Convergences between Platonism and the Abrahamic Religions
a guest lecture sponsored by the Departments of Classics, English, Philosophy
and Religion at Smith College on October 17, 2013
Wayne J. Hankey
Department of Classics, Dalhousie University and King's College, Halifax

A. INTRODUCTION

I am happy to begin with an astonished thank you to my sponsors. At my
University the Departments of Classics, English, Philosophy and Religion could
not unite in the sponsorship of anything and, should such a possibility be
presented, a topic putting together philosophy and religion would certainly
drive them off severally to the four corners of the ring. I am especially pleased
that my lecture has the support the English Department, because when I was an
undergraduate, more than fifty years ago, Arthur Lovejoy's *The Great Chain of
Being* (first published 1936 by Harvard) was compulsory reading in the English
Department. It provided then most of what was generally known about the
Middle and Neo Platonisms and their influence; this is what I shall largely end
up talking about today. It delights me to remember that in those days, Thomas
Taylor's 1816 translation of the massive Platonic Theology of Proclus was always
out of the library because kept on more or less permanent loan in the study of a
Professor of English.

I am, however, equally, somewhat daunted. What I conceived as a rather
informal talk, based in materials I am using in recent undergraduate lectures,
offered at the generous invitation of a former student, now a distinguished
scholar, has turned into something demanding. I am encouraged to present what
I had gathered for my students from Carlos Fraenkel's new *Philosophical Religions
From Plato to Spinoza: Reason, Religion, and Autonomy*[1] It adds to the *loci* in Plato, as
source and authority, and to the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic derivations (not
being precise about the relation) up to modernity. It also gives room for me to
present the other side of philosophical religion, the one Dr Fraenkel does not
treat. What belongs to the God beyond Being and Intellect, a sphere where Plato,
and even more, Neoplatonism, is equally important. I am also heartened by the
example of an influential scholar who makes no claim to being a philosopher.
Diarmaid MacCulloch's *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*[2] starts in
Greece with the *logos*.[3] Nonetheless, this is a modestly conceived talk, so please
allow me to begin by saying what I shall not do.

---

[1] Cambridge University Press, 2012.
[2] London: Penguin, 2009.
[3] *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*, 19.

I shall deal scarcely at all with practice: ethical, liturgical, or ascetic, keeping almost exclusively to doctrine. In respect to doctrines, I shall make no attempt to be complete either in terms of their number or their instances. My examples will be ones common to the three Abrahamic religions, but the list is not exhaustive. Within Platonism, I shall include that self-styled "Platonist", Aristotle, and the many constitutive Aristotelian features of Middle and Neo Platonism. I shall, however, say little about the Peripatetics, because, except insofar as they have absorbed Neoplatonism, their positions, for example on the eternity of the world and the limits of providence are the ones rejected by normative theologians of the Abrahamic religions. The Platonic metaphysical account of the spiritual world will be held to in contrast to the Stoic physical one, though the Platonist assimilation of Stoic, Skeptic, Epicurean, and Cynic spiritual disciplines will be assumed.

B.   WHY PLATO AND ABRAHAM CONVERGE

All this will raise the question of the cause of the convergences between these "pagan" (or, more politely, "Hellenic") forms and ideas and those of the Abrahamic religions with different common, and self-consciously, more authoritative, origins in Judaea and Arabia. I shall not attempt to decide whether the convergences stem from complementarity, or from conscious or unconscious subversion, or from the ultimate singleness of truth and its source.

Dr Fraenkel does an excellent job of presenting the pre-modern answers to the question of convergence in terms of the singleness of truth, its dual representations in reason and imagination, and their unity in the exalted religious founder and prophet, whether Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Paul, or Mohammed, but this is usually found to be incredible today.
Powerpoint slides A3-A6.

In my view the alternative answers developed from the time of the Protestant Reform in the 16th century are either impossible or dangerous or both, but I leave all this open for discussion, if you desire.[4] However, it can be said that, from the time of the definitive ancient joining of Hellenic philosophy and Jewish Scripture in Philo Judaeus, two convictions determining a single method effected the convergence of the two forms of infallible truth.

---

[4] See Robert Crouse, "The Hellenization of Christianity: A Historiographical Study," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 8 (1962): 22–33, my "*Memoria, Intellectus, Voluntas:* the Augustinian Centre of Robert Crouse's Scholarly Work", *Dionysius* 30(2012): 42–76 at 46–47; Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) and my "The Bible in a Post-Critical Age," in *After the Deluge, Essays Towards the Desecularization of the Church*, ed. W. Oddie (London: SPCK, 1987), 41–92.

First, the philosophers sought and, in Platonic tradition, supposed they had found, a single First Principle;[5] the theologians of the Abrahamic religions supposed that their Scriptures revealed the same. In other words, in the end, both philosophy and Scriptural religion were monotheistic, although, for both, there were lots of subordinate spirits.

