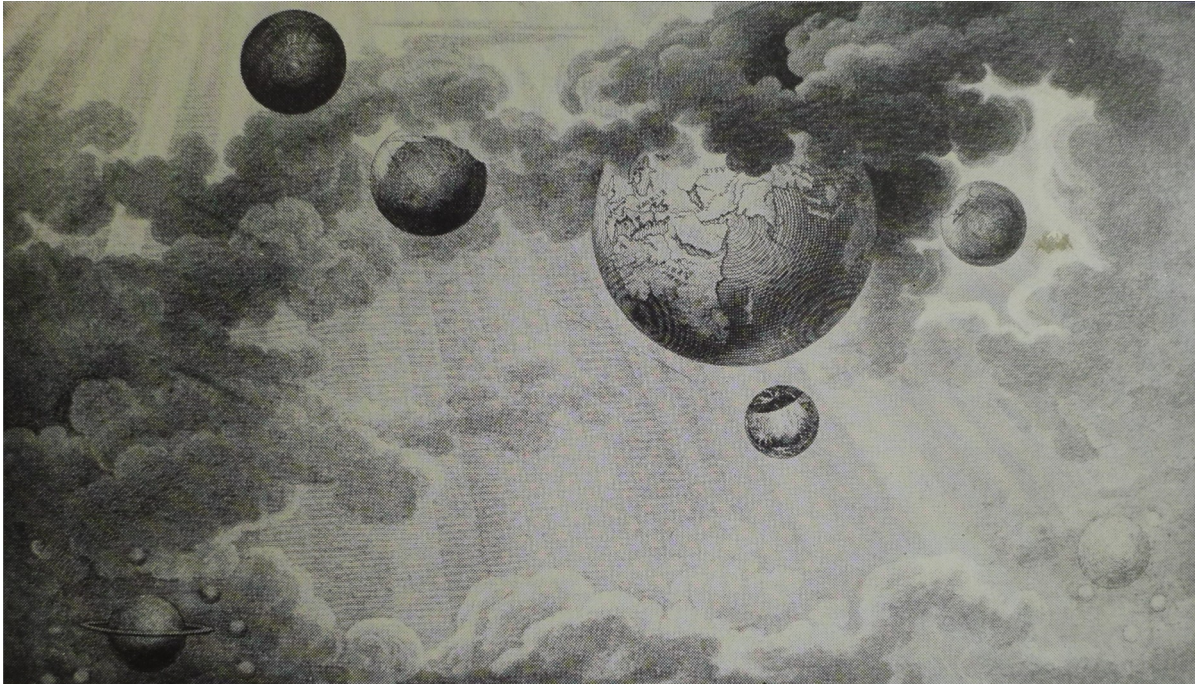




The Theory and Practice of Cosmic Ascent: Comparative and Interdisciplinary Approaches

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10-12 September, 2021 (online)

One of the most striking genres in the history of western thought is the account of cosmic ascent; we find narratives of humans ascending to the stars and beyond in a vast array of sources from among the earliest written accounts of western literature until the present day. How are we to interpret such accounts? Possibilities include reading them as tropological performances, as ritual prescriptions, as experiential accounts, as some combination of these, but this list does not exhaust the hermeneutic options. Even a selective list of ancient and more recent ascent-accounts is striking for the vast range and widely-varied nature of the evidence. From the Hellenistic period onward, Mediterranean religions and philosophies looked increasingly to a model of human ascent as a primary locus for spiritual achievement; however, the ways in which such ascent was conceptualized vary enormously from tradition to tradition. This conference brings together specialists from a number of fields and methodological approaches with a view to expanding understanding of the significance of cosmic ascent-accounts.

The conference has been rescheduled and brought online. If you wish to attend, please send a message to the contact address below. A Zoom link will be sent out prior to the conference.

Contact: Nicholas Banner nicholasbanner@gmail.com

PROGRAMME

Day 1: Platonism, Platonistic Religious Currents, and Divinisation

Friday, 10 Sept.

Session Chair: John Dillon

- 1.00 (BST/GMT + 1) Welcome and opening remarks: Nicholas Banner and John Dillon
- 2.00 Yulia Ustinova, Ben Gurion University: ‘Soul liberated of its fetters:’ out-of-body experiences of Socrates and Plato.
- 2.45 Sean Costello, University of Michigan: Recalling what we were when we were ‘καθαροὶ ὄντες’: Examining the self in the ascending charioteer myth of Plato’s *Phaedrus*
- 3.30 Zdenek Lenner, École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE Paris) and the École Normale Supérieure de Lyon (ENS Lyon): “Where has Plotinus’ soul gone ?” The Moon, the Saltire, and the Chorus, in Plutarch, Porphyry, and Proclus.
- 4.15 Break / discussion
- 4.45 Akindynos Kaniamos, École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE, Paris): Astrological Mysticism and Astral Divinization in Theurgy and Hermeticism.
- 5.30 Christian Bull, Norwegian School of Theology: Eros and Ascent in the *Hermetica*.
- 6.15 Wouter Hanegraaff, Universiteit van Amsterdam: The Hermetic Ascent to the Ogdoad and the Ennead.
- 7.00 Open discussion-session

Day 2: Abrahamic Ascents

Saturday, 11 Sept.

Session Chair: Nicholas Banner

- 1.00 Daniel James Waller, Oriel College, Oxford: ‘I Have Bound the Constellations of the Sky’: Illocutionary Weight and Narrative Spells of Ascent in the Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Incantation Bowls.
- 1.45 Mateusz Stróżyński, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań: *Desiderarem quidem meliora*: the cosmic ascent in Augustine’s *Confessions* 7.13.19
- 2.30 Paul Pasquesi, Marquette University: Φως: Ascent Through and Transformation into a *Soma* of Light in the *Ascension of Isaiah*.

- 3.15 Break / discussion
- 4.00 Naomi Janowitz, University of California, Davis: Ascent Techniques in the *Prayer of Joseph* and the *Prayer of Jacob*.
- 4.45 Bojana Radovanović, Radboud University, Nijmegen: *Quia me vestigia terrent: Isaiah's Vision* in the Bogomil circles - on the trail of the cosmic ascent journey?
- 5.30 Mostafa Younesie: Avicenna on the Speech of the Ascender to Heaven.
- 6.15 Owen Joyce Coughlin, University of Chicago: Ascent in Ficino's *On Love* and Bruno's *On the Heroic Frenzies*
- 7.00 Open discussion-session

Day 3: Receptions of Ascent

Sunday, 12 Sept.

Session Chairs: Dillon and Banner

- 1.00 Ashley Simone, Columbia University: Natural Philosophy and Phaethon's Cosmic Ascent (*Met.* 1.750–2.328).
- 1.45 Christopher Star, Middlebury College: Roman Revelations: Cosmic Ascent in *De rerum natura* and *De re publica*.
- 2.30 Break / discussion
- 3.00 John Dayton, R.I.T. Dubai: The Scarab of Aristophanes.
- 3.45 Katie Reid, University of Warwick: Celestial Desires: The Influence of Martianus Capella's Cosmic Ascent.
- 4.30 Joel White, King's College, London: Scatological Ascent: Antonin Artaud's Cruelty.
- 5.15 Closing Remarks: Nicholas Banner