[Hermes] is called the First Author of theology: he was succeeded by Orpheus, who came second amongst ancient theologians: Aglaophemus, who had been initiated into the sacred teaching of Orpheus, was succeeded in theology by Pythagoras, whose disciple was Philolaus, the teacher of our Divine Plato. Hence there is one ancient theology (prisca theologia) . . . taking its origin in Hermes and culminating in the Divine Plato.

- Marsilio Ficino, Pimander (1471) ¹

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¹ Giordano Bruno, Cena de la ceneri (1584), dial. 1 and 4, quoted in Yates, Giordano Bruno . . . pp. 236, 244-45.
Fig. 01-P4.1) Hermes Trismegistus (Siena Cathedral, 1488)

The inscriptions read:
(below)
HERMES MERCURIUS TRIMEGISTUS CONTEMPORANEUS MOYSE
Heremces Mercurius Tri(s)megistus Contemporary of Moses
(left)
SUSCIPITE O LICERAS ET LEGES EGIPTII [should be ‘LITTERAS’]
Take up thy Letters and Laws O Egyptians
(right)
DEUS OMNIUM CREATOR
SECUM DEUM FECIT
VISIBILEM ET HUNC
QUO OBJEKTATUS EST ET
VALDEAM AVIT PROPRIUM
FILIO UT QUI APPELLATUR
SANCTUM VERBUM:

(According to Scott, this is an abridgement of the Latin passage in Lactantius, quoting Asclepius, which reads as follows:

“The Lord and Creator of all things, whom we have the right to call God, since he made the second God visible and sensible. . . . Since, therefore, he made him first, and alone, and one only, he appeared to him beautiful, and most full of all good things; and he hallowed him and altogether loved him as his own Son.” (Yates, Bruno, pp. 43-43). Scott observes further that the last phrase (“SANCTUM VERBUM”) is from the opening lines of Pimander.

I: (Discourse) of Hermes Trismegistus: Poimandres

Once, when thought came to me of the things that are and my thinking soared high and my bodily senses were restrained, like someone heavy with sleep from too much eating or toil of the body, an enormous being completely unbounded in size seemed to appear to me and call my name and say to me: “What do you want to hear and see; what do you want to learn and know from your understanding?”

“Who are you?” I asked.

“I am Poimandres,” he said, “mind of sovereignty; I know what You want, and I am with you everywhere.”

I said, “I wish to learn about the things that are, to understand their nature and to know god. How much I want to hear!” I said.

Then he said to me: “Keep in mind all that you wish to learn, and I will teach you.”
Saying this, he changed his appearance, and in an instant everything was immediately opened to me. I saw an endless vision in which every thing became light—clear and joyful—and in seeing the vision I came to love it. After a little while, darkness arose separately and descended—fearful and gloomy—coiling sinuously so that it looked to me like a (snake). Then the darkness changed into something of a watery nature, indescribably agitated and smoking like a fire; it produced an unspeakable wailing roar. Then an inarticulate cry like the voice of fire came forth from it. But from the light . . . a holy word mounted upon the (watery) nature, and untempered fire leapt up from the watery nature to the height above. The fire was nimble and piercing and active as well, and because the air was light it followed after spirit and rose up to the fire away from earth and water so that it seemed suspended from the fire. Earth and water stayed behind, mixed with one another, so that (earth) could not be distinguished from water, but they were stirred to hear by the spiritual word that moved upon them.

Poimandres said to me, “Have you understood what this vision means?”

“I shall come to know,” said I.

“I am the light you saw, mind, your god,” he said, “who existed before the watery nature that appeared out of darkness. The light-giving word who comes from mind is the son of god.”

“Go on,” I said.

“This is what you must know: that in you which sees and hears is the word of the lord, but your mind is god the father; they are not divided from one another for their union is life.”

“Thank you,” I said.

