Convergences between Platonism and the Abrahamic Religions

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Greek philosophical monotheism and the quest for the causes

Adam Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers as Theologians: The Divine Arche* (Aldershot/Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), vii:

“…[T]he emergence of Greek philosophy coincides with the theological elaboration of the concept of the divine. The philosophical interest in establishing the cosmic *arche*—that is, both the principle and the beginning of the world—is rooted in the interest of what constitutes the divinity of the gods, which together give rise to a very strong monotheistic bias of theological views of the most of the Greek philosophers.”
There is one Divine Essence which is called and which is God: eternal, without body, without parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, the Maker and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible. Augsburg 1530.

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

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

There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute... Westminster 1646.
The Baltimore Catechism
From 1885 to 1960s the standard for Catholic instruction in the USA

Lesson II: God and His Perfections

8. What do we mean when we say that God is the Supreme Being?
When we say that God is the Supreme Being we mean that He is above all creatures, the self-existing and infinitely perfect Spirit.

I am the First, and I am the Last, and besides me there is no God. (Isaiah 44:6)

9. What is a spirit?
A spirit is a being that has understanding and free will, but no body, and will never die.

To whom then have you likened God? Or what image will you make for Him? (Isaiah 40:18)

10. What do we mean when we say that God is self-existing?
When we say that God is self-existing we mean that He does not owe His existence to any other being.

I am who am. (Exodus 3:14)
**Gnothi Seauton**

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

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

Wisdom consists in knowing God and by Him to know his own self (à se connoître soi-même). The knowledge of ourselves (nous-mêmes) ought to elevate us to the knowledge of God. To rightly understand the human, it is necessary to think that it is composed of two parts, which are the soul and the body. Bishop Bossuet, Tutor to the Dauphin, 1679
Socrates’ *Apology* (Plato)

Chaerephon…went to Delphi and boldly asked the oracle to tell him whether…. anyone was wiser than I was, and the Pythian prophetess answered, that there was no man wiser…. When I heard the answer, I said to myself, What can the god mean? and what is the interpretation of his riddle? for I know that I have no wisdom, small or great. What then can he mean when he says that I am the wisest of men? And yet he is a god, and cannot lie; that would be against his nature. After long consideration, I thought of a method of trying the question. I reflected that if I could only find a man wiser than myself, then I might go to the god with a refutation in my hand. I should say to him, 'Here is a man who is wiser than I am; but you said that I was the wisest.' Accordingly I went to one who had the reputation of wisdom….

The truth is, O men of Athens, that God only is wise; and by his answer he intends to show that the wisdom of men is worth little or nothing; he is not speaking of Socrates, he is only using my name by way of illustration, as if he said, He, O men, is the wisest, who, like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is in truth worth nothing. And so I go about the world, obedient to the god, and search and make enquiry into the wisdom of any one, whether citizen or stranger, who appears to be wise; and if he is not wise, then in vindication of the oracle I show him that he is not wise; and my occupation quite absorbs me, and I have no time to give either to any public matter of interest or to any concern of my own, but I am in utter poverty by reason of my devotion to the god….
Socrates’ *Apology*

For if I tell you that to do as you say would be a disobedience to the God, and therefore that I cannot hold my tongue, you will not believe that I am serious; and if I say again that daily to discourse about virtue, and of those other things about which you hear me examining myself and others, is the greatest good of man, and that the unexamined life is not worth living, you are still less likely to believe me. Yet I say what is true…
Socratic Philosophy as Religion

Socrates, as represented in the *Apology*, is given enough to found a religious revolution. His life will be the saintly exemplar for the followers of this new Hellenic way; his death is its first martyrdom. The Socratic foundations are these:

**Philosophical activity is a divine vocation.**
Its work is self-knowledge.
In this philosophic labour the Delphic Oracle is vindicated and its command fulfilled. So philosophy may be represented as the way to fulfil God’s oracular command to self-knowledge.

