Convergences between Platonism and the Abrahamic Religions B

The List of Convergences

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Dr Wayne J. Hankey

Department of Classics, Dalhousie University and King’s College, Halifax
1. God as perfect good. *Republic* II, 379b-381c: the goodness of god who can only do *good*, perfection, and consequent changelessness \( \alpha \pi \alpha \theta \epsilon \iota \alpha \) of god; the divine incorporality and incapacity to deceive follow from this. Aristotle’s *Physics* leads to the immutability and incorporality of God and Plato’s arguments are combined with it or presupposed by the theologians of the Abrahamic religions. Philo considers God to be actuality and incorporeal, understanding Genesis through the *Timaeus*, he establishes for his *sillage* that the creation is first incorporeal and then corporeal (the after was not temporal for him); Augustine guarantees that for many centuries this will be the common doctrine of Latin Christians. Philo also identifies the good maker of the *Timaeus* with the God of Genesis whose creation is good. Augustine’s *Confessions* is in large part a description of his philosophical journey to the idea of incorporeal substance, and thus to the incorporeal God and human soul as the conditions of Christian faith for him. At the crucial turning Plotinus is his guide. He maintains that what he came to laboriously was known to ordinary Christians. Maimonides is preoccupied with establishing the divine incorporality and laboriously retrieves the Aristotelian arguments for this purpose. The first conclusion Aquinas draws from the divine name with which he begins, Simplicity, requires God’s incorporality. Perfection comes next. These theologians know that their Scriptures seem to contradict divine incorporality and perfection and interpret them allegorically to establish it as essential to religion.
Plato the Philosophical Theologian

1. The Perfection and incorporality of God

*Republic* On the education of the Guardians of the philosophical city, II, 377c-381c [Paul Shorey translation accessed from Perseus]: Then the first thing will be to establish a censorship of the writers of fiction, and let the censors receive any tale of fiction which is good, and reject the bad; and we will desire mothers and nurses to tell their children the authorised ones only. Let them fashion the mind with such tales, even more fondly than they mould the body with their hands; but most of those which are now in use must be discarded….Those, I said, which are narrated by Homer and Hesiod, and the rest of the poets, who have ever been the great story-tellers of mankind…. *Republic*, 377e: “What is that?” “When anyone images badly in his speech the true nature of gods and heroes, like a painter whose portraits bear no resemblance to his models.” “It is certainly right to condemn things like that,” he said; “but just what do we mean and what particular things?” “There is, first of all,” I said, “the greatest lie about the things of greatest concernment, which was no pretty invention of him who told how Uranus did what Hesiod says he did to Cronos, and how Cronos in turn took his revenge; [378a] and then there are the doings and sufferings of Cronos at the hands of his son. Even if they were true I should not think that they ought to be thus lightly told to thoughtless young persons. But the best way would be to bury them in silence, and if there were some necessity for relating them, that only a very small audience should be admitted under pledge of secrecy and after sacrificing, not a pig, but some huge and unprocurable victim, to the end that as few as possible should have heard these tales.”
“Why, yes,” said he, “such stories are hard sayings.” “Yes, and they are not to be told, [378b] Adeimantus, in our city, nor is it to be said in the hearing of a young man, that in doing the utmost wrong he would do nothing to surprise anybody, nor again in punishing his father's wrong-doings to the limit, but would only be following the example of the first and greatest of the gods.” “No, by heaven,” said he, “I do not myself think that they are fit to be told.” “Neither must we admit at all,” said I, “that gods war with gods and plot against one another and contend—for it is not true either—if we wish our future guardians [378c] to deem nothing more shameful than lightly to fall out with one another; still less must we make battles of gods and giants the subject for them of stories and embroideries, and other enmities many and manifold of gods and heroes toward their kith and kin. But if there is any likelihood of our persuading them that no citizen ever quarrelled with his fellow-citizen and that the very idea of it is an impiety, [378d] that is the sort of thing that ought rather to be said by their elders, men and women, to children from the beginning and as they grow older, and we must compel the poets to keep close to this in their compositions. But Hera's fetterings by her son and the hurling out of heaven of Hephaestus by his father when he was trying to save his mother from a beating, and the battles of the gods in Homer's verse are things that we must not admit into our city either wrought in allegory or without allegory. For the young are not able to distinguish what is and what is not allegory, but whatever opinions are taken into the mind at that age are wont to prove [378e] indelible and unalterable. For which reason, maybe, we should do our utmost that the first stories that they hear should be so composed as to bring the fairest lessons of virtue to their ears.”
“Yes, that is reasonable,” he said; “but if again someone should ask us to be specific and say what these compositions may be and what are the tales, what could we name?”

[379a1] I said to him, You and I, Adeimantus, at this moment are not poets, but founders of a State: now the founders of a State ought to know the general forms in which poets should cast their tales, and the limits which must be observed by them, but to make the tales is not their business….Very true, he said; but what are these forms of theology which you mean? Something of this kind, I replied: — God is always to be represented as he truly is, whatever be the sort of poetry, epic, lyric or tragic, in which the representation is given. Right.

And is he not truly good? and must he not be represented as such? Certainly.

And no good thing is hurtful? No, indeed. And that which is not hurtful hurts not? Certainly not. And that which hurts not does no evil? No. And can that which does no evil be a cause of evil? Impossible. And the good is advantageous? Yes. And therefore the cause of well-being? Yes.

It follows therefore that the good is not the cause of all things, but of the good only? Assuredly.

Then God, if he be good, is not the author of all things, as the many assert, but he is the cause of a few things only, and not of most things that occur to men.
For good things are far fewer with us than evil, and for the good we must assume no other cause than God, but the cause of evil we must look for in other things and not in God.” “What you say seems to me most true,” he replied.

“Then,” said I, “we must not accept from Homer or any other poet the folly of such error as this about the gods when he says “Two urns stand on the floor of the palace of Zeus and are filled with Dooms he allots, one of blessings, the other of gifts that are evil,” [Iliad. 24.527-8] and to whomsoever Zeus gives of both commingled—“Now upon evil he chances and now again good is his portion, [Iliad. 24.530] but the man for whom he does not blend the lots, but to whom he gives unmixed evil—“Hunger devouring drives him, a wanderer over the wide world,” [Iliad. 24.532]. [379e] Nor will we tolerate the saying that “Zeus is dispenser alike of good and of evil to mortals.” “But as to the violation of the oaths and the truce by Pandarus, if anyone affirms it to have been brought about by the action of Athena and Zeus, we will not approve, nor that the strife and contention of the gods [380a] was the doing of Themis and Zeus; nor again must we permit our youth to hear what Aeschylus says—“A god implants the guilty cause in men When he would utterly destroy a house,” but if any poets compose a 'Sorrows of Niobe,' the poem that contains these iambics, or a tale of the Pelopidae or of Troy, or anything else of the kind, we must either forbid them to say that these woes are the work of God, or they must devise some such interpretation as we now require, and must declare that what God
[380b] did was righteous and good, and they were benefited by their chastisement. But that they were miserable who paid the penalty, and that the doer of this was God, is a thing that the poet must not be suffered to say; if on the other hand he should say that for needing chastisement the wicked were miserable and that in paying the penalty they were benefited by God, that we must allow. But as to saying that God, who is good, becomes the cause of evil to anyone, we must contend in every way that neither should anyone assert this in his own city if it is to be well governed, nor anyone hear it, [380c] neither younger nor older, neither telling a story in meter or without meter; for neither would the saying of such things, if they are said, be holy, nor would they be profitable to us or concordant with themselves.”

“I cast my vote with yours for this law,” he said, “and am well pleased with it.” “This, then,” said I, “will be one of the laws and patterns concerning the gods to which speakers and poets will be required to conform, that God is not the cause of all things, but only of the good.” “And an entirely satisfactory one,” he said. [380d1] And what do you think of a second principle? Shall I ask you whether God is a magician, and of a nature to appear insidiously now in one shape, and now in another — sometimes himself changing and passing into many forms, sometimes deceiving us with the semblance of such transformations; or is he one and the same immutably fixed in his own proper image? I cannot answer you, he said, without more thought. Well, I said; but if we suppose a change in anything, that change must be effected either by the thing itself, or by some other thing? Most certainly. And things which are at their best are also least liable to be altered or discomposed; for example, when healthiest and strongest, the human frame is least liable to be affected by meats and drinks, and the plant which is in the fullest vigour also suffers least from winds or the heat of the sun or any similar causes. Of course. And will not the bravest and wisest soul be least confused or deranged by any external influence? True.
[381a1] And the same principle, as I should suppose, applies to all composite things — furniture, houses, garments; when good and well made, they are least altered by time and circumstances. Very true. Then everything which is good, whether made by art or nature, or both, is least liable to suffer change from without? True.

But surely God and the things of God are in every way perfect? Of course they are. Then he can hardly be compelled by external influence to take many shapes? He cannot. But may he not change and transform himself? Clearly, he said, that must be the case if he is changed at all. And will he then change himself for the better and fairer, or for the worse and more unsightly? If he change at all he can only change for the worse, for we cannot suppose him to be deficient either in virtue or beauty.

Very true, Adeimantus; but then, would any one, whether God or man, desire to make himself worse? Impossible. Then it is impossible that God should ever be willing to change; being, as is supposed, the fairest and best that is conceivable, every god remains absolutely and for ever in his own form.
Moses Maimonides Guide of the Perplexed

Introduction: The object of this treatise is to enlighten a religious man who has been trained to believe in the truth of our holy Law, who conscientiously fulfils his moral and religious duties, and at the same time has been successful in his philosophical studies….This work has also a second object in view. It seeks to explain certain obscure metaphors which occur in the scripture, and are not distinctly characterized as being metaphors.

You are no doubt aware that the Almighty, desiring to lead us to perfection and to improve our state of society, has revealed to us laws which are to regulate our actions. These laws, however, presuppose an advanced state of intellectual culture. We must first form a conception of the Existence of the Creator according to our capabilities; that is, we must have a knowledge of Divine Science. But this discipline can only be approached after the study of Physics: for the science of Physics borders on Divine Science, and must even precede it in the course of our studies, as is clear to all who are familiar with these questions. Therefore the Almighty commenced Holy Writ with the description of the Creation, that is, with Physical Science [i.e. the account of the creation in Genesis.]

I. 28: The incorporeality of God is a demonstrative truth and an indispensable element in our faith…. The primary object of every intelligent person must be to deny the corporeality of God, and to believe that all apparently sensual perceptions of God were of a spiritual not of a material character. Note this and consider it well.”
Objection 1: It seems that God is a body. For a body is that which has the three dimensions. But Holy Scripture attributes the three dimensions to God, for it is written: "He is higher than Heaven, and what wilt thou do? He is deeper than Hell, and how wilt thou know? The measure of Him is longer than the earth and broader than the sea" (Job 11:8,9). Therefore God is a body.

Objection 2: Further, everything that has figure is a body, since figure is a quality of quantity. But God seems to have figure, for it is written: "Let us make man to our image and likeness" (Gn. 1:26). Now a figure is called an image, according to the text: "Who being the brightness of His glory and the figure," i.e. the image, "of His substance" (Heb. 1:3). Therefore God is a body.

Objection 3: Further, whatever has corporeal parts is a body. Now Scripture attributes corporeal parts to God. "Hast thou an arm like God?" (Job 40:4); and "The eyes of the Lord are upon the just" (Ps. 33:16); and "The right hand of the Lord hath wrought strength" (Ps. 117:16). Therefore God is a body.

Objection 4: Further, posture belongs only to bodies. But something which supposes posture is said of God in the Scriptures: "I saw the Lord sitting" (Is. 6:1), and "He stands up to judge" (Is. 3:13). Therefore God is a body.

On the contrary, It is written in the Gospel of St. John (Jn. 4:24): "God is a spirit."
I answer that, It is absolutely true that God is not a body; and this can be shown in three ways. First, because no body is in motion unless it be put in motion, as is evident from induction. Now it has been already proved (Question [2], Article [3]), that God is the First Mover, and is Himself unmoved. Therefore it is clear that God is not a body. Secondly, because the first being must of necessity be in act, and in no way in potentiality. For although in any single thing that passes from potentiality to actuality, the potentiality is prior in time to the actuality; nevertheless, absolutely speaking, actuality is prior to potentiality; for whatever is in potentiality can be reduced into actuality only by some being in actuality. Now it has been already proved that God is the First Being. It is therefore impossible that in God there should be any potentiality. But every body is in potentiality because the continuous, as such, is divisible to infinity; it is therefore impossible that God should be a body. Thirdly, because God is the most noble of beings. Now it is impossible for a body to be the most noble of beings; for a body must be either animate or inanimate; and an animate body is manifestly nobler than any inanimate body. But an animate body is not animate precisely as body; otherwise all bodies would be animate. Therefore its animation depends upon some other thing, as our body depends for its animation on the soul. Hence that by which a body becomes animated must be nobler than the body. Therefore it is impossible that God should be a body.
Reply to Objection 1: As we have said above (Question [1], Article [9]), Holy Writ puts before us spiritual and divine things under the comparison of corporeal things. Hence, when it attributes to God the three dimensions under the comparison of corporeal quantity, it implies His virtual quantity; thus, by depth, it signifies His power of knowing hidden things; by height, the transcendence of His excelling power; by length, the duration of His existence; by breadth, His act of love for all. Or, as says Dionysius (Div. Nom. ix), by the depth of God is meant the incomprehensibility of His essence; by length, the procession of His all-pervading power; by breadth, His overspreading all things, inasmuch as all things lie under His protection. To Objection 2: Man is said to be after the image of God, not as regards his body, but as regards that whereby he excels other animals. Hence, when it is said, "Let us make man to our image and likeness", it is added, "And let him have dominion over the fishes of the sea" (Gn. 1:26). Now man excels all animals by his reason and intelligence; hence it is according to his intelligence and reason, which are incorporeal, that man is said to be according to the image of God.

To Objection 3: Corporeal parts are attributed to God in Scripture on account of His actions, and this is owing to a certain parallel. For instance the act of the eye is to see; hence the eye attributed to God signifies His power of seeing intellectually, not sensibly; and so on with the other parts. To Objection 4: Whatever pertains to posture, also, is only attributed to God by some sort of parallel. He is spoken of as sitting, on account of His unchangeableness and dominion; and as standing, on account of His power of overcoming whatever withstands Him....
2. God as Pure Being, the identity of being and thinking. *Republic* V, 476e: the equation of being, identity, stability, and knowability, intellect apprehends the forms. While the *Gnothi seauton* descends from the Delphic Oracle to the Abrahamic religions via Plato, in this case, Plato transmits, as Aristotle indicates in *Metaphysics* I.6, the philosophy and the divinity of Parmenides. *The Way of Truth* leads to the predication of being with itself and the meeting in the same of being and thinking. God’s answer to Moses at the Burning Bush is translated into the language of Greek metaphysics in the *Septuaginta* (LXX) [the translation of the Hebrew scripture into Greek made by Jews 200 years before the Common Era and fundamental to the convergence wrought by Philo and Christian theologians]. The “I am who am” [ἐιναι in Greek (*einaí*, “to be”)] becomes one with the answer of the goddess in the poem of Parmenides for Hellenized Jews and Christians. The author of the Book of Revelation assists in this convergence when Jesus calls himself "the being" (ο ὄν), thus identifying himself with the “I am who am” of *Exodus* 3.14 (*Revelation* 1.4). What truly is is also the self-complete thinking.
Augustine is in the tradition of these identifications, conveyed to him by Plotinus and Porphyry as well as by others. **NOUS**, translated as “Mind” or “Intellectual Principle”, is the second level of divinity or spiritual Hypostasis for Plotinus, and the highest for his disciple Porphyry, both of whom influenced Augustine on the nature of God. Plotinus writes at 5.1.4 “Intellectual-Principle by its intellective act establishes Being, which in turn, as the object of intellection, becomes the cause of intellection and of existence to the Intellectual-Principle” For Augustine God’s name is *idipsum esse*, the true to be. *Confessions* 7.10.16 “And I said, ‘Is Truth, therefore, nothing, because it is not diffused through space – neither finite nor infinite?’ And thou didst cry to me from afar, ‘I am that I am.’ Augustine gives authority for Latin Christians not only to a theological ontology erected on this basis but also to a **NOUS** mysticism. Philo had already used Plato’s language about ecstasy “sober intoxication” to describe a **LOGOS** mysticism.
When, in Aristotle, the forms of Plato become ideas thought by minds, the equation results in the Primary Substance, or God, as Self-thinking Thought and Pure Being. In Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* XII.7 we find:

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

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

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

Intuitive Intelligence leads towards it

Being = Knowledge

The Realm of the Forms

Mathematical Objects = Reasoning / Thinking

Sensible Objects = Belief

Images = Imagining
2. Divinity as Pure Being, the identity of being and thinking, has its Platonic origin in the equation of being, identity, stability, and knowability, the “forms”

We start with what Plato speaks about alongside the gods, namely, first, the ideas or forms, and, then, the Good above knowing and being, but the source of them. Together the forms and the Good constitute a conceptual system and its source—below the forms, are mathematical constructions and below them sensible bodies and images. The relation of the Good and the forms to the gods which they both succeed and stand alongside is not clearly worked out by Plato. He produced dialogues, notably the Parmenides, which pointed out the problems but he left them his successors; they, beginning with Aristotle, produced a solution which endured. We look at the ideas and the Good as a metaphysical successor to the gods as conceptual system.

