EMERGENT COMPLEXITY

Article

From Classical Metaphysics to Christian Theology

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Abstract

This essay investigates the symbolic formation of the figure of God in Christianity, highlighting the structural continuity with classical Greek metaphysics. Rejecting essentialist or theological explanations, it argues that Plato and Aristotle do not anticipate Christian theology, but rather establish ontological functions — order, intelligibility, orientation — which will later be reinscribed under a new figuration. The Platonic Demiurge and the Aristotelian Unmoved Mover are not theological gods, but conceptual operators that render the world legible and thought orientable. Christian theology repurposes these functions, attributing to them language, will, and agency. Throughout the text, it is shown how the figure of the Christian God results from the synthesis of philosophical principles, mythical narratives, and religious symbolic *dispositifs*. The aim is not to trace a linear genealogy, but to reveal how the divine function shifts across distinct symbolic regimes, while maintaining a fundamental operative coherence: to ensure that the world is *cosmos*, not chaos.

Keywords: Plato, Aristotle, Demiurge, Unmoved Mover, Idea of the Good, Logos, Symbolic Reinscription, Christian God, Metaphysics, Narrative

Plato, Aristotle, and the Symbolic Formation of the Christian God

To understand the figure of God in Christianity requires returning to the philosophical structures that allowed its symbolic inscription. It is not an isolated invention nor a rupture with ancient thought, but a mutation: functions already active in classical metaphysics are reorganized under a new symbolic regime, the theological. Plato and Aristotle do not provide religious attributes, but they establish schemes of order, orientation, and intelligibility that will later be converted into narrative.

Christianity does not arise in opposition to Greek philosophy, but as its reorganization. Structures that in philosophy operated implicitly — ordering chaos, ensuring cohesion, founding intelligibility — are reinscribed as functions of an absolute subject. The difference lies not in content, but in the regime of inscription: the impersonal operator becomes a speaking character; the abstract structure, an instance endowed with will and word.

The aim of this essay is not to trace doctrinal genealogies, but to recognize the continuity of certain operations: to institute order in becoming, to make the world intelligible, to fix a figure of meaning.

Plato and Aristotle are not merely historical antecedents, but founders of these operations, which Christianity will condense as attributes of God. The Demiurge organizes matter by reference to an eternal

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model; the Unmoved Mover directs the cosmos through the perfection of pure act. Neither is "God" in the theological sense, but both are conceptual operators that will be reinscribed in a new symbolic field.

This reading requires a method that rejects both transcendence and essentialism. It is not a matter of identifying the Demiurge with God or reducing the Unmoved Mover to the Christian figure, but of showing that certain functions — giving cohesion to the world, offering orientation to thought — traverse different symbolic regimes.

Greek philosophy institutes conceptual structures; Christianity reinscribes them with a new coding, transforming philosophical gesture into theological narrative. It is within this horizon that the examination of Platonic thought opens.

Plato's philosophy arises from the experience of the instability of the sensible: a multiple, corruptible world, exposed to incessant becoming. The sensible, unable to guarantee permanence or truth, demands a plane that does not dissolve in change. Hence the separation between the sensible and the intelligible — not as two substantial worlds, but as a gesture of symbolic inscription: the intelligible ensures that the sensible can be interpreted. The Demiurge of the *Timaeus* emerges in this context, not as a creator *ex nihilo*, but as an operator who contemplates the eternal model and reorganizes formless matter. The Demiurge inscribes proportion and measure in the *chôra*, an unstable receptacle saturated with possibilities. He does not create matter, but reconfigures it according to a rationality compatible with it. His function is twofold: the reading of the intelligible as relational matrix and the inscription in the sensible as proportion and harmony. The cosmos results from this operative compatibility between the indeterminacy of matter and the measure of the model.

The demiurgic gesture is thus a response to an excess of possibilities, not a teleological imposition. Goodness is the principle of this operation. Plato affirms that the Demiurge acts out of goodness, but this is neither moral nor affective: it is an ontological principle of organization, that which stabilizes and orders. The Good, in this sense, is the condition for deciphering the real. This structure will later be reinscribed in Christian theology as good creation: God creates because he is good. In Plato, however, goodness is not personal will, but condition of order. The demiurgic gesture articulates operations that Christianity will recognize as divine: separating, naming, stabilizing.