Powerpoint slide 2 & A2.

Second, for the normative Abrahamic theologians, whether there was a divine union with or mediated communication to the human, or an extinguishing identification beyond assimilation to the First, as Intellect, or above it, there is only one truth. The theory of "double truths", in the sense of contradictory ones, is a polemic misrepresentation used by adversaries. There are certainly at least two, and probably more, modes of representation, but what Scripture revealed could not contradict what reason using the methods of philosophical logic demonstrated in the strict sense. Prophetic inspiration might supplement what philosophy demonstrated both in doctrine and for the myriads of practical judgments, but there could not be contradiction. In consequence, the same methods which the Hellenic philosophers and theologians had used to make inspired poetry conform to truth known philosophically were now employed and expanded to achieve the same result for the revealed Scriptures of the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic religions. It is important that the most clear statements on these principles and procedures were given by Averroes (Ibn Rushd), Moses Maimonides, and Thomas Aquinas. Of these three, the Jewish and the Christian philosophical theologians asserted Scriptural revelations beyond the reach of philosophical reason; the Islamic did not. But Averroes was combating al-Ghazali who had made such an assertion, and he was, nonetheless, devoted to philosophical truth.[6]

Powerpoint slides A3-A6.

C. Some Convergences
My list of convergences makes use of Powerpoint

I.   I begin at the further end temporally with **FORMULARIES OF THE CHURCHES OF THE MAGISTERIAL REFORMATION**: Lutheran, Calvinist, and Anglican, from the 16th and 17th centuries, because their Platonism might have been forgotten, or even denied, by some, because they show the extent of what will be called the

---

[5] See Adam Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers as Theologians*: *The Divine* Arche (Aldershot/ Burlington: Ashgate, 2007).

[6] See Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought: Al-Ghazali's Theory of Mystical Cognition and its Avicennian Foundation* (Routledge, 2012).

"Hellenization" of Christianity at the historical point when analysis in these terms is a criticism, and because these formularies are still authoritative for some churches. I include the Baltimore Catechism because it is authoritative American Roman Catholic teaching and because the philosophical doctrines are matched by Scriptural texts which it is supposed teach the same, the convergence before our eyes!

Slides 3 & 4 and A7-A16.

II.   GNOTHI SEAUTON.

I must go on to locate the origins of this early Modern Christian theology in Platonic philosophical religion but, before doing so, we shall look at another essential aspect of the Augustinianism of Modern Latin Christianity, the unity of philosophy, theology and spirituality in the mutual interplay of knowledge of God and self-knowledge. We look at the same doctrine, simultaneously an exhortation, in three sharply different sorts of 16th and 17th century texts: the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* of Jean Calvin, the *Meditations on First Philosophy* of René Descartes, and *Connoissance de Dieu et de Soi-Même* written by the greatest preacher of the French Catholic Church under Louis XIVth and the Tutor for his Dauphin. The Platonic teaching about the human and divine, and the spiritual discipline they communicate come from Augustine both directly and mediated by such works as Anselm's *Proslogion* and the *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* of Bonaventure.

Slides 6 and A18-A22.

Augustine tells us that he was led to the introspective mutually implicated knowledge of what the divine and human are (and so to other essentials of Christian doctrine and practice) by reading the "books of the Platonists" (*Confessions* VII) and this is generally agreed to mean at least several treatises of Plotinus. So we go on to look at the origin of this aspect of Platonism in the philosophic religion of Socrates.

Slides 7 to 10 and A23-A40.

Plato and Aristotle reverse Socratic philosophical religion where it agrees with the poets as the inspired revealers of Hellenic religion. For Socrates only God is wise and the Delphic *Gnothi seauton* is directed against hubristic human pretence to know. In contrast, for Plato and Aristotle, it is a command to know what we are through knowing the divine, so (to quote Aristotle who will be taken up by Plotinus in this and much else) "being human we are not to think like mortals" but rather strive to participate the divine life.

Slides 11-13 and A41-A54.

The modern texts with which we began this part of the lecture most closely reproduce the doctrine of a dialogue which was almost certainly not their

direct source, the *Alcibiades Major* of Plato. In it Socrates, as the faithful lover, is represented in conversation with Athens' most fatally beautiful *kouros*. In the dialogue read early by those being educated in the Neoplatonic schools, the Oracle's admonition is interpreted so as to require knowledge of self through the higher namely: the soul, the true lover and guide, and God. Mirroring, crucial to the understanding both of what is (as theophany) and our knowing in the Platonic philosophical-religious tradition is essential here. Bonaventure's *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* is an infinitely complex system of mirrors, as indeed is the Niche of Lights by al-Ghazali—both of them are systems of mediations derived at least in part from Platonism.
Slides 14 & 15 and A55-A60.