In self-knowledge, and essential to its structure, the positive center by which all is evaluated moves to the divine. God’s knowledge is true knowledge and the standard of human knowing.

Religion is not only a matter of the state or family, but also about the permanent good of the individual.
The care of God for the one fulfilling the divine command to self-knowledge manifests itself in the gift of an interior divine presence; in principle, self-knowledge and interior dialogue with God belong together.

Only one great shift on this foundation is necessary in order to transform the meaning of *Gnothi seauton*, and it takes place very explicitly and intentionally with both Plato and Aristotle. Both the shift itself, and the transformation it brings about, are of unequalled importance for the religions of the Hellenistic world: pagan ones, Judaism, and Christianity. The philosophical theology of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism are determined by the shift in the doctrine of God undertaken by Plato and Aristotle.
From Socratic to Platonic Religion

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

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

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

It is Aristotle in the Nicomachean Ethics whom Plotinus has in mind when he asserts at Ennead 5.3.4.11 that “to know oneself is no longer to know as a human.”
The Philosophical Religion of Plato and Aristotle

When this theory about the nature of God, and this view of the human and its goal, are combined, we get a new understanding of the consequence of knowing God and the self together. The Alcibiades of Plato reversed the interpretation of the Gnothi seauton [know yourself] of the Delphic oracle. Whereas, before Plato, its purpose had been to separate the divine and the human, for Plato and his successors, including Aristotle, it was used for the opposite purpose. By self-knowledge we would imitate the gods and abolish, so far as we are able, the difference between us and them.
S: I will tell you what I suspect to be the meaning and lesson of that inscription. [*Gnothi seauton*] Let me take an illustration from sight, which I imagine to be the only one suitable to my purpose.  A: What do you mean?

S: Consider; if some one were to say to the eye, ‘See thyself,’ as you might say to a man, ‘Know thyself,’ what is the nature and meaning of this precept? Would not his meaning be:—That the eye should look at that in which it would see itself? A: Clearly.

S: And what are the objects in looking at which we see ourselves?

A: Clearly, Socrates, in looking at mirrors and the like.

S: Very true; and is there not something of the nature of a mirror in our own eyes?  A: Certainly. …

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

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

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

S: Then this is that part of the soul which resembles God; and he who looks at this and all that is divine, will be most likely to know himself? 133c
S: You and the state, if you act wisely and justly, will act according to the will of God? A: Certainly. 134d
S: As I was saying before, you will look only at what is bright and divine, and act with a view to them? A: Yes.
S: In that mirror you will see and know yourselves and your own good? A: Yes.
S: And so you will act rightly and well? A: Yes.
S: In which case, I will be security for your happiness. A: I accept the security.
S: But if you act unrighteously, your eye will turn to the dark and godless, and being in darkness and ignorance of yourselves, you will probably do deeds of darkness. A: Very possibly.

It is of the greatest importance that Platonic self-knowledge is mediated both through the human (a properly disposed lover) and through God.
On Moses as Philosopher-King, Prophet, Priest, Paradigm, and Mediator.
So, what exactly is the nature of Moses, the figure who embodied both sacred and secular perfection? If we look to the end of *De Vita Mosis*, where Moses’ essential nature is restored, Philo provides a clear answer:

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

As pure mind, Moses is the undivided light, the perfect activity, which is the source and end of all things. Through his embodied existence, Moses mediates his higher nature by means of encompassing and actualizing each of the four mental faculties that correspond to the four offices. Moses’ nature in itself is whole, which we as mortal humans know in virtue of its distinct division into parts. In the realm of generation, these parts must remain distinct for the sake of human nature, and in this way, the Roman ideal state is the whole in which both sacred and secular parts are retained.
On Moses as Philosopher-King, Priest and Prophet

The account of the education and offices of Moses, the mediator between God and the cosmos, depends on differentiating between what is innate and belongs to philosophical labour, on the one hand, and what is from without and above, on the other. By the union of both Moses acquires the capacities of the philosopher-king, legislator, high priest, and prophet who establishes the cosmic priesthood of Israel. While he receives a complete education, including symbolic philosophy, from all kinds of masters employed from Egypt, the adjacent countries, and Greece, his innate genius meant that he was recollecting rather than learning and was improving upon what his teachers gave (Mos. I.18-24). This grounding of his human labours in the nature given to him indicates the principle at work in Philo’s treatment of the unique bridge between the divine and the human, one with both sides.