“Understand the light, then, and recognize it.” After he said this, he looked me in the face for such a long time that I trembled at his appearance. But when he raised his head, I saw in my mind the light of powers beyond number and a boundless cosmos that had come to be. The fire, encompassed by great power and subdued, kept its place
fixed. In the vision I had because of the discourse of Poimandres, these were my thoughts. Since I was terrified, out of my wits, he spoke to me again. "In your mind you have seen the archetypal form, the preprinciple that exists before a beginning without end." This was what Poimandres said to me.

"The elements of nature—whence have they arisen?" I asked.

And he answered: "From the counsel of god which, having taken in the word and having seen the beautiful cosmos, imitated it, having become a cosmos through its own elements and its progeny of souls. The mind who is god, being androgyne and existing as life and light, by speaking gave birth to a second mind, a craftsman, who, as god of fire and spirit, crafted seven governors; they encompass the sensible world in circles, and their government is called fate."

"From the elements [ ] that weigh downwards, the word of god leapt straight up to the pure craftwork of nature and united with the craftsman-mind (for the word was of the same substance). The weighty elements of nature were left behind, bereft of reason, so as to be mere matter. The craftsman-mind, together with the word, encompassing the circles and whirling them about with a rush, turned his craftworks about, letting them turn from an endless beginning to a limitless end, for it starts where it stops. Revolving as mind wished them to, the circles brought forth from the weighty elements living things without reason (for they no longer kept the word with them); and the air brought forth winged things; the water things that swim. Earth and water had been separated from one another as mind wished, and (earth) brought forth from herself the living things that she held within, four-footed beasts (and) crawling things, wild animals and tame."

"Mind, the father of all, who is life and light, gave birth to a man like himself whom he loved as his own child. The man was most fair: he had the father’s image; and god, who was really in love with his own form, bestowed on him all his craftworks. And after the man had observed what the craftsman had created with the father’s help, he also wished to make some craftwork, and the father agreed to this. Entering the craftsman’s sphere, where he was to have all authority, the man observed his brother’s
craftworks; the governors loved the man, and each gave a share of his own order. Learning well their essence and sharing in their nature, the man wished to break through the circumference of the circles to observe the rule of the one given power over the fire."

"Having all authority over the cosmos of mortals and unreasoning animals, the man broke through the vault and stooped to look through the cosmic framework, thus displaying to lower nature the fair form of god. Nature smiled for love when she saw him whose fairness brings no surfeit (and) who holds in himself all the energy of the governors and the form of god, for in the water she saw the shape of the man’s fairest form and upon the earth its shadow. When the man saw in the water the form like himself as it was in nature, he loved it and wished to inhabit it; wish and action came in the same moment, and he inhabited the unreasoning form. Nature took hold of her beloved, hugged him all about and embraced him, for they were lovers."

"Because of this, unlike any other living thing on earth, mankind is twofold—in the body mortal but immortal in the essential man. Even though he is immortal and has authority over all things, mankind is affected by mortality because he is subject to fate; thus, although man is above the cosmic framework, he became a slave within it. He is androgyne because he comes from an androgyne father, and he never sleeps because he comes from one who is sleepless. (Yet love and sleep are his) masters."

And after this: "... o my mind. I love the word also."

Poimandres said: "This is the mystery that has been kept hidden until this very day. When nature made love with the man, she bore a wonder most wondrous. In him he had the nature of the cosmic framework of the seven, who are made of fire and spirit, as I told you, and without delay nature at once gave birth to seven men, androgyne and exalted, whose natures were like those of the seven governors.

And after this: "0 Poimandres, now I have come into a great longing, and I yearn to hear; so do not digress."

And Poimandres said, "Be silent; I have not yet unfolded to you the first
discourse."

"As you see, I am silent," said I.

"As I said, then, the birth of the seven was as follows. (Earth) was the female. Water did the fertilizing. Fire was the maturing force. Nature took spirit from the ether and brought forth bodies in the shape of the man. From life and light the man became soul and mind; from life came soul, from light came mind, and all things in the cosmos of the senses remained thus until a cycle ended (and) kinds of things began to be."

