

2018

The Afterlife of Greek Thought in the Christian and Islamic Traditions

Chad Berryman
Augsburg University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://idun.augsburg.edu/zyzzogeton>



Part of the [History of Religions of Western Origin Commons](#), and the [Islamic Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Berryman, Chad, "The Afterlife of Greek Thought in the Christian and Islamic Traditions" (2018). *Zyzzogeton Posters*. 1.
<https://idun.augsburg.edu/zyzzogeton/1>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate at Idun. It has been accepted for inclusion in Zyzzogeton Posters by an authorized administrator of Idun. For more information, please contact bloomber@augsb.org.



The Afterlife of Greek Thought in the Christian and Islamic Traditions

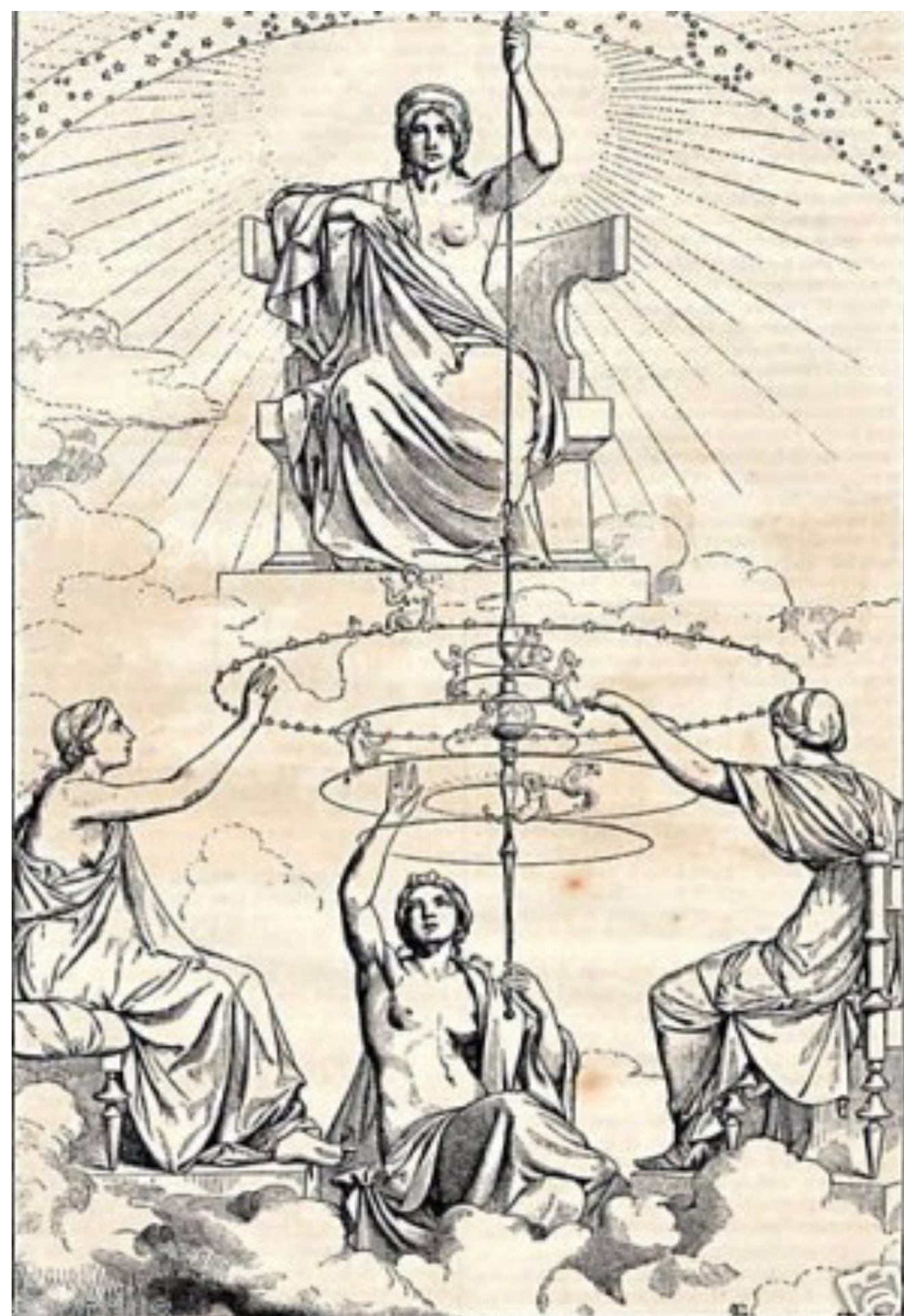
Chad Berryman

Mentor: Dr. Maheen Zaman (History Department)

BACKGROUND

Religious conflicts are a consistent topic of both local and national conversations. The religious and nonreligious alike often resort to one of two blanket reactions: either religious traditions, and particularly the Islamic tradition, are fundamentally incompatible with modern, Western civilization, or all religions ultimately teach the same core values of compassion and service despite the extremist perversions of those teachings.

