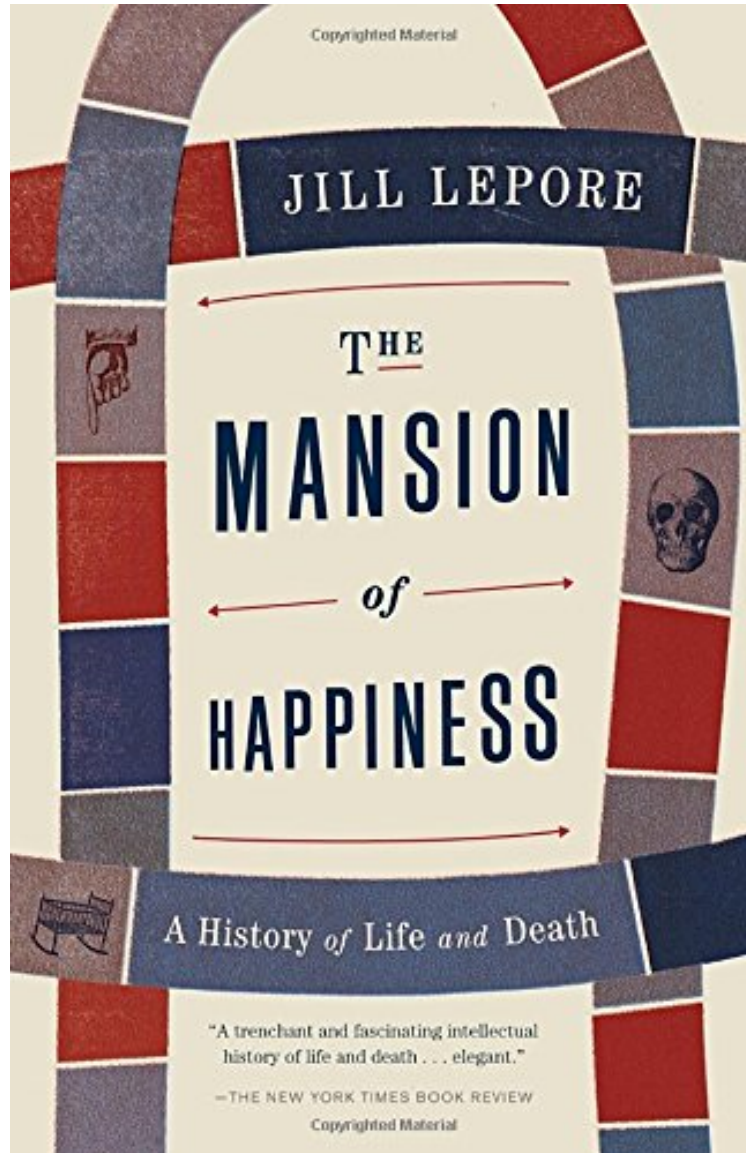


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## The Mansion of Happiness: A History of Life and Death

*Jill Lepore*

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**Jill Lepore : The Mansion of Happiness: A History of Life and Death** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *The Mansion of Happiness: A History of Life and Death*:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Great ReadBy William M. Those looking for simple, weighty, biblical answers to life's essential questions will be disappointed. Instead, Professor Lepore portrays detailed snapshots of our nation at different ages. We are left to pull together the confusing and at times contradictory currents of American history. She offers a carefully documented, readable, and in places humorous look at how our nation and its

thinking has changed, since our founding fathers walked the earth. She gives evenhanded treatment of her subjects that counters history's fundamentalists. She writes of the history that was rather than what ought to have been. Refreshing. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent, Difficult to put down. By Cassandra This is the history of American culture told in the engaging style of a literary newswoman. By using the evolution of a nationally popular game throughout the decades the author defines our changing social values. Her research of events from the wide range of venues including newspapers, books, movies, etc is rendered with an immediacy as if this reader felt as if she were witness to discoveries, ideas, fads in as they effected public opinion then and effect us now. I find it difficult to put this kind of history down. It is New Yorker style at its best; a dramatic immediacy that leaves one feeling that he or she were there. 6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Very interesting read By Suzie Seagull This book is NOT a history of anything, really, but it is a fascinating read if one enjoys well-written essays on American culture. The author is erudite, without being dry or overly academic. I learned some things and got some chuckles reading *The Mansion of Happiness*.

Renowned Harvard scholar and New Yorker staff writer Jill Lepore has written a strikingly original, ingeniously conceived, and beautifully crafted history of American ideas about life and death from before the cradle to beyond the grave. How does life begin? What does it mean? What happens when we die? All anyone can do is ask, Lepore writes. That's why any history of ideas about life and death has to be, like this book, a history of curiosity. Lepore starts that history with the story of a seventeenth-century Englishman who had the idea that all life begins with an egg, and ends it with an American who, in the 1970s, began freezing the dead. In between, life got longer, the stages of life multiplied, and matters of life and death moved from the library to the laboratory, from the humanities to the sciences. Lately, debates about life and death have determined the course of American politics. Each of these debates has a history. Investigating the surprising origins of the stuff of everyday life from board games to breast pumps Lepore argues that the age of discovery, Darwin, and the Space Age turned ideas about life on earth topsy-turvy. New worlds were found, she writes, and old paradises were lost. As much a meditation on the present as an excavation of the past, *The Mansion of Happiness* is delightful, learned, and altogether beguiling.