   Plotinus will take up the disciplines and doctrine of the Alcibiades and Aristotle's *NOUS*, as the second divine hypostasis. The soul must become intellectual through it, in order to know its nature and origin on its way to stand before the One. Before a glance at one of his treatises read by Augustine, we must look at texts by the most important figure for the convergence of Hellenism and the Abrahamic religions, Philo Judaeus of Alexandria. With Philo the human participation in the divine at the heart of the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition is mediated through the divine-human monad of Moses.[7] Philosopher-King, priest and prophet in the *sillage* of Plato's ideal ruler, this Moses is the model on which the Christian Emperor, and the constitution of the Christianised Roman Empire, will be authoritatively imagined by Eusebius and, I think though cannot prove, the Philosopher-King-Imam will be formed by al-Farabi. Certainly Philo's unification of the offices is important for the Christian understanding of what the Christ is.[8] Philo's Moses is mediator, or creator, within Platonism, of what will much later be called mystical union. The assimilation of Philo's Moses to the divine *LOGOS*, and his becoming paradigmatic thereby, are certainly transmitted to Dionysius the Areopagite by way of Gregory of Nyssa with immeasurably huge influence for the Christian Platonist tradition of the God beyond Being. The ascent of Philo's Moses into the darkness at the top of the mountain may also be an important moment in *noetic*, or intellectual, mysticism, such as that of Augustine, in the alternative Platonic-Aristotelian theological tradition, the God

---

[7] See Emily Parker, "Philo of Alexandria's *Logos* and *Life of Moses*," *Dionysius* 28 (2010): 27–44 and "Philo Judaeus of Alexandria: The Paradigmatic Exegete," *Philosophy and the Abrahamic Religions: Scriptural Hermeneutics and Epistemology,* edited by Torrance Kirby, Rahim Acar and Bilal Bas (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2012), 17-27.

[8] See my "Philosopher-King, Legislator, Mystic, Prophet, Cosmic Priest: the Moses of Philo Judaeus and his Islamic and Christian Successors," *Philosophy and the Abrahamic Religions: Scriptural Hermeneutics and Epistemology,* 3–16; see also Fraenkel, *Philosophical Religions,* 109-118, 172.

which is pure Being identical with Thinking. Plotinus is the most important - guide of both mystical *itineraria* for the Abrahamic religions. His guidance is usually so mediated as to be unknown, but this cannot be the case for Augustine who reproduces the states of ascent and union described by Plotinus in Plotinus' language, although Augustinian mysticism emphasises the intellect and its work.[9]

Slides 16-19 and A61-A73.

I have placed material outlining the Christian Imperial (East and West) and the Islamic taking up of the unification of offices in the successors of Philo's Moses in an Excursus.

Slides 20 & 21 and slides A74-A94.

Plotinus appears with an anagogy on which Augustine is clearly dependent and which is reflected in his account of what he learned from the *libri Platonicorum.*

Slides 22-24 and A95-A104.

I conclude this journey with a passage from Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* with a clear derivation from Avicenna. It exhibits a knowledge of self by way of the knowledge of God as necessary self-existent which is not at all in the line from Augustine.

Slides 25 & 26 and slides A105-A107.

Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* brings to mind that, before passing on to what can now be little more than a list of other convergences, I must mention, although I can do no more than that here, an alternative Platonic – Peripatetic tradition dealing with self-reflexivity to the one I have somewhat exhibited. The tradition from which I have outlined some elements depends on the soul having access to its own essence in self-reflexivity and to the noetic by way of mental interiority. Among Christians Augustine is the great propagator of that tradition. There is another tradition which comes from the Neoplatonic understanding of thinking and being as the return of the One upon itself. It combines elements from Plato and from Aristotle. Although the fundamental logic is established in Plotinus, this is especially worked out by Proclus and is important both within the Islamic world and among the Christians after they have assimilated Arabic learning. The so-called *Liber de causis*, elements of the *Corpus Areopagiticum*, and, ultimately, works of Proclus, propagate this in the Latin world where it mixed well with what it received from Aristotle to produce the philosophical

---

[9] See my "Bultmann Redivivus Radicalised: Augustine and Jesus as Heideggerian Existentialists" [A Response to James A.K. Smith "*Confessions* Of An Existentialist: Reading Augustine After Heidegger"] for *The Influence of Augustine on Heidegger: The Emergence of an Augustinian Phenomenology*, ed. Craig J. N. de Paulo (The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 259–288.

underpinnings of the Christian systems of Albertus Magnus, Aquinas, Eckhart and Cusa to mention a few prominent adherents. In fact I shall be talking about this at Princeton early next month.[10]

Slide 27 and A108.

