

T. Ryan Byerly and Eric J. Silverman, eds. *Paradise Understood: New Philosophical Essays about Heaven*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. 378 pp. \$110.00 (hbk).

James T. Turner, Jr.
Anderson University (SC)

My own narrow research interests are in theological and philosophical ways of thinking about life after death, so I have very particular things to say about Paradise, particularly from a Christian theological position. I mention this so as to frame my review of *Paradise Understood* in what follows. My positive and negative assessments are colored by a heavily vested interest in the findings of the scholarly research contained in the volume. Before I launch into my (admittedly extremely truncated) reviews of each chapter, allow me to provide a few summary statements, some positive and one negative, on the book as a whole. I'll say a bit more about my negative comments at the end of the review.

Positively, to my mind, each of these works is philosophically rigorous and clear. I found each of the contributions interesting and well-argued. There are at least three papers on topics about which I hadn't previously considered: Ted Poston's "Will there be Skeptics in Heaven?"; Jonathan Kvanvig's "The Cognitive Dimension of Heavenly Bliss"; and Adam C. Pelsner's "Heavenly Sadness: On the Value of Negative Emotions in Paradise." That contributors and editors are thinking along lines in fields of research sometimes pushed to the side suggests to me that the contributors and editors are thinking deeply and carefully about the avenues of philosophical research open to them. The scope of the papers contained herein are a strength to the volume.

So too is the interplay between a number of the contributions. Byerly and Silverman let the reader know that a number of the contributors were together at a conference on the topic featured in the volume (4); perhaps this has something to do with it. Whatever the case, there are a few instances that act as a particular kind of dialogue not often available in edited volumes wherein papers often stand in isolation. I think that philosophy is best done in community; and this book seems like a community effort (not always, of course, but more than most edited volumes of which I am aware). Partly because of this, *Paradise Understood* ends up being a good philosophical work.

With these summary positive reflections on record, I now offer a brief negative comment. With the exception of one (maybe two) contributions, the theology is, on the whole, impoverished. One might not think this is a negative comment given that *Paradise Understood* is self-referentially a collection of *philosophical* essays. To be sure it is. But its analysandum is theological. As I'll have occasion to mention later, failing to lean further into the theological nature of that which is to be analyzed seems to generate problems.

With these introductory comments out of the way, let me review the specific content of the book. The volume is divided into eight parts: "The Basic Nature of Paradise"; "The

Epistemology of Paradise"; "Virtue in Paradise"; "Paradise and Responding to Evil"; "The Social and Political Philosophy of Paradise"; "Resurrection in Paradise"; "Freedom in Paradise"; and "The Desirability of Paradise". Seven of the eight parts have two contributions; the lone exception is the section on resurrection, which contains three.

To begin the section on "The Basic Nature of Paradise," Eric Silverman (one of the volume's editors) contributes his paper: "Conceiving Heaven as a Dynamic Rather than Static Existence." In it, he argues that "posthumous moral, aesthetic, epistemic, and relational progress in paradise is compatible with traditional commitments...concerning the concept heaven" and that "there are important advantages in conceiving of heaven in this dynamic way" (13). To argue for this, he first canvases "the static view," that view in Western religious traditions that suggests that paradise is a place without progress or change. He finds the static view wanting for a variety of reasons. The two most salient of which, at least for the Christian theologian, is that Paradise is properly understood as a resurrected and embodied state (26). And it's not at all clear that embodied life could be paradisiacal in a static state. Similarly, it's not clear how it is metaphysically possible for temporal beings, such as humans, to move from being temporal to being non-temporal (which is an entailment of stasis) (27-28).

Katherin Rogers's article, "Anselmian Meditations on Heaven," does what its title suggests: it provides an Anselmian way of thinking about a number of related issues that might be housed under the title of this section. Importantly, though, Rogers provides reasons to think that Anselm's view of the beatific vision is consistent with a dynamic account of Paradise. As far as I can tell, Rogers remains agnostic on whether it will be dynamic or not, for what Heaven is like is mysterious, given to us only in faint imagery in the Christian Scriptures (30, note 1; 46). Nevertheless, Rogers provides a sweeping account of the ways in which Anselm might help us think through just what sort of freedom one might have in the eschatological state, whether or not Paradise might be dull, and even the age of those who resurrect into Paradise. One surprising hypothesis Rogers gives regarding the age of the blessed is that, as it turns out, some of the blessed will have differing capacities for enjoying God based on the sorts of experiences and self-shaping they were (or were not) able to accomplish in the pre-mortem life (46).