At Republic V, 476e, Socrates:

Let us think of something to say to a young student of philosophy. Shall we begin by assuring him that he is welcome to any knowledge which he may have, and that we are rejoiced at his having it? But we should like to ask him a question: Does he who has knowledge know something or nothing? (You must answer for him.)
I answer that he knows something.
Something that is or is not?

*Something that is; for how can that which is not ever be known?*

And are we assured, after looking at the matter from many points of view, that absolute being is or may be absolutely known, but that the utterly non-existent is utterly unknown?...

*Being is the sphere or subject-matter of knowledge, and knowledge is to know the nature of being?*

Yes.

And opinion is to have an opinion?

Yes.

And do we know what we opine? or is the subject-matter of opinion the same as the subject-matter of knowledge?

No, he replied, that has been already disproven; if difference in faculty implies difference in the sphere or subject matter, and if, as we were saying, opinion and knowledge are distinct faculties, then the sphere of knowledge and of opinion cannot be the same....
Remains of the Greek theatre in Elea (now called Velia)
The steeds that carried me took me as far as my heart could desire, when once they had brought me and set me on the renowned way of the goddess, who leads the man who knows through every town.

...And the axle [of the chariot], blazing in the socket, was making the holes in the naves sing—for it was urged round by well-turned wheels at each end—while the daughters of the Sun, hasting to convey me into the light, threw back the veils from off their faces and left the abode of night. There are the gates of the ways of Night and Day, fitted above with a lintel and below with a threshold of stone. They themselves, high in the air, are closed by mighty doors, and avenging Justice controls the double bolts. Her did the maidens entreat with gentle words and cunningly persuade to unfasten without demur the bolted bar from the gates. Then, when the doors were thrown back, they disclosed a wide opening, when their brazen posts, fitted with rivets and nails, swung in turn on their hinges. Straight through them, on the broad way, did the maidens guide the horses and the car. And the goddess greeted me kindly, and took my right hand in hers, and spoke to me these words:
Parmenides of Elea

"Welcome, O youth, who comes to my abode in the car that bears you, tended by immortal charioteers. It is no ill chance, but right and justice, that has sent you forth to travel on this way. Far indeed does it lie from the beaten track of men. Now it is that you should learn all things, both the unshaken heart of well rounded truth and the opinion of mortals in which is no true belief at all. Yet none the less shall you learn these things also -- how the things that seem, as they all pass through everything, must gain the semblance of being.

[Fragments 2 & 3, from Proclus] "Come now and I will tell you—and do hearken and carry my word away—the only ways of enquiry that can be thought of [that exist for thinking]: the one way, that it is and cannot not be, is the path of Persuasion, for it attends upon Truth; [The rest of the poem is a quotation from the goddess.] "the other, that it is not and cannot be, that I tell you is a path altogether unthinkable. "For you could not know that which is not (that is impossible) nor utter it; for the same thing can be thought as can be [the same thing exists for thinking as for being]. The argument here is regarded by many as the foundation of logic. It has been translated in many different ways. In fact, none of them is certain."
[Fragment 7, from Plato]
"For never shall this be proved, that things that are not are; but do hold back your thought from this way of enquiry, nor let custom, born of much experience, force you to let wander along this road your aimless eye, your echoing ear or your tongue; but do judge by reason the strife encompassed proof that I have spoken.

[Fragment 8, from Simplicius]
"One way only is left to be spoken of, that it is; and on this way are full many signs that what is is uncreated and imperishable; for it is entire, immovable and without end. It was not in the past, nor shall it be, since it is now, all at once, One, continuous; for what creation will you seek for it? How and whence did it grow? Nor shall I allow you to say or to think, "from that which is not"; for it is not be said or thought that it is not. And what need would have driven it on to grow, starting from nothing, at a later time rather than an earlier?
Thus it must either completely be or be not. Nor will the force of true belief allow that, beside what is, there could also arise anything from what is not.” Because of this Justice "does not loosen her fetters to allow it to come into being or perish, but holds it fast; and the decision on these matters rests here: it is or it is not (éstin ê ouk éstin). "But it has surely been decided, as it must be, to leave alone the one way as unthinkable and nameless (for it is no true way), and that the other is real and true. How could what is thereafter perish? and how could it come into being? For if it comes to be, it is not, and likewise if it is going to be. So coming into being is extinguished and perishing unimaginable.
Parmenides of Elea

"Nor is it divisible, since it is all alike; nor is there more here and less there, which would prevent it from cleaving together, but it is all full of what is. So it is all continuous; for what is clings close to what is. But, motionless within the limits of mighty bonds, it is without beginning or end, since coming into being and perishing have been driven far away, cast out by true belief. Abiding the same in the same place it rests by itself, and so abides firm where it is;” “It cannot go anywhere, since only Not Being could be there before Being arrived, and only Not Being could be left after Being had gone elsewhere. or strong Necessity holds it firm within the bonds of the limit that keeps it back on every side, because it is not lawful that what is should be unlimited; for it is not lacking -- what is not would lack everything. But since there is a furthest limit, it is bounded on every side, like the bulk of a well rounded sphere, from the center equally balanced in every direction; for it cannot be somewhat more here or somewhat less there. For neither is there that which is not, which might stop it from meeting its like, nor can what is be more here and less there than what is, since it is all inviolable; for being equal to itself on every side, it rests uniformly within its limits."
Philo De Opificio Mundi. A Mysticism of the LOGOS

Plato’s language of “sober intoxication” in the “Corybantian festivals” travels down through the Hellenic and Abrahamic philosophers and theologians to describe a state beyond reasonings in respect to the encounter of the human and the divine. Although I use it here for union with the LOGOS, Philo comes to Dionysius to support a Proclean mysticism which seeks what is beyond NOUS.

(70) And again, being raised up on wings, and so surveying and contemplating the air, and all the commotions to which it is subject, it [the soul] is borne upwards to the higher firmament, and to the revolutions of the heavenly bodies. And also being itself involved in the revolutions of the planets and fixed stars according to the perfect laws of music, and being led on by love [eros], which is the guide of wisdom, it proceeds onwards till, having surmounted all essence intelligible by the external senses, it comes to aspire to such as is perceptible only by the intellect: (71) and perceiving in that, the original models and ideas of those things intelligible by the external senses which it saw here full of surpassing beauty, it becomes seized with a sort of sober intoxication like the zealots engaged in the Corybantian festivals, and yields to enthusiasm, becoming filled with another desire, and a more excellent longing, by which it is conducted onwards to the very summit of such things as are perceptible only to the intellect, (see Plato, Phaedrus, 245ff) till it appears to be reaching the great King himself (this is Plato’s language). And while it is eagerly longing to behold him pure and unmingled, rays of divine light are poured forth upon it like a torrent, so as to bewilder the eyes of its intelligence [dianoia] by their splendour.
Plotinus
Ennead 5.1

The Intellectual Principle, the Identity of Thought and Being

4. But there is yet another way to this knowledge: Admiring the world of sense as we look out upon its vastness and beauty and the order of its eternal march, thinking of the gods within it, seen and hidden, and the celestial spirits and all the life of animal and plant, let us mount to its archetype, to the yet more authentic sphere: there we are to contemplate all things as members of the Intellectual — eternal in their own right, vested with a self-springing consciousness and life — and, presiding over all these, the unsoiled Intelligence and the unapproachable wisdom. That archetypal world is the true Golden Age, age of Kronos, who is the Intellectual-Principle as being the offspring or exuberance of God. For here is contained all that is immortal: nothing here but is Divine Mind; all is God; this is the place of every soul. Here is rest unbroken: for how can that seek change, in which all is well; what need that reach to, which holds all within itself; what increase can that desire, which stands utterly achieved?
Plotinus, Ennead 5.1.
The Intellectual Principle, the Identity of Thought and Being

4.... All its content, thus, is perfect, that itself may be perfect throughout, as holding nothing that is less than the divine, nothing that is less than intellective. Its knowing is not by search but by possession, its blessedness inherent, not acquired; for all belongs to it eternally and it holds the authentic Eternity imitated by Time which, circling round the Soul, makes towards the new thing and passes by the old. Soul deals with thing after thing — now Socrates; now a horse: always some one entity from among beings — but the Intellectual-Principle is all and therefore its entire content is simultaneously present in that identity: this is pure being in eternal actuality; nowhere is there any future, for every then is a now; nor is there any past, for nothing there has ever ceased to be; everything has taken its stand for ever, an identity well pleased, we might say, to be as it is; and everything, in that entire content, is Intellectual-Principle and Authentic Existence; and the total of all is Intellectual-Principle entire and Being entire. Intellectual-Principle by its intellective act establishes Being, ...
Plotinus, Ennead 5.1.

The Intellectual Principle, the Identity of Thought and Being

4.…. Intellectual-Principle by its intellective act establishes Being, which in turn, as the object of intellection, becomes the cause of intellection and of existence to the Intellectual-Principle — though, of course, there is another cause of intellection which is also a cause to Being, both rising in a source distinct from either.

Now while these two are coalescents, having their existence in common, and are never apart, still the unity they form is two-sided; there is Intellectual-Principle as against Being, the intellectual agent as against the object of intellection; we consider the intellective act and we have the Intellectual-Principle; we think of the object of that act and we have Being.

Such difference there must be if there is to be any intellection; but similarly there must also be identity [since, in perfect knowing, subject and object are identical.] Thus the Primals [the first “Categories”] are seen to be: Intellectual-Principle; Existence; Difference; Identity: we must include also Motion and Rest:
Plotinus 204/5 - 270 CE derives his notion of the Mind of God (the second level of deity) from Aristotle. *Ennead* III. 2

Since we hold the eternal existence of the Universe, the utter absence of a beginning to it, we are forced, in sound and sequent reasoning, to explain the providence ruling in the Universe as a universal consonance with the divine Intelligence to which the Universe is subsequent not in time but in the fact of derivation, in the fact that the Divine Intelligence, preceding it in Kind, is its cause as being the Archetype and Model which the Universe merely images, the primal by which, from all eternity, the Universe has its existence and subsistence.

The relationship may be presented thus: The authentic and primal Cosmos is the Being of the Intellectual Principle and of the Truly Existent. This contains within itself no spatial distinction, and has none of the feebleness of division, and even its parts bring no incompleteness to it since here the individual is not severed from the whole. In this Mind inheres all life and all intellect, a life living and having intellection as one act within a unity: every part that it gives forth is a whole; all its content is its very own, for there is here no separation of thing from thing, no part standing in isolated existence estranged from the rest, and therefore nowhere is there any wrongdoing of any other, any opposition.
Everywhere one and complete, it is at rest throughout and shows difference at no point; it does not make over any of its content into any new form; there can be no reason for changing what is everywhere perfect. ...Such is the blessedness of this Being that in its very non-action it magnificently operates and in its self-dwelling it produces mightily.

2. By derivation from that Authentic Cosmos, one within itself, there subsists this lower Universe, no longer a true unity. It is multiple, divided into various elements, thing standing apart from thing in a new estrangement. No longer is there concord unbroken; hostility, too, has entered as the result of difference and distance; imperfection has inevitably introduced discord; for a part is not self-sufficient, it must pursue something outside itself for its fulfillment, and so it becomes the enemy to what it needs. ... The Divine Intellect in its unperturbed serenity has brought the universe into being, by communicating from its own store to Matter: and this gift is the Reason-Form flowing from it. For the Emanation of the Intellectual Principle is Reason, [humans are reasoning, not intellectual beings] an emanation unfailing as long as the Intellectual Principle continues to have place among beings.
The source of reason within a seed [its LOGOS] contains all the parts and qualities concentrated in identity; there is no distinction, no jarring, no internal hindering; then there comes a pushing out into bulk, part rises in distinction with part, and at once the members of the organism stand in each other's way and begin to wear each other down.

So from this, the One Intellectual Principle, and the Reason-Form emanating from it, our Universe rises and develops parts, and they inevitably are formed into groups concordant and helpful in contrast with groups discordant and combative; sometimes of choice and sometimes incidentally, the parts maltreat each other; engendering proceeds by destruction.

Yet: Amid all that they effect and accept, the divine Realm imposes the one harmonious act; each utters its own voice, but all is brought into accord, into an ordered system, for the universal purpose, by the ruling Reason-Principle. This Universe is not Intelligence and Reason, like the one above, but participates in Intelligence and true Reason: it stands in need of harmonizing because it is the meeting ground of Necessity and divine Reason—Necessity pulls towards the lower, towards the unreason which is its own characteristic, while yet the Intellectual Principle remains sovereign over it.
The Divine Intellectual Sphere alone is true Reason, and there can never be another Sphere that is nothing else except Reason; so that, given some other system, it cannot be as noble as that first; it cannot be Reason: yet since such a system cannot be merely Matter, which is the utterly unordered, it must be a mixed thing. Its two extremes are Matter and the Divine Reason; its governing principle is Soul, presiding over the conjunction of the two, and to be thought of not as labouring in the task but as administering serenely by little more than an act of presence.
Augustine’s *NOUS* mysticism


Augustine’s intellectualization of the soul which seeks, the means she employs, the goal she attains, and his drawing of the ascent more within human power does not eliminate such essential elements of Plotinian mysticism as transcendence (7.10.16: *supra mentem meam lucem incommutabilem*; 9.10.24: *transcendimus*), love (7.10.16: *caritas novit eam*), step-by-step movement through forms of apprehension (7.17.23), union in an instant which carries us out of time (7.17.23: *in ictu trepidantis aspectus*; 9.10.24: *remeauimus … ad ubi uerbum et incipitur et finitur*), touch (9.10.25: *attingimus aeternam sapientiam*), self-transcendence and self-forgetfulness (ibid.: *ipsa sibi anima sileat et transeat se et non se cogitando*). The same texts in which Augustine describes what is common also present what contrasts. Augustine writes “In the flash of a trembling glance it [our power of knowing and judging] arrived at that which is (*peruenit ad id quod est* [7.17.23]).” In that flash, receiving what Romans 1.20 concedes to philosophy, he saw the invisible things of God (*inuisibilia tua per ea quae facta*), but confesses that “I did not possess the strength in the pinnacle of my mind to hold on, and in my weakness I returned to the banal (*aciem figere non eualui et repercussa infirmitate reditus solitis*).” Things turn out the same in the vision at Ostia. Mother and son sigh, they touch the pinnacle slightly by a moment of total concentration of the heart (*attingimus eam modice toto ictu cordis*) and then fall back to time and the realm of human noise. This is a very incomplete list.
'Art thou mocking me,' said I, 'weaving a labyrinth of tangled arguments, now seeming to begin where thou didst end, and now to end where thou didst begin, or dost thou build up some wondrous circle of Divine simplicity? For, truly, a little before thou didst begin with happiness, and say it was the supreme good, and didst declare it to be seated in the supreme Godhead. God Himself, too, thou didst affirm to be supreme good and all-complete happiness; and from this thou didst go on to add, as by the way, the proof that no one would be happy unless he were likewise God. Again, thou didst say that the very form of good was the essence both of God and of happiness, and didst teach that the absolute One was the absolute good which was sought by universal nature. Thou didst maintain, also, that God rules the universe by the governance of goodness, that all things obey Him willingly, and that evil has no existence in nature. And all this thou didst unfold without the help of assumptions from without, but by inherent and proper proofs, drawing credence one from the other.'

Then answered she: 'Far is it from me to mock thee; nay, by the blessing of God, whom we lately addressed in prayer, we have achieved the most important of all objects. For such is the form of the Divine essence, that neither can it pass into things external, nor take up anything external into itself; but, as Parmenides says of it,

"In body like to a sphere on all sides perfectly rounded,"

it rolls the restless orb of the universe, keeping itself motionless the while. And if I have also employed reasonings not drawn from without, but lying within the compass of our subject, there is no cause for thee to marvel, since thou hast learnt on Plato's authority that words ought to be akin to the matter of which they treat.'
Al-Farabi (died 950) is, after al-Kindi, the founder of the Arabic philosophical tradition. His cosmology, physics, biology, and psychology are Peripatetic, but the overall structure of his system and his theology are a monotheistically modified Neoplatonism.