"Hear the rest, the word you yearn to bear. When the cycle was completed, the bond among all things was sundered by the counsel of god. All living things, which had been androgyne, were sundered into two parts—humans along with them—and part of them became male, part likewise female. But god immediately spoke a holy speech: 'Increase in increasing and multiply in multitude, all you creatures and craftworks, and let him (who) is mindful recognize that he is immortal, that desire is the cause of death, and let him recognize all that exists.'"

"After god said this, providence, through fate and through the cosmic framework, caused acts of intercourse and set in train acts of birth; and all things were multiplied according to kind. The one who recognized himself attained the chosen good, but the one who loved the body that came from the error of desire goes on in darkness, errant, suffering sensibly the effects of death." [. . .]

As be was saying this to me, Poimandres joined with the powers. Then be sent me forth, em powered and instructed on the nature of the universe and on the supreme vision, after I had given thanks to the father of all and praised him. And I began proclaiming to mankind the beauty of reverence and knowledge: "People, earthborn men, you who have surrendered yourselves to drunkenness and sleep and ignorance of god, make yourselves sober and end your drunken sickness, for you are bewitched in unreasoning sleep."

When they heard, they gathered round with one accord. And I said, "Why have you surrendered yourselves to death, earthborn men, since you have the right to share
in immortality? You who have journeyed with error, who have partnered with ignorance, think again: escape the shadowy light; leave corruption behind and take a share in immortality.” [. . . ]

II. A Discourse of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius

"Is it not true, Asclepius, that everything moved is moved in something and by something?"

“Certainly.”

“But isn’t it necessary for that in which something is moved to be larger than the moved?”

“It is necessary.”

“So then the mover is stronger than the moved?”

“Stronger indeed.”

“And that in which something is moved must necessarily have a nature contrary to that of the moved?”

“Yes, entirely so.”

“This cosmos is large, then, and no body is larger?”

“Agreed.”

“And is it densely packed? For it has been filled with many other large bodies or, rather, with all the bodies that exist.”

“So it is.”

“But is the cosmos a body?”

“A body, yes.”

“And a moved body?”

“Certainly.”

“The place in which it moves, then, how large must it be, and what is its nature? Is it not larger by far so as to sustain continuity of motion and not hold back its movement lest the moved be crowded and confined?”
“It must be something truly enormous, Trismegistus.”

“What is its nature? It will be of a contrary nature, Asclepius, no? But the nature contrary to body is the incorporeal.”

“Agreed.”

“Place is incorporeal, then, but the incorporeal is either divine or else it is god. (By ‘divine’ I mean here the unbegotten, not the begotten.) If it is divine, it is something essential; but if it is god, it comes to be even without essence. Otherwise, it is something intelligible, and this is why: for us, god is the foremost intelligible entity, but not so for god himself; what is intelligible falls within the awareness of one who thinks of it; thus, for himself god is not intelligible because he is not something distinct from the object of his thought, i.e., so as to be an object of thought for himself. For us, however, he is something distinct; hence, he is an object of thought for us. But if place is intelligible, it is intelligible not as god but as place, and if it were intelligible as god, it would be regarded so not as place but as energy capable of containing. Yet everything moved is moved not in something moved but in something at rest. And the mover is also at rest, unable to be moved conjointly.”

“How then, O Trismegistus, are the things of this world moved conjointly with their movers? You have said that the planetary spheres are moved by the spheres of the fixed.”

“This motion, Asclepius, is not conjoint but opposed, for the spheres are not moved in the same way; they move contrary to one another, and the contrariety keeps the motion balanced through opposition. Resistance is the stilling of motion. Since the planetary spheres are moved contrarily to the fixed (by a contrary encounter with them, they are moved because of their balance in relation to the contrariety itself). It cannot be otherwise. For example: those bears that you see neither setting nor rising but turning about the same point, do you think they are moved or at rest?”

“They are moved, Trismegistus.”

“What sort of motion, Asclepius?”
“Motion revolving about the same points.”