We have the beginning of the unification of offices and modes of knowledge, sacred and secular, mystical, prophetic, and philosophical in the Moses of Philo, and non identical iterations in the Constantine of Eusebius, the ecclesiastical hierarch of Dionysius, Farabi’s “single idea of the Philosopher, Supreme Ruler, Prince, Legislator, and Imam” and in the Christ of Aquinas. It is now for us to establish the connections. Doing so would draw the three Abrahamic religions together with one another and with the Hellenism through which they became what they are both as a group and individually. Enabling this to be seen is an urgent task in every sense.
Moses as Monad, God, King, Paradigm, Mystic and Mediator

What more shall I say? Has he not also enjoyed an even greater communion with the Father and Creator of the universe, being thought worthy of being called by the same appellation?

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

When he is about to die, the Father changes Moses from “a double being, composed of soul and body, so that his whole nature is that of a monad [μονάδος] without elements, thus transforming him wholly and entirely into a most sun-like mind” (Mos. II.288).
Excursus

Christian and Islamic Heirs of Philo’s Moses: Constantine, Justinian, Roger II of Sicily, Emperor Otto III, al-Farabi’s Philosopher, Supreme Ruler, Prince, Legislator, and Imam
At the center of a philosophical religion is the ideal of Godlikeness attained through the perfection of reason. For one thing, intellectual perfection is the goal to which all members of the religious community ought to be directed. While this ideal can be realized to a greater or lesser degree, it is realized most completely through philosophy, culminating in knowledge of God. Thus philosophy is the highest form of worship. At the same time, intellectual perfection is also religion’s foundation, because it is the most distinctive trait of the founders and leaders of a religious community. Christian philosophers push this view furthest: their Christ is not only a perfect philosopher, but wisdom itself. The key to understanding a philosophical religion is its moral-political character. In a community based on a philosophical religion the life of all members is ordered towards what is best. The beliefs, practices, and institutions that make up this order are divinely ordained. Such a community, therefore, is best described as a theocracy, a community ruled by God. The conceptual move from an excellent order to a divine order is based on two steps: Firstly, something ordered towards what is best – whether an organism or the celestial spheres, a human life or a political community – is taken to be rationally ordered. Secondly, the rational principle that accounts for this order is identified with God. The conception of God as Reason is the metaphysical foundation of a philosophical religion. Note that the theocratic character of the religious community does not depend on the rule of a specific social group, but is a function of its rational order. A rationally ordered democracy, for example, would also count as a theocracy on this view. In the ideal theocracy, as we will see, God’s rule and self-rule coincide.
Returning to the *Gnothi Seauton*
Plotinus *Ennead* 5.1
(MacKenna translation)
On the rise to self-knowledge in the Divine *NOUS*