The Opinions of the People of the Virtuous City

Because the First is not in matter and has itself no matter in any way whatever, it is in its substance actual intellect, for what prevents the form from being intellect and from actually thinking is the matter. When a thing exists without being in need of matter, that very thing will in its being be actual intellect; and that is the status of the First. It, is, then actual intellect. The First is also intelligible through its substance. It is intelligible by virtue of its being intellect; for the One whose identity is intellect is intelligible by the One whose identity is intellect. In order to be intelligible the First is in no need of another essence outside itself which would think it but it itself thinks its own essence. Thus it is intellect and intelligized and thinking, all this being one essence and one indivisible substance...
Avicenna (980-1037)
The Metaphysics of the Healing

VIII,4,1 The Necessary Existence is one, nothing sharing with Him in His rank, and nothing other than Him is a necessary existent. ... He is the principle of the necessitation of the existence of everything.

VIII,4,3 The First has no quiddity other than His individual existence.

VIII,4,4 The Necessary Existent may be intellectually apprehended as the very necessary existence itself, just as the one may be intellectually apprehended as the very one itself.

VIII,5,1 The reality of the First exists for the First, not any other. This is because the One, insofar as He is the Necessary Existent, is what He is in terms of Himself, namely, His essence.

VIII,5,2 ...The First has nothing that shares His meaning. The First, then, has no peer.

VIII,5,3 Necessary existence can in no respect whatsoever be a meaning shared by a number of things....
VIII,6,1 The Necessary Existent is thus perfect because nothing belonging to His existence and the perfections of His existence is lacking in Him.... The Necessary Existent is above perfection because not only does He have the existence that belongs only to Him, but every other existence is also an overflow of His existence and belongs to Him and emanates from Him.

VIII,6,2 The Necessary Existent in Himself is pure good.

VIII,6,6 The Necessary Existent is pure intellect because He is an essence disassociated from matter in every respect. You have known that the cause that prevents a thing from being apprehended intellectually is matter and its attachments...

VIII,6,7 Hence, that which is free of matter and its attachments and is realised through existence separate from matter is an intelligible for itself. Because it is in itself an intellect, being also intellectually apprehended by itself, it itself is the intelligible belonging to itself. Its essence is, hence, at once intellect, intellectual apprehender, and intelligible, not that there are multiple things here.
When God appeared to our Teacher Moses, and commanded him to address the people and to bring them the message, Moses replied that he might first be asked to prove the existence of God in the Universe, and that only after doing so he would be able to announce to them that God had sent him. For all men, with few exceptions, were ignorant of the existence of God; their highest thoughts did not extend beyond the heavenly sphere, its forms or its influences. They could not yet emancipate themselves from sensation, and had not yet attained to any intellectual perfection.

Then God taught Moses how to teach them, and how to establish amongst them the belief in the existence of Himself, namely, by saying “I am that I am.” This is a name derived from the verb to be [hayah] in the sense of "existing," for the verb hayah denotes the notion: he was. In Hebrew no difference is made between saying he was and he existed. The principal point in this phrase is that the same word which denotes "existence," is repeated as an attribute. The word asher," that," corresponds to the Arabic illadi and illati, and is an incomplete noun that must be completed by another noun: it may be considered as the subject of the predicate which follows.
The first noun which is to be described is ehyeh: the second, by which the first is described, is likewise ehyth, the identical word, as if to show that the object which is to be described and the attribute by which it is described are in this case necessarily identical. This is, therefore, the expression of the idea that God exists, but not in the ordinary sense of the term: or, in other words, He is "the existent that is the existent, or the necessarily existent.

Now, it has been proved, that God is an intellect which always is in act, and that-as has been stated, and as will be proved hereafter-there is in Him at no time a mere potentiality, that He does not comprehend at one time, and is without comprehension at another time, but He comprehends constantly; consequently, He and the things comprehended are one and the same thing, that is to say, His essence: and the act of comprehending because of which it is said that He comprehends, is the intellect itself, which is likewise His essence, God is therefore always the intellect, the intelligizing, and the intelligible.
I. 69 According to either opinion, the series of the successive purposes terminates, as has been shown, in God's will or wisdom, which, in our opinion, are identical with His essence, and are not any thing separate from Himself or different from His essence. Consequently, God is the final purpose of everything. Again, it is the aim of everything to become, according to its faculties, similar to God in perfection: this is meant by the expression, “His will, which is identical with His essence,” as will be shown below. In this sense God is called the End of all ends.
Whether this name, HE WHO IS, is the most proper name of God?

Objection 1: It seems that this name HE WHO IS is not the most proper name of God. For this name "God" is an incommunicable name. But this name HE WHO IS, is not an incommunicable name. Therefore this name HE WHO IS is not the most proper name of God.

Objection 2: Further, Dionysius says (Div. Nom. iii) that "the name of good excellently manifests all the processions of God." But it especially belongs to God to be the universal principle of all things. Therefore this name "good" is supremely proper to God, and not this name HE WHO IS.

Objection 3: Further, every divine name seems to imply relation to creatures, for God is known to us only through creatures. But this name HE WHO IS imports no relation to creatures. Therefore this name HE WHO IS is not the most applicable to God.

On the contrary, It is written that when Moses asked, "If they should say to me, What is His name? what shall I say to them?" The Lord answered him, "Thus shalt thou say to them, HE WHO IS hath sent me to you" (Ex. 3:13,14). Therefore this name HE WHO IS most properly belongs to God.
I answer that, This name HE WHO IS is most properly applied to God, for three reasons:

First, because of its signification. For it does not signify form, but simply existence itself. Hence, since the existence of God is His essence itself, \([\text{cum esse Dei sit ipsa eius essentia}]\) which can be said of no other (Question [3], Article [4]), it is clear that among other names this one specially denominates God, for everything is denominated by its form.

Secondly, on account of its universality. For all other names are either less universal, or, if convertible with it, add something above it at least in idea; hence in a certain way they inform and determine it. Now our intellect cannot know the essence of God itself in this life, as it is in itself, but whatever mode it applies in determining what it understands about God, it falls short of the mode of what God is in Himself. Therefore the less determinate the names are, and the more universal and absolute they are, the more properly they are applied to God. Hence Damascene says (\textit{De Fide Orth. i}) that, "HE WHO IS, is the principal of all names applied to God; for comprehending all in itself, it contains existence itself as an infinite and indeterminate sea of substance."

Now by any other name some mode of substance is determined, whereas this name HE WHO IS, determines no mode of being, but is indeterminate to all; and therefore it denominates the "infinite ocean of substance."
Reply to Objection 1: This name HE WHO IS is the name of God more properly than this name "God," as regards its source, namely, existence; and as regards the mode of signification and consignification, as said above. But as regards the object intended by the name, this name "God" is more proper, as it is imposed to signify the divine nature; and still more proper is the Tetragrammaton, imposed to signify the substance of God itself, incommunicable and, if one may so speak, singular.

Reply to Objection 2: This name "good" is the principal name of God in so far as He is a cause, but not absolutely; for existence considered absolutely comes before the idea of cause.

Reply to Objection 3: It is not necessary that all the divine names should import relation to creatures, but it suffices that they be imposed from some perfections flowing from God to creatures. Among these the first is existence, from which comes this name, HE WHO IS.
Aquinas Summa Theologiae I.14.4

Whether the act of God's intellect is His substance?

Objection 1: It seems that the act of God's intellect is not His substance. For to understand is an operation. But an operation signifies something proceeding from the operator. Therefore the act of God's intellect is not His substance.

Objection 2: Further, to understand one's act of understanding, is to understand something that is neither great nor chiefly understood, and but secondary and accessory. If therefore God be his own act of understanding, His act of understanding will be as when we understand our act of understanding: and thus God's act of understanding will not be something great.

Objection 3: Further, every act of understanding means understanding something. When therefore God understands Himself, if He Himself is not distinct from this act of understanding, He understands that He understands Himself; and so on to infinity. Therefore the act of God's intellect is not His substance.

On the contrary, Augustine says (De Trin. vii), "In God to be is the same as to be wise." But to be wise is the same thing as to understand. Therefore in God to be is the same thing as to understand. But God's existence is His substance, as shown above (Question [3], Article [4]). Therefore the act of God's intellect is His substance.
I answer that, It must be said that the act of God's intellect is His substance. For if His act of understanding were other than His substance, then something else, as the Philosopher says (Metaph. xii), would be the act and perfection of the divine substance, to which the divine substance would be related, as potentiality is to act, which is altogether impossible; because the act of understanding is the perfection and act of the one understanding. Let us now consider how this is. As was laid down above (Article [2]), to understand is not an act passing to anything extrinsic; for it remains in the operator as his own act and perfection; as existence is the perfection of the one existing: just as existence follows on the form, so in like manner to understand follows on the intelligible species. Now in God there is no form which is something other than His existence, as shown above (Question [3]). essence itself is also His intelligible species, it necessarily follows that His act of understanding must be His essence and His existence.
Thus it follows from all the foregoing that in God, intellect, and the object understood, and the intelligible species, and His act of understanding are entirely one and the same. Hence when God is said to be understanding, no kind of multiplicity is attached to His substance. [Et sic patet ex omnibus praemissis quod in Deo intellectus, et id quod intelligitur, et species intelligibilis, et ipsum intelligere, sunt omnino unum et idem. Unde patet quod per hoc quod Deus dicitur intelligens, nulla multiplicitas ponitur in eius substantia.]
3. God beyond Being and Thinking. Republic VI, 509b-c: the Good compared to the Sun is Beyond (ἐπεκείνα, epekeina). It is the source of being and knowing but beyond (epekeina) both. Plotinus, by interpreting Plato’s Parmenides dialogue as the master text of philosophical theology, and identifying the Good of the Republic with its One Non-Being, is the founder of Neoplatonism of which this is the characteristic doctrine. Iamblichus and Proclus are also foundational theologians for this tradition and the mysticism of the One or Nothingness by Excess which goes with it. Indeed, the First Principle in the tradition of Iamblichus and Proclus, which may be beyond the One, is more inaccessible than that of Plotinus because humans never escape from being souls and therefore cannot achieve Plotinian henosis. In this respect, their position is closer to that of Islam where, as absolutely unique and exclusive, the One is entered only by extinction. Judaism has a convergent direction so far as God is not nameable, is approached through darkness, and refuses Moses request for face to face sight.
3. ...For Christians, see I Timothy 6.16, God dwells in light unapproachable whom no human hath seen nor can see, and Paul’s sermon on the Athenian Areopagus, Acts 17:22-34, where he preaches “the unknown God”. Paul had been converted in a blinding encounter with a heavenly light “beyond the brightness of the sun” (Acts 26.13). The profoundly and widely influential Christian mystical theologian Dionysius the Areopagite stresses this view of God. Dionysius derived his teaching from Paul and from Plato mediated by Philo Judaeus of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Proclus.

Al-Ghazali is the most influential Islamic heir of this “Eastern” tradition and his teaching is taken up by Ibn Tufayl in Hayy Ibn Yaqzan. Crucially, for both al-Ghazali and Ibn Tufayl, the assent to the Beyond thought and being requires theurgic rituals (as understood by Iamblichus and Proclus) beyond philosophical theory. These Moslems take from the Sufis, who probably derived them from Eastern Christians. There is an ascent by way of light to its source.
Thus we see that both understandings of God can be traced to the *Republic of Plato*, as well as to other Platonic dialogues. We shall turn to the *Republic* in a moment, but it is important to notice that there these ideas are not called “God”. It will be equally important to note that what derived from them was called “God” by other philosophers, in the first case, Aristotle, among Jews and Christians, Philo, and, most importantly among the pagans, Plotinus.

In Plato both these moments occur in the Line and Cave analogies.
The **Good beyond thought and being. Symbolized by the Sun**

**Intuitive Intelligence leads towards it**

- Being = Knowledge
- The Realm of the Forms

- Mathematical Objects = Reasoning / Thinking

- Sensible Objects = Belief

- Images = Imagining
The Good beyond thought and being. Symbolized by the Sun

I. Plotinus, Iamblichus, Dionysius the Areopagite 2nd to 6th centuries
II. Al-Ghazali (1058-1111)
III. Moses Maimonides (1135-1204)
IV. Avicenna (890-1037)
V. Aquinas (1225-1274)
VI. Al-Farabi (870-950) & Averroes (†1198)
VII. Aristotle

Being = Knowledge
The Realm of the Forms

Mathematical Objects = Reasoning / Thinking

Sensible Objects = Belief

Images = Imagining
Republic VI [508] Whose is that light which makes the eye to see perfectly and the visible to appear?

You mean the sun, as you and all mankind say....

And the soul is like the eye: when resting upon that on which truth and being shine, the soul perceives and understands and is radiant with intelligence; but when turned towards the twilight of becoming and perishing, then she has opinion only, and goes blinking about, and is first of one opinion and then of another, and seems to have no intelligence?

Now, that which imparts truth to the known and the power of knowing to the knower is what I would have you term the idea of good, and this you will deem to be the cause of science, and of truth in so far as the latter becomes the subject of knowledge; beautiful too, as are both truth and knowledge, you will be right in esteeming this other nature as more beautiful than either; and, as in the previous instance, light and sight may be truly said to be like the sun, and yet not to be the sun, so in this other sphere, science and truth may be deemed to be like the good, but not the good; the good has a place of honour yet higher.
What a wonder of beauty that must be, he said, which is the author of science and truth, and yet surpasses them in beauty; for you surely cannot mean to say that pleasure is the good?

God forbid, I replied; but may I ask you to consider the image in another point of view?

In what point of view?

You would say, would you not, that the sun is only the author of visibility in all visible things, but of generation and nourishment and growth, though he himself is not generation?

Certainly.

In like manner the objects of knowledge not only receive from the good their power of being known, but their very existence and essence is derived to them from it, though the good itself is not essence, but far exceeds essence in dignity and surpassing power.
Socrates: Ask your questions, Parmenides, and I will respond.”

“Well then,” said he, “if the one exists, the one cannot be many, can it?” “No, of course not.” “Then there can be no parts of it, nor can it be a whole.” “How is that?” “The part surely is part of a whole.” “Yes.” “And what is the whole? Is not a whole that of which no part is wanting?” [137d] “Certainly.” “Then in both cases the one would consist of parts, being a whole and having parts.” “Inevitably.” “Then in both cases the one would be many, not one.” “True.” “Yet it must be not many, but one.” “Yes.” “Then the one, if it is to be one, will not be a whole and will not have parts.” “No.”

“And if it has no parts, it can have no beginning, or middle, or end, for those would be parts of it?” “Quite right.” “Beginning and end are, however, the limits of everything.” “Of course.” “Then the one, if it has neither beginning nor end, is unlimited.” “Yes, it is unlimited.” “And it is without form...[141e] “And 'will be,' 'will become,' and 'will be made to become,' in future time?” “Yes.” “And 'is' and 'is becoming' in the present?” “Certainly.” “Then, if the one has no participation in time whatsoever, it neither has become nor became nor was in the past, it has neither become nor is it becoming nor is it in the present, and it will neither become nor be made to become nor will it be in the future.” “Very true.”
“Can it then partake of being in any other way than in the past, present, or future?” “It cannot.” “Then the one has no share in being at all.” “Apparently not.” “Then the one is not at all.” ” Evidently not.” ” Then it has no being even so as to be one, for if it were one, it would be and would partake of being; but apparently one neither is nor is one, if this argument is to be trusted.”

[142a] “That seems to be true.” “But can that which does not exist have anything pertaining or belonging to it?” “Of course not.” “Then the one has no name, nor is there any description or knowledge or perception or opinion of it.” “Evidently not.” “And it is neither named nor described nor thought of nor known, nor does any existing thing perceive it.” “Apparently not.”
Plato at the Origin of Mysticism

André-Jean Festugière (1898-1982) judged that the beginning of the great mystical tradition which, through Plotinus and Proclus, inspired the Christian mystics of Late Antiquity and Middle Ages and the Islamic Sufi and medieval Jewish Kabbalah and Sufi mysticisms was found in Plato.

