Convergences between Platonism and the Abrahamic Religions

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Dr Wayne J. Hankey
Department of Classics, Dalhousie University and King’s College, Halifax
Adam Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers as Theologians: The Divine Arche* (Aldershot/ Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), vii: “…[T]he emergence of Greek philosophy coincides with the theological elaboration of the concept of the divine. The philosophical interest in establishing the cosmic *arche*—that is, both the principle and the beginning of the world—is rooted in the interest of what constitutes the divinity of the gods, which together give rise to a very strong monotheistic bias of theological views of the most of the Greek philosophers. This is clear from the very beginning of Greek philosophical reflection, when the Milesians’ ontology is based on monotheistic coloring of their views which consider one cosmic principle, and when the Pythagoreans focus on the principle of the harmonious makeup of the world.

This monotheistic tendency is continued by Xenophanes’ strong profession of the existence of one God; with Parmenides, whose Being clearly possesses divine attributes. It can also be seen later in Anaxagoros, whose *Nous* [Mind] was a divine being, all alone, holy and ineffable; in Empedocles, Diogenes of Apollonia, Socrates, Antisthenes, and in Plato, whose Demiurge was a creator of the world; and in the divine Unmoved Mover of Aristotle.”
[For Plato in the *Laws*, in contradistinction from his revolutionary programme in the *Republic*] The existing beliefs, practices, and institutions, he contends, were, in fact, established by philosopher rulers. Only later was their purpose misunderstood. Hence they need not be replaced but only restored to their original purpose. Plato can then engage in the *philosophical reinterpretation* of Greek cultural forms *as if* they were part of a pedagogical-political program designed by philosophers. As a rule, later proponents of a philosophical religion follow Plato’s reform approach, reinterpreting the historical forms of their religious tradition as if Moses, Christ, or Muhammad had been accomplished philosophers who established them for the guidance of non-philosophers. They thus redirect the contents of their religious tradition to a concept of the good supplied by philosophy. Sometimes revolution and reinterpretation are combined. Thus Christian philosophers in antiquity reject pagan beliefs, practices, and institutions as fundamentally corrupt and champion their replacement through philosophically reinterpreted forms of Christianity.
One implication of the claim that the historical forms of a religious tradition are an imitation of philosophy is that they are similar, but not identical to the philosophical doctrines they represent. Strictly speaking, therefore, they are not true. Does this mean that the things the prophets say – for example about a God who speaks, gives laws, and so forth – are nothing but pedagogically well-intentioned falsehoods? To defuse this concern proponents of a philosophical religion argue that only if taken literally prophetic parables are false. Their allegorical sense, by contrast, consists in sound philosophical doctrines. These doctrines can be disclosed through allegorical interpretation. While taken literally a religious tradition is pedagogically and politically useful but not true, taken allegorically it is true but not pedagogically and politically useful. Philosophical doctrines can thus be located in, but not learned from a religious tradition. As a consequence, the transition from the literal to the allegorical content can only be made by someone with prior philosophical training. This, in turn, implies that philosophy is not only the foundation and the goal of religion, but also holds the key to its true content.
Carlos Fraenkel, *Philosophical Religions from Plato to Spinoza*, 16-17.

Let me add three clarifications to the role I attribute to philosophy in the context of a philosophical religion. Firstly, the commitment to philosophy must not entail an unqualified commitment to *Greek* philosophy, or a particular school of Greek philosophy. Some proponents of a philosophical religion claim that the founder of their religious community is superior to Plato or Aristotle. By this, however, they only mean that Moses, Christ, or Muhammad were *better philosophers* than their Greek colleagues, not that there is something in their teachings that reason can in principle not grasp. Philosophy remains the primary path to perfection. When Jewish, Christian, or Muslim philosophers disagree with their Greek colleagues, therefore, the disagreement should be treated like Aristotle’s claim to hold the truth in higher esteem than Plato (*EN* 1.6, 1096a15). By following the better argument rather than Plato or Aristotle, proponents of a philosophical religion honor the truth they claim to be embodied in their religion.

Secondly, neither claiming that the founder of a religious community is superior to Greek philosophers, nor claiming that a religious tradition is unconditionally true has doctrinal implications. Although the allegorical content of religious texts like the Bible or the Koran is said to coincide with true philosophy, true philosophy cannot be *learned* from studying these texts. It can only be *disclosed* through interpretation by someone with prior philosophical training. This also makes room for epistemological modesty.
Some proponents of a philosophical religion conceive philosophy as an ongoing project, open to revision and refinement, that gradually leads closer to the truth their religion contains.

Thirdly, if philosophical doctrines cannot be learned from religious texts, it is not possible that these texts were the source of Plato’s and Aristotle’s philosophy. The “dependency thesis” by which the philosophers discussed in this book are often said to have justified the study of Greek philosophy, is less widely held than scholars have suggested. When it is held, it normally refers to an alleged oral tradition of knowledge. To see that proponents of a philosophical religion deny that studying religious texts can lead to wisdom is crucial for understanding how they justify the place of philosophy in their communities. For, if the religious texts contain, but do not teach philosophy, nobody can blame the intellectually gifted members of the community for turning to outside sources, for example, Plato or Aristotle. At least implicitly, therefore, proponents of a philosophical religion admit that their religions lack the resources to ground their own truth.
I. The Reformation Doctrine of God

The Doctrine of God common to the Reformed and Roman Catholic churches according to their formularies decided in the 16th and 17th centuries is pure Platonism.
There is one Divine Essence which is called and which is God: eternal, without body, without parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, the Maker and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible. Augsburg 1530.

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Unus est vivus et verus Deus, aeternus, incorporeus, impartibilis, impassibilis, immensae potentiae, sapientiae, ac bonitatis, creator et conservator omnium, tum visibilium tum invisibilium. Et in unitate huius divinae naturae tres sunt Personae eiusdem essentiae, potentiae, ac aeternitatis, Pater, Filius, et Spiritus Sanctus. England 42 & 39 Articles 1553 & 1571

There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute... Westminster 1646.
THE CONFESSION OF FAITH which was submitted to His Imperial Majesty Charles V at the Diet of Augsburg in the Year 1530

Article One: Of God

Our Churches, with common consent, do teach that the decree of the Council of Nicaea concerning the Unity of the Divine Essence and concerning the Three Persons, is true and to be believed without any doubting; that is to say,

there is one Divine Essence which is called and which is God: eternal, without body, without parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, the Maker and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible; and yet there are three Persons, of the same essence and power, who also are coeternal, the Father the Son, and the Holy Ghost. And the term “person” they use as the Fathers have used it, to signify, not a part or quality in another, but that which subsists of itself.
Article I Of faith in the Holy Trinity

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

De fide in Sacrosanctam Trinitatem

Unus est vivus et verus Deus, aeternus, incorporeus, impartibilis, impassibilis, immensae potentiae, sapientiae, ac bonitatis, creator et conservator omnium, tum visibilium tum invisibilium. Et in unitate huius divinae naturae tres sunt Personae eiusdem essentiae, potentiae, ac aeternitatis, Pater, Filius, et Spiritus Sanctus.

This article is derived from the Confession of Ausburg via Thomas Cranmer’s draft of Thirteen Articles in 1538.
There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for, His own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him; and withal, most just, and terrible in His judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.

God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of Himself; and is alone in and unto Himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which He hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting His own glory in, by, unto, and upon them. He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever Himself pleaseth.
In His sight all things are open and manifest, His knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to Him contingent, or uncertain. He is most holy in all His counsels, in all His works, and in all His commands. To Him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience He is pleased to require of them.

In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost: the Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.
The Baltimore Catechism
From 1885 to 1960s the standard for Catholic instruction in the USA
Lesson II God and His Perfections

8. What do we mean when we say that God is the Supreme Being? When we say that God is the Supreme Being we mean that He is above all creatures, the self-existing and infinitely perfect Spirit. I am the First, and I am the Last, and besides me there is no God. (Isaiah 44:6)

9. What is a spirit? A spirit is a being that has understanding and free will, but no body, and will never die. To whom then have you likened God? Or what image will you make for Him? (Isaiah 40:18)

10. What do we mean when we say that God is self-existing? When we say that God is self-existing we mean that He does not owe His existence to any other being. I am who am. (Exodus 3:14)
11. What do we mean when we say that God is infinitely perfect?
When we say that God is infinitely perfect we mean that He has all perfections without limit.

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and of his greatness there is no end. (Psalm 144:3)

12. What are some of the perfections of God? Some of the perfections of God are: God is eternal, all-good, all-knowing, all-present, and almighty.

13. What do we mean when we say that God is eternal?
When we say that God is eternal we mean that He always was and always will be, and always remains the same. “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end," says the Lord God. (Apocalypse 1:8)

14. What do we mean when we say that God is all-good?
When we say that God is all-good we mean that He is infinitely lovable in Himself, and that from His fatherly love every good comes to us.

For the word of the Lord is right; and all his works are done with faithfulness. He loveth mercy and judgment: the earth is full of the mercy of the Lord. (Psalm 32:4-5)
15. What do we mean when we say that God is all-knowing?

When we say that God is all-knowing we mean that He knows all things, past, present, and future, even our most secret thoughts, words, and actions.

Behold, O Lord, thou hast known all things, the last and those of old: thou hast formed me, and hast laid thy hand upon me. Thy knowledge is become wonderful to me: it is high, and I cannot reach it. (Psalm 138:5-6)

16. What do we mean when that God is all-present?

When we say that God is all-present we mean that He is everywhere.

Whither may I go from thy spirit, or whither may I flee from they face? (Psalm 138:7)

17. If God is everywhere, why do we not see Him?

Although God is everywhere, we do not see Him because He is a spirit and cannot be seen with our eyes.

