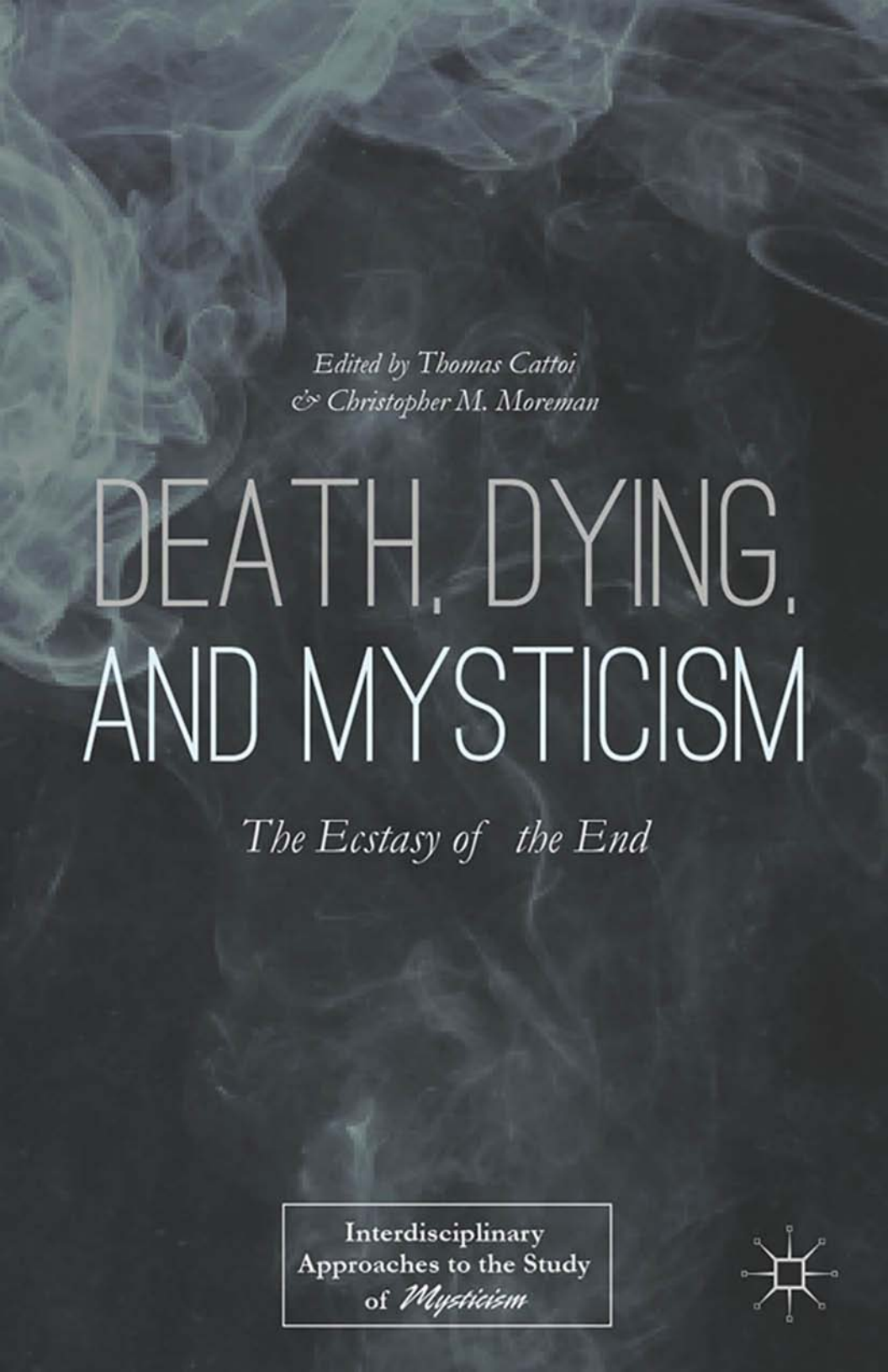
Edited by Thomas Cattoi
& Christopher M. Moreman
DEATH, DYING, AND MYSTICISM
The Ecstasy of the End
Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Study of Mysticism