A small criticism of this section as a whole: if one is going fully to address the basic nature of Paradise, one ought to address whether or not we should think of Paradise as disembodied or embodied, whether we should think of it as an immaterial Heaven or else Heaven come to earth: a new creation. To Silverman's and Rogers's credit, they do address resurrection in their papers. But, a paper (or two) on this more fundamental question would have helped set a context for thinking through the rest of the papers in the volume. For, the "results" of the research contained herein may well depend on whether the place at issue is material or immaterial.

"The Epistemology of Paradise" section begins with Ted Poston's paper, "Will there be Skeptics in Heaven." Right out of the gate, Poston rightly acknowledges that the "Christian hope is focused on a renewed and redeemed creation in which persons will live as God intended..." (51). And he proposes to find a way to explain why there will not be any skeptics in Heaven. To do so, he motivates a global skepticism position before appealing to an epistemology of love (with deference to N. T. Wright) to dissolve the problem (57). An epistemology of love, says Poston, is best explained as unfettered awareness of mutual love between two parties (that is, awareness not clouded by the possibility of disloyalty,

dishonesty, and other such vices) that brings about a perfect kind of knowledge of a person. According to Poston, this is the sort of fellowship we will have with God and one another in the eschaton. I find much with which to agree in this paper, not least that appeals to personal knowledge, as opposed to propositional knowledge, strike me as the correct way of thinking through the sort of knowledge about which one is concerned when thinking about the epistemology of Paradise.

Following Poston is Jonathan Kvanvig's paper, "The Cognitive Dimension of Heavenly Bliss." In keeping with Poston's paper, the move is toward a knowledge of persons and second-personal awareness (62). Like Poston, Kvanvig gives reasons for making this move (his reasons, though, partly are motivated by worries that the blessed might either be infallible or omniscient, rather than a skepticism worry). One important subtlety, however, is that Kvanvig does *not* think that this personal knowledge—knowledge *de te*—is fundamentally non-propositional (76). The move, for Kvanvig, seems to be a push toward understanding personal knowledge as immediate—though still proposition-able—rather than indirect as a result of a basing relation in our noetic structure.

Rachel Lu's "The Virtues in Heaven" begins the section on Virtues in Paradise. Here Lu compares and contrasts the respective views of Aquinas and Bonaventure. Ultimately, she sides with Bonaventure's take on virtues in Paradise. Why? Lu reasons that Bonaventure's understanding of the virtues pays closer attention than Aquinas's account to how the redeemed (and the blessed redeemed) relate to created goods, particularly oneself and one's neighbor (89-93). In this discussion, Lu highlights two reasons—each of which strike me as compelling—for thinking more carefully about Bonaventure's vision of the life hereafter. First, Bonaventure wishes not to throw out the human's connection to created goods in the Beatific vision. It's not *just* staring at God; it's appreciating God and all that is His (92-93). Second, Bonaventure's view might allow for a dynamic view of Paradise, where, arguably, Aquinas's account does not (95).

Continuing the discussion of "The Virtues in Heaven," Timothy Pawl and Kevin Timpe offer another in a series of papers they've co-written on heavenly freedom.¹ I've interacted with their literature elsewhere; and there is much good in it (that is: their literature).² This piece is no exception. They provide a plausible case for thinking that one can grow in virtue even while one cannot possibly move toward a vice (one can cling tighter and tighter to the mean) (98). My intuitions are with them and, in their normally rigorous fashion, they provide good reasons to think they're argument is sound.

