

Editor's Introduction

Incontrovertible evidence informs us that our globe has already suffered several absolute changes, each one nothing less than an *end of the world*; and an indefinable instinct warns us that more revolutions are to come. Many times already it has been thought that such revolutions were close at hand... Judging by what has been said on the subject, men are prone to invest this catastrophe with vengeance and destroying angels, trumpets and other no less terrifying accessories. Alas, there is need of no such fuss for our destruction; we are not worthy of so much pomp; and if the Lord so wills, He can change that face of the globe without the help of ceremonial apparatus.¹ —Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, 1825

These potent words speak to us today just as much as they did to those living in the nineteenth century. One thing has remained constant throughout the panorama of civilizations and centuries: a concern for the end. Today, concerns about eschatology are prevalent—and there is certainly a reason for these concerns, with the state of the world as it currently lies in its economic, ecological, and technological crisis-impending situation. Though the contents of this special issue of *Arc* would heartily disagree with the French author Brillat-Savarin, certain eschatologies (past and present) are very much focused upon the ‘ceremonial apparatus’, that is, the accompanying divine drama, which Brillat-Savarin disregarded. This ‘ceremonial apparatus’ however, is by no means uniform. The scholarship of eschatology presented in this issue shows just how *different* the appearance and conception of ‘the end times’ are for each socio-historical situation, and how the relationship of each group or individual to their historical situation frames and reframes the possibilities and openings found in eschatological speculation.

In this special issue of *Arc* we present to you vast and variegated ways to think about eschatology. In this issue you will not only discover articles which discuss eschatology from ‘traditional’ perspectives, those of religious, theological, or philosophical understanding, but also articles which expand notions and thoughts about eschatology to include new ideas about the ‘end times’, conceptions that apply to an era of science fiction and

1. Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *The Physiology of Taste*, trans. Anne Drayton (London: The Penguin Group, 1994), 130.

virtual realities, to the problem of the impending zombie apocalypse, and other avenues of speculation not typically thought to be under the rubric of 'eschatology'.

Arc is pleased to present the following articles by invited scholars who have provided solid scholarship on eschatology, as well as scholars who have explored new avenues and investigated previously unknown material concerning eschatology. The reader will find below our invited contributions of: Dan Cohn-Sherbok's *Jewish Eschatology*; David Cook's *Apocalypse and Identity: Ibn Al-Munadi and Tenth Century Baghdad*; Lorenzo DiTomasso's *Apocalyptic Eschatology and the Transcendence of Death in William Gibson's Neuromancer*; Gerbern Oegema's *2 Baruch, the Messiah, and the Bar Kochba Revolt* and Zeki Saritoprak's *Revisiting Islamic Eschatology: The Knowledge of "The Hour" and Its Imminence in The Qur'an*.

Additionally, *Arc* is pleased to publish alongside these articles other contributions that provide further insight and new development into scholarship on eschatology.

This issue of *Arc* is about end times, but as the reader will soon realize, this is by no means a simple topic. Each scholar who considers eschatological speculation contemplates the limit of worldly-life, along with the problem of the imminence of death and its position relative to individuals or communities, religious or otherwise. Individuals or communities that have chosen to live in light of the eschaton have been perplexed by these problems; reflection upon these questions remains perhaps the most important aspect about eschatological speculation, to consider what it means to live in the end times or near the end of one's own time, however it may be defined. Whether it is infusion into the virtual world of a matrix as witnessed in *Neuromancer* (DiTomasso), being swallowed by the giant fish (Adelman), being put to *the* test (Saritoprak), or on the cusp of repelling a zombie invasion (Baker). Eschatology, too, can be a serious attempt to inquire into and explain God's ways, the reasons behind worldly suffering, ongoing political events, or for providing an outline for messianic rule, as discussed by David Cook, Dan Cohn-Sherbok, Gerbern Oegema and Ralph Lentz II. On the other hand, eschatology could also be fun and games, just consider the article by Althouse and Wilkinson—in certain strains of charismatic Pentecostalism, this is in fact what eschatological speculation is: play. They emphasize that living in the end times prompts rituals of joyful playfulness,

soaking in God's love, living in the world imaginatively along with other liberating possibilities; a stark contrast to eschatological speculation that emphasizes future catastrophe and judgment.

Regardless of where one falls in relation to the tone or mood of eschatological speculation, the very form of thinking about eschatology opens up possibilities beyond the empirical world before us, whether it is understanding history as buttressed on both ends by catastrophic and prophetic divine events evidenced by Korner's discussion of the "great" earthquake in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, understanding phenomenology as eschatological, which prevents the reduction of reality to a strict materialism (DeRoo), the problem of embodiment of Henry Case in *Neuromancer* (DiTomasso) or providing the necessary inspiration for those suffering in the face of death as evidenced by the witnesses in the book of Revelation (Ricker).

Even Brillat-Savarin, who regarded the content of eschatology as 'ceremonial apparatus' agreed with the *worthiness* of thinking about the eschaton:

This course of events, which is just as likely as any other, has always seemed to me an admirable subject for speculation: and I have no hesitation in dwelling on it now. It is interesting to follow in imagination that ascensional heat, to foresee its gradual action and effects, and to ask: *Quid* during the first day, and the second, and so on to the last? ...*Quid* on obedience to the law, submission to authority, respect for persons and property? *Quid* on the means we might look for, or the attempts we might make, to avoid the danger? *Quid* on the bonds of love, friendship and kinship, on selfishness and devotion? *Quid* on religious sentiment, faith, resignation, hope, etc.? ...I genuinely feel some regret at not telling my readers how I settled all these problems in my wisdom, but I would not like to deprive them of the pleasure of reaching their own conclusions: an occupation which can shorten the hours of a sleepless night, or provide material for daytime siestas.²

It is with *this* hope that *Arc* presents to you our essays on eschatology.

2. Brillat-Savarin, 131.