Death, Dying, and Mysticism

Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Study of Mysticism

The exploration and interpretation of mystical phenomena is an integral part of the study of religion and spiritual practice, which consistently attracts the interest of scholars and the general public. At the same time, the term "mysticism" may encompass all kinds of transformative practices leading to an experience of ultimate reality or the divine outside the context of particular religious traditions. As a result of the increasingly interdisciplinary character of the study of humanities, scholars are becoming more interested in the contributions of different academic disciplines to the understanding of mystical phenomena. In the spirit of this growing conversation across disciplinary boundaries, the series provides a space for the interdisciplinary study of mysticism, where new methodologies informed by psychology, the natural sciences, or the humanities complement more traditional approaches from religious studies and theology. The series also privileges interreligious and comparative approaches to the study of mysticism, with a particular interest in Asian religions and minority religious traditions.

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To Deena and Justyna

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The editors would also like to thank Burke Gerstenschlager for all his work to make this volume possible.

Introduction

Ars Moriendi after Kant's Turn to the Subject

Thomas Cattoi

The present collection of essays will explore the ways in which different religious and spiritual traditions—as well as individuals who do not explicitly identify with any tradition—have approached the dying process as a moment of transformation and opportunity for growth. The approach of this volume is interreligious as well as interdisciplinary, drawing upon the insights of disciplines as varied as psychoanalysis, musicology, and ethnographic studies. The project is the result of the collaboration between the Mysticism and the Death and Dying Groups of the American Academy of Religion: a number of the papers were presented at seminars held at the annual meetings of this organization, while others are the work of scholars who have contributed to the work of these two groups over the years. A number of papers explore the dying process in the writings of authors who broadly drew for inspiration from the Judeo-Christian tradition, either as traditional believers or heterodox practitioners; others set out to chart the experience of death and dying in the context of the Eastern philosophical traditions and their all-encompassing sense of the divine; still others reflect on the experience of dying in the post-religious, secular world, where intimations of life after death in near-death experiences coexist with the joyous despair of Lacanian psychoanalysis and the increased medicalization of the bereavement process. In a world where no religious or ethical norm is any longer viewed as universal, and where traditional answers to questions of ultimate meaning no longer remain uncontested, the inescapable character of death is like a surd rending the all-encompassing web of economics and technology. To echo Yalom, when we consider death, we are blinded, as if we were staring

at the sun.[1] The sun, however, is what keeps us alive; similarly, only confronting the idea of death can save our life from becoming a pit of meaningless banality.

Of course the fear of life's end, of one's own dissolution and sliding toward nothingness is not an experience that is alien to spiritual practitioners. Indeed, episodes when the mind and the self are overwhelmed by the thought of physical suffering and the perspective of one's end punctuate even the lives of great mystics and ascetics. Generations of Christians have read of the agony in the garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus appears overwhelmed by the thought of the passion and appears to ask God for a reprieve:

> He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. (Luke, 41–44)

A great Hindu sage of the twentieth century, Sri Ramana Maharishi, would also recount an episode when he was suddenly overwhelmed by a fear of death:

> Suddenly, while alone in his room, a terrible fear and realization of death overcame him. The young Venkataraman, in perfect health, and without any outward suffering, felt that his last hour had come. His reaction was entirely different from what one would expect. He called for no help. Nor did he seek a doctor, but quietly laid down on the floor, saying to himself: "Death is coming to me, but death of what. My body is already lying without movement, it is becoming cold and stiff, but 'I,' my consciousness, is not affected at all. 'I' am therefore independent of this dying form. 'I' am not this body." After some time life came back to the corpse-like body, but its dweller had changed. His experience brought to him the conviction of the independence of his real Self from the temporary form falsely called "I."[2]

Eventually, Jesus and Maharishi manage to overcome this fear of death through prayer—in the Gospel narrative—or through speculative reasoning, in the words of Maharishi. Contemporary Western man is obsessed with physical survival: addressing his dying father, the poet Dylan Thomas exhorts him not to accept his end in a passive manner, but to struggle, and to fight, against the gradual extinction of his faculties.[3] In complete opposition to this approach we find the attitude

of radical acceptance and readiness to leave this world expressed by the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore: when death comes and knocks at the door of our life, he says, we should be able to offer it the full panoply of our earthly lives, never letting him go with empty hands.[4] We have been summoned to a new journey. Having devoted his life to an exploration of the human condition, Tagore does not fear his passing, but welcomes it like a guest for whom one sets aside the choicest treats.