God is a spirit; and they that adore him must adore him in spirit and in truth. (John 4:24)
18. Does God see us?
God sees us and watches over us with loving care.
Be not solicitous therefore, saying: "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "Wherewith will we be clothed?" For after all these things do the heathens seek. For your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all these things. (Matthew 6:31:32)

19. What is God's loving care for us called?
God's loving care for us is called Divine Providence.
Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. (I Peter 5:7)

20. What do we mean when we say that God is almighty?
When we say that God is almighty we mean that He can do all things. For nothing shall be impossible with God. (Luke 1:37)

21. Is God all-wise, all-holy, all-merciful, and all-just?
Yes, God is all-wise, all-holy, all-merciful, and all-just.
II. *Gnothi Seauton*

Self-knowledge as the correlative to the knowledge of God comes to Platonism via the Delphic Oracle and Socrates. The doctrine and spiritual discipline were common to the philosophy, theology and religion of Catholics and Protestants in the 17th century—as they were to Platonists in the 3rd.
“Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But as these are connected together by many ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes and gives birth to the other. ... [I]t is evident that man never attains to a true self-knowledge until he have previously contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into himself.” Jean Calvin 1536

... I see that there is manifestly more reality in infinite substance than in finite, and therefore that in some way I have in me the notion of the infinite earlier than the finite – to wit, the notion of God before that of myself. For how would it be possible that I should know that I doubt and desire, that is to say, that something is lacking to me, and that I am not quite perfect, unless I had within me some idea of a Being more perfect than myself, in comparison with which I should recognise the deficiencies of my nature? René Descartes 1641

Wisdom consists in knowing God and by Him to know his own self (à se connoître soi-même). The knowledge of ourselves (nous-mêmes) ought to elevate us to the knowledge of God. To rightly understand the human, it is necessary to think that it is composed of two parts, which are the soul and the body. Bishop Bossuet, Tutor to the Dauphin, 1679
“Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But as these are connected together by many ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes and gives birth to the other. ... [I]t is evident that man never attains to a true self-knowledge until he have previously contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into himself.”

Descartes, *Meditations on the First Philosophy*

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Report of Bishop Bossuet to Pope Innocent XI on his programme for the education of the Dauphin, the only son of Louis XIV. One of its elements, a treatise on *Connoissance de Dieu et de Soi-Même*

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Six elements found in mediaeval and early modern followings of Augustine on the *Gnothi Seauton*.

Knowledge of God and the knowledge of the self are inseparable. Knowledge of God is logically and by dignity prior; this priority may also be temporal.

There is some kind of presence of God to the soul such that an encounter between them is both possible and always in fact occurring, even when we are unconscious of it.

God demands, and may even explicitly command, that we know ourselves. Obedience to this demand normally requires the discipline of meditation and thus a variety of what may be called mystical experience.

The result of the journey to self-knowledge sought with, or as a condition of, the knowledge of God is that we shall know the two together. Put in the language of Scripture this would be to know as we are known.
Socrates at the Origin of Platonic Philosophical Religion
The Challenge of the *Gnothi Seauton*
Men of Athens, this reputation of mine has come of a certain sort of wisdom which I possess. If you ask me what kind of wisdom, I reply, wisdom such as may perhaps be attained by man, for to that extent I am inclined to believe that I am wise; whereas the persons of whom I was speaking have a superhuman wisdom which I may fail to describe, because I have it not myself; and he who says that I have, speaks falsely, and is taking away my character. And here, O men of Athens, I must beg you not to interrupt me, even if I seem to say something extravagant. For the word which I will speak is not mine. I will refer you to a witness who is worthy of credit: the God of Delphi--he will tell you about my wisdom, if I have any, and of what sort it is.

21a1 You must have known Chaerephon; he was early a friend of mine, and also a friend of yours, for he shared in the recent exile of the people, and returned with you. Well, Chaerephon, as you know, was very impetuous in all his doings, and he went to Delphi and boldly asked the oracle to tell him whether--as I was saying, I must beg you not to interrupt--he asked the oracle to tell him whether anyone was wiser than I was, and the Pythian prophetess answered, that there was no man wiser....
When I heard the answer, I said to myself, What can the god mean? and what is the interpretation of his riddle? for I know that I have no wisdom, small or great. What then can he mean when he says that I am the wisest of men? And yet he is a god, and cannot lie; that would be against his nature. After long consideration, I thought of a method of trying the question. I reflected that if I could only find a man wiser than myself, then I might go to the god with a refutation in my hand. I should say to him, 'Here is a man who is wiser than I am; but you said that I was the wisest.' Accordingly I went to one who had the reputation of wisdom, and observed him--his name I need not mention; he was a politician whom I selected for examination--and the result was as follows: When I began to talk with him, I could not help thinking that he was not really wise, although he was thought wise by many, and still wiser by himself; and thereupon I tried to explain to him that he thought himself wise, but was not really wise; and the consequence was that he hated me, and his enmity was shared by several who were present and heard me....
23a This inquisition has led to my having many enemies of the worst and most dangerous kind, and has given occasion also to many calumnies. And I am called wise, for my hearers always imagine that I myself possess the wisdom which I find wanting in others: but the truth is, O men of Athens, that God only is wise; and by his answer he intends to show that the wisdom of men is worth little or nothing; he is not speaking of Socrates, he is only using my name by way of illustration, as if he said, He, O men, is the wisest, who, like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is in truth worth nothing. And so I go about the world, obedient to the god, and search and make enquiry into the wisdom of any one, whether citizen or stranger, who appears to be wise; and if he is not wise, then in vindication of the oracle I show him that he is not wise; and my occupation quite absorbs me, and I have no time to give either to any public matter of interest or to any concern of my own, but I am in utter poverty by reason of my devotion to the god....
Strange, indeed, would be my conduct, O men of Athens, if I who, when I was ordered by the generals whom you chose to command me at Potidæa and Amphipolis and Delium, remained where they placed me, like any other man, facing death—if now, when, as I conceive and imagine, God orders me to fulfil the philosopher’s mission of searching into myself and other men, I were to desert my post through fear of death, or any other fear; that would indeed be strange, and I might justly be arraigned in court for denying the existence of the gods, if I disobeyed the oracle because I was afraid of death, fancying that I was wise when I was not wise.…

Men of Athens, I honour and love you; but I shall obey God rather than you, and while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy,… For I know that this is the command of God; and I believe that no greater good has ever happened in the state than my service to the God.
For I do nothing but go about persuading you all, old and young alike, not to take thought for your persons or your properties, but first and chiefly to care about the greatest improvement of the soul. I tell you that virtue is not given by money, but that from virtue comes money and every other good of man, public as well as private. This is my teaching, and if this is the doctrine which corrupts the youth, I am a mischievous person. But if any one says that this is not my teaching, he is speaking an untruth.

Wherefore, O men of Athens, I say to you, do as Anytus bids or not as Anytus bids, and either acquit me or not; but whichever you do, understand that I shall never alter my ways, not even if I have to die many times....

And now, Athenians, I am not going to argue for my own sake, as you may think, but for yours, that you may not sin against the God by condemning me, who am his gift to you....
When I say that I am given to you by God, the proof of my mission is this:--if I had been like other men, I should not have neglected all my own concerns or patiently seen the neglect of them during all these years, and have been doing yours, coming to you individually like a father or elder brother, exhorting you to regard virtue; such conduct, I say, would be unlike human nature. If I had gained anything, or if my exhortations had been paid, there would have been some sense in my doing so; but now, as you will perceive, not even the impudence of my accusers dares to say that I have ever exacted or sought pay of any one; of that they have no witness. And I have a sufficient witness to the truth of what I say--my poverty.
Socrates' *Apology.*
Socrates proposes a penalty

Some one will say: Yes, Socrates, but cannot you hold your tongue, and then you may go into a foreign city, and no one will interfere with you? Now I have great difficulty in making you understand my answer to this. For if I tell you that to do as you say would be a disobedience to the God, and therefore that I cannot hold my tongue, you will not believe that I am serious; and if I say again that daily to discourse about virtue, and of those other things about which you hear me examining myself and others, is the greatest good of man, and that the unexamined life is not worth living, you are still less likely to believe me. Yet I say what is true, although a thing of which it is hard for me to persuade you. Also, I have never been accustomed to think that I deserve to suffer any harm. Had I money I might have estimated the offence at what I was able to pay, and not have been much the worse. But I have none, and therefore I must ask you to proportion the fine to my means. Well, perhaps I could afford a mina, and therefore I propose that penalty: Plato, Crito, Critobulus, and Apollodorus, my friends here, bid me say thirty minae, and they will be the sureties. Let thirty minae be the penalty; for which sum they will be ample security to you.
Socrates’ *Apology*: Socrates speaks of a divine sign which guides him.

33c The duty of examination of those think they are wise and are not…I have accepted in obedience to the God’s commands given both by signs and dreams, and in every way in which the divine decree ever commanded anyone to do anything.”

31d1 You have heard me speak at various times and places of divine sign which comes to me, and is the divinity which Meletus ridicules in the indictment. This sign, which is a kind of voice, first began to come to me when I was a child; it always forbids but never commands me to do anything which I am going to do. For I am certain, O men of Athens, that if I had engaged in politics, I should have perished long ago, and done no good either to you or to myself.