III.   **A LIST OF CONVERGENCES**

Besides the obedience to the Delphic *Gnothi seauton* in Platonic philosophical religion, or philosophy as religion, I give a few details of nine doctrines where what is taught in the Abrahamic religions has a basis, or correspondence, in texts of Plato: the perfect goodness of God, God as the identity of being and thinking, God as beyond being and thinking, true human and cosmic life as conversion, invisible virtue as the important reality of the self, the immortality of the soul, God is the Creator, and the universal and particular providence of God. Some of these teachings are found directly in the dialogues of Plato, even some thought by many as belonging to the Abrahamic religions as opposed to philosophy (for example, the universal and particular providence of God), some are constructed by interpreting one or more texts from the dialogues through others (e.g. God as the unknowable One Non-Being), at least one, God as the being which is self-thinking, is usually supposed to be a criticism of Plato's own teaching.

   The Platonic *Gnothi seauton*, see above

1.   **God as perfect good.** *Republic* II, 379b-381c: the goodness of god who can only do good, perfection, and consequent changelessness απαθεια of god; the divine incorporality and incapacity to deceive follow from this. Aristotle's Physics leads to the immutability and incorporality of God and Plato's arguments are combined with it or presupposed by the theologians of the Abrahamic religions. Philo considers God to be actuality and incorporeal, understanding Genesis through the *Timaeus*, he establishes for his *sillage* that the creation is first incorporeal and then corporeal (the after was not temporal for him); Augustine guarantees that for many centuries this will be the common doctrine of Latin Christians. Philo also identifies the good maker of the *Timaeus*

---

[10] See my *God in Himself*, idem, "Between and Beyond Augustine and Descartes: More than a Source of the Self," *Augustinian Studies* 32:1 (2001): 65–88, idem, "*Participatio divini luminis*, Aquinas' doctrine of the Agent Intellect: Our Capacity for Contemplation," *Dionysius* 22 (2004): 149–78. idem, "*Ab uno simplici non est nisi unum*: The Place of Natural and Necessary Emanation in Aquinas' Doctrine of Creation," in *Divine Creation in Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern Thought: Essays Presented to the Rev'd Dr Robert D. Crouse*, edited by Michael Treschow, Willemien Otten and Walter Hannam, Studies in Intellectual History (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 309–333, idem, "All Given and All Received: *Deus in se* in Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*" a public lecture for the Department of Philosophy at St Thomas University, Fredericton, on October 15, 2013 and for the Program in Classical Philosophy at Princeton University on November 5, 2013.

with the God of Genesis whose creation is good. Augustine's *Confessions* is in large part a description of his philosophical journey to the idea of incorporeal substance, and thus to the incorporeal God and human soul as the conditions of Christian faith for him. At the crucial turning Plotinus is his guide. He maintains that what he came to laboriously was known to ordinary Christians. Maimonides is preoccupied with establishing the divine incorporality and laboriously retrieves the Aristotelian arguments for this purpose. The first conclusion Aquinas draws from the divine name with which he begins, Simplicity, requires God's incorporality. Perfection comes next. These theologians know that their Scriptures seem to contradict divine incorporality and perfection and interpret them allegorically to establish it as essential to religion.
Slides 29 & 30; B2-B12.

2.   **God as Pure Being, the identity of being and thinking.** *Republic* V, 476e: the equation of being, identity, stability, and knowability, intellect apprehends the forms. While the *Gnothi seauton* descends from the Delphic Oracle to the Abrahamic religions via Plato, in this case, Plato transmits, as Aristotle indicates in *Metaphysics* I.6, the philosophy and the divinity of Parmenides. *The Way of Truth* leads to the predication of being with itself and the meeting in the same of being and thinking. God's answer to Moses at the Burning Bush is translated into the language of Greek metaphysics in the *Septuaginta* (LXX) [the translation of the Hebrew scripture into Greek made by Jews 200 years before the Common Era and fundamental to the convergence wrought by Philo and Christian theologians]. The "I am who am" [ειναι in Greek (*einai, "to be"*)] becomes one with the answer of the goddess in the poem of Parmenides for Hellenized Jews and Christians. The author of the Book of Revelation assists in this convergence when Jesus calls himself "the being" (ο ων), thus identifying himself with the "I am who am" of *Exodus* 3.14 (*Revelation* 1.4). What truly is is also the self-complete thinking. Augustine is in the tradition of these identifications, conveyed to him by Plotinus and Porphyry as well as by others. *NOUS*, translated as "Mind" or "Intellectual Principle", is the second level of divinity or spiritual Hypostasis for Plotinus, and the highest for his disciple Porphyry, both of whom influenced Augustine on the nature of God. Plotinus writes at 5.1.4 "Intellectual-Principle by its intellective act establishes Being, which in turn, as the object of intellection, becomes the cause of intellection and of existence to the Intellectual-Principle" For Augustine God's name is *idipsum esse*, the true to be. *Confessions* 7.10.16 "And I said, 'Is Truth, therefore, nothing, because it is not diffused through space – neither finite nor infinite?' And thou didst cry to me from afar, 'I am that I am.' Augustine gives authority for Latin Christians not only to a theological ontology erected on this basis but also to a *NOUS* mysticism. Philo had already used

Plato's language about ecstasy "sober intoxication" to describe *LOGOS* mysticism.

