Caesar's superior, over all rival gods and divine rulers.*

In other ways modern scholarship has misjudged the linguistic data. It is not true that the 'syntactic boundaries' between different types of god-equal expression were 'blurred in actual usage', such that it would be legitimate to treat the adverbial phrase ἴσα θεῷ in Phil. 2:6c as if it were adjectival.[127]

There are multiple reasons to conclude that, in the first century, Greek speakers and authors were sensitive to the syntactic and semantic boundaries between the different types of god-equal statement. Firstly, the conclusion—arising from the basic rules of Greek grammar and syntax—that Paul's τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ must mean '(a/the) being (that is) in a manner equal to God' is consistent with the evidence that there was a distinct type (Type 5) of god-equal construction of which Phil. 2:6c should be viewed as a subtype. The adverbial type of divine equality expression employed here was a relatively rare one, so there was no linguistic pressure in the environment that would explain its employment in Phil. 2:6. It is highly unlikely that the author of Phil. 2:6 has used an adverbial expression *whilst actually intending an adjectival meaning* for which there were more commonly used constructions available. That

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[127] As Heen, 'Phil. 2:6–11', p. 147, claimed.

the type of expression employed in v. 6 is uncommon is best explained if the author *intends a statement about a manner of being that is equal to God's manner of being.*

Not only is there ample evidence that the language was well-known and that there was ready discrimination between distinct types of expression, there are other features of the primary texts which show that god-equal language flowed down well-worn semantic channels, with conventional, stereotyped, terms appearing according to context and purpose. Divine equality is often something to which an individual *attains* (τυγχάνω), of which they are *judged worthy* (ἀξιωθῆναι),[128] and that public bodies *decree* (with δοκέω, νομίζω),[129] or that individuals *consider and perceive* (νομίζω, ἡγέομαι).[130] In the Roman world, under Augustus and his successors, there were conventional diplomatic terms by which the offer of spontaneous or official god-equal honours were rejected.[131] Linguistically, the variety of syntactic types are the product of discrete grammatical rules to which students would be introduced in the early stages of an education that relied heavily on Homer, where already in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*

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[128] Diodorus Siculus 1.97.6: Daedalus was 'accorded great glory because of his genius and, after making many discoveries, was judged worthy (ἀξιωθέντα) … to receive god-equal honors (τυχεῖν ἰσοθέων τιμῶν)', cf. 1.24.7–8; 4.58.6; Artapanus frag. 3.6; Polybius 10.10.11; Dionysius of Halicarnasus 1.44.1–2; Philo *Moses* 2.194.

[129] For νομίζω: Isocrates *Nicocles* 5; Antiphanes frag. 174 line 2; Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Ars. Rhet.* 7.7.7; Lucian *Anacharsis* 10. For ἀξιωθῆναι: Diodorus Siculus 1.22.6; 1.97.6.

[130] For νομίζω used for the perception of the god-equal see Isocrates *Nicocles* 5; Antipater *On Marriage* (cited above). For ἡγέομαι: Eur. *IA* 67; Plato *Phaed.* 258c; Philostratus *Letters of Apollonius* 44:1; Lucian *Dem.* 7.

[131] God-equal honours declined with the verb παραιτέομαι 'I decline': by L. Vaccius L. f. Aemilia Labeo in *I.Kyme* 19 (2 B.C.E. – 14 C.E.) line 17; by Germanicus Caesar in an edict of 19 C.E. (in Hunt, Edgar, and Page, *Select papyri*, vol. 2, pp. 76–78), and in Pseudo-Callisthenes *Alex.* (α-recension) 2:22 by Alexander the Great. For discussion of these texts, their Greek and Latin parallels, and a possible diplomatic formula for the refusal of divine honours in M. P. Charlesworth, 'Refusal of Divine Honours: An Augustan Formula', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 15 (1939), pp. 1–10 (pp. 3–7).

there is the distinction between adjectival and adverbial types of divine equality construction that was basic to the further distinctions between Types 1, 2 and 3, and Types 4 and 5.

All these observations confirm the linguistic case for thinking that τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ must mean something like '(a/the) being (that is) in a manner equal with God'. *Verse 6c denotes not a status, but a particular 'being', namely one that is in a manner equal with God, or, rather, a 'being in a manner equal with God's manner of being'.*

Whilst the ideal reader of v. 6c would have had little trouble identifying τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ as one particular kind of god-equal construction from among several types employed in Greek literature, in its present context it nevertheless contains two unusual, arresting, features. These two unparalleled and arresting features, we propose, help to explain its function in the narrative. They also direct our attention to features of the Christology of the first half of the hymn which modern scholarship has, until now, missed.