How does one achieve this attitude of inner peace and detachment? Writing on the topic of death in 1903, Leo Tolstoy observes: "I love my garden, I love to read books and I love to caress children. When I die, I shall be deprived of all this, and therefore I do not want to die, and I fear death. Perhaps my whole life consists of such temporary, worldly desires and their satisfaction. If this is the case, I am unable not to fear that death will put an end to all these desires. However, if these desires and their satisfaction have been replaced in me by another desire—to carry out the will of God, to surrender to his will, then the more my desires have been replaced the more not only my fear of death will decrease, but death itself will exist for me less."[5] Preparation for death consists in an education—indeed, a reshaping—of one's own desires: moving away from the things of this world, one comes to rest in God in whom there is no shadow of change. In his story "The Death of Ivan Ilyich," the same Leo Tolstoy meditates on the great propaedeutic value of physical suffering, showing how a prolonged and intense experience of bodily pain—something that also alienates us from the company of the living—gradually detaches one from all attachments, showing us the path toward a serene acceptance of our passing.[6]

The great religious traditions that for millennia have accompanied humanity's search for meaning and purpose have always ascribed great importance to preparing for death, so as to reach the moment of one's demise "with the full vessel of one's life" in the words of Tagore. The holistic vision that was typical of traditional religions envisaged the whole cosmos as a kaleidoscope of signs that could—if correctly interpreted—guide spiritual practitioners to an acceptance of their own mortal conditions. In this perspective, bodily suffering and physical decay could be the springboard for a last, intense period of intellectual and spiritual growth: indeed, dying would become the culmination of one's own spiritual progress. Alas, this integral *Weltanschauung* where all aspects of the material world embrace and sustain our spiritual practice has been replaced by the vision of a spatiotemporal universe that is indifferent to the welfare of humanity, and where the

joint forces of economics and the applied sciences view the natural world as a resource for purely material and technological progress. After Immanuel Kant drove a wedge between pure and practical reason—between our cognitive ability to explore the natural world on one hand, and our ethical faculties on the other—the dying process has actually retreated into meaninglessness. The *homo faber* of modernity has become the master of his own destiny, and yet he appears to lose his bearings when it comes to the supreme moment of his passing from this world. If one can no longer experience the earthly joys of this world—this perspective seems to suggest—life is no longer worth living; death becomes nothing else but a failure—and indeed, a failure that unmasks the partial and limited character of our desire to control our life.

The great comforting metanarrative of the Christian tradition—one that accompanied the history of Western civilization for centuries until the threshold of the modern era, and that envisaged death and the end of human existence as part and parcel of a harmonious progress into the mystery of God—has been replaced by another, no less sweeping metanarrative where the meaning and purpose of death are no longer to be found inscribed in the very texture of the natural world, but are to be painstakingly constructed by each and every individual confronted by the threat of meaninglessness and dissolution. While traditional *ars moriendi* followed the pattern of classical iconography, where a limited number of models was proposed for the imitation of all, its contemporary counterpart allows for, and actually welcomes originality—though this originality is so radical that it may even choose to retrieve early, classical approaches to the end of life if these "suit our needs" and sensitivity. Postmodern men and women eagerly look for models, only to discard them in their search for an ever more elusive "authenticity."