When, in Aristotle, the forms of Plato become ideas thought by minds, the equation results in the Primary Substance, or God, as Self-thinking Thought and Pure Being. In Aristotle's *Metaphysics* XII.7 we find:

"And thinking in itself deals with that which is best in itself, and that which is thinking in the fullest sense with that which is best in the fullest sense. And thought thinks on itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought; … The act of contemplation is what is most pleasant and best. … And life also belongs to God; for the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality; and God's self-dependent actuality is life most good and eternal. We say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this is God."

This is the idea of God for the Peripatetics. Islamic and Jewish philosophical theologians in the Peripatetic tradition, led by al-Farabi, like Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Ibn Rushd (Averroes) and Moses Maimonides, also represent God through this equation of being and knowing. Aquinas is in this tradition.

In general, this identification of God and reason leads to philosophical religions of the kind treated by Carlos Fraenkel in *Philosophical Religions from Plato to Spinoza: Reason, Religion, and Autonomy* (Cambridge University Press, 2012). The result in al-Farabi is to produce the most complete identity of philosophical reason and religion in the history of the Abrahamic religions.

Slides 31-38 & slides B13-B46.

3. **God beyond Being and Thinking.** *Republic* VI, 509b-c: the Good compared to the Sun is Beyond (επεκεινα, *epekeina*). It is the source of being and knowing but beyond (*epekeina*) both. Plotinus, by interpreting Plato's *Parmenides* dialogue as the master text of philosophical theology, and identifying the Good of the *Republic* with its One Non-Being, is the founder of Neoplatonism of which this is the characteristic doctrine. Iamblichus and Proclus are also foundational theologians for this tradition and the mysticism of the One or Nothingness by Excess which goes with it. Indeed, the First Principle in the tradition of Iamblichus and Proclus, which may be beyond the One, is more inaccessible than that of Plotinus because humans never escape from being souls and therefore cannot achieve Plotinian *henosis*. In this respect, their position is closer to that of Islam where, as absolutely unique and exclusive, the One is entered only by extinction. Judaism has a convergent direction so far as God is not nameable, is approached through darkness, and refuses Moses request for face to face sight. For Christians, see I *Timothy* 6.16, God dwells in light unapproachable whom no human hath seen nor can see, and Paul's sermon on the Athenian Areopagus, *Acts* 17:22-34, where he preaches "the unknown God". Paul had been converted

in a blinding encounter with a heavenly light "beyond the brightness of the sun" (Acts 26.13). The profoundly and widely influential Christian mystical theologian Dionysius the Areopagite stresses this view of God. Dionysius derived his teaching from Paul and from Plato mediated by Philo Judaeus of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Proclus.

Al-Ghazali is the most influential Islamic heir of this "Eastern" tradition and his teaching is taken up by Ibn Tufayl in *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan.* Crucially, for both al-Ghazali and Ibn Tufayl, the assent to the Beyond thought and being requires theurgic rituals (as understood by Iamblichus and Proclus) beyond philosophical theory. These Moslems take from the Sufis, who probably derived them from Eastern Christians. There is an ascent by way of light to its source.

Slides 39-49 & B47-B83.

4.   Conversion from darkness to light, from ignorance and non-being to knowledge, being and their source. *Republic* VII, 518c-d: the movement within and out of the cave, from darkness to light, from the non-being and ignorance which belongs to becoming, up to being and knowing and their source, the Good, is "to turn around" (*strephein*). A conversion is required (*periakteon*). This demands someone with the art (*techne*) of leading around (*periagoges*), who can convert (*metastraphestai*). Ultimately this requires that someone who has seen the light return to the dark to help the prisoners break their chains, turn around, move upwards and out. Religions, pagan, Jewish, Christian, Muslim have this idea and image at their centre and a converting saviour or saviours (Protagoras, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed). Probably the resulting soteriology (theory of the saviour or of salvation) is most completely worked out philosophically by Iamblichus (c250-c325 CE), but it is everywhere present in the itineraries (journeys) of the soul among the religions of the Book. Moses is the archetype of this figure for the Abrahamic religions, and, with Philo, is presented with this Platonic *agagoge (*guide for the ascent*)* in mind. Philo's *De Vita Mosis* is an anagoge, as is *The Guide of the Perplexed* of Maimonides. Christ plays the role of the saviour guide for Christians, see, from among many possible examples, John 8:12, "I am the Light of the World" and the equation of the divine Word, life and light in John 1:1-5 on which we have Augustine's equation with Platonic doctrine in *Confessions*, VII.ix (13). The conversion toward light is central to Islam and the great Islamic theologian, philosopher and mystic, al-Ghazali, wrote a great exposition of the journey in *The Niche of Lights.* Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan,* at which we have just looked when considering the mysticism of the One, is another Islamic example. However, to get a sense of the total assimilation of Platonism and of Christianity, following it, to the logic of conversion, we must recollect that with Platonism it becomes ontological as well as psychological. All reality beneath the One – Good itself is structured by the *mone* [remaining],