39e: Friends, who would have acquitted me, I would like also to talk with you about the thing which has come to pass, while the magistrates are busy, and before I go to the place at which I must die. Stay then a little, for we may as well talk with one another while there is time. You are my friends, and I should like to show you the meaning of this event which has happened to me. O my judges—for you I may truly call judges—I should like to tell you of a wonderful circumstance. Hitherto the inspiration of my divine sign has constantly been in the habit of opposing me even about trifles, if I was going to make a slip or error in any matter; and now as you see there has come upon me that which may be thought, and is generally believed to be, the last and worst evil.
Socrates’ *Apology*

40b But the divine sign made no sign of opposition, either when I was leaving my house in the morning, or when I was on my way to the court, or while I was speaking, at anything which I was going to say; and yet I have often been stopped in the middle of a speech, but now in nothing I either said or did touching the matter in hand has the sign of god opposed me. What do I take to be the explanation of this silence? I will tell you. It is an intimation that what has happened to me is a good, and that those of us who think that death is an evil are in error. For the customary sign would surely have opposed me had I been going to evil and not to good.

Let us reflect in another way, and we shall see that there is great reason to hope that death is a good; for one of two things--either death is a state of nothingness and utter unconsciousness, or, as men say, there is a change and migration of the soul from this world to another.

Now if you suppose that there is no consciousness, but a sleep like the sleep of him who is undisturbed even by dreams, death will be an unspeakable gain. For if a person were to select the night in which his sleep was undisturbed even by dreams, and were to compare with this the other days and nights of his life, and then were to tell us how many days and nights he had passed in the course of his life better and more pleasantly than this one, I think that any man, I will not say a private man, but even the Great King [of Persia] will not find many such days or nights, when compared with the others. Now if death be of such a nature, I say that to die is gain; for eternity is then only a single night.
Socrates’ *Apology*: 40b But if death is the journey to another place, and there, as men say, all the dead abide, what good, O my friends and judges, can be greater than this? If indeed when the pilgrim arrives in the world below, he is delivered from the professors of justice in this world, and finds the true judges who are said to give judgment there, Minos and Rhadamanthus and Aeacus and Triptolemus, and other sons of God who were righteous in their own life, that pilgrimage will be worth making. What would not a man give if he might converse with Orpheus and Musaeus and Hesiod and Homer? Nay, if this be true, let me die again and again. I myself, too, shall have a wonderful interest in there meeting and conversing with Palamedes, and Ajax the son of Telamon, and any other ancient hero who has suffered death through an unjust judgment; and there will be no small pleasure, as I think, in comparing my own sufferings with theirs. Above all, I shall then be able to continue my search into true and false knowledge; as in this world, so also in the next; and I shall find out who is wise, and who pretends to be wise, and is not.
Socrates’ *Apology*: What would not a man give, O judges, to be able to examine the leader of the great Trojan expedition; or Odysseus or Sisyphus, or numberless others, men and women too! What infinite delight would there be in conversing with them and asking them questions! In another world they do not put a man to death for asking questions: assuredly not. For besides being happier than we are, they will be immortal, if what is said is true.

[41c] Wherefore, O judges, be of good cheer about death, and know of a certainty, that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death. He and his are not neglected by the gods; nor has my own approaching end happened by mere chance. But I see clearly that the time had arrived when it was better for me to die and be released from trouble; wherefore the oracle gave no sign. For which reason, also, I am not angry with my condemners, or with my accusers; they have done me no harm, although they did not mean to do me any good; and for this I may gently blame them.
In the *Apology* Socrates is presented as on trial in large part “for believing in gods of his own invention, gods other than those in which the city believes” [24c]. In response to this, Socrates represents himself as “a gift of God to the state” [31b] who neglected his own interests in devoting himself to what God had laid on him “both by signs and dreams, and in every way in which the divine decree ever commanded anyone to do anything” [33c]. The imposition of that lot came about through the Delphic Oracle. About thirty years before the trial, a childhood friend of Socrates asked the priestess whether anyone was wiser than he. She replied that “No one is wiser.” Being conscious of ignorance rather than wisdom, and believing that God cannot lie, therefore Socrates asks himself: “How shall I explain God’s answer; what riddle is he uttering?” [21b] He decided to set out seeking someone with wisdom in order “to check the truth of the oracle.” Thus he undertook the questioning of those seeming or pretending to be wise which made him such a pest in Athens.
Socrates

From Knowing As We are Known, continued:

While trying to discern the meaning and truth of the oracle, Socrates discovered that: “I was making myself hated, but I felt compelled to put what the God had laid on me first” [21e]. He told his judges that his wanderings in going from person to person were “labours undertaken to establish the truth of the oracle beyond questioning” [22a]. In fact, Socrates found none wise; consequently, he decided: “the truth probably is that it is God who is really wise, and the meaning of this oracle is to say that human wisdom is worth little or nothing” [23a]. He concluded that his wisdom is his consciousness of his own ignorance and that the oracle about Socrates was used by God to bring the citizens to the truth about the human condition generally. With this realization his philosophical questioning becomes a work to “vindicate the oracle.”

So far Socrates, despite his eccentric ways, offers a traditional interpretation of the message of Greek religion and of the Delphic Oracle as its medium. Wisdom belongs to the gods, not to humans. The Oracular command Gnothi seauton, Know yourself, continues to stand against the hybris which would pretend that humans can share what belongs to the divine; it tells us: know yourself as human, know your ignorance.
From Knowing As We are Known, continued:
Philosophy claims religious authority for its activity, but its message is the same as that of the traditional religion of oracle and poet. However, as Socrates becomes a martyr for the philosophical life as service to God, something new appears.

Socrates was found guilty. In naming his penalty, consistent with how he had represented himself, he begins by proposing that, as a benefactor of the city, he should be pensioned and housed as a member of the government. After he offers to pay a tiny fine instead, the jury accepts the death penalty as the alternative, and Socrates makes a final speech. In it he assumes the power of prophesy given those about to die. After predicting that future cross-examiners of the city will be harder on the citizens than he was, he tells his friends the meaning of what has happened. He reveals that his relation to God is very personal indeed. He has an inward prophetic divine “voice” or “sign,” something always accompanying him who “constantly opposed me even in the merest trifles, if I were about to make a mistake” [40a].
From Knowing As We are Known, continued:

This divine sign, which Plato, represents only as a check on evil [31d] and always requiring a rational interpretation to understand, had not opposed him in anything on this day of his trial. The absence of the accustomed sign gives him “great proof” that he is on his way to his own good [40c]. The working of God for his good includes his death.

The result of Socrates’ encounter with the Delphic Oracle accords with the Hellenic religion as conveyed by the poets. Equally, both his own inner prophetic sign and the Oracle also require interpretation; thus a subjective element enters the relation to the divine voice. Self-knowledge and knowledge of the divine will are inseparably intertwined whether the god speaks at his Oracular shrine or within the soul. Nonetheless, Socrates’ “belief in a special direct relation between himself and divine forces” is revolutionary, as both his apologists like Plato and his enemies recognised. The divine appears in interior communion with the individual, caring for his good.
Socrates, as represented in the *Apology*, is given enough to found a religious revolution. His life will be the saintly exemplar for the followers of this new Hellenic way; his death is its first martyrdom. The Socratic foundations are these:

Philosophical activity is a divine vocation.
Its work is self-knowledge.
In this philosophic labour the Delphic Oracle is vindicated and its command fulfilled. So philosophy may be represented as the way to fulfil God’s oracular command to self-knowledge.
In self-knowledge, and essential to its structure, the positive center by which all is evaluated moves to the divine. God’s knowledge is true knowledge and the standard of human knowing.
Religion is not only a matter of the state or family, but also about the permanent good of the individual.
The care of God for the one fulfilling the divine command to self-knowledge manifests itself in the gift of an interior divine presence; in principle, self-knowledge and interior dialogue with God belong together.

Only one great shift on this foundation is necessary in order to transform the meaning of *Gnothi seauton*, and it takes place very explicitly and intentionally with both Plato and Aristotle. Both the shift itself, and the transformation it brings about, are of unequalled importance for the religions of the Hellenistic world: pagan ones, Judaism, and Christianity. The philosophical theology of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism are determined by the shift in the doctrine of God undertaken by Plato and Aristotle.
Plato
The most influential Theologian
429-347 BCE
Socrates’ philosophy as religion is represented by Plato as characterised by these features which will hold for the Platonic tradition:

1. Philosophical activity is a divine vocation.
2. Its work is self-knowledge.
3. In this philosophic labour the Delphic Oracle, who presides over Hellenic religion, is vindicated and its command fulfilled. So philosophy may be represented as the way to fulfil God’s oracular command to self-knowledge.
4. In self-knowledge, and essential to its structure, the positive center by which all is evaluated moves to the divine. God’s knowledge is true knowledge and the standard of human knowing.
5. Religion is not only a matter of the state or family, but also about the permanent good of the individual.
6. The care of God for the one fulfilling the divine command to self-knowledge manifests itself in the gift of an interior divine presence; in principle, self-knowledge and interior dialogue with God belong together.
To establish Platonic religion only one great shift on this foundation is necessary in order to transform the meaning of the oracle’s command, *Gnothi seauton*, Know yourself.

1. It takes place explicitly and intentionally with Plato and Aristotle.
2. Both the shift itself, and the transformation it brings about, are of unequalled importance for the religions of the Hellenistic world: Hellenic, Jewish, and Christian. The philosophical theology of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism are determined by the shift in the doctrine of God undertaken by first by Plato and then by Aristotle, following and modifying him.
From Socratic to Platonic Religion

We witness the shift in the Republic when, in considering the education of the guardians, Plato criticises the myths about the gods, especially those invented by the poets. As against the lies of the poets, which represent the gods as changeable, able to be deceived and influenced, lying, revengeful, and so on, Plato maintains that "in reality, of course, God is good and he must be so described." "God is the cause, not of all things, but only of good."