(i) Firstly, all the other ancient texts that have god-equal honours to rulers envisage divine honours for either a living or a (recently) deceased ruler. If Phil. 2:6c denotes a divine equality in heaven prior to their having a life on earth, it is the only known text to use god-equal language that way.

(ii) Secondly, the way that ἴσα θεῷ modifies the infinitive τὸ εἶναι is striking. The fact that ἴσα θεῷ modifies a form of εἰμί is unsurprising given the potentially durative and active connotations of the Greek verb 'to be' and the similar construction with ἔοι in Homeric Hymns 5 line 214. But in v. 6 we have an unparalleled statement about—and *a reckoning in regard to*—'being' itself. And 'the being (τὸ εἶναι)' about which Christ reckons has a particular manner that makes it a transcendent, divine, kind of being; it is a being in the manner *of God*.

5. *Being* in a manner equal with God: a dynamic ontology

Those nineteenth and twentieth century scholars who took seriously the adverbial force of ἴσα θεῷ concluded that, whilst v. 6c cannot refer to a status or rank, it must be a statement about a divine conduct or a mode of existence. Verse 6c does not denote a divine being, essence or nature.[132] However, they arrived at that conclusion on a strictly grammatical assessment of ἴσα θεῷ, paying little attention to the absolute force of the unusual nominal τὸ εἶναι or the ways in which the meaning of v. 6c might be determined by the peculiar religious and cultural language in the immediate literary context (of vv. 6–8).

Phil. 2:6c cannot be a forward-looking summary of the *status* that Christ attains in vv. 9–11. So, assuming that Christ himself is the implied subject of τὸ εἶναι, v. 6c must refer to some, or all, of vv. 6–8, that is, to Christ's pre-existence, his incarnation and life on earth. In view of the cultural resonances and syntax of vv. 6–8, τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ should be seen as a carefully worded phrase that *denotes a particular kind of dynamic ontology, an active divine 'being'*. The phrase is distinctive because culturally it looks two ways, simultaneously affirming and challenging both the popular belief that a god can self-transform and the elite, philosophical view of the Platonists, that there is a distinction between divine 'being' and 'becoming'.

(i) Being *in a God-equal manner* and the gods' self-transformations

The choice of a peculiar, Type 5, god-equal construction is fitting because the primary movement in the first half is one in which Christ acts in a way that is similar to the gods' self-transformations in Greek and Roman popular religion. By means of a statement about '(a/the) being (that is) in a manner equal

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[132] Meyer, *Philipper*, pp. 103–4 'Nicht zwar Gleichheit der Rang-, Würde- und Machtstellung, wohl aber eine von der des Vaters nicht verschiedene, wesentlich göttliche Existenzweise', however 'nicht direkt ein solches über das Sein an sich; ein Urtheil über die Existenzweise, den Habitus, nicht über Essenz oder Subsistenz des Sohnes'; Gewiess, 'Die Philipperbriefstelle 2, 6b', p. 83 'es nicht als Wesensbestimmung zu nehmen, sondern auf ein Verhalten zu beziehen', cf. Habermann, *Präexistensaussagen,* p. 126.

with God', verse 6c looks forward to Christ's dynamic entry into the stream of human history in v. 7. Christ's becoming human in v. 7, laid out with language typical of accounts, from Homer onwards, of the gods' self-transformations, is naturally heard as a statement about what it truly means to be 'in a manner equal with God'. To be divine in the Greek and Roman worlds was to be able, inter alia, to self-transform. Christ's story is one defined by an incarnational, that is *divine*, manner or mode of existence.

The syntax and meaning of v. 6b–c, which comprise a verb with double accusative (direct object and complement) construction, can be taken in one of two ways. Most translations treat the opening οὐχ as a negation of all that follows—the verb ἡγήσατο, the noun ἁρπαγμός, and the nominal τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ: '(Christ Jesus, who …) did not regard X (τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ) as Y (ἁρπαγμός)'. However, in an important article nearly half a century ago Jean Carmignac presented a strong case for thinking that, in conformity to the usual patterns of Greek negatives and Paul's own style, the οὐχ should be treated as a negation of the noun that it precedes, not the verb: '(Christ Jesus, who …) regarded X (τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ) as *not* Y (ἁρπαγμός)'. On this translation, therefore, Christ *did* actively reckon in pre-existent, only his act of reckoning was a negative one. The usual translation could be taken to mean that Christ did not actively reckon one way or the other in pre-existence, so, of course, he also specifically *refrained from* reckoning X [τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ] to Y [ἁρπαγμός]'. But if the author had wanted to say what most translators think he said, we expect the οὐχ to have immediately preceded ἡγήσατο.[133] The central point of Carmignac's linguistic argument has never been refuted, though objections have been made.[134]