Adam Pelsler and Ryan Byerly take up the topic of "Paradise and Responding to Evil" in their respective papers: "Heavenly Sadness" and "Virtues of Repair in Paradise." Both papers are rigorous and provide nuanced ways of thinking about joy (Pelsler's paper) and forgiveness (or "forgivingness," in Byerly's paper). I fear, though, that both papers fail to take proper account of the promises given in the OT prophets and the NT literature wherein weeping and mourning of any sort is ruled out of court in the new creation. Sadness and prompts to forgiveness are rightly motivated reactions to the presence of evil in the world.

¹ Timothy Pawl and Kevin Timpe, "Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven," *Faith and Philosophy* 26:4 (October, 2009): 398 – 419; Timothy Pawl and Kevin Timpe, "Heavenly Freedom: A Reply to Cowan," *Faith and Philosophy* 30: 2 (April 2013): 188 – 197.

² James T. Turner, Jr., "Perfect Love, Perfect Obedience, and the (So-Called) Problem of Heavenly Freedom," in *Love, Human and Divine: Contemporary Essays in Systematic and Philosophical Theology*, edited by Oliver D. Crisp, James M. Arcadi, and Jordan Wessling (London: T&T Clark, forthcoming).

But there will be no evil in the eschatological state. It is difficult to imagine such a place, I agree. But one must keep in mind that the state in view is one of complete and utter peace, harmony, flourishing, and the unfettered rule and reign of God. At least, this is what the biblical theologians tell us.³

Shawn Graves, Blake Hereth, and Tyler John begin the “Social and Political Philosophy of Paradise” by providing a unique paper: “In Defense of Animal Universalism.” Here they protest against the idea that God would refuse to resurrect animals because they lack the proper kind of sentience or else that God might segregate them to some other kind of Paradise. Helpfully, in my view, they argue that one needn’t wish for non-human animals to become rational creatures in the eschaton. They claim, instead, that sentient animals have moral status—just as they are—to God. And that God’s justice requires he resurrects these creatures. My own biblical theological leanings—that God loves his created order, not just humans—predisposes me to think Graves, Hereth, and John are on the right track. One complaint: their response to the “survival objection” is too quick; they punt to a *hotly* contested issue in the philosophy of mind and the metaphysics of afterlife, viz., that humans and non-human animals are similar enough such that an argument for the possibility of afterlife for the former implies the possibility of afterlife for the latter (182).

Robert Audi’s contribution, “Personhood, Embodiment, and Survival,” starts with a concession the sort of which most contributors to the volume might also have given. Namely, that Audi has in mind the Christian Bible when he’s thinking about central claims to afterlife (193). But I found this concession odd; for, in what followed, Audi’s article is ambivalent on the resurrection. Now, he does admit, too, that he hasn’t any specific theological commitments in mind (193); however, even with this caveat, his contribution doesn’t strike me as obviously Christian, in any sense. That may be on purpose, of course, given that he’s working on *philosophical* conceptions of the afterlife, as are the rest of the authors. But then, why start by mentioning the Christian Bible’s place (particularly the New Testament) in one’s reasoning? This paper highlights a general concern I have about this volume, more about which below. Suffice to say: removing the bodily resurrection *as the central component of Christian conceptions of afterlife*, as does Audi, is just to start off one’s thinking about the matter entirely on the wrong foot.

I enjoyed all three selections in the section “Resurrection in Paradise.” Eric Yang’s and Stephen Davis’s co-written “Composition and the Will of God” employs a novel argument for the reassembly view of the resurrection. This takes seriously the nature of the resurrection, numerical identity of the body in the resurrection, and Patristic thinking on the matter. There’s much to be commended in their work. The same is true for Christopher Brown’s contribution, “A Thomistic Solution to PPID.” Brown provides a thoughtful and clearly argued account of how Aquinas (and Thomists generally) might solve the problem of

³ The eschatological state is compared to the primeval state in the Genesis 1 account in terms of *rest* or *shalom*, a load-bearing term inclusive of YHWH’s unfettered rule and reign, peace and harmony. See G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InverVarsity Press, 2004), 66; Jon D. Levenson, “The Temple and the World,” *The Journal of Religion* 64:3 (1984), 288; J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2005), 81; John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 47; Moshe Weinfeld, “Sabbath, Temple, and the Enthronement of the Lord: The Problem of the *Sitz im Leben* of Genesis 1:1-2:3,” in *Cult and Cosmos: Tilting Toward Temple-Centered Theology*, edited by L. Michael Morales (Leuven, BE: Peeters, 2014), 149-159.