Of his doctrine of the Good beyond thought and being in the Republic, Festugière wrote: “I am for my part convinced that this is the expression of a personal experience. In sum, the supreme object of knowledge, the final degree of our metaphysical investigations, the term on which all the rest depends, is an object which defies definition, and hence cannot be named. It is the Unknown God.” Personal Religion among the Greeks (Berkeley, 1954), 44.

Thus, Festugière identifies the origin of the “Indefinable God,” the “Ineffable God,” in Plato and the Platonic tradition:

“both in Plato and in his successors . . . the noeton is certainly the intelligible in the true sense of the word, the object we can comprehend and define. But at the same time it is the object above the intelligible . . . which we attain only by mystical contact . . . . [I]t is an ocean of joy in which we submerge ourselves. . . . Plato stands at the beginning of the great mystical tradition which, through Plotinus and Proclus, inspired Pseudo-Dionysius, John Scotus Eriugena, and which then . . . exercised so great an influence in the Middle Ages . . . .”
Plotinian Neoplatonism

Essential is the interpretation of Plato’s analogy of the Sun at the top of the analogies of the Line and the Cave. We begin with the επεκεῖνα (epekeina), the Good compared to the Sun which is the source of being and knowing but beyond (epekeina) both. Plotinus interprets this passage through Plato’s Parmenides 137c ff. Where the first One is not: the One non-being. So Plotinus at Ennead 5.1.8:

“The Platonic Parmenides is more exact; the distinction is made between the Primal One, a strictly pure Unity, and a secondary One which is a One-Many and a third which is a One-and-many.”

Whatever name Neoplatonists give the First, Beyond, Ineffable, One, Good, Non-being, Infinite Nothingness, Pure Being, Nothingness by excess, no thing, infinite fullness, infinite power, spontaneous creativity, the name is never a predicate and never gives its nature because it has none. It is always absolutely simplicity but completely full.

This takes us to the One-Good at Ennead 5.1.7, compared to the Sun, stressing its absolute simplicity. There are three Primary subsistences for Plotinus, three eternal, divine realities:
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 forthgoing 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...

6. But how and what does the Intellectual-Principle see and, especially, how has it sprung from that which is to become the object of its vision?
In volume 79 of the *Annuaire* of the École Pratique des Hautes Études, Hadot wrote of “a type of experiential knowledge which one is able to classify as ‘mystical’.”

For him the character of this special knowledge occurring with Plotinus seems to be “without precedent in the Greek tradition”:

“The new elements appear to me to be these:

1) the idea of a vision of an object without form, ultimately, the idea of a pure vision without an object;

2) the idea of a transformation of the visionary who at the same time is no longer himself and becomes truly himself;

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.”
“The mystical experience itself is an overthrow of the being which is of a totally different order than the preparations by which anyone could prepare themselves for it. Moreover, it is not sufficient to prepare oneself. The experience is the effect of a chance [or a grace] which is not given to everyone.” The irruption in the consciousness “makes the consciousness to explode in some sense...one has the impression of being a part of another.”

This kind of description moves Jean-Marc Narbonne to ask if there is, in Neoplatonism: “an abandonment of the proper terrain of philosophy.” After conceding that Platonism generally is “a combination of knowledge and revelation,” he concludes that “the Neoplatonists conceive philosophy as a servant, duty-bound in respect to a divine vision, which, at one and the same time, summons all her efforts and yet does not entirely depend on her. Plotinus is very clear about this.” “Philosophy in Neoplatonism ends in her own proper self-suppression, and must bow before a higher form of experience for which she prepares but for whose strangeness nothing can prepare her, because the One does not come in the way we expect it...” “EPÉKEINA THS GNWSEWS,” [Metaphysik und Religion: Zur Signatur des spätaniken Denkens München/Leipzig: K. G. Saur, 2001], 487
May we stop, content, with that [union with the Intellectual Principle, Subsistent Mind]? No: my Soul is still in even stronger labour. Perhaps she is now at the point where she must bring forth, having reached the fullness of her birth-pangs in her eager longing for the One.

But we must sing another song to her, if we can find one anywhere to allay her pangs. Perhaps in what has already been uttered, there lies the charm if only we tell it over often? No: we need a new, a further, incantation.

All our effort may well skim over every truth and through all the verities in which we have part, and yet the reality escape us when we hope to affirm, to understand: for the understanding, in order to its affirmation must possess itself of item after item; only so does it traverse all the field: but how can there be any such peregrination of that in which there is no variety? All the need is met by a contact purely intellective.

At the moment of touch there is no power whatever to make any affirmation; there is no leisure; reasoning upon the vision is for afterwards.

We may know we have had the vision when the Soul has suddenly taken light. This light is from the Supreme and is the Supreme;
We may believe in the Presence when, like that other God on the call of a certain man, He comes bringing light: the light is the proof of the advent. Thus, the Soul unlit remains without that vision; lit, it possesses what it sought.

And this is the true end set before the Soul, to take that light, to see the Supreme by the Supreme and not by the light of any other principle — to see the Supreme which is also the means to the vision; for that which illumines the Soul is that which it is to see just as it is by the sun's own light that we see the sun. But how is this to be accomplished? Cut away everything.
That awesome Prior, The Unity, is not a being, for so its unity would be vested in something else: strictly no name is apt to it, but, since name it we must, there is a certain rough fitness in designating it as unity with the understanding that it is not the unity of some other thing. Thus it eludes our knowledge, so that the nearer approach to it is through its offspring, Being: we know it as cause of existence to Intellectual-Principle, as fount of all that is best, as the efficacy which, self-perduring and undiminishing, generates all beings and is not to be counted among these its derivatives, to all of which it must be prior. Thus we can but name The Unity, indicating it to each other by a designation that points to the concept of its partlessness while we are in reality striving to bring our own minds to unity.

We are not to think of such unity and partlessness as belong to point or monad; the veritable unity is the source of all such quantity which could not exist unless first there existed Being and Being’s Prior: we are not, then, to think in the order of point and monad but to use these — in their rejection of magnitude and partition — as symbols for the higher concept.
In what sense, then, do we assert this Unity, and how is it to be adjusted to our mental processes? Its oneness must not be entitled to that of monad and point: for these the mind abstracts extension and numerical quantity and rests upon the very minutest possible, ending no doubt in the partless but still in something that began as a partible and is always lodged in something other than itself. The Unity was never in any other and never belonged to the partible: nor is its impartibility that of extreme minuteness; on the contrary it is great beyond anything, great not in extension but in power, sizeless by its very greatness as even its immediate sequents are impartible not in mass but in might.

We must therefore take the Unity as infinite not in measureless extension or numerable quantity but in fathomless depths of power.

Ennead 5.1.7 tells of the radical transcendence & simultaneous immanence of the One: “the Unity which is the potentiality [the power] of all existence.” Because the One is not itself a being or a thing, it is both infinitely separate from all things and is the power by which they exist and act.
The tradition emerging from the Syrian priest-king-philosopher, the divine Iamblichus, was transmitted and developed by the heads of the Academy in Athens (Syrianus, Proclus, d. 485, and Damascius, who taught there until he was forced into exile in 529, by the Christians).
The Tradition of Neoplatonism from Iamblichus and Proclus

After Plotinus, two traditions emerge, each developing a different side of his thought. On the one hand, there is the interpretation of Plotinus by his immediate disciple Porphyry (d. 303), who taught after him in Rome. This tradition, transmitted by Victorinus, a pagan philosopher who became Christian, determined what Augustine (d. 430) thought Plato taught. This Plotinian tradition has its strongest influence in the Latin West. The mysticism in the *sillage* of Augustine is to union with God as *NOUS*. On the other hand, there is a tradition emerging from Iamblichus (d. 325), who criticised his teacher Porphyry. This tradition was transmitted and developed by the heads of the Academy in Athens (Syrianus, Proclus, d. 485, and Damascius, who taught there until he was forced into exile in 529). This is primarily a Greek tradition but, in fact, both traditions meet. During the Middle Ages the most authoritative transmitter of the second tradition to the Latin West is Dionysius the (pseudo) Areopagite (6th century, perhaps the Bishop of Athens). For the Iamblichan-Proclean tradition, the First Principle is elevated beyond being and thought. It is an Other, which, although active at the interior of all which is, itself remains above all knowing, naming and predication. It is no thing. It is better understood through Non-being than through Being, and it cannot be represented as an object of thought. The “One” may be placed below it in their systems. Coming to union with the Good requires practice of the rites ordained by the gods as well as intellectual work.
The negative conclusions of the first hypothesis of the Parmenides demonstrate the failure of reason and language to grasp the ineffable One that rises above all forms of relative knowledge. The dialectic is a meditation for freeing the mind, thereby opening it up to mystical illumination. Proclus writes:

As by opinion we know the objects of opinion, and as we know by discursive intellect (*dianoia*) the objects of that faculty, and as by the intuitive intellectual element (*noeron*) in us we know the object of intellect, even so it is by the One that we know the One. This is the same as saying that it is by Not-Being that we know the One, and this in turn is equivalent to saying that it is by negation that we know the One. (Book VI, 1081).
Proclus

Adapted from W.J. Hankey “Jean-Luc Marion’s Dionysian Neoplatonism” Proclus leads us to the silence of not naming. The soul must ascend beyond naming, beyond philosophical work and striving. For him the negativity of the One is not “nothingness,” but philosophy cannot tell the difference between negativity by excess and negativity by defect because we are dealing in both cases with what is unknowable.

Hence we need the pre-noetic operation of the gods’ work. Because union is not only the end but also the beginning, “inspired impulse” is necessary to rouse the power of the One in the soul so that she is converted towards God. [Proclus, In Parm., VI, 1071, 425.]

Reason is inadequate both to the beginning and to the consummation. Proclus writes:

... dialectical operations are the preparation for the strain towards the One, but are not themselves the strain. Or rather, not only must [dialectical activity] be eliminated, but the strain as well. Finally, when it has completed its course, the soul may rightly abide with the One. Having become single and alone in itself, it will choose only the simply One. [Ibid., VII, 75K, 603].

Proclus continues: “It is with silence, then, that...[Aristotle] brings to completion the study of the One.” [Ibid., VII, 76K, 603].
Dionysius the Areopagite

6th century

Although by no means the only Christian theologian who worked in the tradition of God as the One Non-Being, because of his unequalled influence on both Eastern and Western Christianity, the 6th century pseudo anonymous figure Dionysius is the most important. To understand anything about him we must note this passage from the Acts of the Apostles 17.21:

Now all the Athenians and the strangers living there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing. Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus, and said, "You men of Athens, I perceive that you are very religious in all things. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I announce to you. The God who made the world and all things in it, he, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands, neither is he served by men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he himself gives to all life and breath, and all things. He made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the surface of the earth, having determined appointed seasons, and the bounds of their habitation, that they should seek the Lord, if perhaps they might reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live, and move, and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also his offspring.' [29] Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold, or silver, or stone, engraved by art and device of man. [30] The times of ignorance therefore God overlooked. But now he commands that all men everywhere should repent,
Dionysius the Areopagite  
The Incomprehensible God of Christian scripture

Acts 17.31: because he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained; whereof he has given assurance to all men, in that he has raised him from the dead." [32] Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; but others said, "We want to hear you yet again concerning this." [33] Thus Paul went out from among them. [34] But certain men joined with him, and believed, among whom also was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

I Timothy 6.15: He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen nor can see, to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen.
Chapter One: 1. Now, Blessed Timothy, ... I will proceed, so far as in me lies, to an Exposition of the Divine Names. And here also let us set before our minds the scriptural rule that in speaking about God we should declare the Truth, not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the power which the Spirit stirred up in the Sacred Writers, whereby, in a manner surpassing speech and knowledge we embrace those truths which, in like manner, surpass them, in that Union which exceeds our faculty, and exercise of discursive, and of intuitive reason. We must not then dare to speak, or indeed to form any conception, of the hidden super-essential Godhead, except those things that are revealed to us from the Holy Scriptures.

2. Now concerning this hidden Super-Essential Godhead we must not dare, as I have said, to speak, or even to form any conception Thereof, except those things which are divinely revealed to us from the Holy Scriptures. For as It hath lovingly taught us in the Scriptures concerning Itself the understanding and contemplation of Its actual nature is not accessible to any being; for such knowledge is superessentially exalted above them all. And many of the Sacred Writers thou wilt find who have declared that It is not only invisible and incomprehensible, but also unsearchable and past finding out, since there is no trace of any that have penetrated the hidden depths of Its infinitude. Nobody has ever penetrated into the ultimate Depths of Deity.
4. … Since the ultimate Godhead is ineffable, Scripture can only hint at its Nature by speaking of Its manifestations in the relative sphere. Wherefore, in almost all consideration of Divine things we see the Supreme Godhead celebrated with holy praises as One and an Unity, through the simplicity and unity of Its supernatural indivisibility, from whence (as from an unifying power) we attain to unity, and through the supernal conjunction of our diverse and separate qualities are knit together each into a Godlike Oneness, and all together into a mutual Godly union…

Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*, Chapter One:

Trinity, which exceeds all Being, Deity, and Goodness! Thou that instructs Christians in Thy heavenly wisdom! Guide us to that topmost height of mystic lore which exceeds light and more than exceeds knowledge, where the simple, absolute, and unchangeable mysteries of heavenly Truth lie hidden in the dazzling obscurity of the secret Silence, outshining all brilliance with the intensity of their darkness, and surcharging our blinded intellects with the utterly impalpable and invisible fairness of glories which exceed all beauty! Such be my prayer;
Chapter Five: … we maintain that It is not soul, or mind, or endowed with the faculty of imagination, conjecture, reason, or understanding; nor is It any act of reason or understanding; nor can It be described by the reason or perceived by the understanding, since It is not number, or order, or greatness, or littleness, or equality, or inequality, and since It is not immovable nor in motion, or at rest, and has no power, and is not power or light, and does not live, and is not life; nor is It personal essence, or eternity, or time; nor can It be grasped by the understanding since It is not knowledge or truth; nor is It kingship or wisdom; nor is It one, nor is It unity, nor is It Godhead or Goodness; [all this exactly repeats Plato’s *Parmenides*] nor is It a Spirit, as we understand the term, since It is not Sonship or Fatherhood; nor is It any other thing such as we or any other being can have knowledge of; nor does It belong to the category of non-existence or to that of existence; nor do existent beings know It as it actually is, nor does It know them as they actually are; nor can the reason attain to It to name It or to know It; nor is it darkness, nor is It light, or error, or truth; nor can any affirmation or negation apply to it; for while applying affirmations or negations to those orders of being that come next to It, we apply not unto It either affirmation or negation, inasmuch as It transcends all affirmation by being the perfect and unique Cause of all things, and transcends all negation by the pre-eminence of Its simple and absolute nature, free from every limitation and beyond them all.
Although self-knowledge was derived from the knowledge of God, union with the Absolute requires forgetfulness of self.

§ 82. Then he began to seek after this third Assimilation [to the Absolute], and took pains in the attaining it. And first he consider'd the Attributes of the necessarily self-existent Being. Now it had appear'd to him, during the time of his Theoretical Speculation, before he enter'd upon the Practical Part; that there were two Sorts of them, viz. Affirmative, as Knowledge, Power and Wisdom &c. and Negative, as Immateriality; not only such as consisted in the not being Body; but in being altogether remov'd from any thing that had the least Relation to Body, though at never so great a Distance. And that this was a Condition, not only requir'd in the Negative Attributes, but in the Affirmative too, viz. that they should be free from all Properties of Body, of which, Multiplicity is one. Now the Divine Essence is not multiplied by these Affirmative Attributes, but all of them together are one and the same thing, viz. his real Essence.
§ 83. This he apply'd himself to; and as for the Negative Attributes, they all consisted in Separation from Bodily Things. He began therefore to strip himself of all Bodily Properties, which he had made some Progress in before,...Therefore he began to reject and remove all those things from himself, as being in no wise consistent with that State which he was now in search of. So he continu'd, confining himself to rest in the Bottom of his Cave, with his Head bow'd down, and his Eyes shut, and turning himself altogether from all sensible Things and the Corporeal Faculties, and bending all his Thoughts and Meditations upon the necessarily self-existent Being, without admitting any thing else besides him; and if any other Object presented itself to his Imagination, he rejected it with his utmost Force; and exercis'd himself in this, and persisted in it to that Degree, that sometimes he did neither eat nor stir for a great many Days together. § 84. But he found that his own Being was not excluded by his Thoughts, no not at such times when he was most deeply immers'd in the Contemplation of the first, true, necessarily self-existent Being. Which concern'd him very much, for he knew that even this was a Mixture in this simple Vision, and the Admission of an extraneous Object in that Contemplation. Upon which he endeavour'd to disappear from himself, and be wholly taken up in the Vision of that true Being; till at last he attain'd it;
and then both the Heavens and the Earth, and whatsoever is between them, and all Spiritual Forms, and Corporeal Faculties; and all those Powers which are separate from Matter, and are those Beings which know the necessarily self-existent Being, all disappear'd and vanish'd, and were as if they had never been, and amongst these his own Being disappear'd too, and there remain'd nothing but this ONE, TRUE, Perpetually Self-existent Being, who spoke thus in that Saying of his (which is not a Notion superadded to his Essence.) ...