It is hard to judge between these two alternatives. But either way, the syntactic relationship between v. 6b–c and vv. 7–8 likely means that readers would take Paul's words to mean that Christ's

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[133] J. Carmignac, 'L'Importance de la place d'une négation: ΟΥΧ ΑΡΠΑΓΜΟΝ ΗΓΗΣΑΤΟ (Philippiens II.6)', *NTS* 18 (1972), pp. 131–60 (esp. pp. 131–42), cf. M. D. Hooker, *From Adam to Christ: Essays on Paul,* (CUP: Cambridge, 1990), pp. 88–89; Reumann, *Philippians*, p. 344.

[134] P. Grelot, 'La Valeur de οὐχ ... ἀλλά... dans Philippiens ii. 6–7', *Bib* 54 (1973), pp. 25–42.

becoming human in vv. 7–8 is somehow a positive counterpart to the negative statement in v. 6. Verses 6b–8 are governed by a point-counterpoint οὐ … ἀλλά construction that sets up a contrast between what is negated in v. 6b–c and all that follows the ἀλλά ('not … but rather').[135] This has implications for what the poem says about the nature of 'the being that is in a manner equal with God'.

On Carmignac's reading the negation of ἁρπαγμός implies that whilst the pre-existent Christ regarded τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ as *not* ἁρπαγμός, by virtue of the fact that *instead* (ἀλλά) he emptied himself and became human, he judged τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ ('being in a manner equal with God') to be fittingly expressed in, or defined by, a whole-life incarnational self-transformation. In this case, an act of 'reckoning' is not just explicit in v. 6, it may also be *implied* in the act of self-transformation in v. 7: Christ reckoned 'the being in a manner equal with God' *not harpagmos*, but rather *he, also, reckoned it* appropriately expressed in a dramatic act of self-transformation. Following Carmignac, we can say that the οὐ … ἀλλά makes an explicit connection between 'the being in a manner equal with God' in v. 6c and Christ's incarnational manner of life in what follows.

Even if the majority of translators are correct the connection is implicit. Even if the οὐχ negates the nexus of words that follow (including the verb ἡγήσατο), the conclusions of the foregoing linguistic analysis show that the author's choice of an *active*, adverbial, expression of divine equality (τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ), as *a way of speaking about a particular divine mode of being* (rather than a status), is a fitting anticipation of Christ's mode of being and action in his self-transformation. The words τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ denote a 'being, or mode of existence, in a manner equal with God' that is the principal focus of the first half of the poem: Christ did not accept one way of understanding 'being in a manner equal with God', but rather, implicitly, in his incarnation, he adopted another one. To paraphrase, '(Christ Jesus,

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[135] When a non-verb is negated by an immediately preceding negative particle within an οὐ ... ἀλλά construction the audience expects a positive counterpart in the ἀλλά part of the construction. See A. C. Moorhouse, *Studies in the Greek negatives* (University of Wales Press: Cardiff, 1959), pp. 2–3, 141.

who …) did not regard the being (that is) in a manner equal with God as *harpagmos*, but rather (in an act that implicitly expressed his understanding of that divine being), he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave'.[136]

(ii) *Being* in a God-equal manner and a Platonic ontology

Phil. 2:6c lacks features typical of ancient divine equality talk. There is no honour language, nor any achieving or being judged worthy of divine honours by a human community. Christ is not god-equal by the Senate or by popular vote. And this is the only preserved ancient text in which a figure is apparently ascribed equality with God (or with the gods) from heavenly pre-existence.

These features of the text are mutually explanatory: verse 6c denotes an innate, pre-incarnate, or *metaphysical*, identity and way of being, not one that is earnt, acquired, ascribed or inherited. So, it is fitting that Phil. 2:6 uses the nominal τὸ εἶναι for a god-equal '*being*'. When first-century readers hear of Christ's peculiar, pre-existent, divine equality they are bound to conclude that, by comparison with the god-equal position of human rulers, Christ's divine equality is an innate being, not an attained (τυγχάνω) or decreed (δοκέω, νομίζω, ἀξιωθῆναι) *status*. The hymn implicitly contrasts true 'being' with a humanly constructed, opinion-based, status, which was the way divine equality was understood in both Greek and Roman forms of ruler cult in which kings and emperors were deified by communities in response to their