personal identity through death and resurrection. I have a particular affinity for Brown's work on this matter, as I've borrowed substantially from it in my own work.⁴

Hud Hudson's contribution to this section is, in typical Hudsonian fashion, clear, well-argued, and interesting. Rightly, in my view, he wishes to address what potentially creates a problem: afterlife is embodied; embodied things require locations. So, where are the bodies located in the resurrection? One could say: in the future, they will be located in the new creation. Hudson entertains a worry that this response won't do, for the sciences tell us that the future of the universe is death. To get around this, Hudson appeals to hypertime. The resurrection occurs in the hyperfuture, not the future. Hudson's response requires one to consider hypertime as metaphysically and scientifically possible, and such that one can have unending hyper-life that doesn't infringe on the future death of the universe.

In the "Freedom in Paradise" section, Brian Boeninger and Robert Garcia and Richard Tamburro entertain a potential incompatibility between the notion of perfect happiness, libertarian freedom, and the ability to sin in Paradise. Boeninger and Garcia argue in their paper that there just is a straight-forward incompatibility, and that no rescue accounts work (for comparison, see how Pawl and Timpe refer to moral responsibility in Paradise in their chapter). Tamburro suggests the opposite. The differences between the two accounts are many, but the most pertinent one (to my mind) is this: Boeninger and Garcia think that moral praise is necessary for perfect happiness (286). Tamburro disagrees (324 note 39).

The final section is "The Desirability of Paradise." Here Jerry Walls and Richard Swinburne offer two papers (one apiece) providing reasons to think that the desire for a paradisiacal afterlife is coherent, but also that (in the case of Walls's paper) rejecting such a desire might be incoherent. Swinburne's paper, and its development of in what a good and perfected life consists, can be thought of (at least) as a useful way to blunt some of the objections raised in earlier papers *vis-à-vis* a potential boredom objection to Paradise.

I mention above that the concept of Paradise, as these writers explore it, is theological. Given these particular papers, the concept that's explored is specifically *Christian* theological. Moreover, if one wants to be *really* particular, it is *biblical* Christian theological. Why? Paradise, as considered in this volume, comes first to us by way of the Hebrew Bible into the Christian Scriptures (as the Old Testament) and secondarily from what Christian theologians have said about those Christian Scriptures and how they refer to one particular location of life after death: Paradise. Other than Walls's and Poston's contributions, there's almost no interaction with, for example, what the best of biblical scholarship has to say about to what the word 'Paradise' refers and that toward which, eschatologically speaking, it points. It points to new creation, the cosmos put right. Rarely is this mentioned, save for its explicit mention in Walls's paper (343ff.). This is a miss on the level of doing philosophy of biology without reference to what biologists say an organism is. If one properly is to do philosophy about a biblical subject matter, one should consult experts in the Bible to make sure one has the right sort of data to investigate. Instead, most of the contributors use outmoded—that is to say, out of date—ways of thinking about the biblical and theological material. Here I am thinking about the conflation of Heaven, Paradise, and the resurrection state. These are not

⁴ James T. Turner, Jr., *On the Resurrection of the Dead: A New Metaphysic of Afterlife for Christian Thought* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019). See especially chapter 4.

synonymous terms, as most exegetes will tell you. And their conflation in this volume is, at times, more than distracting.⁵

But, I wish not to end on a negative note. As I say above, each selection is well-crafted and well-argued. And, most of the contributions are genuinely useful articles that, despite my reservations just noted, will be profitable for (at least) Christian philosophers and theologians. Anyone interested in afterlife research should have this volume on hand.

⁵ For some biblical theological reasons for thinking “Heaven” a poor term for denoting the eschatological state, see J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014). See especially pp. 211 – 237; see also my “Purgatory Puzzles: Moral Perfection and the Parousia,” *Journal of Analytic Theology* 5 (May, 2017): 215 – 217.