To whom now belongs the Kingdom? To this One, Almighty God.[22] Which Words of his Hai Ebn Yokdhan understood, and heard his Voice; nor was his being unacquainted with Words, and not being able to speak, any Hindrance at all to the understanding him. Wherefore he deeply immers'd himself into this State, and witness'd that which neither Eye hath seen, nor Ear heard; nor hath it ever enter'd into the Heart of Man to conceive.

He reiterates the Sufi ascent described by al Ghazali—together with its problems and temptations and also arrives at the Extinction of Extinction required because the unique singularity is not a one within the category of number.

Hayy Ibn Yaqzan: § 86. ...

Now, Multiplicity is because of the Difference of one Being from another:...
Hayy Ibn Yaqzan: § 86. ...

Now, Multiplicity is because of the Difference of one Being from another, and there can be no Unity but by Conjunction, and none of these can be understood without Compound Notions which are mix'd with Matter. Besides, that the Explication of Things in this place is very straight and difficult; because if you go about to express what belongs to these separate Essences, by way of Multitude, or in the Plural, according to our way of speaking, this insinuates a Notion of Multiplicity, whereas they are far from being many; and if you speak of them by way of Separation, or in the Singular, this insinuates a Notion of Unity, whereas they are far from being one.

To express the end of the mystical journey, al-Ghazali also required a logic not founded in the difference between specific and generic.
Cusa’s  *De visione dei*

*Tractatus 4. in quo prius solumm dixit Nicolaus de Cusa, et postea ad

voluma puni Cornelius Epistulam ad abes et secreto inteusse de visione dei.*

Andam mun que voca alter illum

statim quin promittere veni studi

atem misere theologorum, et nos

qui nos se deo dixer, hoc est quod si ha

statim operamur quae praedicta sunt de

et maxime sancti, et mens

missim ifi viri verbis sanguinis et verbi

nem episcoporum qui salva sepe pandet

potest ne pro certa vel certate quod illud

sit omne sensibile sonum et melodie

enim visum.

Deo ait simplicissimo, et consimmo modo vos,

experimentare, si existimaream obstinae et manum

ibidem erat in sensibilem luces ad eis tenentes, quibus

et testam: modo que ibi a te, a te consedente doneque

probet atque et hye, praegrande quumiam quam quum

in numero eorum, quorum est, tempus beneficeti

*Post*
Nicholas of Cusa’s convergence of Platonism and the Abrahamic Religions


Nicholas was the first Latin to employ the term “negative theology” as a usual designation. There Cusa applied it to “maximus Dionysius” whom “Rabbi Solomon and all the wise follow”—“Solomon” is Moses Maimonides. Nicholas belonged to the tradition uniting Averroes, Avicenna, “the divine Plato,” and Dionysius who “imitated Plato to such an extent that he is quite frequently found to have cited Plato’s words in series.” In his first explicit mention of Proclus’ Commentary on the Parmenides, he brings Proclus into the discussion to support negative theology and, in this context, Cusanus makes clear that the One is neither numerical nor conceptual:

Rightly, then, as Proclus mentions in his commentary on the Parmenides, Plato rejects all [predication] apropos of the Beginning. Likewise, too, our Dionysius prefers negative theology to affirmative theology. However, the name “One” seems to befit God better than does any other name. This is what Parmenides calls Him—and so too Anaxagoras, who said: “the One is better than all other things together.” Do not construe this as pertaining to the numerical one, which is called the monad or the singular, but construe it as pertaining to the One that is indivisible by any means of division—a One understood apart from any duality.
In a discussion of Proclus’ *Platonic Theology in De Li Non Aliud*, Nicholas says:

I think that Plato mentally viewed the substance, or the beginning, of things by way of revelation—in the manner in which the Apostle tells the Romans that God has revealed Himself to them. I understand this revelation by means of a likeness to light, which through itself presents itself to sight. It is not seen or known in any other way than it reveals itself, since it is invisible, because it is higher than, and antecedent to, everything visible. In his letters Plato very briefly declares that these matters are thus—saying that God eventually manifests Himself to one who seeks Him steadfastly and very vigilantly. (Proclus, too, repeats these [views] in his *Commentary on the Parmenides*.)

The *De Venatione sapientiae*, written after the *De Li Non Aliud*, records the Cardinal’s pursuits of wisdom. Nicholas both corrects Proclus from the standpoint of the monotheism of Dionysius and exhibits their accord. I quote a statement of the agreement:

And Proclus...sums up [Plato’s view] when he says: he-who-believes-Plato remains amidst negations. For an addition to the One contracts and diminishes the excellence of the One; and by means of an addition we are shown not-One rather than One. Dionysius, who imitates Plato, made a similar pursuit within the field of oneness; and he says that negations that are not privative assertions but are excellent and abundant are truer than are affirmations.
Cusa on Proclus (continued)

... Since I think that these marvelous pursuers are to be followed and praised, I refer one-who is-studious to the careful considerations left behind for us in their writings.

For Cusa, there is one sole source of being, truth, and good, beyond conceptual grasp, but giving, disclosing, indeed creating itself diversely.
The Tomb of Nicolas Cardinal von Kues,
San Pietro in Vincolo Rome
4. Conversion from darkness to light, from ignorance and non-being to knowledge, being and their source. *Republic* VII, 518c-d: the movement within and out of the cave, from darkness to light, from the non-being and ignorance which belongs to becoming, up to being and knowing and their source, the Good, is “to turn around” (*strephein*). A conversion is required (*periakteon*). This demands someone with the art (*techne*) of leading around (*periagoges*), who can convert (*metastraphestai*). Ultimately this requires that someone who has seen the light return to the dark to help the prisoners break their chains, turn around, move upwards and out. Religions, pagan, Jewish, Christian, Muslim have this idea and image at their centre and a converting saviour or saviours (Protagoras, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed). Probably the resulting soteriology (theory of the saviour or of salvation) is most completely worked out philosophically by Iamblichus (c250-c325 CE), but it is everywhere present in the itineraries (journeys) of the soul among the religions of the Book. Moses is the archetype of this figure for the Abrahamic religions, and, with Philo, is presented with this Platonic *agagoge* in mind. Philo’s *De Vita Mosis* is an *anagoge*, as is *The Guide of the Perplexed* of Maimonides. Christ plays the role of the saviour guide for Christians, see, from among many possible examples, John 8:12, “I am the Light of the World” and the equation of the divine Word, life and light in John 1:1-5 on which we have Augustine’s equation with Platonic doctrine in *Confessions*, VII.ix (13).
The conversion toward light is central to Islam and the great Islamic theologian, philosopher and mystic, al-Ghazali, wrote a great exposition of the journey in *The Niche of Lights*. Ibn Tufayl’s *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, at which we have just looked when considering the mysticism of the One, is another Islamic example.

However, to get a sense of the total assimilation of Platonism, and of Christianity following it, to the logic of conversion, we must recollect that with Platonism it becomes ontological as well as psychological. All reality beneath the One – Good itself is structured by the *mone* [remaining], *proodos* [going out], *epistrophe* [return]. All is in the First, proceeds from it and returns, is converted, back towards its source when it achieves its proper good. Once this is gathered from Plotinus and Proclus, for example, then Christian doctrine (for example the Trinity) and literature is evidently replete with examples of this structure. Augustine’s *Confessions*, Boethius’ *Consolatio*, Eriugena’s *Periphyseon*, Anselm’s *Proslogion*, Aquinas’ *Summa theologiae*, Bonaventure’s *Itinerarium* and Richard Hooker’s *Lawes of the Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book One, are outstanding instances are outstanding instances. There are verbal references back to Plato’s description of the prisoners at the bottom of the Cave in Augustine’s *Confessions* (Books 3 & 4), Boethius’ *Consolatio* (Book 1), Anselm’s *Proslogion* (cap. 1), and Bonaventure’s *Itinerarium* (Book 1), but only Boethius is likely to have known whose language he was reproducing—and he most certainly did know!
And now, I said, let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened: — Behold! human beings living in a underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the den; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets.

I see.

And do you see, I said, men passing along the wall carrying all sorts of vessels, and statues and figures of animals made of wood and stone and various materials, which appear over the wall? Some of them are talking, others silent. You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners.

Like ourselves, I replied; and they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave?

True, he said; how could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?
And of the objects which are being carried in like manner they would only see the shadows?...

And now look again, and see what will naturally follow it the prisoners are released and disabused of their error. At first, when any of them is liberated and compelled suddenly to stand up and turn his neck round and walk and look towards the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the shadows; and then conceive some one saying to him, that what he saw before was an illusion, but that now, when he is approaching nearer to being and his eye is turned towards more real existence, he has a clearer vision, — what will be his reply? And you may further imagine that his instructor is pointing to the objects as they pass and requiring him to name them, — will he not be perplexed? Will he not fancy that the shadows which he formerly saw are truer than the objects which are now shown to him?

Far truer.

And if he is compelled to look straight at the light, will he not have a pain in his eyes which will make him turn away to take and take in the objects of vision which he can see, and which he will conceive to be in reality clearer than the things which are now being shown to him?
True, he said.

And suppose once more, that he is reluctantly dragged up a steep and rugged ascent, and held fast until he's forced into the presence of the sun himself, is he not likely to be pained and irritated? When he approaches the light his eyes will be dazzled, and he will not be able to see anything at all of what are now called realities.

Not all in a moment, he said.

He will require to grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world. And first he will see the shadows best, next the reflections of men and other objects in the water, and then the objects themselves; then he will gaze upon the light of the moon and the stars and the spangled heaven; and he will see the sky and the stars by night better than the sun or the light of the sun by day?

Certainly.

Last of he will be able to see the sun, and not mere reflections of him in the water, but he will see him in his own proper place, and not in another; and he will contemplate him as he is….Imagine once more, I said, such an one coming suddenly out of the sun to be replaced in his old situation; would he not be certain to have his eyes full of darkness?

To be sure, he said.
And if there were a contest, and he had to compete in measuring the shadows with the prisoners who had never moved out of the den, while his sight was still weak, and before his eyes had become steady (and the time which would be needed to acquire this new habit of sight might be very considerable) would he not be ridiculous? Men would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes; and that it was better not even to think of ascending; and if any one tried to loose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would put him to death.

No question, he said.

This entire allegory, I said, you may now append, dear Glaucon, to the previous argument; the prison-house is the world of sight, the light of the fire is the sun, and you will not misapprehend me if you interpret the journey upwards to be the ascent of the soul into the intellectual world according to my poor belief, which, at your desire, I have expressed whether rightly or wrongly God knows. But, whether true or false, my opinion is that in the world of knowledge the idea of good appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen, is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in this visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual; and that this is the power upon which he who would act rationally, either in public or private life must have his eye fixed....
Any one who has common sense will remember that the bewilderments of the eyes are of two kinds, and arise from two causes, either from coming out of the light or from going into the light, which is true of the mind's eye, quite as much as of the bodily eye; and he who remembers this when he sees any one whose vision is perplexed and weak, will not be too ready to laugh; he will first ask whether that soul of man has come out of the brighter light, and is unable to see because unaccustomed to the dark, or having turned from darkness to the day is dazzled by excess of light…. 

Whereas, our argument shows that the power and capacity of learning exists in the soul already; [therefore conversion and self-knowledge do together] and that just as the eye was unable to turn from darkness to light without the whole body, so too the instrument of knowledge can only by the movement of the whole soul be turned from the world of becoming into that of being, and learn by degrees to endure the sight of being, and of the brightest and best of being, or in other words, of the good.
Moses: the undivided Light
from Emily Parker, “Reflecting the Divine: Philo’s Moses and the Roman Ideal,” 77.

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.
Augustine Confessions 7.9.13

The identity (same doctrine, different words) of John 1.1-5 and what Augustine found in the books of the Platonists.

[T]hou didst procure for me...certain books of the Platonists, translated from Greek into Latin. And therein I found, not indeed in the same words, but to the selfsame effect, enforced by many and various reasons that "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made." That which was made by him is "life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shined in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." Furthermore, I read that the soul of man, though it "bears witness to the light," yet itself "is not the light; but the Word of God, being God, is that true light that lights every man who comes into the world." And further, that "he was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not." But that "he came unto his own, and his own received him not. And as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believed on his name"-- this I did not find there.

Christian philosophical theology can, however, go further than this, for example in Anselm (1033-1109). The Benedictine who became Archbishop of Canterbury not only proves the existence of God (Proslogion) but also the doctrine of the Trinity (Monologion), and the Incarnation and Atonement (Cur Deus Homo), with the consequence that faith and thought become identical in content even if different in form.
The Omnipotent, creative, guiding and converting light in Norman Sicily

Over the Eastern apse of the great Abbey Church at Monreale presides: “ΙΕΣΟΥΣ ΚΡΙΣΤΟΣ Ο ΠΑΝΤΟ ΚΡΑΤΩΡ” “Jesus Christ the All Powerful.”

The Church names Jesus with the same title given to the Father in the Septuagint. This Jesus is the Cosmic Christ, the Eternal Word, the Son begotten by the Father as his equal, and because of this equality “Almighty, Ο ΠΑΝΤΟ ΚΡΑΤΩΡ,” the Creator of all things. The creative Word shows us from the open Gospel he stretches out to us that he is the light of every journey. The text in Greek and Latin proclaims: “I am the light of the ΚΟΣΜΟΥ (cosmos), what follows me shall not circle around in darkness” John 8.12). Further along the northern coast at Cefalù and in the Palace Chapel in Palermo, the Gospel held by the Jesus Christ, completes the text from John so as to associate life and light: “I am the light of the ΚΟΣΜΟΥ (cosmos), who follows me shall not ΠΕΡΙΠΑΤΗΣΗΙ / AMBVIAT (circle around) in the darkness but shall have the light of life.” Christ is “the light of the cosmos” and “the light of life.” Life and knowing belong together for Christian proclamation as they do in the whole Platonic tradition. I give here the depiction in the Capella Palatina.
(Cefalu) John 8.12 is displayed in the open gospel.
Immortal Life in the Heavenly Light
San Vitale
6th century
The “Light Verse” (35th verse of chapter 24) of the Qur’an

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as it were a shining star. (This lamp is) kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would almost glow forth (of itself) though no fire touched it. Light upon light. Allah guideth unto His light whom He will. And Allah speaketh to mankind in allegories, for Allah is Knower of all things. (Pickthall translation)

Hugely important, al-Ghazali’s *The Niche of Lights* is a meditation on this verse. It was written at the top of the dome of Hagia Sophia during the 19th century restoration when it was in use as a mosque. Its architectural effect can be seen in the Dome of the Rock.
Al-Ghazali’s mausoleum in Tus
The Niche for Lights, one of al-Ghazali’s last works is dominated by the notion of experience of God sought by way of the journey from lights to Light.

Part One from which all these quotations are taken begins:
The Real Light is Allah; and the name "light" is otherwise only predicated metaphorically and conveys no real meaning.

He goes on to show the superiority of the light of reason (how the few understand light) to the external perception of the physical eye.

For example, he writes:

1.9 You must know, further, that the light of physical sight is marked by several kinds of defects. It sees others but not itself. Again, it does not see what is very distant, nor what is very near, nor what is behind a veil. It sees the exterior of things only, not their interior; the parts, not the whole; things finite, not things infinite. It makes many mistakes in its seeing, for what is large appears to its vision small; what is far, near; what is at rest, at motion; what is in motion, at rest. Here are seven defects inseparably attached to the physical eye…. [As opposed to each of these defects reason, or intelligence, provides a higher, errorless way, so he writes:]

1.11 From all which you understand that the eye may more justly be called Light than the light (so called) which is apprehended by sense; and further that the rational faculty should more properly be called Light than the eye. It would be even true to say that between these two there exists so great a difference in value, that we may, nay we must, consider only the rational faculty as deserving the name Light at all.
There is however a higher seeing yet: 1.32 We say: That which sees itself and others deserves more properly the name of Light, while that which adds to these two functions the function of making other things to see still more properly deserves the name of Light than that which has no effect whatever beyond itself. This is the light which merits the name of "Light-giving lamp," because its light is effused upon others. Now this is the property of the holy prophetic spirit, for through its means are effused the illuminations of the sciences upon the created world. Thus is explained the name given by Allâh to Mohammed, "Light-giving lamp," Now all the Prophets are Lamps, and so are the Learned—but the difference between them is incalculable.