[136] The meaning of the word ἁρπαγμός and its role in the context is beyond the scope of this article. In a forthcoming study I will develop the argument of David Fredrickson (*Eros and the Christ: Longing and Envy in Paul's Christology* (Paul in critical contexts; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013], pp. 86–104) that it means 'erotic abduction, kidnapping for marriage'. Christ reckons that the character of divine being is not to violently seize humans out of erotic desire for them. Rather, divine being is appropriately expressed in the journey Christ makes in vv. 7–11. Other ways of construing ἁρπαγμός might, conceivably, be compatible with the argument for the meaning of τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ presented here.

benefactions and deeds of power.[137] *From his heavenly, pre-incarnate, position Christ is, he does not attain.*[138] Joseph Hellerman was right that the hymn challenges first-century notions of status and honour. It invites readers to conclude that Christ's identity is one that, at its ground and in its core—outside the contingencies of history—is altogether free of human judgement.[139]

Once these features of the text are recognised, an intriguing new possibility presents itself. Philippians 2:6–8 now describes a divine 'being' ('who *being* in the form of God, considered (his) *being* in a manner equal with God …') that 'becomes' ('*becoming* in the likeness of humans … *becoming* obedient to death'). The language of 'being' and 'becoming' is Platonic.

The popular view that the gods can self-transform and *become* human (for a brief span), which we noted at the start is employed and adapted in vv. 6–8, was opposed by the philosophers. Their objections were moral (since they believed that the gods do not deceive and steal through disguise) but also metaphysical. Plato insisted on a distinction between the ideal divine realm that is characterised by

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[137] See esp. S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1984).

[138] The giving of God-equal honours in vv. 9–11 would most naturally be taken then, as a recognition of the *position* newly granted by God, by virtue of the act of superexaltion (v. 9) and the giving of the supreme name. In the first-century world the giving of new names typically signifies a change of status, and when the whole passage is compared with all the other ways in which Greek speakers talked about divine equality, the superexaltation of Christ would most naturally be viewed as the giving to him of a public, or rather a *cosmic*, position commensurate with the identity that he had always had. In another study I will argue that τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὄνομα (v. 9) is the compound divine cult name Κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός (cf. M. Jones, *The Epistle to the Philippians* [Methuen: London, 1918], p. 33).

[139] This vision of a ruler's action grounded in a kind of divine nature echoes contemporary discussions about the 'nature' of the ideal ruler in relation to their virtue and exemplary conduct. According to Musonius Rufus in *That Kings Should Also Study Philosophy* 8, only a ruler endowed with a 'superior nature (φύσει… διαφερούσῃ)' is capable of the virtue and perfection that is required of them.

stable, invisible but rationally intelligible, 'being (τὸ ὄν, οὐσία)' and the created, sensible, ever-changing, compounded, and unstable realm of 'generation (γένεσις)' and 'what becomes (τὸ γιγνόμενον)' (*Tim.* 27d–28a, cf. *Phaedo* 78c–d; *Symp.* 210e–211b; *Theaet.* 152d–153e; *Soph.* 248a–249d). The divine is immortal, unchangeable, free from the contingencies that define the world of human experience. A god, therefore, 'abides for ever simply in his own form (ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ μορφῇ)' (*Rep.* 2.380d, 381c). It belongs in the realm of 'being' and cannot 'become' (*Rep.* 2.380c–381d, 382e–383a, *Tim.* 27d, 52a, cf. Plutarch *On the E* 21 [*Mor.* 393f–394a]). The gods do not self-transform and take on human likenesses.

Platonists in the first century C.E. took for granted that axiomatic distinction between being and becoming.[140] Any first century C.E. description of a divine being 'becoming' something in the human realm would therefore invite a Platonist's critical disbelief and censure. For the most part, Greek and Roman authors, artists, and actors who espoused stories of the gods' self-transformations carried on regardless. Some attempted to overcome such philosophical objections to the older, culturally canonical, stories of the gods' becomings by allegorical interpretation. By contrast, the author of Phil. 2:6, I contend, confronts a Platonic objection head on. That he does so has escaped modern commentators' attention because τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ has been mistranslated, obscuring the presence of a statement about 'being'.[141] Yet, there are several reasons to be certain that vv. 6–8 evokes a Platonic discourse to colour a familiar biblical distinction between Creator and created with philosophical language, but also to make a pointed challenge to any philosophically determined dualism between God and the world that would deny the possibility of Christ's whole-life incarnation.