In the *Timaeus*, each element is configured by mathematical proportions; the cosmos is a figure of rationality, not of arbitrariness. This rationality fulfills the function of making the world intelligible, a function that theology will convert into creative word, expression of divine intelligence. The symbolic regime changes: where Plato speaks of proportion, theology will speak of word; where there is eternal model, there will be creative will.

Even more decisive is the figure of the Good in Book VI of the *Republic*. The Good is the supreme principle, prior to the Ideas, the condition of their intelligibility. Like the Sun in the visible world, it makes it possible to see, to understand, to orient. Without it, there is no truth and no knowledge. Christian theology will transpose this figure into God as source of light, of truth, and of being.

The language changes, from philosophical analogy to dogmatic formulation, but the function remains the same: to guarantee coherence and to orient thought. The Platonic Good is not a subject, it does not intervene. It is a pure operative condition.

The Christian God, by contrast, speaks, legislates, and creates. This difference does not annul continuity: what in Plato was abstract principle becomes narrative subject. The silent operator turns into voice; the impersonal structure into sacred character. The gesture, constant, is the same: to give form to the multiple, decipherability to the formless, cosmos to chaos.

In Christianity, what was philosophical structure becomes absolute subject — not by the addition of attributes, but by symbolic transposition of functions. To create, to legislate, to orient, and to give meaning cease to appear as effects of a divine essence and present themselves as reorganization of gestures already operative in classical metaphysics. This condensation marks the Christian figure of God as a totality in which order, language, and will are composed.

The next question is to understand how Aristotle radicalizes this inheritance by displacing agency: instead of an operator who acts, he proposes a principle whose very excellence suffices to serve as reference for the real.

Aristotle takes up the Platonic matrix but removes the Demiurge as agent. In place of the hand that imposes form, he establishes the Unmoved Mover: an instance that does not manufacture the world, but renders it intelligible as end. As pure act, it does not intervene, but offers a reference of perfection. Movement does not result from external causality: it is structured by relation to a final term that confers direction and cohesion.

In Book XII of the *Metaphysics*, the Unmoved Mover is "thought thinking itself": self-sufficient reality, pure actuality without becoming. By thinking itself, it becomes an exemplary form for each being to reach its entelechy. The cosmos does not arise from *creatio ex nihilo*, but from a finalistic ordering: not divine hands, but orientation by the best possible.

The intelligibility of the Aristotelian universe thus depends on final causality. Each being finds identity because it tends toward the actualization of what it can be; the Mover guarantees coherence not through action, but through contemplative excellence. Chaos does not prevail because everything is oriented toward its proper end. This architecture prepares theological reinscription. By excluding demiurgic agency, Aristotle fixes an absolute principle that, without intervening, is condition of order.

Christianity will inherit this matrix and reorganize it in a new symbolic regime: formal presence becomes character who speaks and legislates through the word. The difference is clear: where Aristotle describes a contemplative reference, theology presents a subject endowed with will and language. In Plato, the goodness of the Demiurge was a principle of ordering; in Aristotle, this goodness is transposed into the perfection of pure act. God, here, is absolute thought: independent of the world, yet indispensable to its intelligibility.

Christian theology will transform this silent presence into narrative figure. The absence of agency in the Unmoved Mover introduces a tension: transcendent for not participating in movement, immanent

as condition of its coherence. Aristotle formulates this duplicity in philosophical terms; theology reinscribes it as devotional articulation.

The impact is structural. Without Platonic goodness and Aristotelian pure act, Christianity would lack the instruments to think a God who founds meaning. The Unmoved Mover functions as schema of cohesion: presence that does not speak, and yet institutes measure. By converting it into a subject who speaks, theology prolongs an already delineated function: principle of meaning, origin of order, condition of intelligibility. Thus the Unmoved Mover is not full subject, but structure of reference. Christian theology will convert that reference into a named person. The difference lies not in the function — organizing the world by a criterion exterior to immediate experience — but in the symbolic regime that enunciates it: in Aristotle, a thought that thinks itself; in theology, a word addressed to the human.