God is perfect and, in consequence, changeless.—the perfect could only change for the worse. God cannot be affected (apatheia). Perfect goodness is God’s very nature and determines the other characteristics. Apatheia, simplicity, and incorporality are fundamental attributes of God consequent on changeless perfection—bodies have parts and can be broken up and changed. [More on all this later]. Consequently, God cannot be jealous, weakly desiring to keep what he has to himself. Instead the final goal of the human quest for knowledge is Goodness itself, represented through the image of the sun, giving knowledge and being to everything else.
Aristotle follows Plato (*Timaeus* 29c-30a) when he asserts at the beginning of the *Metaphysics* that “Poets tell many a lie.” [Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1.2.] He too argues that God cannot be jealous, i.e. wishing to keep his wisdom, which is essential to his being as thinking, to himself. Rather the unmoved divine Good, desire for whose intellectual self-sufficiency moves all things, shares his self-knowledge with us. This is not only the basis of theology but also of ethics. At the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle urges:

“We must not follow those who advise us, being human, to think of human things, and, being mortal, of mortal things, but must, so far as we can, aim at immortality, and do all things so as to live in accordance with what is best in us.” [Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7.]

It is Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* whom Plotinus has in mind when he asserts at *Ennead* 5.3.4.11 that “to know oneself is no longer to know as a human.”
Metaphysics 1.2 For this reason the acquisition of wisdom might justly be supposed to be beyond human power, since in many respects human nature is servile; in which case, as Simonides says, "God alone can have this privilege," and man should only seek the knowledge which is within his reach. Indeed if the poets are right and the Deity is by nature jealous, [983a] it is probable that in this case He would be particularly jealous, and all those who excel in knowledge unfortunate. But it is impossible for the Deity to be jealous (indeed, as the proverb says, "poets tell many a lie")…

Metaphysics XII.7 And it is a life such as the best which we enjoy, and enjoy for but a short time (for it is ever in this state, which we cannot be), since its actuality is also pleasure…. And thought thinks on itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought…. It is active when it possesses this object. Therefore the possession rather than the receptivity is the divine element which thought seems to contain, and the act of contemplation is what is most pleasant and best. If, then, God is always in that good state in which we sometimes are, this compels our wonder; and if in a better this compels it yet more. And God is in a better state. 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.

Nicomachean Ethics X.7 But such a life would be too high for man; for it is not in so far as he is man that he will live so, but in so far as something divine is present in him; and by so much as this is superior to our composite nature is its activity superior to that which is the exercise of the other kind of virtue. If reason is divine, then, in comparison with man, the life according to it is divine in comparison with human life. But we must not follow those who advise us, being men, to think of human things, and, being mortal, of mortal things, but must, so far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us; for even if it be small in bulk, much more does it in power and worth surpass everything.
For this reason the acquisition of wisdom might justly be supposed to be beyond human power, since in many respects human nature is servile; in which case, as Simonides says, "God alone can have this privilege," and man should only seek the knowledge which is within his reach. Indeed if the poets are right and the Deity is by nature jealous, [983a] it is probable that in this case He would be particularly jealous, and all those who excel in knowledge unfortunate. But it is impossible for the Deity to be jealous (indeed, as the proverb says, "poets tell many a lie"), nor must we suppose that any other form of knowledge is more precious than this; for what is most divine is most precious. Now there are two ways only in which it can be divine. A science is divine if it is peculiarly the possession of God, or if it is concerned with divine matters. And this science alone fulfils both these conditions; for (a) all believe that God is one of the causes and a kind of principle, and (b) God is the sole or chief possessor of this sort of knowledge. Accordingly, although all other sciences are more necessary than this, none is more excellent.
The first mover, then, exists of necessity; and in so far as it exists by necessity, its mode of being is good, and it is in this sense a first principle…. On such a principle, then, depend the heavens and the world of nature. And it is a life such as the best which we enjoy, and enjoy for but a short time (for it is ever in this state, which we cannot be), since its actuality is also pleasure. (And for this reason are waking, perception, and thinking most pleasant, and hopes and memories are so on account of these.) 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; for it becomes an object of thought in coming into contact with and thinking its objects, so that thought and object of thought are the same. For that which is capable of receiving the object of thought, i.e. the essence, is thought. But it is active when it possesses this object. Therefore the possession rather than the receptivity is the divine element which thought seems to contain, and the act of contemplation is what is most pleasant and best. If, then, God is always in that good state in which we sometimes are, this compels our wonder; and if in a better this compels it yet more. And God is in a better state.

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.
If happiness is activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with the highest virtue; and this will be that of the best thing in us. Whether it be reason or something else that is this element which is thought to be our natural ruler and guide and to take thought of things noble and divine, whether it be itself also divine or only the most divine element in us, the activity of this in accordance with its proper virtue will be perfect happiness. That this activity is contemplative we have already said.

Now this would seem to be in agreement both with what we said before and with the truth. For, firstly, this activity is the best (since not only is reason the best thing in us, but the objects of reason are the best of knowable objects); and secondly, it is the most continuous, since we can contemplate truth more continuously than we can do anything. And we think happiness has pleasure mingled with it, but the activity of philosophic wisdom is admittedly the pleasantest of virtuous activities; at all events the pursuit of it is thought to offer pleasures marvellous for their purity and their enduringness, and it is to be expected that those who know will pass their time more pleasantly than those who inquire. And the self-sufficiency that is spoken of must belong most to the contemplative activity.
Participation in God’s Intellectual Life is the Highest Human Happiness

Nicomachean Ethics X.7

For while a philosopher, as well as a just man or one possessing any other virtue, needs the necessaries of life, when they are sufficiently equipped with things of that sort the just man needs people towards whom and with whom he shall act justly, and the temperate man, the brave man, and each of the others is in the same case, but the philosopher, even when by himself, can contemplate truth, and the better the wiser he is; he can perhaps do so better if he has fellow-workers, but still he is the most self-sufficient. And this activity alone would seem to be loved for its own sake; for nothing arises from it apart from the contemplating, while from practical activities we gain more or less apart from the action. And happiness is thought to depend on leisure; for we are busy that we may have leisure, and make war that we may live in peace. Now the activity of the practical virtues is exhibited in political or military affairs, but the actions concerned with these seem to be unleisurely.

Warlike actions are completely so (for no one chooses to be at war, or provokes war, for the sake of being at war; any one would seem absolutely murderous if he were to make enemies of his friends in order to bring about battle and slaughter); but the action of the statesman is also unleisurely, and-apart from the political action itself-aims at despotic power and honours, or at all events happiness, for him and his fellow citizens—a happiness different from political action, and evidently sought as being different.
So if among virtuous actions political and military actions are distinguished by nobility and greatness, and these are unleisurely and aim at an end and are not desirable for their own sake, but the activity of reason, which is contemplative, seems both to be superior in serious worth and to aim at no end beyond itself, and to have its pleasure proper to itself (and this augments the activity), and the self-sufficiency, leisureliness, unweariedness (so far as this is possible for man), and all the other attributes ascribed to the supremely happy man are evidently those connected with this activity, it follows that this will be the complete happiness of man, if it be allowed a complete term of life (for none of the attributes of happiness is incomplete).

But such a life would be too high for man; for it is not in so far as he is man that he will live so, but in so far as something divine is present in him; and by so much as this is superior to our composite nature is its activity superior to that which is the exercise of the other kind of virtue. If reason is divine, then, in comparison with man, the life according to it is divine in comparison with human life. But we must not follow those who advise us, being men, to think of human things, and, being mortal, of mortal things, but must, so far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us; for even if it be small in bulk, much more does it in power and worth surpass everything.
This would seem, too, to be each man himself, since it is the authoritative and better part of him. It would be strange, then, if he were to choose not the life of his self but that of something else. And what we said before will apply now; that which is proper to each thing is by nature best and most pleasant for each thing; for man, therefore, the life according to reason is best and pleasantest, since reason more than anything else is man. This life therefore is also the happiest.
When this theory about the nature of God, and this view of the human and its goal, are combined, we get a new understanding of the consequence of knowing God and the self together. The *Alcibiades* of Plato **reversed** the interpretation of the *Gnothi seauton* [know yourself] of the Delphic oracle. Whereas, before Plato, its purpose had been to separate the divine and the human, for Plato and his successors, including Aristotle, it was used for the opposite purpose. **By self-knowledge we would imitate the gods and abolish, so far as we are able, the difference between us and them.**
Alcibiades
The Alcibiades of Plato

Iamblichus is credited with establishing the curriculum in the Neoplatonic schools and giving the Alcibiades its prominent place in that curriculum – it was read first. He gave the practice of self-knowledge as the way to the knowledge of God its centrality in the later Platonic schools.

SOCRATES: And can we ever know what art makes a man better, if we do not know what we are ourselves? ALCIBIADES: Impossible. 129a

SOCRATES: And is self-knowledge such an easy thing, and was he to be lightly esteemed who inscribed the text on the temple at Delphi? Or is self-knowledge a difficult thing, which few are able to attain?

ALCIBIADES: At times I fancy, Socrates, that anybody can know himself; at other times the task appears to be very difficult.

SOCRATES: But whether easy or difficult, Alcibiades, still there is no other way; knowing what we are, we shall know how to take care of ourselves, and if we are ignorant we shall not know. ALCIBIADES: That is true.

SOCRATES: Well, then, let us see in what way the self-existent [αυτο ταυτο]can be discovered by us; that will give us a chance of discovering our own existence, which otherwise we can never know.
The Alcibiades

S. Then a man is not the same as his own body? A. That is the inference. 129e
S. What is he, then? A. I cannot say.
S. Nay, you can say that he is the user of the body. A. Yes.
S. And the user of the body is the soul? A. Yes, the soul.
S. And the soul rules? A. Yes. ….