[140] For a strongly dualistic version of the distinction between being and becoming see the speech attributed to Ammonius, Plutarch's Athenian teacher, in Plutarch *On the E* 17–21 (*Mor.* 391e–394c).

[141] For reasons to think that modern scholarship has suffered 'an ideologically driven refusal to acknowledge Platonic elements in Paul's thought' see S. Stowers, 'Paul and the terrain of philosophy', *Early Christianity* 6 (2015), pp. 141–56 (p. 143).

The first point is linguistic: τὸ εἶναι means 'being'. Of course, Plato himself regularly employed the participle forms ὄν and οὐσία to speak of 'being' (or 'Being'). But on occasion he also used τὸ εἶναι for the 'being' that he otherwise labelled 'essence itself (αὐτὴ ἡ οὐσία)' and (τὸ) ὄν.[142] After Plato, Aristotle also used τὸ εἶναι as a synonym for (τὸ) ὄν.[143] And for the middle Platonism of the first century C.E. both τὸ εἶναι and the verb ὑπάρχω 'to begin, to come to be, to be in existence, to be' (as in Phil. 2:6a) (along with its nominal derivative ὕπαρξις 'existence, reality, substance') had become part of the linguistic repertoire of discussions of 'being'. The phenomenon is illustrated in the works of Philo of Alexandria, who is often a reliable witness to first-century Platonic discourse.[144]

In his *Special Laws* 1:41 Philo writes:

> … the hierophant and most beloved of God, Moses, entreated God, saying, 'Show yourself to me' (Exod. 33:13), all but possessed and crying out directly, 'Of your being and existence (τοῦ μὲν εἶναί σε καὶ ὑπάρχειν) this world has become my teacher and guide, as a son teaching me about his father and as a work about its manufacturer. But, being desirous to know what you are in essence (κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν), I can find none in any parts of the whole to be an instructor in this lesson.

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[142] Plato *Phaed.* 78d, cf. *Parm.* 162a; *Thaet.* 188c-d; *Rep.* 6.509b and note the instances of τὸ μὴ εἶναι 'not-being' (e.g. *Rep.* 5:479c and *Theaet.* 185c).

[143] Aristotle *Analytica priora et posteriora* 34a 5–6, 16, 24; 53b 12–13. For τὸ εἶναι as 'being' note already Parmenides' εἶναι for 'being' in *On Nature* frags. 4; 5.1–2.

[144] For a recent discussion of Philo's Platonism see M. Bonazzi, 'Towards Transcendence: Philo and the Renewal of Platonism in the Early Imperial Age', in F. Alesse (ed), *Philo of Alexandria and Post-Aristotelian Philosophy* (Brill: Leiden), pp. 233–51. For Philo's acceptance of the basic Platonic dichotomy between being and becoming see D. T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato* (Brill: Leiden, 1986), pp. 92–103.

In this text both τὸ εἶναι and his ὑπάρχειν denote 'being' and 'existence' in a way that defers to a Platonic account of reality. That which Moses 'has regard to' at the start of this section is the quest for God's essence (οὐσία) and the vision of 'God as he truly is (τὸν ὄντως ὄντα θεόν)' (§§36–40). And, in what follows this excerpt, the divine answer to Moses' entreaty is couched in terms that assume a categorical distinction between divine being and creation—'that which has become (γένεσις)' (§43)—because of which God offers to Moses a limited, intellectual, vision of the divine powers which he identifies with Plato's 'forms' (§§43–50). In another passage Philo uses τὸ εἶναι in a way that is more or less synonymous with the neuter singular participle τὸ ὄν, 'being'.[145] Although ὑπάρχω and ὕπαρξιν are not prevalent in such contexts, the fact that a similar linguistic pattern is present in Plutarch's version of a Platonic ontology shows that in this respect Philo represents a Mediterranean-wide first-century development of Plato's language.[146]

In its first-century setting, a statement that there is a figure who, *being* in the divine form has a peculiar relation to *the being* that is in a manner equal with God (ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ *ὑπάρχων ... ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ*), *becomes* (ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων *γενόμενος … γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου*) evokes a Platonic discourse. The emphatic, two-fold 'being' followed by a two-fold 'became' calls time on a Platonic dogma that the truly divine being cannot 'become' and that the divine cannot suffer change. Paul's subversive reduplication of Platonic-sounding terms goes with the equally challenging repetition of the word 'form (μορφή)' in the procession from 'the form *of God*' (v. 6a) to the 'the form *of a slave*'

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[145] Philo *The Worse Attacks the Better* 160 (on the Platonic-sounding ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν of Exod. 3:14 LXX). For an opposition between μὴ ὄντα 'not being' and τὸ εἶναι 'being' see *Special Laws* 2:225 (parallel to a contrast between ὑπάρχων and ὕπαρξιν); *Unchangeableness* 119; *Decalogue* 111; *Life of Moses* 2:267. See also *On the Change of Names* 11; *Migration* 40, 182; *Life of Moses* 1:75; 2:100; *Special Laws* 4:187; *Virtues* 130; *Questions on Genesis* 2:13.