proodos [going out], *epistrophe* [return]. All is in the First, proceeds from it and returns, is converted, back towards its source when it achieves its proper good. Once this is gathered from Plotinus and Proclus, for example, then Christian doctrine (for example the Trinity) and literature is evidently replete with examples of this structure. Augustine's *Confessions*, Boethius' *Consolatio*, Eriugena's *Periphyseon*, Anselm's *Proslogion*, Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*, Bonaventure's *Itinerarium,* and Richard Hooker's *Lawes of the Ecclesiastical Polity,* Book One are outstanding instances. There are verbal references back to Plato's description of the prisoners at the bottom of the Cave in Augustine's *Confessions* (Books 3 & 4), Boethius' *Consolatio (*Book 1), Anselm's *Proslogion (*cap. 1), and Bonaventure's *Itinerarium* (Book 1), but only Boethius is likely to have known whose language he was reproducing—and he most certainly did know!
Slides 50-57 & slides B84-B109.

5.   **The Goal**: **likeness to God.** From Carlos Fraenkel, *Philosophical Religions from Plato to Spinoza: Reason, Religion, and Autonomy*, 123-124: The foundational Christian theologians "Clement and Origen agree with [the Jewish theologian] Philo that being created in God's "image" and "likeness" means that human reason is an image and likeness of divine Reason which, in turn, is an image and likeness of God. For them, of course, human reason is also an image and likeness of Christ. Since they take "image" to refer to reason's potential and "likeness" to the realization of this potential, they can connect Genesis 1:26 to the *telos* formula of the *Theaetetus* [(176a–b)] – "to become like God as much as possible." The goal is to move from "image" to "likeness" (*Strom*. 2.22, 131, 6; *De princ*.3.6, 1). The Christian ideal, then, like the Platonic ideal, is a life ordered by reason towards the perfection of reason. Indeed, everyone who follows the prescriptions of reason by the same token follows Christ's prescriptions and with every true insight increases his share in Christ." *Deiformity*, likeness to God, is the goal of the Neoplatonic philosophers and their Jewish, Islamic and Christian heirs.
Slides 58-60 & B110-B116.

6.   **The human self. Soul and its unseen internal justice is important, not externally visible rewards.** *Republic* II, 366e. The physical ugliness and inward beauty of Socrates make him a paradigm. The soul is immortal and we ought to make our choices in this life relative to its future. Its present and future happiness depend upon its being just. This justice as internal and external order is taken up in the Hellenic philosophy and the Abrahamic religions. Beginning with Plato we pass by way of the Septuagint to the merging of Greek and Hebrew which comes down to Paul, Augustine, and Anselm. I conclude with al Farabi's system which mixes elements from Plato, Aristotle, the Neoplatonists and Peripatetics to found a universal community based on justice in God, the

cosmos, the human soul, the relation of soul and body and in the political ruled by the Philosopher-king-Imam.
Slides 61-64 & B117-B124.

7.   **Immortality of the Soul.** For Plato the soul is immortal, *Republic* X, 608c-613e. Aristotle and his followers, the Peripatetics, are at best ambiguous on the inherent immortality of the individual soul, but do prescribe a way for the human to become immortal by contemplation and absorption into the divine thinking. This path many Islamic and Jewish philosophical theologians follow. Indeed, Philo seems to propose it. Many pagan philosophers follow Plato in teaching the transmigration of souls, a notion usually strongly rejected in the Abrahamic religions. No convergence is more difficult to map than this one. Since the time of the encounter of Hellenism and Israel during the Maccabees, the doctrine of the resurrection has been either an alternative to, or a form of, or conformed to, or absolutely opposed to the Platonic and Aristotelian versions of human immortality. With the Pharisees and Rabbinic Judaism, with Christianity, and Islam, the resurrection became, along with monotheism, the central doctrines. The problems are indicated by the fact that Maimonides makes belief in the resurrection an article of Jewish faith, as it was of the Islamic , but clearly teaches Aristotelian assimilation to divine intellect by contemplation, and is accused of being an infidel by his fellow Jews on the resurrection. Augustine and his followers until the 13th century follow Plato. Aquinas moves to an Aristotelian idea of soul and body incompatible with Augustine but interprets Aristotle by way of the Neoplatonists to preserve individual immortality.
Slides 65–67 & B125-B137.