With her characteristically sharp-edged humor and luminous storytelling, Lepore regales us with stories that follow the stages of life. . . her inspired commentary on our shared social history offers a fresh approach to our changing views of life and death. Publishers Weekly A trenchant and fascinating intellectual history of life and death . . . elegant. Dani Shapiro, *The New York Times Book Review* A stunning meditation on three questions that have dominated serious reflection about human nature and cultures for centuries: How does life begin? What does it mean? What happens when we die? . . . Lepore's refreshing and often humorous insights breathe fresh air into these everlasting matters. Bookpage A breezy, informative, wide-ranging book . . . singular, always stimulating. The American Scholar Lepore's prose is thoroughly engaging and witty . . . covers enough of mankind's earnest curiosity about life and death to both entertain and provoke thought. Booklist Lepore chooses quirky, though always revealing, lenses through which to examine the changing definitions of conception, infancy, childhood, puberty, marriage, middle age, parenthood, old age, death, and immortality. . . . Through sheer force of charisma, Lepore keeps her readers on track: this book, with all its detours and winding turns, is a journey worth taking. Library Journal [Lepore] manages to spin a larger narrative that both fascinates and informs, showing that our taken-for-granted ideas about every stage of life are culturally specific, very much a product of our times. Rachel Newcomb, *The Washington Post* Engaging. . . . Lepore writes about our striving to understand our existence. *The Mansion of Happiness* is an important addition to the effort. San Francisco Chronicle Lepore has a brilliant way of selecting just the right historical detail to illuminate a larger point. . . . The most valuable lesson here is that of impermanence. Everything changes. And although, as Lepore writes, it's best to have a plan, as her multifaceted, sometimes dizzying joyride of a book reveals, the next roll of dice could, in fact, change everything. Boston Sunday Globe This fascinating book explores a few centuries' worth of ideas about life and death you know, just a light beach read. But for all its analysis of Darwin and Aristotle, *The Mansion of Happiness* is a lot of fun. . . . [Lepore] is always engaging, even surprising. Entertainment Weekly A sharp, illuminating history of ideas. . . . Brilliantly written and engaging throughout . . . superb. Kirkus, starred review Equip a profound scholar with H. L. Mencken's instinct for running down charlatans and chuckleheads, and you get this book. It will amuse and embarrass those of us ever befuddled by the rogues in her gallery. Garry Wills, author of *Lincoln at Gettysburg* Written with sardonic wit and penetrating intelligence, *The Mansion of Happiness* is a fascinating and startlingly original guide to the ways in which the human life-cycle has been imagined, manipulated, managed, marketed, and debased in modern times. Lepore weaves her way brilliantly along the mazy track that leads from the egg in which life's game begins to the giant freezers in which certain crack-brained visionaries hope to defeat death itself. A fast-paced, hilarious, angry, poignant, and richly illuminating book. Stephen Greenblatt, author of *The Swerve: How The World Became Modern* This is why Jill Lepore is becoming my favorite historian: wise, witty, wide in scope and deep in spirit. James Gleick, author of *The Information* A series of engaging and wonderfully perceptive essays on how individuals caught in time made sense of life and death. Jill Lepore is one of America's most accomplished and imaginative historians.

