

attempts, discussing Balthasar's initial articles, then his book on Barth, and offering observations on Barth's influence in Balthasar's great trilogy. D.'s reminder that students of Vatican II must also look beyond Catholic borders for sources of that renewal is timely, as historiographical battles over the council have commenced.

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THE MANSION OF HAPPINESS: A HISTORY OF LIFE AND DEATH. By Jill Lepore. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012. Pp. xxxiii + 280. \$27.95.

IMMORTALITY: THE QUEST TO LIVE FOREVER AND HOW IT DRIVES CIVILIZATION. By Stephen Cave. New York: Crown, 2012. Pp. viii + 320. \$25.

ETERNAL CONSCIOUSNESS. By John S. Dunne. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2012. Pp. xiii + 132. \$25.

Having spent the better part of three decades reflecting on matters regarding death and eternal life I relish the opportunity to read these three works that together deal with the history, philosophy, theology, and spirituality of eschatology or the so-called "last things." Traditional eschatology, as Karl Rahner once lamented, is overly concentrated on what comes after death rather than on what precedes it and on dying itself as a human act. Lepore's volume, though not intended as a treatment of the "last things," is a welcome correction of this unfortunate bias. The David Woods Kemper '41 Professor of American History at Harvard University, L. traces the transformation of the American view of human life from the 17th century to our time or, more exactly, from the Englishman William Harvey's discovery of the beginning of human life in the egg to the American Robert Ettinger's attempt to achieve "resurrection" through cryonics in the 1960s. If, as L. puts it, history is "the art of making an argument by telling a story about the dead" (192), *The Mansion of Happiness* is a fascinating and persuasive tale. The title is itself the name of a board game invented in England and brought to the United States as early as 1806. A spiral race game that represents life as a moral pilgrimage with the mansion of happiness as the final destination, it has a moralistic purpose: to teach virtue with the goal "to gain the seat of happiness" (xxiii). By the time this game was succeeded in 1860 by Milton Bradley's Checkered Game of Life, its moral ideal had been replaced by one of life-as-a-journey-to-wealth, according to which, in Mark Twain's memorable words, the "chief end of man" is to "get rich," "dishonestly if we can, honestly if we must" (xxix). L. organizes her narrative of the transformation of the American understanding of the purpose of life according to the ten stages of human development—from conception to "resurrection." With admirable concision she characterizes

this transformation as “a shift in where people were seeking answers to questions about the meaning of life the ancients to the moderns, from the pulpit to the patent office, from books to machines, from the arts to the sciences. Not just the source but the nature of authority changes. Answers you used to find in the past you were now expected to find in the future. Then you were supposed to find them yourself” (xxiv).

The philosophical aspects of eschatology are discussed by philosopher Stephen Cave, who argues that the “human will to immortality is the foundation of human achievement; it is the well-spring of religion, the muse of philosophy, the architect of our cities and the impulse behind the arts. It is embedded in our very nature, and its results is what we know as civilization” (2). C. describes the four ways in which humans have tried to achieve immortality, that is, through magic and science, the bodily resurrection by divine power, the immortal soul, and a personal legacy (e.g., genes, art, or fame). That death, or more precisely, the fear of death and the attempt to overcome it, has served as an engine for civilization is, of course, not original with C. Sigmund Freud and Ernest Becker, to cite only two influential theorists, have famously proposed such an idea. Rather, C.’s challenging proposal is that immortality is achieved not by following any or all of the four ways mentioned above but by adopting what he calls the “Wisdom Narrative.” This narrative is rooted in the conviction that we cannot not die and yet at the same time cannot imagine that we are dead, and thus it paves “a way to accept and live with mortality” (278). C. ends by suggesting that we can learn how to live with death by practicing three virtues: identifying with others, focusing on the present, and cultivating gratitude.

The third volume under consideration is vintage John Dunne, the John A. O’Brien Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame. It is the fruit of decades of deep and wide-ranging learning. Here insights from literature, science, music, poetry, art, philosophy, theology, comparative religion, mysticism, and interreligious dialogue are harnessed, often placed cheek-by-jowl, to show that there is in us an “eternal consciousness”—an awareness of living, not in the present, but in the presence of others, oneself, and above all, the Other. Not much is new here; most, if not all, of the ideas have been expressed earlier in D.’s prolific writings. Furthermore, *Eternal Consciousness* is itself excessively repetitious: quotations after quotations are repeated in every chapter. There may be virtue in repetition, so that readers will finally get the point if they have missed it the first, second, or third time, but they may be turned off if they read the same texts, sometimes verbatim, in chapter after chapter. But fortunately no major harm has been done. D.’s text brims with so many profound insights, his learning so vast, his style so poetic that readers will be seduced into thinking and feeling and singing with him and nodding in agreement with his

final lines: “Eternal life, I believe, belongs to those who live in the presence, and eternal consciousness is an awareness of ‘real presences,’ our real presence to one another and to ourselves and to God, and God’s real presence to us” (108).

I have reviewed the three books in the progressive order of academic disciplines. But it would be equally, and perhaps more intellectually stimulating and spiritually profitable, to read them in reverse order. One can see then that spirituality lies at the heart of theology, philosophy, and history, and that is how it should be.

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JOURNEY BACK TO GOD: ORIGEN ON THE PROBLEM OF EVIL. By Mark M. S. Scott. AAR Academy Series. New York: Oxford University, 2012. Pp. xiv + 228. \$74.

At the beginning of this interesting and succinct study of theodicy in Origen’s writing, Scott explains why the question of theodicy is best viewed as a search for meaning. Drawing, in his opening chapter, on Max Weber, Peter Berger, and Clifford Geertz, whom he calls “seminal theorists,” he explains why the project he is proposing moves from “theodicy as meaning-making” to “theodicy as navigation.” The image of navigation, S. suggests, is more likely to put us in mind of narrative rather than heavy speculative effort. What he has in the back of his mind, however, is not his own personal narrative, but the narrative that shaped Origen’s thinking: creation, the fall of souls, and final restoration. “Rather than simply explaining evil and suffering,” he writes, Origen’s theodicy “charts a way through it and beyond it by creating a cosmic narrative that becomes a map for the soul’s ascent” (21). S. does not attempt to defend Origen but simply to explicate, with his eye on the homilies and Scripture commentaries as well as on the *De principiis* and *Contra Celsum*.

Chapter 2 takes up the way Origen and others approached the problem and metaphysical status of evil in light of the Platonism that shaped their thinking. Yet Origen was first and foremost a man of the church, and thus the status of evil—“existing and not existing,” “uncreated and yet arising from creation” (48)—was always more than a philosophical issue. Chapter 3 explores Origen’s reasoning about the origin of evil and the precosmic fall of souls, and then raises the question as to “why the *potential* for evil exists in the first place” (71, emphasis original). Clearly, by giving us free will, God has created a universe in which the possibility for evil exists, but why not fashion a universe where our choices are not between good and evil, but solely between different kinds of goods? The fall of souls accounts for the terrible unevenness we see all around us, but why did souls fall?