8.   Creation: With Plato we have the first philosopher who maintained that the world was created by an intelligent cause and who declared that this order was established by a divine being also occupied with the moral destiny of mankind. His *Timaeus* teaches literally that time begins with the creation of the sensible world, which is "the moving image of eternity"; it is sustained only by the will of the creator God that it continue forever so as to be as good as possible, i.e. as nearly eternal as possible. Philosophers and theologians in late Antiquity who knew both the account in the book of Genesis and Plato's found them so close that they supposed the one had been borrowed from the other or that both had the same source in the divine truth. Beginning with Philo, Jews, Christians, and Muslims understood their revealed texts through Plato's philosophical story. Later pagan philosophers reconciled Plato's Demiurge (creator) with Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, so that both philosophers were supposed to have taught that God created all things from nothing (i.e. there was no other first cause), and Christian, Islamic, and Jewish philosophical theologians (e.g. Thomas Aquinas) followed them on this. By the end of his teaching, Aquinas, balancing almost all

the elements of the Hellenic tradition along with the now supposedly Scriptural notion of a temporal beginning of the creation (e.g. Philo and many of the Arabic philosophers did not hold this, to say nothing of John 1.1), held that Plato and Aristotle agreed on the creation of the world from nothing, although he faulted Aristotle for holding that the world was eternal.

Slides 68-71 & B138-B147.

9.   Providence: According to Plato "the gods perceive, see, and hear everything, nothing is able to escape them which falls within sense or knowledge" (*Laws* X, 901d) and these gods "are more, not less, careful for small things than for great" (*Laws* X, 900d). The Neoplatonic philosophers and Christian philosophical theologians follow Plato on this. Aristotle and his followers, the Peripatetics, are at best ambiguous whether God exercises a care for particulars and some Islamic and Jewish philosophical theologians follow them instead of Plato. I use Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* which borrows a great part of its teaching on providence from Plotinus, Iamblichus and Proclus to give the common position of philosophical Hellenes and Christians in late Antiquity on providence and fate and conclude with a passage from Moses Maimonides which stands in the Peripatetic tradition but which stands with Boethius in finding an escape from fate and a safety in God's providence through intellect.[11]

Slides 72-75 & B148-B160.

D. Conclusion

Many other convergences are there to be investigated: trinitarian structures of divinity, the relation, if any, between the Iamblichean / Proclean soul vehicle and the development of the doctrine of the resurrection body, Christian and Neoplatonic incarnation and sacraments (to speak loosely) in the wake of Iamblichus, hierarchies of spiritual beings, continuities in the veneration of holy places and heroes, sacred music. Some of these concern the distinctively Christian doctrines of Trinity and Incarnation which cannot be thought apart from Platonism (in the broad sense I have used it here). The ones I have treated are the most obvious and are ones which cross the religious boundaries.

Owing to the language of its Scriptures, Christianity is the most completely Greek of the three Abrahamic religions, but all are thoroughly

---

[11] For a survey of the positions see my "God's Care for Human Individuals: What Neoplatonism gives to a Christian Doctrine of Providence" *Quaestiones Disputatae* 2: 1 & 2 (Spring –Fall 2011): 4–36 & "Neoplatonist Surprises: The Doctrine of Providence of Plotinus and his Followers both Conscious and Unconscious," *Dionysius* 27 (2009): 117–126.

Hellenic (whether or not "Hellenized"). There have been, and perhaps still are, many reasons this fact has been used as an accusation. One scholarly reality has made throwing "Platonic" as a term of abuse more difficult. When it is taken in the widest sense to include its Neoplatonic developments, especially those which emerge with Iamblichus, most of the old accusations fall away. Its deity is not static, it is not fundamentally dualistic, or matter and body hating, and it is not a rationalism which submits the divine mystery to human conceptualizing. In fact, the Hellenic constitutes a common ground on which the three Abrahamic religions meet and through which they share a connection to the sources of our sciences, political structures, and our arts and letters. Not a bad thing to acknowledge and explore.

<div align="center">*******************</div>

<div align="center">

EXCURSUS
Robert Crouse on GREEK BLENDED WITH HEBREW
From "*Memoria*, *Intellectus*, V*oluntas:* the Augustinian Centre of Robert Crouse's Scholarly Work", *Dionysius*30 (2012): 42–76 at 45–50.