How did we move from the all-embracing narrative of the early church to the harsh existential fragmentation of the present world? If we look at the writings of Gregory of Nyssa (335–395), we see how familiar he was with the temptation of meaninglessness.[7] At the beginning of his essay *De Anima et Resurrectione*, Gregory recounts how his soul was "sorrow-stricken" after the demise of his brother Basil, who had spent the last ten years of his life ministering to his flock in Caesarea while championing the teachings of the council of Nicaea as well as the belief in the full divinity of the Holy Spirit.[8] Yearning for an "interchange of sympathy" over the loss of his brother, Gregory journeys to visit his sister Macrina, only to find that she is also close to

her death. Gregory tells us in the *Vita Macrinae* that upon his arrival, she artfully subdued her labored breathing and feigned perfect cheerfulness and tranquility of spirit, going as far as suggesting "pleasant topics" for conversation. Gregory's soul is in the grips of turmoil; Macrina, "like a skilful driver," gives in momentarily to the grief of her brother; eventually, however, she engages him in conversation, and sets out to calm the "disordered state" of his soul. Macrina quotes the words of the Apostle, for whom we are not to "grieve for those that sleep," as only "those who are without hope" indulge in these feelings (1 Thess. 4:13).[9] What follows between Gregory and Macrina is an extraordinary speculative tour-de-force, where Macrina and her brother examine a panoply of philosophical positions on the meaning of mortality and the human condition, and find them all wanting when compared with the insights provided by the Christian revelation. For Gregory and Macrina, Christianity is far more than a collection of doctrines rooted in Scripture and faithfully transmitted from generation to generation. Christianity, rather, is a comprehensive philosophy, which offers an exhaustive account of the human condition, of the meaning and purpose of human existence, but also of its position within the cosmos—a cosmos that is illumined by the joint lights of revelation, reason, and human experience.[10]

Gregory and his fellow Cappadocians lived and worked at a time when the growth of the Christian church in the wake of the Edict of Milan made it gradually necessary to draw doctrinal, no less than institutional, boundaries around the deposit of faith. The great Christological and Trinitarian controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries created a theoretical framework that the Christian churches of East and West would inhabit—albeit with constant adjustments and modifications—well into the modern era. This framework emerged from the synthesis of three distinct elements: the teachings of the books that the tradition would come to consider as the inspired Word of God; the conceptual legacy of Neo-Hellenism, which had evolved into the philosophical *koinē* of the times, and whose various currents blended a fundamental Neoplatonic thrust with a variety of Aristotelian correctives; and finally, what Gregory called the "common conceptions" (*koinē hypolēpsis*) of humanity—our shared reason, which alone could explore the mysteries of the created order, as well as the depths of God's self-disclosure in Scripture. Gregory's sweeping account of the creation of humanity in *De Hominis Opificio* is a poignant example of this synthesis, which allows Gregory to present the human person as the culmination of God's creation.[11]

When contemporary readers approach a text by Gregory, a startling characteristic of his argumentation is his extraordinary confidence in reason's ability to discern and adjudicate between different positions and beliefs—beliefs that do not concern solely the great speculative questions of the creation of the universe, the fall of humanity and its redemption by the incarnation of the Logos. For Gregory, reason is also the lodestar of ethical discernment; it enables us to read the created order as a constellation of signs disclosing God's providential plan for the cosmos, as well as his intended purpose for humanity. The universe of the Cappadocian Fathers is pregnant with ethical meaning; everything is ordered and subordinate to the eternal Logos that is present in every aspect of the cosmos, and thereby invests the laws of nature with a significance that transcends their role as the ontological backbone of the created order. Continuing in this respect the great ethical vision of Origen's *De Principiis*, Gregory circumvents the dichotomy between God's cosmic providence and God's eagerness to wean us away from the lure of self-centeredness and self-indulgence, and to introduce us gradually to a relationship of love and intimacy with Him. In this perspective, the goal of Christian philosophy is to evidence the intrinsic congruence between divine *pronoia* and divine *paideusis*: every element of the created order is also the bearer of an ethical teaching, which we can discern with the aid of reason as well as the deliverances of Scriptural revelation.[12]