[146] For τὸ εἶναι equivalent to the Platonic τὸ ὄν in contrast to 'becoming' see Plutarch *On the E* 17, 18, 19 (*Mor.* 392a–c, 392f, 393a), and note the use of τὸ εἶναι, ὕπαρξιν and ὑπάρχουσιν in Plutarch's *Reply to Colotes* 14–16 (*Mor.* 1116b–d).

(v. 7b). The one true God—or, rather, the one who has a 'being' equal (in manner) to His being—can make a change from 'being' to 'becoming', just as much as he can make a change from the divine 'form' to the 'form of a slave' (with everything else that his adopting such a servile status entails).

The philosophical connotations of the words ὑπάρχων and τὸ εἶναι as a contrast to the two-fold γενόμενος would not be missed since they are appropriate to the narrative's stage directions. In verse 6 Christ is in the heavenly realm above—with God and in the form of God; in verses 7–8 he is on earth—in the empirical world of human affairs. For educated readers it would be obvious that these are the realms that Plato and his followers labelled the realms of 'being' and 'becoming'. The 'being' of v. 6 is a divine kind of being, described with language that echoes the rejection of the poetic myths of the gods in the *Republic* (*Rep.* 2.380d, 381c). And, although for Platonists the distinction between 'being' and 'becoming' was manifest supremely in the experience of 'death' to that which becomes, Christ's becoming issues, climactically, in his death on a cross (Phil. 2:8).

The attentive reader who has more than a passing acquaintance with Platonic thought would also hear in v. 7 an epistemological confirmation of the 'being-becoming' distinction. For Platonists the distinction typically meant a skepticism about what can be truly known about reality in the realm of Becoming. 'As Being is to Becoming, so Truth is to Belief' (Plato *Tim.* 29c). That which is Becoming is only an object of belief or opinion (δόξα) (*Tim.* 28a, cf. 52a,) and cannot with certainty be properly apprehended (Plato *Crat.* 439e–440b; Aristotle *Met.* 4 1010a 1–15; Plutarch *On the E* 18 [*Mor.* 392a–b, e]: 'everything of a mortal nature … presents only a dim and uncertain semblance and appearance of itself' and 'our senses, through ignorance of reality, falsely tell us what appears to be').[147] So it is fitting

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[147] Cf. Plutarch *Reply to Colotes* 13, 19 (*Mor.* 1114c–d, 1118c). On the epistemological problem of the realm of generation in Plutarch see J. Opsomer, 'M. Annius Ammonius: a Philosophical Profile', in J. Opsomer (ed), *The origins of the Platonic system. Platonisms of the Early Empire and their philosophical contexts* (Peeters: Leuven, 2009), pp. 123–86, 153–54; H. Obsieger, *Plutarch:* De E apud Delphos. *Über das Epsilon am Apolltempel in Delphi: Einführung, Ausgabe und*

that the hymn says that in pre-existence Christ truly is 'in the form of God', but that when he became a human being he was only 'found' by others as one in the figure of a man. He was, that is, unrecognized and misjudged when he 'became' mortal. Ordinary human *opinion* of him was limited. His true identity can only be known from the perspective of the heavenly realm (v. 6)—what a Platonist would call the 'noetic' and 'intelligible'—as that perspective is recounted in this narrative.

Although such a conscious dialogue with a philosophical theme has not been seriously advocated in modern scholarship on Phil. 2:6–11, its presence in a Christological piece included in this letter should not surprise us. In at least three other ways Paul's letter to the Philippians speaks to the concerns of first-century popular philosophy.[148] Throughout, it advocates a distinctive (Christologically-grounded) form of moral reasoning, with the numerous instances of the verb φρονέω echoing one of Plato's four cardinal virtues (φρόνησις 'thoughtfulness, prudence').[149] In 4:11–12 Paul affirms the Stoic virtue of detachment (achievable, Paul's case, 'through him who strengthens me'). And in 1:9–10 he adopts the position of the popular moral philosophers who helped people 'to distinguish between good and bad, advantageous and disadvantageous, helpful and harmful' (Musonius Rufus, *That Kings Should Also Study Philosophy* 2).[150] Also, the presence of philosophical 'being' and 'becoming' language *in an early Christological piece* should not surprise us. The Christ hymn's engagement with such a basic,

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Kommentar (Franz Steiner Verlag: Stuttgart, 2013), pp. 315–322; M. Bonazzi, 'Plutarch and the Skeptics', in M. Beck (ed.) *A Companion to Plutarch* (Wiley-Blackwell: Chichester, 2014), pp. 126–27.