1.35 Let us now take these Lights Celestial from which are lit the Lamps Terrestrial, and let us rank them in the order in which they themselves are kindled, the one from the other. Then the nearest to the fountain-head will be of all others the worthiest of the name of Light for he is the highest in order and rank. Now the analogy for this graded order in the world of sense can only be seized by one who sees the light of the moon coming through the window of a house, falling on a mirror fixed upon a wall, which reflects that light on to another wall, whence it in turn is reflected on the floor, so that the floor becomes illuminated therefrom. The light upon the floor is owed to that upon the wall, and the light on the wall to that in the mirror, and the light in the mirror to that from the moon, and the light in the moon to that from the sun, for it is the sun that radiates its light upon the moon.
Thus these four lights are ranged one above the other, each one more perfect than the other; and each one has a certain rank and a proper degree which it never passes beyond. 1.36 I would have you know, then, that it has been revealed to the men of Insight that even so are the Lights of the Realm Celestial ranged in an order; and that the highest is the one who is nearest to the Ultimate Light. It may well be, then, that the rank of Seraphiel is above the rank of Gabriel; and that among them is that closest to Allâh, he whose rank comes nighest to the Lordly Presence which is the Fountain-head of all these lights; and that among these is a closest to Man, and that between these two are grades innumerable, whereof all that is known is that they are many, and that they are ordered in rank and grade, and that as they have described themselves, so they are indeed--"Not one of us but has his determined place and standing," and "We are verily the ranked ones; we are they in whose mouth is Praise.”[We must go higher, to the Alone:]

1.39 Therefore, the Real Light is He in Whose hand lies creation and its destinies; He who first gives the light and afterwards sustains it. He shares with no other the reality of this name, nor the full title to the same; save in so far as He calls some other by that name, deigns to call him by it in the same way as a Liege-Lord deigns to give his vassal a fief, and therewith bestows on him the title of lord. Now when that vassal realizes the truth, he understands that both he and his are the property of his Liege, and of Him alone, a property shared by Him with no partner in the world.
1.45 These gnostics, on their return from their Ascent into the heaven of Reality, confess with one voice that they saw nought existent there save the One, the Real. Some of them, however, arrived at this scientifically, and others through a state of tasting. From these last the plurality of things fell away in its entirety. They were drowned in the absolute Unitude, and their intelligences were lost in Its abyss. Their rational faculties became so satiated that in this state they are, as it were, stunned. No capacity remained within them save to recall God; yea, not so much as the capacity to recall their own selves. So there remained nothing with them save God. They became drunken with a drunkenness wherein the sway of their own intelligence disappeared; so that one exclaimed, "I am The Real!" and another, "Glory be to me! How great is my glory!" and another, “Within this robe is nought but God!”

1.46 But the words of Lovers Passionate in their intoxication and ecstasy must be hidden away and not spoken of... Then when that drunkenness abated and they came again under the sway of the rational faculty—which is God's balance-scale upon His earth—is given back to them. They come to know that that had not been actual Identity, but only something resembling Identity; as in those words of the Lover at the height of his passion:--"I am He whom I love and He whom I love is I; We are two spirits immanent in one body.”
1.48 Now, when this state prevails, it is called in relation to him who experiences it, Extinction, nay, Extinction from Extinction, for the soul has become extinct to itself, extinct to its own extinction; for it becomes unconscious of itself and unconscious of its own unconsciousness, since, were it conscious of its own unconsciousness, it would be conscious of itself. In relation to the man immersed in this state, the state is called, in the language of metaphor, "Identity"; in the language of reality, "Unification." And beneath these verities also lie mysteries which it would take too long to delve into.

1.52 Thus you see that the whole world is all filled
1. with the external lights of perception,
2. and the internal lights of intelligence; also that the lower lights are effused or emanate the one from the other, as light emanates or is effused from a lamp;
3. while the Lamp itself is the transcendental Light of Prophecy;
4. and that, the transcendental Spirits of Prophesy are lit from the Spirit Supernal, as the lamp is lit from fire; and that the Supernals are lit the one from the other; and that their order is one of ascending grades:
5. further, that these all rise to the Light of Lights, the Origin and Fountainhead of lights, and that is God, only and alone; and that all other lights are borrowed from Him, and that His alone is real light; and that everything is from His light, nay, He is everything. Or, rather, nothing, possesses a "he-ness" other than He, save by metaphor. Therefore there is no light but He.
Niche of Lights (Continued)

1.53 All other lights are only lights from the Aspect which accompanies Him, not from themselves. Thus the aspect and face of everything faces to Him and turns in His direction; and "whithersoever they turn themselves there is the Face of God." So, then, there is no divinity but HE; for "divinity" is an expression by which is connoted that towards which all faces are directed" in worship and in confession--that He is Deity; but which I mean the faces of the hearts of men, for they verily are lights and spirits. Nay, more, just as "there is no deity but He," so there is no he but He, for "he" is an expression for something which one can indicate; but in every and any case we can but indicate Him. Every time you indicate anything, your indication is in reality, to Him, even though through your ignorance of the truth of truths which we have mentioned you know it not. 1.54 Just as one cannot point to, indicate, sunlight but only the sun, so the relation of the sum of things to God is, in the visible analogue, as the relation of light to the sun. Therefore "There is no deity but God" is the Many's declaration of Unity: that of the Few is "There is no he but HE"; the former is more general, but the latter is more particular, more comprehensive, more exact, and more apt to give him who declares it entrance into sheer singularity and utter oneness.

1.55 This kingdom of singularity is the ultimate point of mortals' Ascent.
5. The Goal: likeness to God. From Carlos Fraenkel, *Philosophical Religions from Plato to Spinoza: Reason, Religion, and Autonomy*, 123-124: The foundational Christian theologians “Clement and Origen agree with [the Jewish theologian] Philo that being created in God’s “image” and “likeness” means that human reason is an image and likeness of divine Reason which, in turn, is an image and likeness of God. For them, of course, human reason is also an image and likeness of Christ. Since they take “image” to refer to reason’s potential and “likeness” to the realization of this potential, they can connect Genesis 1:26 to the *telos* formula of the *Theaetetus* [(176a-b)] – “to become like God as much as possible.” The goal is to move from “image” to “likeness” (*Strom*. 2.22, 131, 6; *De princ.* 3.6, 1). The Christian ideal, then, like the Platonic ideal, is a life ordered by reason towards the perfection of reason. Indeed, everyone who follows the prescriptions of reason by the same token follows Christ’s prescriptions and with every true insight increases his share in Christ.” *Deiformity*, likeness to God, is the goal of the Neoplatonic philosophers and their Jewish, Islamic and Christian heirs.
Socrates. Evils, Theodorus, can never pass away; for there must always remain something which is antagonistic to good. Having no place among the gods in heaven, of necessity they hover around the mortal nature, and this earthly sphere. Wherefore we ought to fly away from earth to heaven as quickly as we can; and to fly away is to become like God, as far as this is possible; and to become like him, is to become holy, just, and wise.

In the *Symposium* Diotima sets out an anagogy to conformity with God by way of the love of beauty

210ff: “These are the lesser mysteries of love, into which even you, Socrates, may enter; to the greater and more hidden ones which are the crown of these, and to which, if you pursue them in a right spirit, they will lead, I know not whether you will be able to attain. But I will do my utmost to inform you, and do you follow if you can. For he who would proceed aright in this matter should begin in youth to visit beautiful forms; and first, if he be guided by his instructor aright, to love one such form only—out of that he should create fair thoughts; and soon he will of himself perceive that the beauty of one form is akin to the beauty of another; and then if beauty of form in general is his pursuit, how foolish would he be not to recognize that the beauty in every form is one and the same!
And when he perceives this he will abate his violent love of the one, which he will despise and deem a small thing, and will become a lover of all beautiful forms; in the next stage he will consider that the beauty of the mind is more honourable than the beauty of the outward form. So that if a virtuous soul have but a little comeliness, he will be content to love and tend him, and will search out and bring to the birth thoughts which may improve the young, until he is compelled to contemplate and see the beauty of institutions and laws, and to understand that the beauty of them all is of one family, and that personal beauty is a trifle; and after laws and institutions he will go on to the sciences, that he may see their beauty, being not like a servant in love with the beauty of one youth or man or institution, himself a slave mean and narrow-minded, but drawing towards and contemplating the vast sea of beauty, he will create many fair and noble thoughts and notions in boundless love of wisdom; until on that shore he grows and waxes strong, and at last the vision is revealed to him of a single science, which is the science of beauty everywhere.

210e To this I will proceed; please to give me your very best attention:
‘He who has been instructed thus far in the things of love [τα ἐρωτικα], and who has learned to see the beautiful in due order and succession, when he comes toward the end will suddenly perceive a nature of wondrous beauty (and this, Socrates, is the final cause of all our former toils)—a nature which in the first place is everlasting, not growing and decaying, or waxing and waning;

secondly, not fair in one point of view and foul in another, or at one time or in one relation or at one place fair, at another time or in another relation or at another place foul, as if fair to some and foul to others, or in the likeness of a face or hands or any other part of the bodily frame, or in any form of speech or knowledge, or existing in any other being, as for example, in an animal, or in heaven, or in earth, or in any other place; but

beauty absolute, separate, simple, and everlasting, which without diminution and without increase, or any change, is imparted to the ever-growing and perishing beauties of all other things. He who from these ascending under the influence of true love, begins to perceive that beauty, is not far from the end.
And the true order of going, or being led by another, to the things of love, is to begin from the beauties of earth and mount upwards for the sake of that other beauty, using these as steps only, and from one going on to two, and from two to all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions, until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute beauty, and at last knows what the essence of beauty is. This, my dear [φιλε] Socrates,’ said the stranger of Mantinea, ‘is that life above all others which man should live, in the contemplation of beauty absolute; a beauty which if you once beheld, you would see not to be after the measure of gold, and garments, and fair boys and youths, whose presence now entrances you; and you and many a one would be content to live seeing them only and conversing with them without meat or drink, if that were possible — you only want to look at them and to be with them. But what if man had eyes to see the true beauty — the divine beauty, [θειον καλον] I mean, pure and clear and unalloyed, not clogged with the pollutions of mortality and all the colours and vanities of human life — thither looking, and holding converse with the true beauty simple and divine? Remember how in that communion only, beholding beauty with the eye of the mind, he will be enabled to bring forth, not images of beauty, but realities (for he has hold not of an image but of a reality), and bringing forth and nourishing true virtue to become the friend of God and be immortal, if mortal man may.

It is of the greatest importance for both philosophy and religion that according to Diotima and Plato ascent to the highest beauty and good is by love, a demi-god.
(70) And again, being raised up on wings, and so surveying and contemplating the air, and all the commotions to which it is subject, it is borne upwards to the higher firmament, and to the revolutions of the heavenly bodies. And also being itself involved in the revolutions of the planets and fixed stars according to the perfect laws of music, and being led on by love [eros], which is the guide of wisdom, it proceeds onwards till, having surmounted all essence intelligible by the external senses, it comes to aspire to such as is perceptible only by the intellect:

(71) and perceiving in that, the original models and ideas of those things intelligible by the external senses which it saw here full of surpassing beauty, it becomes seized with a sort of sober intoxication like the zealots engaged in the Corybantian festivals, and yields to enthusiasm, becoming filled with another desire, and a more excellent longing, by which it is conducted onwards to the very summit of such things as are perceptible only to the intellect, (see Plato, *Phaedrus*, 245ff) till it appears to be reaching the great King himself. And while it is eagerly longing to behold him pure and unmingled, rays of divine light are poured forth upon it like a torrent, so as to bewilder the eyes of its intelligence [dianoia] by their splendour. But as it is not every image that resembles its archetypal model, since many are unlike, Moses has shown this by adding to the words "after his image," the expression, "in his likeness," to prove that it means an accurate impression, having a clear and evident resemblance in form.
Plotinus
Mounting beyond the human to Deiformity, Godlikeness
(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 …”

This seems to be Plotinus’ version of Aristotle’s conception of the human as true to itself when participating in the Divine *NOUS*.
6. The human self. Soul and its unseen internal justice is important, not externally visible rewards. *Republic* II, 366e. The physical ugliness and inward beauty of Socrates make him a paradigm. The soul is immortal and we ought to make our choices in this life relative to its future. Its present and future happiness depend upon its being just. This justice as internal and external order is taken up in the Hellenic philosophy and the Abrahamic religions. Beginning with Plato we pass by way of the Septuagint to the merging of Greek and Hebrew which comes down to Paul, Augustine, and Anselm. I conclude with al Farabi’s system which mixes elements from Plato, Aristotle, the Neoplatonists and Peripatetics to found a universal community based on justice in God, the cosmos, the human soul, the relation of soul and body and in the political ruled by the Philosopher-king-Imam.
Republic II, 366e: The cause of all this, Socrates, was indicated by us at the beginning of the argument, when my brother and I told you how astonished we were to find that of all the professing panegyrists of justice — beginning with the ancient heroes of whom any memorial has been preserved to us, and ending with the men of our own time — no one has ever blamed injustice or praised justice except with a view to the glories, honours, and benefits which flow from them. No one has ever adequately described either in verse or prose the true essential nature of either of them abiding in the soul, and invisible to any human or divine eye; or shown that of all the things of a man's soul which he has within him, justice is the greatest good, and injustice the greatest evil. Had this been the universal strain, had you sought to persuade us of this from our youth upwards, we should not have been on the watch to keep one another from doing wrong, but every one would have been his own watchman, because afraid, if he did wrong, of harbouring in himself the greatest of evils.... justice is one of that highest class of goods which are desired indeed for their results, but in a far greater degree for their own sakes — like sight or hearing or knowledge or health, or any other real and natural and not merely conventional good
Dr Crouse defines St. Anselm’s concept of *Justitia* as “universal rectitude of order” and traces it back to not only to Augustine but also to the pagan Greeks and to the Hebrews, as well as to their ancient concordance. I cannot give his whole argument here, but a suggestion of its character will appear from its first words: “The Greek idea of justice (*dikē*) was initially a religious idea.”

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

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

The Church Fathers, building on the methods and doctrines of Philo, simply continued the blending of Hellenic and Hebrew which they found in Scripture and “accepted the full implications of both Biblical and philosophical usage.” One of these was that justice, as both justification and sanctification—to use the technical language of Christian theology—, was, for them and for Robert, simultaneously an attribute of God imputed to the just and also really possessed by them.
The *Republic* looks at the *polis* in order to see the soul better. Moreover, as the *Myth of Er* indicates, the aim of the whole discourse is that we should learn to choose rightly because the choices of souls—which Socrates proves to be immortal just before the *Myth* is told—may have endlessly long consequences. The intelligible, the cosmos, and the human are bound together in Plato and his successors, as D. O’Meara on Proclus’ *Commentary on the Timaeus* points out:

Political theory is both inferior and superior to physical theory: it is inferior in that it concerns the organization of human affairs whereas physics deals with a larger order; it is superior in that a political order already exists in intelligible reality. The ideal city pre-exists in the intelligible, and exists in the heavens and (lastly) in human lives. Thus Plato’s *Republic* precedes his *Timaeus*, although it concerns a moral order inferior to the perfect order of the universe. If politics occupies a lower place in the structure of philosophy, it derives its principles nevertheless from a transcendent level of reality, intelligible immaterial being.


*Mutatis mutandis* these words apply equally to Al-Fârâbî and Aquinas. Justice in the Neoplatonic traditions of late Antiquity and the Middles Ages, including those which have assimilated or been assimilated to Aristotelianism, is found in every kind of reality at every level because it is an attribute of the Divine.
Justice first appears in Al-Farabi’s summary of his book. After having outlined his treatment of the cosmos in eight chapters from the “First Cause,” through the separate substances and the celestial bodies down to the sublunar natural material bodies, he writes that he will consider: “How the continuous existence of each species of the natural material bodies is brought about, and how the individuals of each species remain in existence, in what way justice expresses itself in the manner in which these bodies are arranged; that whatever happens with regard to these bodies happens with utmost justice, perfection and completeness; that there is neither injustice nor fault or defect in any of them.”

Once within the body of his treatise, Al-Farabi writes: “the First is just, and its justice is in its substance.” “This does not apply to anything apart from the first.” (1.2.2) With all else justice has to do not with substance but with rank and order.