132d

S: I will tell you what I suspect to be the meaning and lesson of that inscription. [Gnothi seauton] Let me take an illustration from sight, which I imagine to be the only one suitable to my purpose. A: What do you mean?
S: Consider; if some one were to say to the eye, ‘See thyself,’ as you might say to a man, ‘Know thyself,’ what is the nature and meaning of this precept? Would not his meaning be:—That the eye should look at that in which it would see itself? A: Clearly.
S: And what are the objects in looking at which we see ourselves?
A: Clearly, Socrates, in looking at mirrors and the like.
S: Very true; and is there not something of the nature of a mirror in our own eyes? A: Certainly.
The Alcibiades

S: Did you ever observe that the face of the person looking into the eye of another is reflected as in a mirror; and in the visual organ which is over against him, and which is called the pupil, there is a sort of image of the person looking? A: That is quite true.

S: Then the eye, looking at another eye, and at that in the eye which is most perfect, and which is the instrument of vision, will there see itself? A: That is evident.

S: But looking at anything else either in man or in the world, and not to what resembles this, it will not see itself? A: Very true.

S: Then if the eye is to see itself, it must look at the eye, and at that part of the eye where sight which is the virtue of the eye resides? A: True.

S: And if the soul, my dear Alcibiades, is ever to know herself, must she not look at the soul; and especially at that part of the soul in which her virtue resides, and to any other which is like this? A: I agree, Socrates.

S: And do we know of any part of our souls more divine than that which has to do with wisdom and knowledge? A: There is none.

S: Then this is that part of the soul which resembles God; and he who looks at this and all that is divine, will be most likely to know himself? 133c
The Alcibiades

S: You and the state, if you act wisely and justly, will act according to the will of God? A: Certainly. 134d
S: As I was saying before, you will look only at what is bright and divine, and act with a view to them? A: Yes.
S: In that mirror you will see and know yourselves and your own good? A: Yes.
S: And so you will act rightly and well? A: Yes.
S: In which case, I will be security for your happiness. A: I accept the security.
S: But if you act unrighteously, your eye will turn to the dark and godless, and being in darkness and ignorance of yourselves, you will probably do deeds of darkness. A: Very possibly.

It is of the greatest importance that Platonic self-knowledge is mediated both through the human (a properly disposed lover) and through God.
Bonaventure (Contemporary of Thomas Aquinas, both died in 1274) Perhaps the most complete mediated of all systems. *The Mind’s Journey into God I*

4. Following this threefold progress, our mind has three principal aspects. One refers to the external body, wherefore it is called animality or sensuality; the second looks inward and into itself, wherefore it is called spirit; the third looks above itself, wherefore it is called mind. …. 

5. Since, however, all of the aforesaid modes are twofold--as when we consider God as the alpha and omega, or in so far as we happen to see God in one of the aforesaid modes as "through" a mirror and "in" a mirror, or as one of those considerations can be mixed with the other conjoined to it or may be considered alone in its purity--hence it is necessary that these three principal stages become sixfold, so that as God made the world in six days and rested on the seventh, so the microcosm by six successive stages of illumination is led in the most orderly fashion to the repose of contemplation. As a symbol of this we have the six steps to the throne of Solomon [III Kings, 10, 19]; the Seraphim whom Isaiah saw have six wings; after six days the Lord called Moses out of the midst of the cloud [Ex., 21, 16]; and Christ after six days, as is said in Matthew [17, 1], brought His disciples up into a mountain and was transfigured before them.
Philo Judaeus

On Moses as Philosopher-King, Prophet, Priest, Paradigm, and Mediator.
So, what exactly is the nature of Moses, the figure who embodied both sacred and secular perfection? If we look to the end of *De Vita Mosis*, where Moses’ essential nature is restored, Philo provides a clear answer:

Later, the time came when he was ready to migrate from here into heaven, leaving the mortal life, aimed at immortality, summoned there by the father who, realigning his dyadic existence, body and soul, into the monad, resolved his whole entire nature into *the most sun-like mind*. [Philo, *De Vita Mosis*, 2.287-292.]

As pure mind, Moses is the undivided light, the perfect activity, which is the source and end of all things. Through his embodied existence, Moses mediates his higher nature by means of encompassing and actualizing each of the four mental faculties that correspond to the four offices. Moses’ nature in itself is whole, which we as mortal humans know in virtue of its distinct division into parts. In the realm of generation, these parts must remain distinct for the sake of human nature, and in this way, the Roman ideal state is the whole in which both sacred and secular parts are retained.
The account of the education and offices of Moses, the mediator between God and the cosmos, depends on differentiating between what is innate and belongs to philosophical labour, on the one hand, and what is from without and above, on the other. By the union of both Moses acquires the capacities of the philosopher-king, legislator, high priest, and prophet who establishes the cosmic priesthood of Israel. While he receives a complete education, including symbolic philosophy, from all kinds of masters employed from Egypt, the adjacent countries, and Greece, his innate genius meant that he was recollecting rather than learning and was improving upon what his teachers gave (Mos. I.18-24). This grounding of his human labours in the nature given to him indicates the principle at work in Philo’s treatment of the unique bridge between the divine and the human, one with both sides.

We have the beginning of the unification of offices and modes of knowledge, sacred and secular, mystical, prophetic, and philosophical in the Moses of Philo, and non identical iterations in the Constantine of Eusebius, the ecclesiastical hierarch of Dionysius, Farabi’s “single idea of the Philosopher, Supreme Ruler, Prince, Legislator, and Imam” and in the Christ of Aquinas. It is now for us to establish the connections. Doing so would draw the three Abrahamic religions together with one another and with the Hellenism through which they became what they are both as a group and individually. Enabling this to be seen is an urgent task in every sense.
(2) For some persons say, and not without some reason and propriety, that this is the only way by which cities can be expected to advance in improvement, if either the kings cultivate philosophy, or if philosophers exercise the kingly power. But Moses will be seen not only to have displayed all these powers—I mean

1. the genius of the philosopher and of the king—in an extraordinary degree at the same time, but three other powers likewise,
2. one of which is conversant about legislation,
3. the second about the way of discharging the duties of high priest, and
4. the last about the prophetic office; ...

(3) all these things have fitly been united in him, inasmuch as in accordance with the providential will of God he was both a i) king and a lawgiver, and ii) a high priest and iii) a prophet, and because in each office he displayed the most eminent wisdom and virtue. We must now show how it is that every thing is fitly united in him. (4) It becomes a king to command what ought to be done, and to forbid what ought not to be done; but the commanding what ought to be done, and the prohibition of what ought not to be done, belongs especially to the law, so that the king is at once a living law, and the law is a just king. [Note this notion of kingship will descend by way of Eusebius to Constantine, for example].
(5) But a king and a lawgiver ought to pay attention not only to human things, but also to divine ones, for the affairs of neither kings nor subjects go on well except by the intervention of divine providence; on which account it was necessary that such a man as Moses should enjoy the first priesthood, in order that he might with perfectly conducted sacrifices, and with a perfect knowledge of the proper way to serve God, entreat for a deliverance from evil and for a participation in good, both for himself and for the people whom he was governing, from the merciful God who listens favourably to prayers.

6) But since there is an infinite variety of both human and divine circumstances which are unknown both to king, and lawgiver, and chief priest, for a man is no less a created and mortal being from having all these offices, or because he is clothed with such a vast and boundless inheritance of honour and happiness, he was also of necessity invested with the gift of prophecy, in order that he might through the providence of God learn all those things which he was unable to comprehend by his own reason; for what the mind is unable to attain to, that prophecy masters.
What more shall I say? Has he not also enjoyed an even greater communion with the Father and Creator of the universe, being thought worthy of being called by the same appellation?

For he also was called the god and king (θέος καί βασιλεύς) of the whole nation, and he is said to have entered into the darkness where God was; that is to say, into the invisible, and shapeless, and incorporeal world, the archetypal substance of all beings, where he beheld things unseen by mortal nature; for, having brought himself and his own life into the middle [between the divine and the human], as an excellently wrought picture, he established himself and his own life as a most beautiful and Godlike work, to be a paradigm for all those who were willing to imitate it.

When he is about to die, the Father changes Moses from “a double being, composed of soul and body, so that his whole nature is that of a monad [μονάδος] without elements, thus transforming him wholly and entirely into a most sun-like mind” (Mos. II.288).
As Moses had utterly discarded all desire of gain and of those riches which are held in the highest repute among men, God honoured him, and gave him instead the greatest and most perfect wealth; and this is the Wealth...of all the earth and sea, and of all the rivers, and of all the other elements, and all combinations whatever; for having judged him deserving of being made a partaker with himself in the portion which he had reserved for himself, he gave him the whole world as a possession suitable for his heir: (156) therefore, every one of the elements obeyed him as its master, changing the power which it had by nature and submitting to his commands. And perhaps there was nothing wonderful in this; for if it be true according to the proverb, -- "That all the property of friends is common;" and if the prophet was truly called the friend of God, then it follows that he would naturally partake of God himself and of all his possessions as far as he had need;

I.XXVII.(157) for God possesses everything and is in need of nothing; but the good man has nothing which is properly his own, no, not even himself, but he has a share granted to him of the treasures of God as far as he is able to partake of them. And this is natural enough; for he is a citizen of the world (cosmopolitan); on which account he is not spoken of as to be enrolled as a citizen of any particular city in the habitable world, since he very appropriately has for his inheritance not a portion of a district, but the whole world [olon ton kosmon.](158)
XIV. (68) But, in the first place, before assuming that office, it was necessary for him to purify not only his soul but also his body, so that it should be connected with and defiled by no passion, but should be pure from everything which is of a mortal nature, from all meat and drink, and from all connection with women.