[148] For additional observations on probable philosophical discourse in Philippians see P. A. Holloway, 'Paul as Hellenistic Philosopher', in W. Blanton and H. de Vries (eds), *Paul and the Philosophers* (Fordham University Press: New York, 2013), pp. 52–68, who concludes that 'Paul wrote to the Philippians as a philosopher—a Christianizing philosopher, to be sure, but a philosopher nonetheless' (p. 67).

[149] The word appears seven times in Philippians (1:7; 2:2, 5; 3:15, 19; 4:2, 10); more than in any other letter.

[150] For Paul's prayer that the Philippians are able to determine τὰ διαφέροντα (1:10) see the comparable Philosophical texts in P. Holloway, *Philippians*, p. 78 n. 67 and *idem* 'Paul as Hellenistic Philosopher,' pp. 63–65.

widely known, Platonic theme is consistent with the way several other early texts employ contemporary prepositional metaphysics in their praise of Christ and for his role in creation.[151]

We have suggested that Christ's '*being*' from pre-existence intends a contrast to the way rulers *attain* a divine status. In several ways, *the Platonic language of vv. 6–8 also serves the hymn's careful negotiation of a distinctive philosophical and political position for Paul's presentation of the true divine ruler*.

It *affirms* a distinction between 'being' and 'becoming'; between the divine and human realms. Verse 6a describes Christ's true identity where he exists in his own, divine, form (cf. Plato *Rep.* 2.380d, 381c). The verse says that this Christ reckoned rightly on the matter of the divine 'being' that is of the kind that is equal in manner to God's manner of 'being'. *The pre-incarnate Messiah philosophised.* Verses 7–8 describe his *becoming*, noting the failure of other mortals to recognise his true identity (v. 7d). So, the first half of the hymn (vv. 6–8) agrees with the philosophical view that reality is not what it seems to mere sense perception. There is a superior divine realm wherein the divine exists in its own proper form. The truth of God's relation to, or presence in, the world, must be discerned. It has been properly discerned by Christ. The hymn offers to those who read and understand it an opportunity to think the philosophical thoughts of Christ after him.

[151] On the Philosophical background of 'from whom', 'to/for whom', 'through whom' in 1 Cor. 8:6, the 'in him', 'through him', 'to/for him' in Col. 1:15–20, and the 'through him' of John 1:3, 10 and Heb. 1:2 see G. Sterling, 'Prepositional Metaphysics in Jewish Wisdom Speculation and Early Christian Liturgical Texts', *SPhA* 9 (1997), pp. 219–38. For notable recent contributions to the case for thinking that Pauline theology had Platonic influences see the work of George van Kooten (especially his *Paul's Anthropology in Context: The Image of God, Assimilation to God and Tripartite Man in Ancient Judaism, Ancient Philosophy and Early Christianity* (WUNT 232, Mohr Siebeck: Tübingen, 2008) and Emma Wasserman (for example, in her 'Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide? The Case of Pauline Anthropology in Romans 7 and 2 Cor 4–5', in S. Porter and A. Pitts [eds], *Christian Origins and Hellenistic Judaism: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament* [Brill: Leiden], pp. 259–79).

All philosophical schools would find comfort here, since they agreed that the truth had to be figured out, by philosophical endeavour, and that the great minds of the past (principally Socrates, who was admired by all) had set the supreme example. However, secondly, in distinguishing between the realms of 'being' and 'becoming' the passage sides squarely with the Platonists against the leading school of the day, that of the Stoics, for whom the goal of the virtuous life was a rational conformity to divine nature in a cosmos lacking a sharp distinction between the divine and sensible reality. The Christ hymn also subordinates ethics to metaphysics: Christ did these things in creation (that is, in the realm of 'becoming') because he was this divine person (in the realm of 'being', whence he came). And in so doing, he offers to mortals a mode of being in which they are invited to act (vv. 1–5, 12–16) in conformity to what truly is (and what has truly happened).