If Plato inscribed the gesture of ordering and Aristotle that of orienting, Christianity will unite both: the God who creates is also the one who attracts. The Christian tradition read Greek philosophy as seed maturing into theology, but more than natural evolution it is symbolic appropriation: philosophical categories are reinterpreted in narrative form. The God of the Old Testament represents the most decisive reorganization of this inheritance. What in Plato and Aristotle remained concealed principle — proportion and perfection — now appears as named and speaking subject.

Genesis opens with the founding gesture of separation and naming: "Let there be light," and there was light. The world is no longer only cosmos intelligible by proportions, but creation enunciated by word. In this transposition, philosophy gives way to religion. The Demiurge contemplated eternal models, the Mover attracted by perfection; the biblical God intervenes and legislates. His word is performative gesture: to speak is to create, to order is to institute. The coherence of the world rests no longer on mathematical proportion or ontological finality, but on the word-law that founds cosmos and community.

This displacement is also affective. The goodness of the Demiurge and the attraction of the Mover condense into divine love: contemplative desire becomes love that chooses, establishes covenants, and demands fidelity. But this love is asymmetrical bond, capable of welcoming and of subjugating. Hence the constitutive contradictions of the biblical text: the same God who presents himself as source of love is also severe legislator, who punishes and legitimates wars. Love and violence coexist as attributes of the same subject. Religion thus becomes political instrument. The biblical God does not only guarantee the order of the cosmos: he regulates behaviour, institutes laws, and organizes collective destinies.

What was philosophical structure becomes normative narrative and power of institution. The Old Testament reinscribes classical functions within a new symbolic framework, preparing Christianity. It is this continuity-in-difference that opens the space for Christianity. Philosophy had provided principles of order and intelligibility, Hebrew religion had transformed them into narrative of creation and law. Christianity will make the synthesis: from philosophy it inherits rationality that organizes and orients, from religion the subject who speaks and legislates.

The Christian God is born of this condensation: love, law, and creative goodness. The diagnosis is one of structural convergence. The Christian God is a metamorphosis of an ancient function: the need for the real to be decipherable. This coherence assumes diverse forms — mathematical proportion, teleological finality, creative word — but the operation is the same. By inscribing it in an absolute subject, Christianity inaugurates a new field of tensions: what was structure becomes power; what was principle, institution; what was intelligibility, regime of obedience.

From that point on, Western philosophy would have to measure itself against this figure — the absolute subject who guarantees meaning, yet concentrates contradictions within itself. This is not an inevitable destiny, but a long chain of reinscriptions: philosophy provided conditions of figuration, religion reinscribed them as narrative, Christianity condensed them into an absolute subject. The result is the transformation of a persistent demand — that the real be made intelligible — into political institution.

Conclusion

Christianity, as crystallized in the history of the West, cannot be understood as pure revelation, detached from the operations of classical thought. What appears in it as absolute novelty — a single God, creator, legislator, principle and end of all things — is in fact the result of a symbolic condensation in which philosophical functions previously formulated are reinscribed in narrative and religious form. The thesis that imposes itself here is clear: there is a philosophical paternity of the Christian figure of God. Christianity does not invent the divine structure *ex nihilo*; it inherits, adapts, and reconfigures the principles that Plato and Aristotle had already inscribed within the horizon of metaphysics, adding to them the narrative voice of the Hebrew tradition and the affective density of faith.

In Plato we find the first gesture. In the *Timaeus*, the Demiurge does not create matter, but organizes it out of goodness (*agathotēs*), transforming the formless into cosmos through mathematical proportions and structural separations (29a–30c). This goodness is not psychological virtue, but ontological principle: the good is that which orders, that which renders intelligible. In Book VI of the *Republic*, Plato radicalizes this idea by affirming the Idea of the Good as supreme principle, comparing it to the Sun — it is what makes seeing and knowing possible, the condition of all intelligibility (509b–510a). Already inscribed here is the structure that Christianity will inherit: goodness as foundation of the cosmos, the Good as source of intelligibility.