(69) And this last thing, indeed, he had despised for a long time, and almost from the first moment that he began to prophesy and to feel a divine inspiration, thinking that it was proper that he should at all times be ready to give his whole attention to the commands of God. And how he neglected all meat and drink for forty days together, evidently because he had more excellent food than that in those contemplations with which he was inspired from above from heaven, by which also he was improved in the first instance in his mind, and, secondly, in his body, through his soul, increasing in strength and health both of body and soul, so that those who saw him afterwards could not believe that he was the same person.
XIV. (70) For, having gone up into the loftiest and most sacred mountain in that district in accordance with the divine commands, a mountain which was very difficult of access and very hard to ascend, he is said to have remained there all that time without eating any of that food even which is necessary for life; and, as I said before, he descended again forty days afterwards, being much more beautiful in his face than when he went up, so that those who saw him wondered and were amazed, and could no longer endure to look upon him with their eyes, inasmuch as his countenance shone like the light of the sun.
Philo’s influence was not primarily within his own religious community, where, after the Roman destruction of the Second Temple, although Hellenic Judaism persisted, there was a turn against the kind of identification with Greco-Roman culture of which his corpus was the acme. Nonetheless, Philo shares the common theology out of which the *Wisdom of Solomon*, and great parts of the New Testament—most notably the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Pauline corpus, and the Gospels of Luke and John emerge. This will facilitate his gigantic influence among the Christian Fathers, underestimated because substantially unacknowledged by them.
On the Influence of Philo

Clement of Alexandria, and the Catechetical School there, continued Philo’s unification of philosophy and scriptural revelation in his home city, and Clement’s works contain massive reiterations of both content and methods. In Alexandria, Origen came into the heritage and he made a hugely important contribution to its dissemination by carrying the Philonic corpus to Palestine when he moved. It was there, where, among other uses, his *Life of Moses* came to underlie the ideology of the Byzantine Empire through Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea’s modelling of Constantine on it.

How, beyond the Christian Empire, for a philosopher like al-Farabi, Philo’s unification of philosopher-king, legislator, prophet and religious leader came to be the model for the ruler of the Islamic perfect state remains unknown. Indeed, no one has traced what we owe to him outside the Christian Fathers with the barest adequacy; not only the Islamic but also the pagan philosophical reception are neglected.

In my account of Philo I shall emphasise how his writing crossed the physical / metaphysical, philosophical / theological, natural / revealed, rational / mystical divides, in ways that the pagan and Christian Neoplatonic, and the so-called Islamic “Peripatetic” philosophical theologians would later do. It is not until we look for him in everything which came out of his Alexandria that we shall find this Jewish philosophical exegete of Scripture everywhere.
On Philo’s Influence

Emily’s Parker abstract for her paper at the Philosophy and the Abrahamic Religions: Scriptural Hermeneutics and Epistemology conference indicates Philo’s importance; he provides the first explicit synthesis of scripture-based monotheism and Hellenic and Hellenistic philosophy. After Philo, there emerges a vast tradition of scriptural exegesis, in which sacred texts and philosophical methods and doctrines are interpreted in light of each other. In Philo, we find many of the principles fundamental to this hermeneutical tradition, such as the allegorical reading of scripture, the formulation of dogmatic statements, the concordance between Plato, Aristotle and revelation, to name just a few.

There can be no doubt that Philo provided cruxes of Eastern and Western Christian, as well as Islamic, and ultimately also Jewish, allegorical techniques and content for the interpretation of scripture, especially hexamaeral texts. We may indicate this by mentioning the works entitled Hexamaeron of bishops Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose of Milan, and the multiple interpretations of Genesis by Augustine; there are also the De Vita Moysis and De Hominis Opificio of Gregory, to mark the most obvious. John Scottus Eriugena translated Gregory’s On the Creation of Humankind and (probably) Basil’s Hexamaeron into Latin. Their content passed into his Periphyseon. In this context, we must note David Runia’s assertion that Philo was “the first thinker” to take the all important step of associating “the goodness of Plato’s demiurge with the Judaeo-Christian conception of God the creator.”
On Philo’s Influence

For Philo, *physiologia* (the contemplation of nature) does not only lead to Stoic *apatheia*, it opens the human to prophecy. Connection to the natural elements made the authors of the *Septuagint* susceptible to revelation; they became not translators but “hierophants and prophets.” After prayer, to which God assented so that the human race might be led to a better life by using the “philosophical and truly beautiful ordinances” of the Jewish Law, secluded on the island of Pharos with “nothing except the elements of nature: earth, water, air, heaven, the genesis of which was to be the first theme of their sacred revelation—for the production of the cosmos is the principle of the laws—like men inspired, they prophesied...”.

In consequence, without conferring with one another “they found words corresponding to the things.” In arriving at the very realities which had been revealed through Moses, and expressing them in Greek, their minds went along with the purest of spirits, his (*Mos. II.36-40*).

The Mosaic Law, understood in union with nature, and as both philosophical and revealed, is now available to teach all humankind.
Excursus

Christian and Islamic Heirs of Philo’s Moses: Constantine, Justinian, Roger II of Sicily, Emperor Otto III, al-Farabi’s Philosopher, Supreme Ruler, Prince, Legislator, and Imam
At the center of a philosophical religion is the ideal of Godlikeness attained through the perfection of reason. For one thing, intellectual perfection is the goal to which all members of the religious community ought to be directed. While this ideal can be realized to a greater or lesser degree, it is realized most completely through philosophy, culminating in knowledge of God. Thus philosophy is the highest form of worship. At the same time, intellectual perfection is also religion’s foundation, because it is the most distinctive trait of the founders and leaders of a religious community. Christian philosophers push this view furthest: their Christ is not only a perfect philosopher, but wisdom itself. The key to understanding a philosophical religion is its moral-political character. In a community based on a philosophical religion the life of all members is ordered towards what is best. The beliefs, practices, and institutions that make up this order are divinely ordained. Such a community, therefore, is best described as a theocracy, a community ruled by God. The conceptual move from an excellent order to a divine order is based on two steps: Firstly, something ordered towards what is best – whether an organism or the celestial spheres, a human life or a political community – is taken to be rationally ordered. Secondly, the rational principle that accounts for this order is identified with God. The conception of God as Reason is the metaphysical foundation of a philosophical religion. Note that the theocratic character of the religious community does not depend on the rule of a specific social group, but is a function of its rational order. A rationally ordered democracy, for example, would also count as a theocracy on this view. In the ideal theocracy, as we will see, God’s rule and self-rule coincide.
Constantine in the midst of the bishops of the Council of Nicaea holding its creedal statement. This is a modern icon which depicts them all as saints.
Sir Steven Runciman concludes his *The Byzantine Theocracy* as follows: “the ordinary man and woman in Byzantium believed their Empire to be God’s holy empire on earth, with the holy Emperor as representative of God before the people and representative of the people before God. For eleven centuries, from the days of the first Constantine..., the theocratic constitution of the Christian Roman Empire was essentially unchanged. No other constitution in all the history of the Christian era has endured so long.”

“St.” Constantine had himself buried in his Church of the Twelve Apostles as their equal and “equal to the apostles” became one of the titles of his successors.
Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea
On “the Blessed Emperor Constantine”

In his *On the Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine*, Bishop Eusebius, positively compares Constantine to Moses, as depicted in the *Life of Moses* by Philo Judaeus. Philo had made Moses the perfect Philosopher-King, Legislator, Prophet, and Priest, the “living (ensouled) law,” “cosmopolites” citizen of the cosmos, quasi-divine super human mediator between God and the human. Eusebius justifies Constantine’s calling, presiding over, and intervening in the Council of Nicaea (many scholars think that the *homoousios* formula—of the same substance as the Father—came from Constantine), as follows:

I.44. ... he, like some general bishop constituted by God, convened synods of his ministers. Nor did he disdain to be present and sit with them in their assembly, but bore a share in their deliberations, ministering to all that pertained to the peace of God.

The constitution of the Christian Roman Empire as inaugurated by Constantine and articulated by Bishop Eusebius depended on a comparison between Jesus Christ as the divine-human mediator and the Emperor as caring out his work on earth as Viceroy or Vicar (to use the title the Pope took, adopting the same model for himself). Just as in his *Life* Constantine had become a “general bishop,” in his *Tricennial Oration*, Bishop Eusebius asserts that the governing authority, saving and preserving work, the sacrifice and priesthood, and the shepherding of Christ, all derive in an earthy form to the Christian Emperor. Part of that work of presenting a pure sacrifice is ridding the Empire of pagans, unbelievers, and Christian heretics.
1. This only begotten Word of God reigns, from ages which had no beginning, to infinite and endless ages, the partner of his Father’s kingdom. And [our emperor] ever beloved by him, who derives the source of imperial authority from above, and is strong in the power of his sacred title has controlled the empire of the world for a long period of years.

2. Again, that Preserver of the universe orders these heavens and earth, and the celestial kingdom, consistently with his Father’s will. Even so our emperor whom he loves, by bringing those whom he rules on earth to the only begotten Word and Saviour renders them fit subjects of his kingdom.

3. And as he who is the common Saviour of mankind, by his invisible and Divine power as the good shepherd, drives far away from his flock, like savage beasts, those apostate spirits which once flew through the airy tracts above this earth, and fastened on the souls of men so this his friend, graced by his heavenly favour with victory over all his foes, subdues and chastens the open adversaries of the truth in accordance with the usages of war.