The Cappadocian Fathers argue that human beings alone possess—or indeed carry in the structure of their very being—the hermeneutic key that can disclose the meaning of the cosmos. Human beings are the crown and culmination of God's creation; they alone can interpret the mystery of creation, and indeed, the mystery of creation has been planned for them and with them at its summit. Gregory's brother Basil, for instance, expatiates at great length in his *Hexaemeron* about the propaedeutic meaning of animals' behavior—indeed, of some of the quirkiest and oddest of them all: elephants lifting their trunks to heaven remind us of our duty to worship God, and the oyster's resistance to the curiosity of crabs teach us the value of modesty and chastity. While a dazzling vista of allegorical readings rises up from the plain letter of Scripture, animals, plants, and the heavens are there to instruct us, to warn us, and ultimately to remind us of our special role in God's plan.

Gregory's and Macrina's dialogue in *De Anima et Resurrectione* is one more exposition—and one of the most compelling—of this all-encompassing vision: the starting point for the dialogue is not the idiosyncratic behavior of some exotic animal, or the majestic and

harmonious movement of some inapproachable constellation: it is the experience of death itself, as well as the gradual, progressive, and inexorable dissolution of our earthly frame, that keeps together our body and our soul. At the outset of this dialogue, Gregory is prostrated by grief at the death of his brother, and as he contemplates the impending passing of his sister, he considers the tragic character of the human condition, which showers us with such an abundance of gifts, only to cruelly snatch them away from us at the end. Macrina seeks to console her brother, but she goes well beyond a mere address to the emotions: rather, she seeks to engage Gregory's intellect, and she guides him through a long and complex intellectual exploration of the fundamental unity of body and soul, which are separated for a time at the moment of death, but will be reunited again—this time for all eternity—at the moment of the Resurrection. Gregory initially struggles to follow Macrina's intellectual peregrinations, as his mind is obfuscated by the passions of grief and resentment. Eventually, however, he is lured by Macrina's sweeping vision of the irreversible unity of our body and soul, a reality inscribed in the very purpose of the created order, and simultaneously hinting at the divine plan for humanity.

Much like Plato's own dialogues, *De Anima et Resurrectione* is unlikely to be the record of an actual conversation between Gregory and his sister at the time of her impending death. Our knowledge of Macrina is limited to Gregory's own writings about her, and we do not know the extent to which the views expressed in this text by Macrina are really her own, or originate from Gregory. The trope of the propaedeutic dialogue, however, enables Gregory to present a whole plethora of philosophical positions on the ultimate significance of death, and to examine them one by one and to find them all wanting. In resorting to the philosophical tradition of Hellenism, Gregory and Macrina assess it in light of divine revelation in Scripture, but also following the cues of human rationality—the "common notions" just mentioned, which are part of our shared heritage as members of the human family. Indeed, the very purpose of the dialogue is to show that there is a deep congruence between the two, and that one's intellectual assent to the teaching of immortality does not rest on the silencing of one's intellectual faculty, but is actually an insight whose compelling character will inevitably emerge, if one's use of reason is not obfuscated by prejudice and error. The role of Macrina in this conversation is thus to purify Gregory's reason from the defilements left by the passions, on one hand, and by wrongful teaching, on the other. How can there be no occasion for grieving, says Gregory, "when we see one who so

lately lived and spoke becoming all of a sudden lifeless and motionless, with the sense of every bodily organ extinct, with no sight or hearing in operation, or any other faculty of apprehension that the sense possesses?"[13] True, revelation affirms personal immortality; but such utterances, Gregory says, seem like arbitrary commands, asking us to believe that the soul lasts forever, but offering no rational argument in support of this claim. Indeed, "our mind" may be able to "accept slavishly" this teaching, but actually struggles to acquiesce to it "with a spontaneous impulse." Reason appears to rebel at the divine teaching of the survival of the soul, and if this is the case, this teaching can only be embraced with an effort of the will.