“Justice expresses itself in the manner in which the bodies of the cosmos are arranged;… whatever happens with regard to these bodies happens with utmost justice, perfection and completeness;… there is neither injustice nor fault or defect in any of them.”

The cosmos, both in its intelligible and in its visible structures, the human, both as soul and again as bodily organism, and the city, both in its head and in the hierarchical relation of those who govern and are governed, are images of the First and its justice.
The images are connected and ordered. Ordered connections exist both between the intellectual, the rational, and the political, and also within each. There is a relation of inner and outer between the intelligences and the visible heavenly substances, between the soul and the body, between the Philosopher-King and the parts of the city.

An outline of the bodily existences follows, and then al-Farabi produces an anthropology, in which he generally follows Aristotle.

He describes the faculties of the human soul “their ranks in relation to another; which of them only rules and which of them only serves, and which of them rules one thing and serves another, and which of them rules which.” (Chapter 10).

In Chapter 3.13 (§7) the order in the human world is set out: “Thus the nutritive faculty is made to be the servant of the body, and the faculties of sense and of representation are both made to serve the body and the rational faculty. All three of them, while serving the body, are ultimately dependent on the rational faculty … practical reason is made to serve theoretical reason.” When felicity as known by the theoretical reason and is sought according to this order “the actions of man will be all good and noble.”

So far we have passed through the first three parts of Al-Farabi’s book. In the Fourth Part we come to the city and the realm of human will. There we discover that even as the “natural” human was ordered in accord with the cosmic existences which precede it, so, in the voluntary realm, “the excellent city resembles the perfect and healthy body.” Rank and subordination are essential in the city: “Its parts are different by nature, and their natural dispositions are unequal in excellence: there is in it a man who is the ruler, and there are others whose ranks are close to the ruler, each of them with a disposition and habit through which he performs an action in conformity with the intention of that ruler: these are the holders of the first ranks.” (4.15 §4.)
And so it goes, until we reach “the bottom of the scale.” In the next paragraphs, the right order of the city is first compared to the order of the organs in human body and then to the order of the cosmos: “For the relation of the First Cause to the other existents is like the relation of the king of the city to its other parts.” (4.15 § 6) After reminding us of the cosmic order as described in the First Part of his treatise, Al-Farabi concludes: “The excellent city ought to be arranged in the same way: all its parts ought to imitate in their actions the aim of their first ruler according to their rank.” The figures on whom this depends are the philosopher-kings.

The perfection of the rulers stems from their 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.”

Here we see a dependence on Philo as well as Plato,
7. Immortality of the Soul. For Plato the soul is immortal, *Republic X*, 608c-613e. Aristotle and his followers, the Peripatetics, are at best ambiguous on the inherent immortality of the individual soul, but do prescribe a way for the human to become immortal by contemplation and absorption into the divine thinking. This path many Islamic and Jewish philosophical theologians follow. Indeed, Philo seems to propose it. Many pagan philosophers follow Plato in teaching the transmigration of souls, a notion usually strongly rejected in the Abrahamic religions. No convergence is more difficult to map than this one. Since the time of the encounter of Hellenism and Israel during the Maccabees, the doctrine of the resurrection has been either an alternative to, or a form of, or conformed to, or absolutely opposed to the Platonic and Aristotelian versions of human immortality. With the Pharisees and Rabbinic Judaism, with Christianity, and Islam, the resurrection became, along with monotheism, the central doctrines. The problems are indicated by the fact that Maimonides makes belief in the resurrection an article of Jewish faith, as it was of the Islamic, but clearly teaches Aristotelian assimilation to divine intellect by contemplation, and is accused of being an infidel by his fellow Jews on the resurrection. Augustine and his followers until the 13th century follow Plato. Aquinas moves to an Aristotelian idea of soul and body incompatible with Augustine but interprets Aristotle by way of the Neoplatonists to preserve individual immortality.
Are you not aware, I said, that the soul of man is immortal and imperishable?

He looked at me in astonishment, and said: No, by heaven: And are you really prepared to maintain this?

Yes, I said, I ought to be, and you too --there is no difficulty in proving it.

I see a great difficulty; but I should like to hear you state this argument of which you make so light.

Listen then.

I am attending.

There is a thing which you call good and another which you call evil?

Yes, he replied.

Would you agree with me in thinking that the corrupting and destroying element is the evil, and the saving and improving element the good?

Yes.

And you admit that every thing has a good and also an evil; as ophthalmia is the evil of the eyes and disease of the whole body; as mildew is of corn, and rot of timber, or rust of copper and iron: in everything, or in almost everything, there is an inherent evil and disease?
Yes, he said.
And anything which is infected by any of these evils is made evil, and at last wholly dissolves and dies?
True.
The vice and evil which is inherent in each is the destruction of each; and if this does not destroy them there is nothing else that will; for good certainly will not destroy them, nor again, that which is neither good nor evil.
Certainly not.
If, then, we find any nature which having this inherent corruption cannot be dissolved or destroyed, we may be certain that of such a nature there is no destruction?
That may be assumed.
Well, I said, and is there no evil which corrupts the soul?
Yes, he said, there are all the evils which we were just now passing in review: unrighteousness, intemperance, cowardice, ignorance.
But does any of these dissolve or destroy her? --and here do not let us fall into the error of supposing that the unjust and foolish man, when he is detected, perishes through his own injustice, which is an evil of the soul. Take the analogy of the body: The evil of the body is a disease which wastes and reduces and annihilates the body; and all the things of which we were just now speaking come to annihilation through their own corruption attaching to them and inhering in them and so destroying them. Is not this true?

Yes.

Consider the soul in like manner. Does the injustice or other evil which exists in the soul waste and consume her? Do they by attaching to the soul and inhering in her at last bring her to death, and so separate her from the body?

Certainly not.

And yet, I said, it is unreasonable to suppose that anything can perish from without through affection of external evil which could not be destroyed from within by a corruption of its own?

It is, he replied.
The Immortality of the Soul

Republic X

But does any of these dissolve or destroy her? --and here do not let us fall into the error of supposing that the unjust and foolish man, when he is detected, perishes through his own injustice, which is an evil of the soul. Take the analogy of the body: The evil of the body is a disease which wastes and reduces and annihilates the body; and all the things of which we were just now speaking come to annihilation through their own corruption attaching to them and inhering in them and so destroying them. Is not this true?

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And yet, I said, it is unreasonable to suppose that anything can perish from without through affection of external evil which could not be destroyed from within by a corruption of its own?

It is, he replied.
Consider, I said, Glaucon, that even the badness of food, whether staleness, decomposition, or any other bad quality, when confined to the actual food, is not supposed to destroy the body; although, if the badness of food communicates corruption to the body, then we should say that the body has been destroyed by a corruption of itself, which is disease, brought on by this; but that the body, being one thing, can be destroyed by the badness of food, which is another, and which does not engender any natural infection --this we shall absolutely deny?

Very true.

And, on the same principle, unless some bodily evil can produce an evil of the soul, we must not suppose that the soul, which is one thing, can be dissolved by any merely external evil which belongs to another?

Yes, he said, there is reason in that.

Either then, let us refute this conclusion, or, while it remains unrefuted, let us never say that fever, or any other disease, or the knife put to the throat, or even the cutting up of the whole body into the minutest pieces, can destroy the soul, until she herself is proved to become more unholy or unrighteous in consequence of these things being done to the body; but that the soul, or anything else if not destroyed by an internal evil, can be destroyed by an external one, is not to. be affirmed by any man.
And surely, he replied, no one will ever prove that the souls of men become more unjust in consequence of death.

But if some one who would rather not admit the immortality of the soul boldly denies this, and says that the dying do really become more evil and unrighteous, then, if the speaker is right, I suppose that injustice, like disease, must be assumed to be fatal to the unjust, and that those who take this disorder die by the natural inherent power of destruction which evil has, and which kills them sooner or later, but in quite another way from that in which, at present, the wicked receive death at the hands of others as the penalty of their deeds?

Nay, he said, in that case injustice, if fatal to the unjust, will not be so very terrible to him, for he will be delivered from evil. But I rather suspect the opposite to be the truth, and that injustice which, if it have the power, will murder others, keeps the murderer alive -- aye, and well awake too; so far removed is her dwelling-place from being a house of death.
True, I said; if the inherent natural vice or evil of the soul is unable to kill or destroy her, hardly will that which is appointed to be the destruction of some other body, destroy a soul or anything else except that of which it was appointed to be the destruction.

Yes, that can hardly be.

But the soul which cannot be destroyed by an evil, whether inherent or external, must exist for ever, and if existing for ever, must be immortal?

Certainly.

That is the conclusion, I said; and, if a true conclusion, then the souls must always be the same, for if none be destroyed they will not diminish in number. Neither will they increase, for the increase of the immortal natures must come from something mortal, and all things would thus end in immortality.
The Hellenistic world...was caught up by a new revelation that solved the problem of evil on earth: retribution would come after death, when the wicked would be punished and the righteous rewarded and awakened to new life. Such notions are alien to the Bible, indeed in contradiction to it, for the Torah promises reward and punishment in this life. Hence the Sadducees rejected the new doctrine and ridiculed the Pharisaic teaching of resurrection...The Pharisees...adopted the Hellenistic doctrine of resurrection, but subsumed it under the principles of the Torah.

What to the pagans was an event dictated more or less by necessity, appears among the Jews as the working of the free will of God....For this fateful and continually operative necessity, the Pharisees substituted the single event of the Last Judgment, whose day and scope God would determine, and so dovetailed the new Hellenistic idea into the structure of biblical ideas...

(77) And some one may inquire the cause why it was that man was the last work in the creation of the world. For the Creator and Father created him after every thing else as the sacred scriptures inform us. Accordingly, they who have gone most deeply into the laws, and who to the best of their power have investigated everything that is contained in them with all diligence, say that God, when he had given to man to partake of kindred with himself, grudged him neither reason, which is the most excellent of all gifts, nor anything else that is good; but before his creation, provided for him every thing in the world, as for the animal most resembling himself, and dearest to him, being desirous that when he was born, he should be in want of nothing requisite for living, and for living well; the first of which objects is provided for by the abundance of supplies which are furnished to him for his enjoyment, and the other by his power of contemplation of the heavenly bodies, by which the mind is smitten so as to conceive a love [*nous erota*] and desire for knowledge on those subjects; owing to which desire, philosophy [*philosophia*] has sprung up, by which, man, though mortal, is made immortal.
Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians 15.8: “and last of all, as to the child born at the wrong time, he [the resurrected Christ] appeared to me also. [9] For I am the least of the apostles, who is not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the assembly of God. [10] But by the grace of God I am what I am. His grace which was bestowed on me was not futile, but I worked more than all of them; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. [11] Whether then it is I or they, so we preach, and so you believed. [12] Now if Christ is preached, that he has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? [13] But if there is no resurrection of the dead, neither has Christ been raised. [14] If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith also is in vain. [15] Yes, we are found false witnesses of God, because we testified about God that he raised up Christ, whom he didn't raise up, if it is so that the dead are not raised. [16] For if the dead aren't raised, neither has Christ been raised. [17] If Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins. [18] Then they also who are fallen asleep in Christ have perished. [19] If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most pitiable. [20] But now Christ has been raised from the dead. He became the first fruits of those who are asleep.”
Moses Maimonides on Immortality gained by true contemplative worship

*Guide of the Perplexed* III.51: The true worship of God is only possible when correct notions of Him have previously been conceived. When you have arrived by way of intellectual research at a knowledge of God and His works, then commence to devote yourselves to Him, try to approach Him and strengthen the intellect, which is the link that joins you to Him.... man's love of God is identical with His knowledge of Him. The Divine service enjoined in these words must, accordingly, be preceded by the love of God. Our Sages have pointed out to us that it is a service in the heart, which explanation I understand to mean this: man concentrates all his thoughts on the First Intellect, and is absorbed in these thoughts as much as possible. David therefore commands his son Solomon these two things, and exhorts him earnestly to do them: to acquire a true knowledge of God, and to be earnest in His service after that knowledge has been acquired... I have shown you that the intellect which emanates from God unto us is the link that joins us to God. You have it in your power to strengthen that bond, if you choose to do so, or to weaken it gradually, till it breaks if you prefer this. It will only become strong when you employ it in the love of God, and seek that love: it will be weakened when you direct your thoughts to other things. You must know that even if you were the wisest man in respect to the true knowledge of God, you break the bond between you and God whenever you turn entirely your thoughts to the necessary food or any necessary business; you are then not with God, and He is not with you: for that relation between you and Him is actually interrupted in those moments.
Aquinas Summa Theologiae 1.75.2
Whether the Human Soul is Something Subsistent

I answer that It must necessarily be allowed that the principle of intellectual operation which we call the soul, is a principle both incorporeal and subsistent. For it is clear that by means of the intellect man can have knowledge of all corporeal things. …

Therefore, if the intellectual principle contained the nature of a body it would be unable to know all bodies. Now every body has its own determinate nature. Therefore it is impossible for the intellectual principle to be a body. It is likewise impossible for it to understand by means of a bodily organ; since the determinate nature of that organ would impede knowledge of all bodies; as when a certain determinate color is not only in the pupil of the eye, but also in a glass vase, the liquid in the vase seems to be of that same color.

Therefore the intellectual principle which we call the mind or the intellect has an operation "per se" apart from the body. Now only that which subsists can have an operation "per se." For nothing can operate but what is actual: for which reason we do not say that heat imparts heat, but that what is hot gives heat.

We must conclude, therefore, that the human soul, which is called the intellect or the mind, is something incorporeal and subsistent.
8. **Creation:** With Plato we have the first philosopher who maintained that the world was created by an intelligent cause and who declared that this order was established by a divine being also occupied with the moral destiny of mankind. His *Timaeus* teaches literally that time begins with the creation of the sensible world, which is “the moving image of eternity”; it is sustained only by the will of the creator God that it continue forever so as to be as good as possible, i.e. as nearly eternal as possible. Philosophers and theologians in late Antiquity who knew both the account in the book of Genesis and Plato’s found them so close that they supposed the one had been borrowed from the other or that both had the same source in the divine truth. Beginning with Philo, Jews, Christians, and Muslims understood their revealed texts through Plato’s philosophical story. Later pagan philosophers reconciled Plato’s Demiurge (creator) with Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover, so that both philosophers were supposed to have taught that God created all things from nothing (i.e. there was no other first cause), and Christian, Islamic, and Jewish philosophical theologians (e.g. Thomas Aquinas) followed them on this. By the end of his teaching, Aquinas, balancing almost all the elements of the Hellenic tradition along with the now supposedly Scriptural notion of a temporal beginning of the creation (e.g. Philo and many of the Arabic philosophers did not hold this, to say nothing of John 1.1), held that Plato and Aristotle agreed on the creation of the world from nothing, although he faulted Aristotle for holding that the world was eternal.
Creation

Timaeus [27d] First then, in my judgment, we must make a distinction and ask, What is that which always is and has no becoming; and what is that which is always becoming and never is? That which is apprehended by intelligence and reason is always in the same state; but that which is conceived by opinion with the help of sensation and without reason, is always in a process of becoming and perishing and never really is. Now everything that becomes or is created must of necessity be created by some cause, for without a cause nothing can be created. The work of the creator, whenever he looks to the unchangeable and fashions the form and nature of his work after an unchangeable pattern, must necessarily be made fair and perfect; but when he looks to the created only, and uses a created pattern, it is not fair or perfect. Was the heaven then or the world, whether called by this or by any other more appropriate name-assuming the name, I am asking a question which has to be asked at the beginning of an enquiry about anything—was the world, I say, always in existence and without beginning? or created, and had it a beginning? Created, I reply, being visible and tangible and having a body, and therefore sensible; and all sensible things are apprehended by opinion and sense and are in a process of creation and created. Now that which is created must, as we affirm, of necessity be created by a cause. But the father and maker of all this universe is past finding out; and even if we found him, to tell of him to all men would be impossible.
And there is still a question to be asked about him: Which of the patterns had the artificer in view when he made the world the pattern of the unchangeable, or of that which is created? If the world be indeed fair and the artificer good, it is manifest that he must have looked to that which is eternal; but if what cannot be said without blasphemy is true, then to the created pattern. Every one will see that he must have looked to, the eternal; for the world is the fairest of creations and he is the best of causes. And having been created in this way, the world has been framed in the likeness of that which is apprehended by reason and mind and is unchangeable, and must therefore of necessity, if this is admitted, be a copy of something. Now it is all-important that the beginning of everything should be according to nature. And in speaking of the copy and the original we may assume that words are akin to the matter which they describe; when they relate to the lasting and permanent and intelligible, they ought to be lasting and unalterable, and, as far as their nature allows, irrefutable and immovable—nothing less. But when they express only the copy or likeness and not the eternal things themselves, they need only be likely and analogous to the real words. As being is to becoming, so is truth to belief. If then, Socrates, amid the many opinions about the gods and the generation of the universe, we are not able to give notions which are altogether and in every respect exact and consistent with one another, do not be surprised. ….
Enough, if we adduce probabilities as likely as any others; for we must remember that I who am the speaker, and you who are the judges, are only mortal men, and we ought to accept the tale which is probable and enquire no further.

