

# The Neoplatonic Eschatology of al-Fārābī and al-ʿĀmirī: A Comparative Exploration with Reference to *al-Madīna al-Fāḍila* and *Kitāb al-Amad*

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## *Plato's 'Phaedo' Dialogue and Islamic Philosophy*

**A**t the heart of much Platonic philosophy lies the subject of the soul and the immortality of that soul. Any casual investigation of the textual fabric of Platonic thought shows that there are few places where this is more evident than in the *Phaedo* Dialogue.<sup>1</sup> In this text Socrates stresses:

Then it is as certain as anything can be, Cebes, that soul is undying and imperishable, and that our souls will really exist in the next world.<sup>2</sup>

The same subjects, soul and its immortality, also occupied the minds of many of the great medieval Islamic philosophers. We think, for example, of the famous Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ of Baṣra who, in their 52 *Rasāʾil*, devote an entire *Risāla* to these concepts entitled “On the belief of the Brethren of Purity about the Immortality of the Soul after its separation from the

<sup>1</sup> See Harold Tarrant, “General Introduction”, *Plato: The Last Days of Socrates: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo*, trans. Hugh Tredennick & Harold Tarrant, (London: Penguin Books, 2003) [hereafter *Last Days*], pp. xxii, xxvi and *Phaedo*, *passim*; R.M. Hare, *Plato, Past Masters*, (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 6, 54; Andrew S. Mason, *Plato, Ancient Philosophies*, (Durham: Acumen, 2010), pp. 104-107, 109-110; I.F. Stone, *The Trial of Socrates*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1988), pp. 192, 195-196.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Phaedo*, 106e, trans. *Last Days*, p. 186 and *passim*. For the original Greek text, see Plato, *Phaedo*, 106e-107e in Chris Emlyn-Jones & William Preddy, (eds. & trans.), *Plato: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo*, Loeb Classical Library, (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 2017 [hereafter *Phaedo*]), p. 484. This Loeb edition translates *en Haidou* as “in Hades” (p. 485) in preference to the *Last Days*’ rendition by Tredennick & Tarrant of “in the next world” (p. 186).

body”.<sup>3</sup> In this they outline the death of Socrates, clearly drawing on the *Phaedo* Dialogue.<sup>4</sup>

These subjects also preoccupied the mind of al-Fārābī<sup>5</sup> but they were elaborated by this author in a spectacular Neoplatonic fashion. With the thought and philosophy of al-Fārābī we enter a discourse and world which is filled not just with individual souls but intellects and emanation as well. Over all hangs the spectre – if that is the right word! – of the triadic emanation theory and doctrines of Plotinus<sup>6</sup> but elaborated in a way that Plotinus would not have recognized and probably would not have accepted.

In this essay, our primary *topoi* and leitmotifs will be the immortality of the soul and the resurrection (or not) of the body. Our primary sources for our exploration will be Plato's *Phaedo* Dialogue, al-Āmirī's *Kitāb al-Amad wa l-Abad*<sup>7</sup> and al-Fārābī's *al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*.<sup>8</sup> Division of material will be according to the classical fourfold eschatological paradigm of death, judgement, Hell and Heaven.

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<sup>3</sup> *Epistle 44*, trans. Ian Richard Netton in Samer Traboulsi, Toby Mayer & Ian Richard Netton, *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity: On Companionship and Belief: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 43-45*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press in Assoc. with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2016 [hereafter *Epistle 44*]), pp. 71-112. For the Arabic text see pp. 29-94.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 77-80 (Arabic), 103-105 (English).

<sup>5</sup> For an introduction to the massive literature on and by al-Fārābī, see Ian Richard Netton, *Al-Fārābī and His School*, (London & New York: 1992) and *idem.*, *Allāb Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1989; repr. Richmond: Curzon, 1994), pp. 99-148.

<sup>6</sup> For Plotinus, see *Plotinus: Enneads*, trans. A.H. Armstrong, Loeb Classical Library, (7 vols., Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966-1988); R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, (London: Duckworth, 1972); Lloyd P. Gerson, *Plotinus, Arguments of the Philosophers*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1994); Paulina Remes, *Neoplatonism, Ancient Philosophies*, (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Everett K. Rowson's *A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and Its Fate: Al-Āmirī's Kitāb al-Amad 'alā l-Abad*, American Oriental Series, Vol. 70, (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1988) contains the Arabic text and an English translation. It is hereafter referenced in the footnotes as *Amad* (Arabic or English), *Amad/Introd. or Amad/Comm* (=Commentary).

<sup>8</sup> Richard Walzer, (Introd., Trans. & Commentary), *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State: Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī's Mabādi' Ārā Abl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), [hereafter referred to as *MF*].

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