Presumably, the author of these verses, who is a scripturally-pious monotheist, believes it is acceptable to describe reality this way because the 'being-becoming' distinction maps loosely onto the biblical distinction between God and the world. Maybe, also, he was encouraged to make a linguistic leap towards Greek philosophy because his Bible spoke of the LORD God as 'He who is' or 'The (masc.) Being' (Ὁ ὤν in Exod. 3:14 LXX) and, according to the Greek Bible, when God made the world 'it became (ἐγένετο)' (Gen. 1:3, 5, 6, 8, 8, 11, 13, 15, 19, 20, 23, 24, 30, 31; 2:4).[152] Perhaps, too, he was aware of Jews like Philo who enthusiastically embraced a fusion of the two traditions.

On the other hand, thirdly, *these verses reject a Platonic insistence that divine being cannot become*. They say that '*because* he existed in the divine form' Christ was able to 'become' human and that in doing so he reckoned rightly that such 'becoming' fittingly expresses '*being* (τὸ εἶναι) (of the kind

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[152] For later, second century C.E., evidence (in the writings of Numenius of Apamea) of Platonists finding the Ὁ ὤν of Exod. 3:14 congenial, see M. F. Burnyeat, 'Platonism in the Bible: Numenius of Apamea on Exodus and Eternity', in G. H. van Kooten, (ed), *Revelation of the Name YHWH to Moses: Perspectives from Judaism, the Pagan Graeco-Roman World, and Early Christianity* (Brill: Leiden), pp. 139–68.

that is) in the manner of God's being'. That is, all of vv. 6a and 7–11 tell a story that reveals, or actualises, the true character of 'being that is in a god-equal manner': a personal life that has proceeded from a state or identity of 'existence in the form of God', through a 'becoming' human even unto death on a cross, climaxing in God the Father's vindication and reversal of that destruction by exaltation to a position of universal recognition and fully divine status. This, the passage claims, is now the definitive historical statement of the nature, and the manner, of divine being (τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ). To philosophize after Christ means no slavish adherence to one or other of the centuries-old philosophical schools; it means the adoption of a distinctively new way of thinking for those who are 'in Christ' (v. 5).

Also, the 'being' that is in view in the τὸ εἶναι of v. 6 is not an abstract, hypostatized, 'Being', but the 'being' that characterizes, and that belongs to, a particular *person*, namely the one who, through the course of his life, is revealed as both 'equal in mode of existence to God the Father' and, at a climactic biographical turning point, has been given the public, cosmic, name above all names. The hymn does not expostulate, in the abstract, on divine 'being' per se. Nevertheless, as a biographical narrative that reveals the identity of *this* divine individual, it comments on, or reveals, something of the truth of divine 'being'. It reveals that true divine 'being' 'becomes'; it becomes, or has become, in this particular life of self-emptying, humble service and obedience.

So, the hymn takes sides with a popular enthusiasm for the possibility that gods can self-transform against the high-minded dismissiveness of an intellectual elite. Of course, on the other hand, it takes sides with the intellectual predilection for a simple, monotheistic, theology, against a naïve polytheism.[153] But by saying that Christ's divine self-transformation is truly a 'being that becomes' the hymn bestows upon popular piety a respectable philosophical pedigree: Paul's Christological

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[153] For the philosophical inclination to a monotheistic position in the first century see S. Mitchell and P. van Nuffelen, *One god: pagan monotheism in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2010).

monotheism offers a (new) philosophical position on the nature of the relationship between divine and human realms. True divine being can become: it *has* become in the Christ event. And that event ties the moral concerns of popular philosophy—how to live well and virtuously, and to discern what truly matters (about which Paul has prayed in Phil 1:9–11)—to a particular ontology or physics, and logic, namely the logic of one who is divine, and is therefore able to judge (v. 6b) and act (vv. 7–8) in a manner that is now prescriptive (v. 5) for all those who follow him in the pattern set by his peculiar course of life.

Appendix

Text distribution by syntax type

	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4	Type 5	Type 6	All texts
Homer (including Homeric Hymns)	12	0	0	3	4	0	19
Post-Homer	69	28	4	19	4	7	131
3rd cent. B.C.E. – 3rd cent. C.E.	52	17	2	13	2	5	91
Total (Homer + Post-Homer)	81	28	4	22	7	7	149

Percentage distribution by syntax type

	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4	Type 5	Type 6
Homer	63%	0%	0%	15%	21%	0%
Post-Homer	53%	21%	3%	15%	3%	5%
3rd cent. B.C.E. – 3rd cent. C.E.	58%	19%	2%	14.5%	2%	5.5%
Average	55%	19%	3%	15%	4.5%	4.5%