Timaeus  

When the father creator saw the creature which he had made moving and living, the created image of the eternal gods, he rejoiced, and in his joy determined to make the copy still more like the original; and as this was eternal, he sought to make the universe eternal, so far as might be. Now the nature of the ideal being was everlasting, but to bestow this attribute in its fullness upon a creature was impossible. Wherefore he resolved to have a moving image of eternity, and when he set in order the heaven, he made this image eternal but moving according to number, while eternity itself rests in unity; and this image we call time.
Moses, who had early reached the very summits of philosophy, and who had learnt from the oracles of God the most numerous and important of the principles of nature, was well aware that it is indispensable that in all existing things there must be an active cause, and a passive subject; and that the active cause is the intellect of the universe, thoroughly unadulterated and thoroughly unmixed, superior to virtue and superior to science, superior even to abstract good or abstract beauty; (9) while the passive subject is something inanimate and incapable of motion by any intrinsic power of its own, but having been set in motion, and fashioned, and endowed with life by the intellect, became transformed into that most perfect work, this world [cosmos].

And those who describe it as being uncreated, do, without being aware of it, cut off the most useful and necessary of all the qualities which tend to produce piety, namely, providence: (10) for reason proves that the father and creator has a care for that which has been created; for a father is anxious for the life of his children, and a workman aims at the duration of his works, and employs every device imaginable to ward off everything that is pernicious or injurious, and is desirous by every means in his power to provide everything which is useful or profitable for them.
(16) for God, as apprehending beforehand, as a God must do, that there could not exist a good imitation without a good model, and that of the things perceptible to the external senses nothing could be faultless which were not fashioned with reference to some archetypal idea conceived by the intellect, when he had determined to create this visible world, previously formed that one which is perceptible only by the intellect, in order that so using an incorporeal model formed as far as possible on the image of God, he might then make this corporeal world, a younger likeness of the elder creation, which should embrace as many different genera perceptible to the external senses, as the other world contains of those which are visible only to the intellect.

(21) And the power which could be capable of creating the world has for its source that good which is founded on truth; for if any one were desirous to investigate the cause on account of which this universe was created, I think that he would come to no erroneous conclusion if he were to say as one of the ancients did say: “That the Father and Creator of all was good; because of this he did not grudge the substance a share of his own excellent nature, since it had nothing good of itself, but was able to become everything.
The fifth lesson that Moses teaches us is, that God exerts his providence [pronoia] for the benefit of the world [cosmos]. (172) For it follows of necessity that the Creator must always care for that which he has created, just as parents do also care for their children. And he who has learnt this not more by hearing it than by his own understanding [dianoia], and has impressed on his own soul these marvellous facts which are the subject of so much contention, namely, that God has a being and existence, and that he who so exists is really one, and that he has created the world, and that he has created it one [hena] as has been stated, having made it like to himself in singleness [monosin]; and that he exercises a continual care [pronoia] for that which he has created, will live a happy and blessed life, stamped with the doctrines of piety and holiness.
For Aquinas there is a sharp difference between the question about the temporal beginning and about creation, Aquinas, *De Aeternitate Mundi*:

If someone holds that something besides God could have always existed, in the sense that there could be something always existing and yet not made by God, then we differ with him: such an abominable error is contrary not only to the faith but also to the teachings of the philosophers, who confess and prove that everything that in any way exists cannot exist unless it be caused by him who supremely and most truly has existence. However, someone may hold that there has always existed something that, nevertheless, had been wholly caused by God, and thus we ought to determine whether this position is tenable.

The first of the philosophers solely considered the causes of accidental mutations, and thought all becoming was alteration. Those who succeeded them arrived at a knowledge of substantial changes, but those who came still later, such as Plato and Aristotle, arrived at a knowledge of the principle of all existence (Aquinas, *In Physic.*, VIII, ii, § 975)
Aquinas on Creation

In *On Separate Substances*, Thomas reports that:

According to the opinion of Plato and Aristotle… It is necessary beyond the mode of coming to be, by which something becomes by the coming of form to matter [this doctrine he ascribed to the *Naturales*], to presuppose another origin of things, according as *esse* is bestowed on the whole universe of things by a first being which is its own being.

This creation *ex nihilo* is not contradicted because Plato and Aristotle held immaterial substances and the heavenly bodies to have always existed. Aquinas declares that they did not therefore deny a cause of their being; indeed, they did not “deviate in this from the doctrine of Catholic faith” by positing *increata*. He states the doctrine that God is the sole cause of being for all things in a form which is more Platonic than Aristotelian. The First Principle is called *simplicissimum*, and Thomas argues that “because subsistent being must be one … it is necessary that all other things which are under it exist in the way they do as participants in *esse*”.

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Aquinas on Creation

His exposition of the *Liber de causis* shows that, having looked at Plato more and more in Neoplatonic terms, Thomas saw that, for Platonists, all is derived from one exalted First Principle from which being comes. Even if the Platonists “posited many gods ordered under one” rather than, as we do, “positing one only having all things in itself,” everyone agrees “universality of causality belongs to God.” The Platonic language betrays what underlies this concordance here.

The notion that Aristotle taught a doctrine of creation was developed among the late Antique conciliators of Plato and Aristotle. The Platonists want to draw together the pagan *Genesis*, the *Timaeus*, and its “Demiurge” with Aristotle’s *Physics* and his Unmoved Mover. To do this they needed to find some way of reconciling Aristotle’s eternal universe with that in the *Timaeus*, which is, as Aquinas had discerned in his *Exposition of the De Caelo* written just before the *On Separate Substances*, generated and corruptible, though perpetual because it is held in being by the divine will. The efforts and diverse positions of the ancient commentators give rise to the pervasive notion in late Antiquity and the Middle Ages that Aristotle and Plato regarded the First Principle as a creator. Aquinas and his Aristotle are its heirs.
9. **Providence:** According to Plato “the gods perceive, see, and hear everything, nothing is able to escape them which falls within sense or knowledge” (*Laws* X, 901d) and these gods “are more, not less, careful for small things than for great” (*Laws* X, 900d). The Neoplatonic philosophers and Christian philosophical theologians follow Plato on this. Aristotle and his followers, the Peripatetics, are at best ambiguous whether God exercises a care for particulars and some Islamic and Jewish philosophical theologians follow them instead of Plato. I use Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy* which borrows a great part of its teaching on providence from Plotinus, Iamblichus and Proclus to give the common position of philosophical Hellenes and Christians in late Antiquity on providence and fate and conclude with a passage from Moses Maimonides which stands in the Peripatetic tradition but which stands also with Boethius in finding an escape from fate and a safety in God’s providence through intellect.
Belief in the gods and lawful behaviour go together.

Laws 885b No one who in obedience to the laws believed that there were Gods, ever intentionally did any unholy act, or uttered any unlawful word; but he who did must have supposed one of three things-either that they did not exist,-which is the first possibility, or secondly, that, if they did, they took no care of man, or thirdly, that they were easily appeased and turned aside from their purpose, by sacrifices and prayers.

The existence of the gods can be proved.

885e Clinias. But is there any difficulty in proving the existence of the Gods? Athenian. How would you prove it? Clinias. How? In the first place, the earth and the sun, and the stars and the universe, and the fair order of the seasons, and the division of them into years and months, furnish proofs of their existence; and also there is the fact that all Hellenes and barbarians believe in them.
A long argument from the cause of motion is produced, it concludes at 899b:

Athenian. And of the stars too, and of the moon, and of the years and months and seasons, must we not say in like manner, that since a soul or souls having every sort of excellence are the causes of all of them, those souls are Gods, whether they are living beings and reside in bodies, and in this way order the whole heaven, or whatever be the place and mode of their existence;—and will any one who admits all this venture to deny that all things full of Gods?

Right belief about them is also important. We must believe that the gods care about humans. *Laws X, 900d*:

Athenian. There will probably be no difficulty in proving to him that the Gods care about the small as well as about the great. For he was present and heard what was said, that they are perfectly good, and that the care of all things is most entirely natural to them.

A proof follows

901a Athenian. Should we not on any principle be entirely mistaken in praising any one who has some special business entrusted to him, if he have a mind which takes care of great matters and no care of small ones? Reflect; he who acts in this way, whether he be God or man, must act from one of two principles.

Clinias What are they?
Either he must think that the neglect of the small matters is of no consequence to the whole, or if he knows that they are of consequence, and he neglects them, his neglect must be attributed to carelessness and indolence. Is there any other way in which his neglect can be explained? For surely, when it is impossible for him to take care of all, he is not negligent if he fails to attend to these things great or small, which a God or some inferior being might be wanting in strength or capacity to manage?

Clinias Certainly not.

Ath. Now, then, let us examine the offenders, who both alike confess that there are Gods, but with a difference—the one saying that they may be appeased, and the other that they have no care of small matters: there are three of us and two of them, and we will say to them—In the first place, you both acknowledge that the Gods hear and see and know all things, and that nothing can escape them which is matter of sense and knowledge...
We must conclude that the universal order is forever something of this kind [truly inescapable, truly justice, and wonderful wisdom] from the evidence of what we see in the All, that this order extends to everything, even to the smallest [μικρότατον], and that the art is wonderful which appears not only in the divine beings but also in the things which one might have supposed providence would have despised for their smallness (Ennead III.2.13)
Boethius *Consolation of Philosophy*

Giving what was common to philosophical Christians and Hellenes in his time reproduces the doctrine of Iamblichus and Proclus on Providence and Fate often in the same words and with images and ratios to help our understanding.

Lady Philosophy describes the distinction between providence and fate:
The generation of all things, the whole production of all changing natures, whatever is moved in any way, receive their causes, their order, and their forms because they are allotted to them from out of the stability of the divine mind. In the high citadel of its simplicity, the unchanging mind of God establishes a plan for the multitude of things. When this plan is thought in terms of the purity of God’s own understanding, it is called Providence. When this same plan is thought of in terms of the manifold different movements which are the life of individual things, it is called Fate by the ancients.

She goes on:

For Providence is the very divine reason itself in the highest principle of all, disposing everything, but fate is a disposition inherent in movable things, through which providence binds all things together, each in its own proper ordering. Boethius, *Cons.* IV. vi.
Providence and Fate are different, but the one hangs upon the other….things which God constructs by his Providence are worked out by Fate in many ways and in time. By whatever means Fate operates, either by certain divine spirits who are servants of providence, or whether its course is woven together by soul, the whole of nature, the celestial motions of the stars, by angelic power or the diverse skills of daemons, one thing is certain, namely that Providence is the unchangeable simple form of all creation, while Fate is the movable interlacing and temporal ordering of the activities which the divine simplicity has placed in being. Everything which is subject to Fate is also subject to Providence, to which Fate is itself subject. But there are things which, though beneath Providence, are above the chain of Fate. These are things which rise above the course of the movement of Fate in virtue of the stability of their position fixed nearest God. Boethius, *Cons.* IV.vi.
When we look at reality in terms of Providence, we see what embraces all things, all at once, however different each thing may be, however varied and even opposed their motions. Simultaneity and immediacy are the modes of Providence which always works in the same way, giving itself as completely to each creature as each one is able and willing to receive infinite goodness. When, in contrast, we look at reality in terms of Fate or Fortune, we see a series of different, but interconnected, motions. These constitute each of the individuals of the universe assigned as they are to their own appropriate places and times. Dispersion and difference are the modes of Fate. Lady Philosophy explains this with words she has taken from Iamblichus and Proclus: Providence and Fate are different, but the one hangs upon the other….things which God constructs by his Providence are worked out by Fate in many ways and in time. By whatever means Fate operates, either by certain divine spirits who are servants of providence, or whether its course is woven together by soul, the whole of nature, the celestial motions of the stars, by angelic power or the diverse skills of daemons,
one thing is certain, namely that Providence is the unchangeable simple form of all creation, while Fate is the movable interlacing and temporal ordering of the activities which the divine simplicity has placed in being. Everything which is subject to Fate is also subject to Providence, to which Fate is itself subject. But there are things which, though beneath Providence, are above the chain of Fate. These are things which rise above the course of the movement of Fate in virtue of the stability of their position fixed nearest God. Boethius, Cons. IV.vi.
The most influential Latin depiction of the essentials of the Neoplatonic doctrine of providence occurs in Book IV of the *Consolation*. To assist our gaining freedom from the merciless turning of the wheel of fate or fortune, Lady Philosophy draws a picture:

Imagine a set of concentric circles. The inmost one comes closest to the simplicity of the centre, while forming itself a kind of centre around which revolve those which are set outside it. The circle furthest out rotates through a wider orbit. The greater distance a circle is from the indivisible centre point, the greater the space its motion spreads through.

The greater the distance from the centre, the greater is the speed of the change which belongs to the life of a circle. What is caught in the furthermost circles is subjected to rapid change. In contrast, anything which joins itself to the centre is pulled into its peace and stability. Boethius, *Cons.* IV.vi.
Having drawn this picture of four moving circles with a common centre, Philosophy reveals that the fixed centre and the rotating circles are images for kinds of life, four kinds of apprehension. The centre corresponds to the vision of God, the seeing by which he intuits everything he makes in one simple view. Thus, the centre is providence. The first moving circle is the activity of the angels and the governing cosmic causes. With their immediate closeness to God, they know and operate by the power of their vision and of his creativity. Below them are the circles formed by soul. The first of these is the human circle constructed by the movement of our changing reasonings and our consequent choices. We make our world by dealing with one thing after another and putting things together, by connecting things into an order as best we can. Every one of our thinkers expends great effort maintaining that this is the sphere of the (limited) freedom of choice. Outside our proper human circle are the spheres of imagination and of sense which produce animal and plant life. Because humans are partly eating, growing, reproducing bodies, and partly animals who move from place to place interacting with one another, humans are caught up in the movement of the outmost circles. However, because a share of the angelic knowledge, and of God’s own creative vision overflows to them, they are also connected to the inmost circle and the stable centre. That humans are in between in this way and can move either towards providence or towards “what the ancients called fate”, is an essential of the common doctrine.
When we choose what we make our primary business and on what we fix our love, we come to be moved by it. When we turn to what is below or outside, we become subject to its motion and are enchained by Fortune. So Lady Philosophy tells the prisoner:

That which goes farther from the first knowing becomes enmeshed in ever stronger chains of Fate, and everything is freer from Fate the closer it seeks the centre of all. And if it cleaves to the steadfast mind of God, it is free from movement and so escapes the necessity imposed by Fortune. The relationship between the ever-changing course of Fate and the stable simplicity of Providence corresponds to the relation between human reasoning and divine understanding, between that which is coming into being and that which is, between time and eternity, between the moving circle and the still point in the centre. Boethius, Cons. IV.vi.

Moses Maimonides thinking more within the Peripatetic tradition arrives at what is, practically speaking, a similar idea.
Moses Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* III.51: Divine Providence is constantly watching over those who have obtained that blessing which is prepared for those who endeavour to obtain it. If man frees his thoughts from worldly matters, obtains a knowledge of God in the right way, and rejoices in that knowledge, it is impossible that any kind of evil should befall him while he is with God, and God with him. When he does not meditate on God, when he is separated from God, then God is also separated from him; then he is exposed to any evil that might befall him; for it is only this link with God that secures the presence of Providence and protection from evil accidents. Hence it may occur that the perfect man is at times not happy, whilst no evil befalls those who are imperfect; in these cases what happens to them is due to fortune. This principle I find also expressed in the Law: “And I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them: so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?” (Deut. 31.17). It is clear that we ourselves are the cause of this hiding of the face, and that the screen that separates us from God is of our own creation. This is the meaning of the words: “And I will surely hide my face in that day, for all the evils which they shall have wrought” (Deut. 31.18). There is undoubtedly no difference in this regard between one single person and a whole community. It is now clearly established that the cause of our being exposed to fortune, and abandoned to destruction like cattle, is to be found in our separation from God. Those who have their God dwelling in their hearts, are not touched by any evil whatever….. “Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace” (Job 22.21); i.e., turn unto Him, and you will be safe from all evil.