In order to push back on both a superficial religious pluralism and the apocalyptic “clash of civilizations” narrative, this project interrogates the eschatological claims of Augustine of Hippo, an influential Christian saint, and Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi, the great Muslim sage. Taking Plato’s Theory of Forms and the Greek Myth of Er as a shared conceptual foundation, effort was made both to appreciate the common philosophical heritage of the Christian and Islamic traditions and to explore the tensions among the ethical and metaphysical implications of Augustine and Ibn ‘Arabi’s eschatological thought.



PLATO’S FORMS & MYTH OF ER

Plato’s Theory of Forms posited the existence of another world, one of which our world is an imperfect image. In that world, there existed forms such as Beauty and Justice in themselves—that is to say, Beauty independent of any beautiful thing. For Plato, the human soul was akin to the never-changing forms, while the body more closely resembled the ever-changing physical world.

The Myth of Er, which narrates the journey of a soldier following bodily death, describes the one thousand years of rewards and punishments meted out to humans after they die. It details the corrective role of such punishment and the importance of cultivating virtue in this life.

AUGUSTINE’S ESCHATOLOGY

For Augustine, eternity in either heaven or hell awaits the human being after death. While still responsible for their actions, human beings are ultimately dependent upon God to lift them up from their natural inclination toward sin. Furthermore, God has foreknowledge of who will enter into heaven on the Day of Judgment.

Augustine conceives of two deaths: the soul’s death in irreligion and sin, which occurs during this life, and bodily death at the end of a human being’s life in this world. Accordingly, there are two resurrections: that of the soul through Christ, and that of the body on the Day of Judgment. Following bodily resurrection and judgment, saints and sinners respectively will enter unending paradise and eternal punishment according to their deeds.



AUGUSTINE AND PLATO

Similarities

- Augustine and Plato share a low opinion of flesh and the material world. They both conceptualize the next world as stable and ordered, unlike the messy world of this life.
- Both Augustine and Plato are profoundly concerned with explaining how it is that, in this life, some just men suffer while wicked men prosper. For both, punishment following death helps resolve this philosophical dilemma.

Differences

- Rather than being able to discern correct action through philosophy, as Plato taught, Augustine views humanity as deeply corrupt and only able to be justified through grace.
- The linear eschatological trend of Augustine stands in contrast to the Myth of Er, in which each human being lives multiple lives and posthumous punishment can guide unjust souls toward a better life. Augustine explicitly rejects the Platonist conception of punishment for sin as corrective.

IBN ‘ARABI’S ESCHATOLOGY

Unlike Augustine, Ibn ‘Arabi conceives of an eternity in the Garden for the felicitous and a limited punishment in the Fire for the wretched. While some individuals indeed will remain in the Fire forever, their punishment will end and become bliss. Otherwise, God’s Mercy would not surpass His Wrath.

However, the next world is preceded by an Isthmus (barzakh) in which meanings are embodied and individuals see clearly those aspects of their soul which previously were veiled. Just like the soul, which connects the corporeal and the spiritual, this “life in the grave” corresponds to the imaginal level of Ibn ‘Arabi’s ontology. Both the transition from this world to the Isthmus and from the Isthmus to the next world are analogous to one awaking from a dream.



IBN ‘ARABI AND PLATO

Similarities

- Punishment of the wretched ends once wickedness has been appropriately repaid, a process which varies according to the severity of the evil.
- This world involves a mixture of the corporeal and the spiritual and is dependent upon higher realities for its existence.

Differences

- Ibn ‘Arabi, in contrast to Plato, does not see the body as something which corrupts the spirit. Corporeal existence is another dimension of the unfolding of possible existents which derive from God’s role as the Outward.
- While Plato viewed the body as part of the ever-changing material world and the soul as capable of stability, Ibn ‘Arabi viewed the human being as the inverse image of God’s Inward/Outward nature. That is to say, one’s outward form is fixed and one’s inward form is variegated. Importantly, this relationship is reversed in the next world, as humans become inwardly fixed, outwardly variegated, and able to manifest imaginings.