5.1.1. [Why have souls forgotten] the father, God, and, though members of the Divine and entirely of that world, do they ignore at once themselves and It? The evil…has its source in self-will,…A double discipline must be applied if human beings in this pass are to be reclaimed, and brought back to their origins, lifted once more towards the Supreme and One and First. **There is the method…declaring the dishonour of the objects which the Soul holds here in honour; the second teaches or recalls to the soul its race and worth; this latter is the leading truth, and, clearly brought out, is the evidence of the other.**
CHAPTER X, 16. And being admonished by these books [of the Platonists, certainly including important treatises of Plotinus] to return into myself, I entered into my inward soul, guided by thee. [admonitus redire ad memet ipsum, intravi in intima mea duce te], This I could do because you were my helper. And I entered, and with the eye of my soul -- such as it was -- saw above the same eye of my soul and above my mind the Immutable Light. [intravi et vidi qualicumque oculo animae meae supra eundem oculum animae meae, supra mentem meam, lucem incommutabilem] It was not the common light, which all flesh can see; nor was it simply a greater one of the same sort, as if the light of day were to grow brighter and brighter, and flood all space. It was not like that light, but different, yea, very different from all earthly light whatever. Nor was it above my mind in the same way as oil is above water, or heaven above earth, but it was higher, because it made me, and I was below it, because I was made by it. He who knows the Truth knows that Light, and he who knows it knows eternity. Love knows it, O Eternal Truth and True Love and Beloved Eternity! Thou art my God, to whom I sigh both night and day. [Superior, quia ipsa fecit me, et ego inferior, quia factus ab ea. qui novit veritatem, novit eam, et qui novit eam, novit aeternitatem; caritas novit eam. o aeterna veritas et vera caritas et cara aeternitas, tu es deus meus, tibi suspiro die ac nocte.]
When I first knew thee, thou didst lift me up, that I might see that there was something to be seen, though I was not yet fit to see it. And thou didst beat back the weakness of my sight, shining forth upon me thy dazzling beams of light, and I trembled with love and fear. I realized that I was far away from thee in the land of unlikeness, *et reverberasti infirmitatem aspectus mei, radians in me vehementer, et contremui amore et horrore. et inveni longe me esse a te in regione dissimilitudinis* as if I heard thy voice from on high: "I am the food of strong men; grow and you shall feed on me; nor shall you change me, like the food of your flesh into yourself, but you shall be changed into my likeness." And I understood that thou chastenest man for his iniquity, and makest my soul to be eaten away as though by a spider.

And I said, "Is Truth, therefore, nothing, because it is not diffused through space – neither finite nor infinite?" And thou didst cry to me from afar, "I am that I am." And I heard this, as things are heard in the heart, and there was no room for doubt. I should have more readily doubted that I am alive than that the Truth exists – the Truth which is "clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made." *[clamasti de longinquo, `immo vero ego sum qui sum.' et audivi, sicut auditur in corde, et non erat prorsus unde dubitarem, faciliusque dubitarem vivere me quam non esse veritatem, quae per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspicitur.]*
§ 62. Having now attained to the Knowledge of this Supreme Being, of Permanent Existence, which has no Cause of his own Existence, but is the Cause why all things else exist; he was desirous to know by what Means he had attained this Knowledge, and by which of his Faculties he had apprehended this Being. And first he examined all his Senses, viz. his Hearing, Sight, Smelling, Tasting and Feeling, and perceived that all these apprehended nothing but Body, or what was in Body. For the Hearing apprehended nothing but Sounds, and these came from the Undulation of the Air, when Bodies are struck one against another. The Sight, apprehends Colours. The Smelling, Odours. The Taste, Savours. And the Touch, the Temperatures and Dispositions of Bodies, such as Hardness Softness, Roughness ad Smoothness. Nor does the Imagination apprehend any thing, but as it has Length, Breadth and Thickness. Now all these things which are thus apprehended, are the Adjuncts of Bodies; nor can these Senses apprehend any thing else, because they are Faculties diffused through Bodies, and divided according to the division of Bodies, and for that reason cannot apprehend any thing else but divisible Body.
For since this Faculty is diffused through the visible Body, 'tis impossible, but that when it apprehends any thing whatsoever, that thing so apprehended, must be divided as the Faculty is divided. For which Reason, no Faculty which is seated in Body, can apprehend any thing but what is Body, or in it. Now we have already demonstrated, that this necessarily Existent Being is free in every respect from all Properties of Body; and consequently not to be apprehended, but by something which is neither Body, nor any Faculty inherent in Body, nor has any manner of dependence upon it, nor is either within it, or without it, nor joined to it, nor separated from it. From whence it appeared to him, that he had apprehended this Being by that which was his Essence, and gained a certain Knowledge of him. And from hence he concluded, that this Essence was Incorporeal, and free from all the Properties of Body. And that all his External Part which he saw, was not in reality his Essence; by that his true Essence was That, by which he apprehended that Absolute Being of necessary Existence.