Macrina's response to Gregory rests on an initial refutation of Stoic and Epicurean cosmology. Epicurus made the senses the only means to apprehending anything of value about the universe, and he—so to speak—"closed the eyes of the soul." As a result, he envisaged the whole of the created order—and the body along with it—as a concourse of different elements that are forever coming together and moving apart. This approach would deny the existence of God no less than the existence of the soul; but this is due to the undue reduction of the scope of our cognitive operations. Humans do begin to explore the outer world by ways of the senses, but the sensory operations lead us "to the understanding of the super-sensual world of fact and thought," and thereby we learn to discern the divine intelligence that sustains and encompasses the universe within itself. As the human being is a microcosm that mirrors and reflects the dynamics of the cosmos as a whole, the senses will similarly teach us the operations of the body, but the intellect will lead us to an intuition of the immaterial intelligence that sustains them and is their ultimate source. Macrina goes on to describe different bodily functions and different natural phenomena, noting that in both cases the intellect is led to discern the presence of a mind that guides and directs the body and the cosmos to their goal. If this is the case—she asks her brother at the end of her peroration—why should one conceive such a hatred of death? The body may undergo dissolution, but the mind is not subject to the vagaries of space.[14]

Gregory seemingly accepts Macrina's argument, but he goes on to question whether passions such as anger and desire are actually part of the soul. Macrina notes that they are like warts growing on the soul, and that there is a tendency on our part to try to get rid of them; indeed, some great men "such as Moses" were able to get rid of them. Emotions, however, have been given us to be used with a purpose; indeed, "according to the use which our free will puts them to, these emotions of the

soul become the instruments of virtue or vice." Reason, like a charioteer, will use the emotions to move forward the chariot of the soul; but if reason drops the reins and is dragged by the emotions like the charioteer who got entangled in his car, our passions will gain the upper hand, and we will be no different from brutes. For Macrina, it is important to remember that if desire is taken from us—and desire can become love—we can no longer be united with God; and if we are no longer capable of anger, we shall no longer be able to resist the devil. As such, even though we come to understand the created order with the intellect, it is with our passions that we engage it, and it is the passions that can lead us to a better grasp of its authentic purpose. In the same way as the husbandman leaves "bastard seeds" in the field, so that the land may make the harvest more abundant, the master left the passions in our soul so that we may come to know and understand him more deeply than we would ever be capable of doing if we only resorted to our intellect. Through desire we are brought nearer to God, drawn up, so to speak, by a chain that brings together the intellect and the emotions.[15]

Gregory's beliefs on death reflect the broader Cappadocian commitment to the construction of a comprehensive, integral Christian philosophy—a project that was pursued with equal dedication by his brother Basil. In *De Hominis Opificio*, Gregory envisages the whole of the universe as a manifestation of God's propaedeutic plan: God's salvific intent is not extrinsic to the natural laws of the cosmos—rather the latter are an expression of the divine plan.[16] While certain currents of desert spirituality tend to look at human passion and emotions with an attitude of disdain and present the goal of practice as an intellectual flight from their grasp, Gregory's approach actually encompasses the emotions into a more optimistic anthropology and regards them as an important, if not crucial, cognitive tool. In this perspective, growth in intellectual knowledge necessarily entails growth in emotional self-control; and a greater understanding of the structure and purpose of the natural order will simultaneously afford a greater understanding of the stages and overall purpose of our spiritual trajectory. This unified vision is what enables Macrina to take her brother by the hand and accompany him in this exploration of the parallel structure of the cosmos and humanity, highlighting the inner congruence between the two and the role of the divine and human intellect in sustaining its different parts–an intellect that can then guide desire and anger toward their righteous goal in God. Macrina's reflection on the *ars moriendi* is thus informed by a profound confidence in the power and unity of intellect and emotions: a correct understanding of their relationship

will assuage all fear of death, and remind us that our passions are themselves tools that we received from God to draw closer to him. The dying process is thus an opportunity to ponder and reflect one last time on the mystery of the human condition: intellectual awareness of the reality of our nature will soothe all fears of eternal dissolution, whereas redirecting our emotions to God—away from the transitory things of this world—will ease our passage into his presence.