</div>

I cannot move forward from the first decade of Robert's work without a word about the article which came out of his Master of Theology thesis written under Eugene Fairweather at Trinity: "The Augustinian Background of St. Anselm's Concept of *Justitia*." In it, he defines St. Anselm's concept of *Justitia* as "universal rectitude of order"[12] and traces it back to not only to Augustine but also to the pagan Greeks and to the Hebrews, as well as to their ancient concordance. I cannot give his whole argument here, but a suggestion of its character will appear from its first words: "The Greek idea of justice (*dikē*) was initially a religious idea."[13]

After outlining the form it takes in the Hellenic poets and philosophers, Robert goes on to assert that "For the Hebrews, the concept of the justice of God was central", but this does not set the Scriptures in opposition to the Greek and Roman poets and philosophers, just the contrary. Crucially for him, when the "seventy-two elders" (to whom tradition attributes the Septuagint) translated the Hebrew term for justice, "they chose the Greek term *dikē* and its derivatives."[14] In consequence:

---

[12] Robert D. Crouse, "The Augustinian Background of St. Anselm's Concept of *Justitia*," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 4 (1958): 111–119 at 114.
[13] *Ibid*.
[14] *Ibid*.: 115.

For all those who read these writings in Greek, the ideas associated with the Greek term would inevitably be blended with the Hebrew concept. Philo Judaeus, writing some centuries later from the same Alexandrian background, shows how effectively these ideas could be blended by a philosophically minded Jew. St. Paul, who was familiar with both the Hebrew and the Greek of the Scriptures, chose the same Greek word (*dikaisunē*) to express the justice of God, a central idea in his theology, both as an attribute of God, and as a quality in man caused by God.[15]

For Robert, the Church Fathers, building on the methods and doctrines of Philo, simply continued the blending of Hellenic and Hebrew which they found in Scripture and "accepted the full implications of both Biblical and philosophical usage."[16] One of these was that justice, as both justification and sanctification—to use the technical language of Christian theology—, was, for them and for Robert, simultaneously an attribute of God imputed to the just and also really possessed by them. He never varied either from this teaching or from its being an implication of the unity of revealed theology with philosophy.[17]

Robert's publishing in the 1960s began with an essay on the hellenization of Christianity, that is on the criticism of Christianity as fatally infected by pagan Hellenism—the criticism is implied in the characterisation. In it he identified the origins and modern history of how the elements, which he, part of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, the Christian Fathers, and the mediaeval doctors, had blended together, came to be set against each other. This opposition ultimately put Christianity at war with its own doctrinal, sacramental and institutional traditions and structures. He determined that "the possibility of systematic and critical discussion of this problem, and the use of the concept of hellenization as a fundamental theme in the explication of the history of dogma, depended on the circumstances of the Reformation."[18] Prior to it such an

---

[15] *Ibid*.

[16] *Ibid*.

[17] See my "Visio: the Method of Robert Crouse's Philosophical Theology," *Dionysius* 30 (2012): 19–40 at 22–25; see, for example, Robert D. Crouse, "Justification and Sanctification in the Thought of St Paul and St Augustine," *Justification and Sanctification*, Papers delivered at the Twenty-Seventh Annual Atlantic Theological Conference, May 29th to June 1st, 2007, Christ Church Cathedral, Fredericton, New Brunswick, edited Susan Harris (Charlottetown: St. Peter Publications, 2008), 1–10 at 9.

[18] Robert D. Crouse, "The Hellenization of Christianity: A Historiographical Study," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 8 (1962): 22–33 at 22.

extensive criticism of theological tradition as the concept of hellenization implied seemed impossible….As in the case of biblical criticism, so too in the case of the history of dogma, the sacred character of Christian doctrine, hallowed by centuries of tradition, made such an enterprise seem impious.[19]

After tracing the impious enterprise from the 16th century through to Harnack and the 1950s, Robert concluded with words defending the unification he had discerned as requisite to Anselm's Augustinian concept of *Justitia*. The statement also gives the most general principles of his scholarly programme and the structure he will discern in the divine forms, reasons, or words he would continue to study, as well as the texts he would explicate:

> While schematizations of contrasts between Hebrew and Greek modes of thought and expression are useful, it is dangerous…to regard them as in any sense absolute….To say that Greek thought about God is static, for instance, is untrue; for the Greeks, God is full of active power. And it is similarly wrong to suppose that the Hebrews have no concept of the being of God. The real distinctions here, as elsewhere, are rather a matter of emphasis on different aspects of the same concept. Thus…Hebrew and Greek ways of thinking should be regarded as complementary rather than opposed. It is perhaps along such lines as these that there is now promise of some solution…. Perhaps it is no longer necessary to think of hellenization in terms of deterioration….[T]he hellenization of Christianity is implicit in the historicity of Christianity itself—in the enfleshment of revelation…[20]

October 9, 2013

---

[19] *Ibid*.

[20] *Ibid*.: 33.