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

There is an alternative Platonic – Peripatetic tradition dealing with self-reflexivity to the one I have somewhat exhibited. The tradition from which I have outlined some elements depends on the soul having access to its own essence in self-reflexivity and to the noetic by way of mental interiority. Among Christians Augustine is the great propagator of that tradition. There is another tradition which comes from the Neoplatonic understanding of thinking and being as the return of the One upon itself. It combines elements from Plato and from Aristotle. This is especially worked out by Proclus and is important both within the Islamic world and among the Christians after they have assimilated Arabic learning. The so-called Liber de causis, elements of the Corpus Areopagiticum, and, ultimately, works of Proclus, propagate this in the Latin world where it mixed well with what it received from Aristotle to produce the philosophical underpinnings of the Christian systems of Albertus Magnus, Aquinas, Eckhart and Cusa to mention a few prominent adherents.
III. A List of Convergences
1. **God as perfect good.** *Republic* II, 379b-381c: the goodness of god who can only do *good*, perfection, and consequent changelessness *απαθεία* 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.
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.”
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” [εἰναι in Greek (*einaî*, “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 intellection 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
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…. 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.]
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 verbum 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.
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...
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
“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.”
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 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.
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 [this exactly repeats Plato’s *Parmenides*]; nor is It kingship or wisdom; nor is It one, nor is It unity, nor is It Godhead or Goodness; 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.
Ibn Tufayl

Although self-knowledge was derived from the knowledge of God, union with the Absolute requires forgetfulness of self

§ 83. This he applied himself to; and as for the Negative Attributes, § 84. But he found that his own Being was not excluded by his Thoughts, no not at such times when he was most deeply immersed in the Contemplation of the first, true, necessarily self-existent Being. Which concerned 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 attained 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 disappeared and vanished, and were as if they had never been, and amongst these his own Being disappeared too, and there remained 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.) ... Wherefore he deeply immersed himself into this State, and witnessed that which neither Eye hath seen, nor Ear heard; nor hath it ever entered 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
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.
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!
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.
Over the Eastern apse of the great Abbey Church at Monreale presides: “INESSUS CRISTOS O PANTO KRATOR” “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, O PANTO KRATOR,” 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 KOSMOU (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 KOSMOU (cosmos), who follows me shall not ΠΕΡΙΠΑΤΙΣΗΙ / 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.
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.
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.

The Real Light is Allah; and the name "light" is otherwise only predicated metaphorically and conveys no real meaning…. 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…. 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.
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.
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:

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.
Greek and Hebrew Justice

“The Greek idea of justice (dikē) was initially a religious idea.” After outlining the form it takes in the Hellenic poets and philosophers, Dr Crouse 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: “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 *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.
Al-Farabi, *The Opinions of the People of the Virtuous City*,
Clearly dependent on the *Republic* though probably not directly
On Justice: first in God.

**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.
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.
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 erotica] and desire for knowledge on those subjects; owing to which desire, philosophy [philosophia] has sprung up, by which, man, though mortal, is made immortal.
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.
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.
The Cosmos, which he calls a god and son of God, is both Created and Eternal

(8) 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].
Philo De Opificio Mundi
The Cosmos is both Created and Eternal

(171)... The fifth lesson that Moses teaches us is, that God exerts his providence \textit{[pronoia]} for the benefit of the world \textit{[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 \textit{[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 \textit{[hena]} as has been stated, having made it like to himself in singleness \textit{[monosin]}; and that he exercises a continual care \textit{[pronoia]} for that which he has created, will live a happy and blessed life, stamped with the doctrines of piety and holiness.
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”.
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.
Plotinus

States Plato’s doctrine in a way which determines the whole Neoplatonic tradition

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 (Enn. III.2.13)
Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*

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.*
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.