If the dying process for Gregory is an exercise in intellectual and emotional purification, this is because Gregory's overarching epistemology sees no discrepancy between the human faculties that explore the structure of the cosmos on one hand, and our inner emotional scaffolding—which is closely connected with our moral sense—on the other. For Gregory, the ethical, propaedeutic dimension of the natural order is an unquestioned starting point, much as it was for most Hellenist thinkers of his era. Unlike them, however, Gregory grounds this ethical intent in the mystery of the Christian God, glimpses of which we can catch in the books of Scriptures and the depths of our own spiritual experience. Resting in the intellectual certainty of the purposive nature of reality, which she has acquired after being thoroughly schooled in the tradition of Greek thought and the deliverances of Christian revelation, Macrina faces the dying process as one last test for the intellect and emotions, eagerly awaiting its resolution in God.

Alas, Gregory's intellectual world—a world where philosophy, revelation, and "the common conceptions of humanity" speak in harmony of a glorious destiny for humanity—is not the world that most of us inhabit—or indeed, the world that most Western thinkers have inhabited ever since Immanuel Kant postulated a distinction between pure and practical reason in the late eighteenth century. Immanuel Kant lived during a historical period characterized by impressive developments in the field of philosophy and the natural sciences—the achievements of Newton, Locke, and Hume immediately come to mind, with which theological reflection seemed unable to hold pace. One of the central problems in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is the question of the foundation of metaphysical knowledge—how is it possible for us to know anything at all about the natural world?[17] The empiricist school answered this question by pointing at the mechanical processes undergirding nature, and claimed that we acquired knowledge as we gradually became acquainted with these processes. Kant challenged this approach, which turned intellectual inquiry into a purely passive process, and claimed that our knowledge is actually something that we inhabit, or in other words, we shape from the inside. Classical realism

suggested that we could discern a meaning that was already inscribed into the world, but for Kant meaning was something that we grafted onto the world, whereby we could then make sense of our experiences. In order to get any kind of empirical knowledge of the world, we bring in a set of metaphysical categories that are not derived from empirical science—categories such as space and time, which Kant regards as innate and inherent to the human condition. The implication of this reasoning—an insight whose audacity would have startled the thinkers of previous centuries—is that the world does not operate independently of us; we do not merely learn to read the laws of nature that structure the natural order and determine its evolution over time. Rather, our interpretation of the world is necessarily colored by our assumptions and categories, and emerges out of this synergistic encounter.[18]

The problem with this approach, however, is that according to Kant, pure reason—that branch of reason that explores the natural world—has nothing to teach us about the problem of the existence of God, or the fundamental questions of morality. Ethics is not inscribed in the structure of the universe, but is the offshoot of our own practical reason. The all-embracing vision of Gregory—which broadly exemplified the normative worldview of the Christian West from its inception until the threshold of modernity—crumbled to pieces under the hammer of the philosopher from Koenigsberg. According to Kant, ideas such as God and morality are outside the purview of scientific investigation; in addition, they are also beyond the scope of synthetic judgments, since the latter rest on spatiotemporal categories, which God clearly transcends.[19] What enables us to think morally is our practical reason, which gives us the motivation to act "for the sake of duty alone," and which also requires us to act in such a way that each and every rational being is treated as an end and not as a means. The *Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals* suggests clearly that human beings will fall short of the deliverances of practical reason, and as such they are almost inevitably bound to fall short of their potential; however, the possession of this practical reason is also what sets us apart from the animal kingdom.[20] Kant actually developed a highly philosophical Christology, but his understanding of Christ was very distant from the classical paradigm of the first centuries: the tension between Christ's humanity and divinity merely exemplified the dialectic between inclination and law, which shapes our moral choices. If Gregory viewed Christ as the paradigm of the deified individual, Kant views him as the model of the perfect moral agent. Practical reason requires you to set aside your own "natural inclinations"; heeding one's passions thwarts

our growth and prevents us from acting "autonomously," or—in other words—from acting in line with the moral law.