“Revolution is the same thing as motion about the same point that is held in place by immobility. Going around it prevents going beyond it, but when the going beyond is prevented, there is resistance to the going around, and thus the contrary motion remains constant, stabilized by the contrariety. I will give you an example here on earth, one that your eyes can see: as they swim, observe mortal living things, those like a human, I mean; when the water rushes by, the resistance of feet and hands becomes an immobility so that the person is not swept downstream with the water.”

“A clear example, Trismegistus.”

“Thus, all motion is moved in immobility and by immobility. And it happens that the motion of the cosmos and of every living thing made of matter is produced not by things outside the body but by those within it acting upon the outside, by intelligible entities, either soul or spirit or something else incorporeal. For body does not move ensouled body, nor does it move any body at all, not even the soulless.”

“How do you mean this, Trismegistus? Are they not bodies that move sticks and stones and all the other soulless things?”

“By no means, Asclepius. Not the body itself but what is within the body that moves the soulless thing is what moves them both, the body that bears as well as the body that is borne. Hence, the soulless will not move the soulless, and so you see how the soul is overloaded when it bears two bodies by itself. And so it is clear that things moved are moved in something and by something.”

“Must things that are moved be moved in emptiness, Trismegistus?”

“Hold your tongue, Asclepius! Not one of the things that are is empty—by reason of their substantiability. For a being could not be a being if it were not full of substance. The subsistent can never become empty.”

“Are not some things empty, Trismegistus, such as a pail or a pot or a vat or other such things?”

“Ah, what a great mistake, Asclepius! Would you consider ‘empty’ the things that
are entirely and completely full?"

"What do you mean, Trismegistus?"

"Air is a body, no?"

"Yes, it is a body."

"But does not this body pervade everything that exists and fill them all by pervading them? And a body is a mixture constituted of the four elements, is it not? So all those things that you call 'empty' are full of air. But if they are full of air, they are also full of the four bodies, and so it turns out that a contrary account comes to light: that the things you call 'full' are all empty of air since they are crowded with these other bodies and have no place to take in the air. Therefore, the things you call 'empty' must be named 'hollow' rather than 'empty,' for in their substance they are full of air and spirit."

"Your reasoning is irrefutable, Trismegistus. So what have we said of the place in which the universe is moved?"

"That it is incorporeal, Asclepius."

"What is the incorporeal, then?"

"Mind as a whole wholly enclosing itself, free of all body, unerring, unaffected, untouched, at rest in itself, capable of containing all things and preserving all that exists, and its rays (as it were) are the good, the truth, the archetype of spirit, the archetype of soul."

"What, then, is god?"

"God is what does not subsist as any of these since he is the cause of their being, for all of them and for each and every one of them that exists. And he has left nothing else remaining that is not-being, for all things are those that come to be from things that are, not from those that are not. Things that are not do not have a nature that enables them to come to be; their nature is such that they cannot come to be anything. Things that are, on the other hand, do not have a nature that prevents them from ever existing." 

{(What do you mean by what never exists?)

"God is not mind, but he is the cause of mind’s being; he is not spirit, but the
cause of spirit’s being; and he is not light, but the cause of light’s being. Hence, one must show god reverence with those two names assigned to him alone and to no other. Except god alone, none of the other beings called gods nor any human nor any demon can be good, in any degree. That good is he alone, and none other. All others are incapable of containing the nature of the good because they are body and soul and have no place that can contain the good. For the magnitude of the good is as great as the substance of all beings, corporeal and incorporeal, sensible and intelligible. This is the good; this is god. You should not say that anything else is good or you will speak profanely, nor should you ever call god anything but ‘the good’ since this too would be profane. All use the word ‘good’ in speaking, of course, but not all understand what it can mean. For this reason, god is not understood by all. In their ignorance, they apply the name ‘good’ to the gods and to certain humans even though these beings are never able to be good or to become so. The good is what is inalienable and inseparable from god, since it is god himself. All other immortal gods are given the name ‘good’ as an honor, but god is the good by nature, not because of honor. God has one nature—the good. In god and the good together there is but one kind, from which come all other kinds. The good is what gives everything and receives nothing; god gives everything and receives nothing; therefore, god is (the) good, and the good is god.”