4. He who is the pre-existent Word, the Preserver of all things, imparts to his disciples the seeds of true wisdom and salvation, and at once enlightens and gives them understanding in the knowledge of his Father’s kingdom. Our emperor, his friend, acting as interpreter to the Word of God, aims at recalling the whole human race to the knowledge of God; proclaiming clearly in the ears of all, and declaring with powerful voice the laws of truth and godliness to all who dwell on the earth.
5. Once more, the universal Saviour opens the heavenly gates of his Father’s kingdom to those whose course is thitherward from this world. Our emperor, emulous of his Divine example, having purged his earthly dominion from every stain of impious error, invites each holy and pious worshiper within his imperial mansions, earnestly desiring to save with all its crew that mighty vessel of which he is the appointed pilot. And he alone of all who have wielded the imperial power of Rome, being honoured by the Supreme Sovereign with a reign of three decennial periods, now celebrates this festival, not, as his ancestors might have done, in honour of infernal demons, or the apparitions of seducing spirits, or of the fraud and deceitful arts of impious men; but as an act of thanksgiving to him by whom he has thus been honoured, and in acknowledgment of the blessings he has received at his hands. He does not, in imitation of ancient usage, defile his imperial mansions with blood and gore, nor propitiate the infernal deities with fire and smoke, and sacrificial offerings; but dedicates to the universal Sovereign a pleasant and acceptable sacrifice, even his own imperial soul, and a mind truly fitted for the service of God.
2. 6. For this sacrifice alone is grateful to him: and this sacrifice our emperor has learned, with purified mind and thoughts, to present as an offering without the intervention of fire and blood, while his own piety, strengthened by the truthful doctrines with which his soul is stored, he sets forth in magnificent language the praises of God, and imitates his Divine philanthropy by his own imperial acts. Wholly devoted to him, he dedicates himself as a noble offering, a first-fruit of that world, the government of which is entrusted to his charge. This first and greatest sacrifice our emperor first dedicates to God; and then, as a faithful shepherd, he offers, not “famous hecatombs of firstling lambs,” but the souls of that flock which is the object of his care, those rational beings whom he leads to the knowledge and pious worship of God.

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Constantine did not patronize Christianity alone. After the victory at the Milvian Bridge (312), his triumphal arch is most notably decorated with images of the goddess Victoria and, at the time of its dedication, sacrifices to gods like Apollo, Diana, and Hercules were made. Absent are any depictions of Christian symbols.
Mosaic over South Door of Hagia Sophia set up by Emperor Basil II between 986-944

Constantine presents the city & Justinian presents Hagia Sophia to the Madonna represented as the
Theotokos
Justinian in San Vitale (Ravenna), adapted from Emily Pegues

Justinian is depicted as the “regent of Christ on earth” placed at the centre of twelve men (thus Christ and the Twelve Apostles—see San Apollinare in the apse mosaic of San Apollinare in Classe). Justinian is both individualized and eternal. Set in the golden light of heaven has a halo encircling his glittering crown. He holds a gold paten containing the Communion bread towards the altar, and is accompanied by other men, some bearing liturgical: a censer, a jeweled cross, an ornately-covered book & the soldier’s shield displays Christ's monogram, the Chi-Rho. Three figures who are identifiable by name: the man to Justinian’s left is MAXIMIANIUS, the bishop of Ravenna. Between the emperor and Maximian is the banker who supported the construction of St. Vitale, to his immediate right is General Belisarius, who restored the military power of Byzantium during Justinian’s regime.

Thus as sacred King (Basileus) he is at the centre of priestly and secular power, dispensing both.
In the Gospel commissioned by Emperor Otto III (c 1000) he is depicted like Justinian with the sacred power on his right (a bishop and an abbot) and with military figures on his left (though note that the on right and left are reversed vis-à-vis Justinian). One holds up the orb of the earth, the other supports the throne. Otto is venerated by a procession of gift bearing provinces represented by kings and queens. Despite reigning briefly, he deposed one Pope and appointed two others. The Holy Roman Emperors conceived of themselves as doing in the West what the Byzantine Basileus did in the East and the two imperial families intermarried.
Crowning of Roger II of Sicily robed as a Byzantine Basileus in the Martorana, late 12th century (the upper side of the direct relationship of the king and Christ)
Roger II’s Throne in the Royal Chapel in Palermo where he sits in the place of Christ flanked like the Pope by Saints Peter and Paul.
“The Second Master” questions the First, Aristotle
The perfect city of al-Farabi has the *Republic* of Plato as its model. Justice is an order of the parts in accord with a structural harmony; that harmony is primarily in the soul and it is brought about in the city by an art dependent on knowledge and possessed by the philosopher. In al-Farabi’s world of Aristotelian theoretical sciences, where the forms have lost their separate existence and belong to intellects, justice outside the First is three-fold: in the order of the Primary existences of the universe, in the human, and in the city, nonetheless, justice still depends on philosophy, now united with religion as representation.

For al-Farabi, as for Plato, rule is an art, for al-Farabi in the Platonic succession, the king who possesses “the art of ruling the excellent city” (4.15 § 7) must be a philosopher. The foundation of the city depends on a human who is both philosopher and prophet, thus having the full development of both the rational and the representational parts of the soul.

In this al-Farabi is operating with a pattern for the ruler found in Philo’s *Life of Moses*. As also for Philo, the combination of philosophy and religion enables the universal actuality of the ideal city. Plato was updated by the Jewish Philo and now Philo was updated Eusebius who replaced Moses with Christ and made Constantine, the Christian Roman Emperor into a philosopher-king and chief priest; now the Muslim philosopher updates him again. At 4.15 § 11 al-Farabi writes that the Philosopher-King is “the Imam; he is the first sovereign of the excellent city, he is the sovereign of the excellent nation, and the sovereign of the universal state (the *oikumene*).”
The perfection of the ruler stems from his unity with the hierarchy immediately above him: “His soul is united as it were with the Active Intellect […],” (Section 4. Chapter 15. §11) which is the lowest intellectual (angelic) subsistence emanating from God.

Al-Farabi asserts (Section 4. Chapter 15. §10): “When this [unity] occurs in both parts of his rational faculty, namely the theoretical and the practical rational faculties, and also in his representative faculty, then it is this man who receives Divine Revelation, and God Almighty grants him Revelation through the mediation of the Active Intellect…

Thus he is, [1] through the emanation from the Active Intellect to his Passive Intellect, a wise man and a philosopher and an accomplished thinker who employs an intellect of divine quality, and,

[2] through the emanation from the Active Intellect to his faculty of representation, a visionary prophet: who warns of things to come and tells of particular things which exist at present.”
We recognise here a unity of philosophy and prophecy in the ruler which comes from Philo’s Moses. This hierarch who looks above himself directly to the spiritual realm and thus has its order in himself which he imposes on those below is also like the hierarch of the hugely influential Christian theologian and mystic Dionysius the Areopagite (6th century); his works may have been known to Islamic philosophers, having been translated from Greek both into Syrian and into Arabic.

After those who combine the complete development of both faculties, according to al-Farabi, there may be a diminution of the quality of the ruler. However, the first characteristic of “the next sovereign, who is successor of the first sovereigns” is that “he will be a philosopher.” (4.15 §13.)

Only philosophy can rule this city: “When it happens, at a given time, that philosophy has no share in the government, though every other condition may be present in it, the excellent city will remain without a king, the ruler actually in charge of this city will not be a king, and the city will be on the verge of destruction; and if it happens that no philosopher can be found who will be attached to the actual ruler of the city, then, after a certain interval, this city will undoubtedly perish.” (4.15 §14.)

So let it be clear that the idea of the Philosopher, Supreme Ruler, Prince, Legislator, and Imam is but a single idea. No matter which one of these words you take, if you proceed to look at what each of them signifies among the majority of those who speak our language, you will find that they all finally agree by signifying one and the same idea….

Now [the true governing principles of the city] are *philosophy* when they are in the soul of the legislator. They are *religion* when they are in the souls of the multitude. For when the legislator knows these things they are evident to him by pure insight, whereas what is established in the souls of the multitude is through an image and a persuasive argument.

Although it is the legislator who also represents these things through images, neither the images nor the persuasive arguments are intended for himself. As far as he is concerned, they are certain. He is the one who invents the images and the persuasive arguments, but not for the sake of establishing these things in his own soul as a religion for himself. No, the images and the persuasive arguments are intended for others, whereas, so far as he is concerned, these things are certain. They are a religion for others, whereas, so far as he is concerned, they are philosophy. Such, then, is true philosophy and the true philosopher.
Excursus

Concluded
Back to the
*Gnothi Seauton*

Plotinus

On Self-knowledge and the ascent to Soul, NOUS and the One,
Plotinian Mysticism
Mounting beyond the human to Deiformity, Godlikeness
(modified from Pierre Hadot)

Plotinus is not really the friend of the human. Plotinus had written of the good man: “[He] will altogether separate himself, as far as possible from his lower nature and will not live the life of the good man which civic virtue requires. He will leave that behind, and choose another, the life of the gods: for it is to them, not to the good men, that we are to be made like.”