Aristotle, in turn, reformulates this inheritance. In Book XII of the *Metaphysics*, he proposes the Unmoved Mover as "thought thinking itself," pure act, eternal and necessary (1072b). For Aristotle, there cannot be infinite regress of causes: movement requires an originating principle, a cause without cause. The Unmoved Mover is simultaneously efficient cause — because it inaugurates the chain of motion — and final cause — because it draws all things toward the perfection of its contemplation. The cosmos exists because there is an instance that does not move, yet makes movement possible. Already here we find the idea of an absolute principle, uncreated, eternal, beginning and end of all that exists.

When the Old Testament reinscribes these functions, it does so in a distinct symbolic regime: no longer as philosophical structure, but as sacred narrative. In Genesis 1, God creates through the word:

"And God said: Let there be light. And there was light." To name is to create, to order is to institute. In Exodus 20, that same God delivers the Law at Sinai: the intelligibility of the cosmos becomes communal norm, the order of creation extends into the order of collective life. The divine word is not mere description, but absolute performativity. The hidden subject of Greek philosophy becomes speaking subject, legislator, present in history.

It is the New Testament that will take this reinscriptions to the extreme, condensing philosophical and religious functions into a single figure. The prologue of the Gospel of John opens with a formula resonant both with philosophy and with myth: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (1:1). Creation is no longer only separation and naming: it is eternal Word, *Logos*, absolute principle. In Revelation, the glorified Christ declares: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (22:13). Here we find explicitly the duplicity already hinted at in the Unmoved Mover: efficient cause and final cause, principle and end of all things. Christianity unites in a single voice what Plato and Aristotle had kept in distinct figures.

The structural convergence is thus evident. Plato provides goodness as ordering principle; Aristotle provides the cause without cause, efficient and final; the Old Testament provides the narrating and legislating subject. Christianity condenses these three dimensions into a single figure: a God who creates out of goodness, who draws through love, who legislates by word. What was abstract structure becomes absolute subject. What was philosophical principle becomes religious narrative. What was intelligibility of the cosmos becomes politics of humanity.

It is important, however, to underline the difference of symbolic regime. Classical philosophy operated in the field of abstraction: universal principles, hidden functions, operators of order. Hebrew religion introduced the narrative dimension: a God who speaks, intervenes, legislates. Christianity, finally, carries out the synthesis: it attributes to a single personal subject all the dispersed attributes of philosophy and mythical tradition. The result is a God who is simultaneously goodness, love, law, principle, and end. A totalizing God, who not only guarantees the intelligibility of the world, but claims the government of history and of humanity.

The diagnosis is unavoidable: the Christian God is the condensed heir of classical metaphysics. His figure was not born of revelation alone, but of philosophy turned into myth, of abstraction converted into narrative subject. Philosophical ideas that were abstract acquire religious body, and the myths of pagan gods are dissolved in the unity of a single God who concentrates within himself all the classical functions of intelligibility. This transposition is not innocent: by transforming principles into subject, religion acquires political power, moral authority, and the capacity to organize entire societies.

Christianity, then, is less rupture than synthesis. It is philosophy turned into religion, metaphysics made narrative, abstraction converted into institution. The Christian God is the Demiurge who has gained a voice, the Unmoved Mover who has become love, philosophical goodness that has become law and salvation.

This essay forms a conceptual diptych with the text *From Classical Metaphysics to Christian Theology*, where the analysis of symbolic reinscriptions that transform the philosophical operators of the Greek tradition into the theological figures of Christianity is further developed. While the present work focuses on the symbolic operation of the hidden subject and the intelligibility of the world, the complementary essay deepens the synthesis effected by Christianity between Greek philosophical structure and Hebrew narrative tradition, showing how the figure of God is constituted as condensation of inherited ontological functions, reorganized under a new symbolic regime.

"The Christian God was not born of revelation alone: he was born of philosophy. He is beginning and end, cause and destiny, love and law — the religious condensation of the most ancient philosophical necessity: that the world be legible."

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