“God’s other name is ‘father’ because he is capable of making all things. Making is characteristic of a father. Prudent people therefore regard the making of children as a duty in life to be taken most seriously and greatly revered, and should any human being pass away childless, they see it as the worst misfortune and irreverence. After death such a person suffers retribution from demons. This is his punishment: the soul of the childless one is sentenced to a body that has neither a man’s nature nor a woman’s—a thing accursed under the sun. Most assuredly then, Asclepius, you should never congratulate a childless person. On the contrary, show pity for his calamity, knowing what punishment awaits him.”

“This is the content and the extent of what should be told to you, Asclepius, by
way of introduction to the nature of all things."

III: A Sacred Discourse Of Hermes

God is the glory of all things, as also are the divine and the divine nature. God, as well as mind and nature and matter, is the beginning of all things that are since he is wisdom meant to show them forth. The divine is also a beginning, and it is nature and energy and necessity and completion and renewal.

In the deep there was boundless darkness and water and fine intelligent spirit, all existing by divine power in chaos. Then a holy light was sent forth, and elements solidified [ ] out of liquid essence. And all the gods {divide the parts} of germinal nature. While all was unlimited and unformed, light elements were set apart to the heights and the heavy were grounded in the moist sand, the whole of them delimited by fire and raised aloft, to be carried by spirit. The heavens appeared in seven circles, the gods became visible in the shapes of the stars and all their constellations, and the arrangement of (this lighter substance) corresponded to the gods contained in it. The periphery rotated (in) the air, carried in a circular course by divine spirit.

Through his own power, each god sent forth what was assigned to him. And the beasts came to be—four-footed, crawling, water-dwelling, winged—and every germinating seed and grass and every flowering plant; {within them they had the seed of rebirth. The gods sowed} the generations of humans to know the works of god; to be a working witness to nature; to increase the number of mankind; to master all things under heaven; to discern the things that are good; to increase by increasing and multiply by multiplying. And through the wonder-working course of the cycling gods they created every soul incarnate to contemplate heaven, the course of the heavenly gods, the works of god and the working of nature; to examine things that are good; to know divine power; to know the whirling changes of fair and foul; and to discover every' means of working skillfully with things that are good.

For them this is the beginning of the virtuous life and of wise thinking as far as
the course of the cycling gods destines it, and it is also the beginning of their release to what will remain of them after they have left great monuments on earth in works of industry. {In the fame of seasons they will become dim, and, from every birth of ensouled flesh, from the sowing of crops and from every work of industry,) what is diminished will be renewed by necessity and by the renewal that comes from the gods and by the course of nature’s measured cycle.

For the divine is the entire combination of cosmic influence renewed by nature, and nature has been established in the divine.

IV. A Discourse Of Hermes To Tat: The Mixing Bowl Or The Monad

“Since the craftsman made the whole cosmos by reasoned speech, not by hand, you should conceive of him as present, as always existing, as having made all things, as the one and only and as having crafted by his own will the things that are. For this is his body, neither tangible nor visible nor measurable nor dimensional nor like any other body; it is not fire nor water nor air nor spirit, yet all things come from it. Because he is good, it was (not) for himself alone that he wished to make this offering and to adorn the earth; so he sent the man below an adornment of the divine body, mortal life from life immortal. And if the cosmos prevailed over living things as something ever-living, (the man) prevailed even over the cosmos through Reason and Mind. The man became a spectator of god’s work. He looked at it in astonishment and recognized its maker. God shared reason among all people, 0 Tat, but not mind, though he begrudged it to none. Grudging envy comes not from on high; it forms below in the souls of people who do not possess Mind.”