In *Ennead* 5.3, Plotinus’ last description of illumination by the One, he tells us that the one who knows himself is double, one reasoning, having knowledge according to soul: “and one up above this man, who knows himself according to Intellect because he has become that intellect; and by that Intellect he thinks himself again, not any longer as a man …”

When, at the end of the treatise, we mount beyond Intellect to the One, the language is denuded of any rational self-elevation. Plotinus says that there is a “sudden reception of a light” which compels the soul “to believe” that “it is from Him, it is Him.” There is a breaking in; the illumination “comes.” With this arrival of the “true end of the soul,” it “contemplates the light by which it sees,” but it is equally no longer operating by a power over which it has control. Hadot’s analyses of Plotinian mysticism make clear this loss, is not of the true self, but of a self-possessed power; he writes that “it is an irruption into consciousness of an entire activity of which the soul was unconscious.”
5.1.1. [Why have souls forgotten] the father, God, and, though members of the Divine and entirely of that world, [do they ignore at once themselves and It? The evil…has its source in self-will,… and in the primal differentiation with the desire for self ownership. They conceived a pleasure in this freedom and largely indulged their own motion; thus they were hurried down the wrong path, and in the end, drifting further and further, they came to lose even the thought of their origin in the Divine…. [T]he souls…no longer discern either the divinity or their own nature; ignorance of their rank brings self-depreciation; they misplace their respect, honouring everything more than themselves; all their awe and admiration is for the alien, and, clinging to this, they have broken apart, as far as a soul may, and they make light of what they have deserted; their regard for the mundane and their disregard of themselves bring about their utter ignoring of the divine. Admiring pursuit of the external is a confession of inferiority; and nothing thus holding itself inferior to things that rise and perish, nothing counting itself less honourable and less enduring than all else it admires could ever form any notion of either the nature or the power of God. A double discipline must be applied if human beings in this pass are to be reclaimed, and brought back to their origins, lifted once more towards the Supreme and One and First. There is the method…declaiming the dishonour of the objects which the Soul holds here in honour; the second teaches or recalls to the soul its race and worth; this latter is the leading truth, and, clearly brought out, is the evidence of the other.
Plotinus, *Ennead 5.1*

5.1.3 [The individual soul apprehends that it is part of the Soul which animates the cosmos and”] once seen to be thus precious, thus divine,…you are already nearing God: in the strength of this power make upwards towards Him: at no great distance you must attain: there is not much between. But over this divine, there is still a diviner: grasp the upward neighbour of the soul, its prior and source. Soul, for all the worth we have shown to belong to it, is yet a secondary, an image of *NOUS*, the Intellectual-Principle: reason uttered is an image of the reason stored within the soul, and in the same way soul is an utterance of the Intellectual-Principle: it is even the total of its activity, the entire stream of life sent forth by that Principle to the production of further being; it is the forthcoming heat of a fire which has also heat essentially inherent. ...Sprung … from the Intellectual-Principle Soul is intellective, but with an intellectual operation by the method of reasonings…
Augustine of Hippo

Following Plotinus to Self-Knowledge
CHAPTER X, 16. And being admonished by these books [of the Platonists, certainly including important treatises of Plotinus] to return into myself, I entered into my inward soul, guided by thee. [*admonitus redire ad memet ipsum, intravi in intima mea duce te*], This I could do because you were my helper. And I entered, and with the eye of my soul -- such as it was -- saw above the same eye of my soul and above my mind the Immutable Light. [*intravi et vidi qualicumque oculo animae meae supra eundem oculum animae meae, supra mentem meam, lucem incommutabilem*] It was not the common light, which all flesh can see; nor was it simply a greater one of the same sort, as if the light of day were to grow brighter and brighter, and flood all space. It was not like that light, but different, yea, very different from all earthly light whatever. Nor was it above my mind in the same way as oil is above water, or heaven above earth, but it was higher, because it made me, and I was below it, because I was made by it.

He who knows the Truth knows that Light, and he who knows it knows eternity. Love knows it, O Eternal Truth and True Love and Beloved Eternity! Thou art my God, to whom I sigh both night and day. [*Superior, quia ipsa fecit me, et ego inferior, quia factus ab ea. qui novit veritatem, novit eam, et qui novit eam, novit aeternitatem; caritas novit eam. o aeterna veritas et vera caritas et cara aeternitas, tu es deus meus, tibi suspiro die ac nocte.*]
When I first knew thee, thou didst lift me up, that I might see that there was something to be seen, though I was not yet fit to see it. And thou didst beat back the weakness of my sight, shining forth upon me thy dazzling beams of light, and I trembled with love and fear. I realized that I was far away from thee in the land of unlikeness, [et reverberasti infirmitatem aspectus mei, radians in me vehementer, et contremui amore et horrore. et inveni longe me esse a te in regione dissimilitudinis] as if I heard thy voice from on high: "I am the food of strong men; grow and you shall feed on me; nor shall you change me, like the food of your flesh into yourself, but you shall be changed into my likeness." And I understood that thou chastenest man for his iniquity, and makest my soul to be eaten away as though by a spider.

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." And I heard this, as things are heard in the heart, and there was no room for doubt. I should have more readily doubted that I am alive than that the Truth exists – the Truth which is "clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made." [clamasti de longinquo, `immo vero ego sum qui sum.' et audivi, sicut auditur in corde, et non erat prorsus unde dubitarem, faciliusque dubitarem vivere me quam non esse veritatem, quae per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspicitur.]
CHAPTER XI, 17. And I viewed all the other things that are beneath thee, and I realized that they are neither wholly are nor wholly are not. [vidi nec omnino esse nec omnino non esse]. They are in so far as they come from thee; but they are not in so far as they are not what thou art. For that truly is which remains immutable. [id enim vere est quod incommutabiliter manet] It is good, then, for me to hold fast to God, for if I do not remain in him, neither shall I abide in myself; but he, remaining in himself, renews all things. And thou art the Lord my God, since thou standest in no need of my goodness.

...[W]hen the Platonic books admonished Augustine to return into himself, and became the means of God’s own guidance, what he saw on that interior journey, described in Plotinus’ language, finally gave him the positive conception of incorporeal substance which he required to move beyond Academic Skepticism. Immutable light—that is to say, unchanging and unchangeable knowing—was both the means and the content of the vision he describes. The identity of knowing and being, which is *NOUS* as what underlies and makes possible the changing reasonings of soul’s knowing,—as Plotinus puts it,—or the light of the eternal Word illumining his mind,—as Augustine called it, following St John and Philo Judaeus,—gave true knowledge of the incorporeal, eternal, and immutable God, and, consequently, of himself, as immortal, incorporeal, but mutable soul. This knowledge enabled solving the problem of evil...
Hankey, *Recurrens in te unum, continued*

Many scholars have questioned the specifically Neoplatonic character of his conversion by what Augustine says “love knows” in Book Seven because God here, and elsewhere in the *Confessions*, is seen and mystically touched as Being (esse), the “I am, who I am” of Exodus 3:14. Plotinus, following the Chaldean Oracles, also apprehends the First by “intellect in love” but “the One” is the name by which Plotinus designated the First, and it is the One-Non-Being with whom he has intuitive and erotic union. As a result of the work of scholars, primarily French, his doubt has evaporated.

Plotinus lies at the origin of two traditions of Neoplatonism. One, coming to Augustine through modifications Porphyry and Marius Victorinus made to Plotinus, results in a “a metaphysics of pure being” and, besides the Bishop of Hippo, this tradition includes Boethius, Anselm, Aquinas, Pico della Mirandola, as well as the Arabic Neoplatonised Peripatetics, among its notable adherents. Its logic, laid out in an *Anonymous Commentary on the Parmenides*, which substitutes an infinitive “to be,” with neither subject or predicate, for “the One,” is evident in Thomas’ *Summa Theologiae*, where the identity of essence and existence in God is made a consequence of his absolute simplicity. The other tradition, with the First as One-Non-Being, culminates among the pagan Neoplatonists in Proclus; its Christian examples include Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, Eriugena, the Rhenish mystics, and Nicholas of Cusa.
Ibn Tufayl

Oriental and Occidental Philosophy Meet within Islam
§ 62. Having now attained to the Knowledge of this Supreme Being, of Permanent Existence, which has no Cause of his own Existence, but is the Cause why all things else exist; he was desirous to know by what Means he had attained this Knowledge, and by which of his Faculties he had apprehended this Being. And first he examined all his Senses, viz. his Hearing, Sight, Smelling, Tasting and Feeling, and perceiv'd that all these apprehended nothing but Body, or what was in Body. For the Hearing apprehended nothing but Sounds, and these came from the Undulation of the Air, when Bodies are struck one against another. The Sight, apprehends Colours. The Smelling, Odours. The Taste, Savours. And the Touch, the Temperatures and Dispositions of Bodies, such as Hardness Softness, Roughness ad Smoothness. Nor does the Imagination apprehend any thing, but as it has Length, Breadth and Thickness. Now all these things which are thus apprehended, are the Adjuncts of Bodies; nor can these Senses apprehend any thing else, because they are Faculties diffused through Bodies, and divided according to the division of Bodies, and for that reason cannot apprehend any thing else but divisible Body.
For since this Faculty is diffused through the visible Body, 'tis impossible, but that when it apprehends any thing whatsoever, that thing so apprehended, must be divided as the Faculty is divided. For which Reason, no Faculty which is seated in Body, can apprehend any thing but what is Body, or in it. Now we have already demonstrated, that this necessarily Existent Being is free in every respect from all Properties of Body; and consequently not to be apprehended, but by something which is neither Body, nor any Faculty inherent in Body, nor has any manner of dependence upon it, nor is either within it, or without it, nor joined to it, nor separated from it. From whence it appeared to him, that he had apprehended this Being by that which was his Essence, and gained a certain Knowledge of him. And from hence he concluded, that this Essence was Incorporeal, and free from all the Properties of Body. And that all his External Part which he saw, was not in reality his Essence; by that his true Essence was That, by which he apprehended that Absolute Being of necessary Existence.

The argument here is dependent on Avicenna, although Ibn Tufayl also uses arguments from the Peripatetics.
The Alternative Tradition

There is 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. 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 underpinnings of the Christian systems of Albertus Magnus, Aquinas, Eckhart and Cusa to mention a few prominent adherents.