For Gregory, desire and anger were part and parcel of the psychophysical composition of humanity, even as both of them had to be trained so as to be harmonized with the intellect. The individual is essentially an embodied reality, and a reality that will be redeemed inasmuch as he or she is embodied: the individual is a psychophysical unity that death provisionally sunders, but whose bond will be eschatologically restored. For Kant, however, moral autonomy is realized in the employment of practical reason, and one's own emotions are swept under the carpet of the kingdom of ends. Kant's Christ is an idealized moral agent, but compared to the incarnate redeemer of Gregory and the Church Fathers, he is little more than an empty cipher, gesturing at a disembodied moral horizon that appears to transcend our ordinary lives. In the kingdom of ends, there is little room for contingency; everything is subjugated by the call of duty—a duty that is ultimately self-referential and that can coax or enjoin, but hardly comfort and encourage. Death is no longer a preparatory exercise, reminding us of the divine intelligence that sustains the cosmos and of the unity of the individual that will be restored; it is a natural event among many, and one whose moral value we are called to shape by way of our individual choices in this world. If Kant had visited the bedside of Macrina, he would have been impressed by her stoicism and moral rectitude, but would have had more than a few reservations as to her readiness—indeed, eagerness—to discern God's presence in the natural order; nor would he have approved of her belief in the ultimate congruence between natural regularities on one hand, and ethical laws on the other. One may then rush to conclude that Kant's call to moral autonomy and authenticity anticipates the postmodern sensitivity that prizes individualism and self-realization. However, Kant's invitation to silence the sirens of feeling and individual inclination reminds us that the path to the kingdom of ends is rocky, and that many will be left disoriented or wounded.

In our world, more than at any other time in history, dying is something that one has to do alone; while in the past one could imitate the lives of the saints and the great mystics of the East, in the same way as iconographers copied the hallowed models of the past, our own *ars moriendi* has become a kind of spiritual collage, a sort of end-of life graffiti, where elements from different traditions are cut and pasted to suit our own ever-changing sensitivity. This collection of essays wishes to be a palette for the reader.

Notes

1. See Irvin Yalom, *Staring at the Sun: Overcoming the Terror of Death* (New York: Jossey-Bass, 2009).
2. See Mouni Sadhu, *In Days of Great Peace* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1957), 38–39.
3. From Dylan Thomas, *In Country Sleep and Other Poems* (New York: A New Directions Book, 1952).
4. From Rabindranath Tagore, *Selected Classics* (London and New York: Penguin Classics, 2005).
5. See Leo Tolstoy, *What I Believe* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007).
6. See Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich and Other Stories* (London and New York, 2008: Penguin Classics).
7. Gregory of Nyssa (335–395) is one of the three Cappadocian Fathers, alongside his brother Basil of Caesarea (329–379) and Gregory of Nazianzos (329–389). For an overview of his thought alongside that of the other Cappadocians, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), esp. Chs. 4 and 5, 57–90.
8. Gregory of Nyssa, *De Anima et Resurrectione*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series II, Vol. V, 430–468.
9. Gregory of Nyssa, *De Anima et Resurrectione*, 430.
10. See Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 169–184.
11. Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 120–136, on the notion of the image of God in humanity and its relationship to the cosmos.
12. See Origen, *De Principiis*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts, D.D., and James Donaldson, LLD, Vol. 4, 239–385, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publ., [1885]2004, reprint from 1885; also Jean Daniélou, *Origène* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1948).
13. Gregory of Nyssa, *De Anima et Resurrectione*, 430.
14. Gregory of Nyssa, *De Anima et Resurrectione*, 432–434.
15. The passions (*pathē*) are thus considered a *pharmakon*, a medicine that can heal but also poison the soul. Gregory of Nyssa, *De Anima et Resurrectione*, 432–434.
16. See Gregory of Nyssa, *De Hominis Opificio*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series II, Vol. V, 386–428.
17. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Penguin Classics, 2008) on the difference between pure and empirical knowledge, 37–57.
18. See Chris Firestone, *Kant and Theology at the Boundaries of Reason* (Burlington, VT; Ashgate, 2009), 41–63.
19. Pamela Sue Anderson and Jordan Bell, *Kant and Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 27–35.
20. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 17–19.