“For what reason, then, did god not share Mind with all of them, my father?”
“He wanted it put between souls, my child, as a prize for them to contest.”
“And where did he put it?”
“He filled a great mixing bowl with it and sent it below, appointing a herald whom he commanded to make the following proclamation to human hearts: ‘Immerse yourself
in the mixing bowl if your heart has the strength, if it believes you will rise up again to the one who sent the mixing bowl below, if it recognizes the purpose of your coming to be.”

“All those who heeded the proclamation and immersed themselves in Mind participated in knowledge and became perfect people because they received Mind. [ . . . ] They have scorned every corporeal and incorporeal thing, and the hasten toward the one and only. This, Tat, is the way to learn about Mind, to {resolve perplexities} in divinity and to understand god. For the mixing bowl is divine.” [ . . . ]

XI: Mind to Hermes

“Since people have said many contradictory things of all sorts about the universe and god, I have not learned the truth. Make the truth plain to me, master; it is you alone on whom I may depend to reveal it.”

“Mark my words, then, Hermes Trismegistus, and remember what I say. I will not hesitate to speak what occurs to me. [ . . . ] Hear how it is with god and the universe, my child.”

“God, eternity, cosmos, time, becoming.”

“God makes eternity; eternity makes the cosmos; the cosmos makes time; time makes becoming. The essence (so to speak) of god is [the good, the beautiful, happiness,] wisdom; the essence of eternity is identity; of the cosmos, order; of time, change; of becoming, life and death. But the energy of god is mind and soul; the energy of eternity is permanence and immortality; of the cosmos, recurrence and counter recurrence; of time, increase and decrease; of becoming, quality (and quantity). Eternity, therefore, is in god, the cosmos in eternity, time in the cosmos, and becoming in time. And while eternity has stood still in god’s presence, the cosmos moves in eternity, time passes in the cosmos but becoming comes to be in time.”

“The source of all things is god; eternity is their essence; the cosmos is their
matter. Eternity is the power of god, and the cosmos is eternity’s work, but the cosmos has never come into being; it comes to be forever from eternity. Therefore, nothing in the cosmos will ever be corrupted (for eternity’ is incorruptible), nor will it pass away since eternity encloses the cosmos.”

“But the wisdom of god—what is it?”

“The good and the beautiful and happiness and all excellence and eternity’. Eternity establishes an order, putting immortality and permanence into matter.”

“The becoming of that matter depends from eternity, just as eternity’ depends from god. Becoming and time, whose natures are twofold, exist in heaven and on earth: in heaven they are changeless and incorruptible, but on earth they change and become corrupt. And god is the soul of eternity; eternity is the soul of the cosmos; heaven is the soul of earth. God is in mind, but mind is in soul, and soul is in matter, yet all these exist through eternity. Inwardly, a soul full of mind and god fills this universal body in which all bodies exist, but outwardly soul surrounds the universe and brings it to life. Outwardly, the universe is this great and perfect living thing, the cosmos; inwardly’, it is all living things. Above in heaven soul persists in its identity, but on earth below it changes what it comes to be.”

“Eternity holds all this together, either through necessity or providence or nature or whatever else anyone believes or will believe. This universe is god producing his energy, but god’s energy is an insuperable power, not comparable to anything human or divine. Therefore, Hermes, you should not suppose that anything below or anything above is like god since you would stray from the truth; nothing is like the unlike, the one and the only. Nor should you suppose that god gives up his power to anyone else. Besides him, is there any maker of life and immortality (and) change? What else might he do (but) make? God is not idle, else everything would be idle, for each and every thing is full of god. Nowhere in the cosmos nor in any other thing is there idleness. Said of the one who makes or of one who comes into being, idleness is an empty word. Everything must come to be, always and according to the inclination of each place. The
one who makes exists in all things, not firmly fixed or making in any particular thing but making all things. Because he is an energetic power, his autonomy does not come from things that come to be; those that come to be exist by his agency.

"Through me look out on the cosmos set before your gaze and observe its beauty carefully, a body undefiled, than which nothing is more ancient, always in its prime and young and yet even more in its prime. And see the seven worlds spread out below, marshaled in eternal order, each completing eternity in a different circuit; see how everything is full of light, yet nowhere is there fire. The attracting and combining among things contrary and unlike became light shining down from the energy of the god who is father of all good, ruler and commander of the whole order of the seven worlds. Coursing ahead of them all is the moon, nature’s instrument, transforming the matter below, and in the midst of the universe is the earth, the nurse who feeds terrestrial creatures, settled in the beautiful cosmos like sediment. Look at the multitude —how great it is—of immortal living beings and of the mortal, and in between the two, the immortal and the mortal, the circling moon. All things are full of soul and all are moved, some around heaven, others about the earth. Those on the right do not go left; those on the left do not go right; those above do not go below, nor do those below go above That all of them have come to be, dearest Hermes, you no longer need to learn from me. For they are bodies and they have a soul and they are moved, but body and soul cannot join in a single being without someone to bring them together. Such a one must exist, then, and must be one in all respects. Since motions are many and diverse and bodies are dissimilar, while one speed has been ordained for all of them, there cannot be two makers or more than two. If there are many, one order cannot be kept. The consequence of plurality is envy of the better. I will explain: if there were a second maker of living things mortal and subject to change, he would long to make immortal beings as well, as the maker of immortals would wish to make mortals. Look—if there are two, and if matter is one and soul is one, which of them will supply the making? Or if both supply it, which has the greater part? Think of it this way: Every living body, both
immortal and mortal, (reasoning and) unreasoning, is composed of matter and soul. For all living bodies are ensouled. The non-living, on the other hand, consist of matter by itself; soul, likewise coming by itself from the maker, is the cause of life, but the one who makes the immortals causes all life. How, then, is be not also the maker of the mortal living things that differ from the {immortals}? How can an immortal being who makes immortality not make what is possessed by living things?"

"Clearly, there is someone who makes these things, and quite evidently he is one, for soul is one, life is one and matter is one. But who is this someone? Who else but the one god? To whom, if not to god alone, might it belong to make ensouled living beings? God is one, then. {How entirely absurd!} Since you have agreed that the cosmos is always one, that the sun is one, the moon one and divinity one, do you propose to number god himself among them?"

"God makes everything. {In a god who is many you have the ultimate absurdity.} And why is it a great accomplishment for god to make life and soul and immortality and change when you yourself make so many such things? You see and you speak and you bear; you smell and touch and walk about and think and breathe. It is not as if one sees another hears, another speaks; and someone else touches, someone else smells, walks about, thinks and breathes. One person does all these things. In another sense, things on high cannot happen without god.

Just as you are no longer a living being if you are idle at your affairs, so, if god is idle, he is no longer god—though it is not right to say so."

"If it has been proven that (you) can(not) be without (making) something, how much truer is this of god? For if there is something that god does not make, be is imperfect—though it is not right to say so. But if god is perfect and not idle, then he makes everything."

"Give me just a moment, Hermes, and you shall quickly understand that god’s work is one thing only: to bring all into being—those that are coming to be, those that have once come to be, those that shall come to be. This is life, my dearest friend. This
is the beautiful; this is the good; this is god. If you want to understand it from experience, notice what happens to you when you wish to beget; it is not like the work of god. God takes no pleasure in his work, nor does he have assistance in it. Working alone, be is in his work eternally since be is what be makes. If they were parted from it, all things would collapse; of necessity, all would die since there would be no life. But if all are alive and life is also one, then god, too, is one. Again, if all things are alive, those in heaven and also those on earth, and if life is one for all of them, it comes to be by god’s agency and it is god. All things come to be by the agency of god, then, and life is the union of mind and soul. Eternity, therefore, is an image of god; the cosmos is an image of eternity; and the sun is an image of the cosmos. The human is an image of the sun.’

“Death is not the destruction of things that have been combined but the dissolution of their union. They say that change is death because the body is dissolved and life passes on to the unseen. {Hear me devoutly,} my dearest Hermes, when I say that the cosmos and the things said to be dissolved in this manner are changed because each day a part of the cosmos becomes unseen, (but) they are by no means dissolved. These are the passions of the cosmos, swirlings and concealments. The swirling is {a return} and the concealment a renewal. The cosmos is omniform: it does not have forms inserted in it but changes them within itself. Since the cosmos came to be as omniform, who can have made it? Let us not call him formless. But if he, too, is omniform, be will be like the cosmos. What if he has one form? In this respect he will be less than the cosmos. What do we say he is, then, so as not to bring our discourse to an impasse? For there can be no impasse in our understanding of god. Therefore, if be has any structure in him, it is one structure, incorporeal, that does not yield to appearances. And he reveals all structures through bodies.”

“Do not be surprised at the notion of an incorporeal structure, for it is like the structure of a word. Mountain ridges seem to stand out high in pictures, but in reality they are absolutely smooth and even. Be mindful of what I am saying, something rather
daring but also quite true. Just as a human cannot live apart from life, neither can god exist without making the good. For in god this making is life and movement, as it were, moving all things and making them live."

"Some things that I say need special attention. Consider what I am saying now. All things are in god but not as lying in a place (for place is also body, and body is immobile, and what is lying somewhere has no movement); in incorporeal imagination things are located differently. Consider what encompasses all things, that nothing bounds the incorporeal, that nothing is quicker nor more powerful. Of all things, the incorporeal is the unbounded, the quickest and most powerful."

"Consider this for yourself: command your soul to travel to India, and it will be there faster than your command. Command it to cross over to the ocean, and again it will quickly be there, not as having passed from place to place but simply as being there. Command it even to fly up to heaven, and it will not lack wings. Nothing will binder it, not the fire of the sun, nor the aether, nor the swirl nor the bodies of the other stars. Cutting through them all, it will fly to the utmost body. But if you wish to break through the universe itself and look upon the things outside (if, indeed, there is anything outside the cosmos), it is within your power."

"See what power you have, what quickness! If you can do these things, can god not do them? So you must think of god in this way, as having everything—the cosmos, himself, (the) universe—like thoughts within himself. Thus, unless you make yourself equal to god, you cannot understand god; like is understood by like. Make yourself grow to immeasurable immensity, outleap all body, outstrip all time, become eternity and you will understand god. Having conceived that nothing is impossible to you, consider yourself immortal and able to understand everything, all art, all learning, the temper of every living thing. Go higher than every height and lower than every depth. Collect in yourself all the sensations of what has been made, of fire and water, dry and wet; be everywhere at once, on land, in the sea, in heaven; be not yet born, be in the womb, be young, old, dead, beyond death. And when you have understood all these at
once—times, places, things, qualities, quantities—then you can understand god.”

“But if you shut your soul up in the body and abase it and say, ‘I understand nothing, I can do nothing; I fear the sea, I cannot go up to heaven; I do not know what I was, I do not know what I will be,’ then what have you to do with god? While you are evil and a lover of the body, you can understand none of the things that are beautiful and good. To be ignorant of the divine is the ultimate vice, but to be able to know, to will and to hope is the (straight and) easy way leading to the good. As you journey, the good will meet you everywhere and will be seen everywhere, where and when you least expect it, as you lie awake, as you fall asleep, sailing or walking, by night or by day, as you speak or keep silent, for there is nothing that it is not.”

“And do you say, ‘god is unseen’? Hold your tongue! Who is more visible than god? This is why he made all things: so that through them all you might look on him. This is the goodness of god, this is his excellence: that be is visible through all things. For nothing is unseen, not even among the incorporeals. Mind is seen in the act of understanding, god in the act of making.”

“Up to this point, 0 Trismegistus, these matters have been revealed to you. Consider all the rest in the same way—on your own—and you will not be deceived.”
Fig. 01-P4.2) Hermes’ Dream

[Explain Flammeron’s forget woodcut showing Seeker peering beyond the appearances of the world and looking at the very workings of nature.]