Linda Colley, author of *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh* Come expecting to be entertained, educated, and given several helpful new ways to think about the stages of life and what lies beyond. . . . Lepore has mastered the neat trick of writing imaginatively and often humorously for a general audience without checking her scholarly swing . . . she gets you thinking like she does, and you can ask no more from a historian. Malcolm Jones, *The Daily Beast* With wit and erudition, Lepore demonstrates that nothing is more mutable and time-bound than our most cherished notions about the supposedly eternal verities of life and death. Susan Jacoby, author of *The Age of American Unreason* Well-researched and emotionally intelligent new book. . . . The history of poetry is the history of shifting conceptions of life, the body, where we come from and what the future holds. In this sense, Lepores new book is the stuff that poetry is made of. . . . Lepores history isnt single-file. She weaves names and dates, illuminates unlikely connections; she is a master storyteller. Poets, writers, and artists have made connections between landscape and the body, but Lepore argues the point brilliantly using historical documents. *The Millions* Marvelously fresh and inventive. . . . The pieces here are also invigorated by storytelling brio, a wry sense of humor, and a gift for the bon mot. Barnes and Noble review Each sentence brims, each paragraph delights. Taken together these essays are more than the sum of their parts. They are an inquiry into how we think about being alive. *Smithsonian* The beauty of Lepores book is the simple elegance and wit with which she conveys her conclusions. . . . Its hard to stop quoting Lepore; her prose is that clever. But whats more important is that its hard to stop reading *The Mansion of Happiness*. *The Courier Journal* One of the pleasures of Lepores work is the way she uses a single, deftly chosen artifact to crack open a much wider cultural vista. . . . If the bonds between the disparate subjects and motifs in *The Mansion of Happiness* sometimes seem to be sustained by Lepores own personal version of extraordinary measures, there are plenty that hold firm. They cant be disputed or endorsed like traditional theories, but they can dazzle and illuminate and inspire. And thats just what they do. *Salon* A great ride. . . . Lepore writes with a clear feminist perspective, and its a relief to read someone, for example, who personally knows her way around breast pumps and reproductive rights, and can write about them with humor and affection. *Bust* For the naturally curious who want to explore something new with the help of a thoughtful essayist like Lepore. . . . It reads very much like a good conversation with a shrewd, witty woman, which is all that can be asked of such a book. *BookBrowse* About the Author Jill Lepore is the David Woods Kemper 41 Professor of American History at Harvard University and a staff writer at *The New Yorker*. Her books include *The Story of America*; *The Whites of Their Eyes*; *New York Burning*, a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize; and *The Name of War*, winner of the Bancroft Prize. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Introduction In 1860, the year Abraham Lincoln was elected president, a lanky, long-nosed, twenty-three-year-old Yankee named Milton Bradley invented his first board game, played on a red-and-ivory checkerboard of sixty-four squares. He called it the Checkered Game of Life. Play starts at the boards lower left corner, on an ivory square labeled Infancy illustrated by a tiny, black-inked lithograph of a wicker cradle and ends, usually but not always, at Happy Old Age, at the upper right, although landing on Suicide, inadvertently, helplessly, miserably, and with a noose around your neck, is more common than you might think, and means, inconveniently, that youre dead. The game represents, as indicated by the name, the checkered journey of life, Bradley explained. There are good patches and bad, in roughly equal number. On the one hand: Honesty, Bravery, Success. On the other: Poverty, Idleness, Disgrace. The wise player will strive to gain on his journey that which shall make him the most prosperous, and to shun that which will retard him in his progress. But even when youre heading for Happiness, you can end up at Ruin, passed out, drunk and drooling, on the floor of a seedy-looking tavern where Death darkens the door disguised as a debt collector straight out of *Bleak House*: the bulky black overcoat, the strangely sinister stovepipe hat. The history of games of life contains within it a history of ideas about life itself. The Checkered Game of Life made Milton Bradley a brand name. His company, founded in 1860, survived his death in 1911, the Depression, and two world wars. In 1960, to celebrate its centennial, the Milton Bradley Company released a commemorative Game of Life. It bears almost no resemblance to its checkered nineteenth-century namesake. Instead, Milton Bradleys antebellum game about vice, virtue, and the pursuit of happiness was reinvented as a lesson in consumer conformity, a two-dimensional Levittown, complete with paychecks and retirement homes and medical bills. In *Life*, players fill teeny plastic station wagons with even teensier pink and blue plastic Mommies and Daddies, spin the Wheel of Fate, and ride along the Highway of Life, earning money, buying furniture, having pink and blue plastic babies, and retiring, if theyre lucky, at Millionaire Acres. Along the way, there are good patches: Adopt a Girl and Boy! Collect Presents! And bad: Jury Duty! Lose Turn. Whoever earns the most money wins. (The games motto: Thats Life!) Inside the game box are piles and piles of paper: fake automobile insurance, phony stock certificates, pretend promissory notes, and play money, \$7.5 million of it, including a heap of mint-green fifty-thousand-dollar bills, each featuring a portrait of Bradley, near the end of his days: bearded, aged, antique. As the years passed, *Life* came to look more and more like that portrait of old man Bradley. Only a handful of games have had as long a shelf life. After all, not for long did anyone play *Park and Shop*, another game sold by the Milton Bradley Company in 1960, whose object was to outsmart the other players by parking your car in a strategic place, completing your shopping quickly, and being the first to return home. In the 1990s, Hasbro, which bought the Milton Bradley Company in 1984, revised *Life* to market it to the baby boomer parents who had grown up with it: the station wagons swelled into minivans and it became possible, a few miles down lifes

highway, to have a midlife crisis. The update was a disappointment. And so, in 2006, in an attempt to Botox the shiny, puffy nowness of youth into a gray-whiskered game, Hasbro decided to start again, to design a new game of life, by asking, What would Life be like if it were invented today? Thats a question about the present. If you turn it around, though, you can make it into a question about the past: Why did Milton Bradley invent the Checkered Game, the way he did, when he did? How, in short, did Life begin? A great many questions about life and death have no answers, including, notably, these three: How does life begin? What does it mean? What happens when youre dead? These questions are ancient; they riddle myths and legends; they lie at the heart of every religion; they animate a great deal of scientific research. No one has ever answered them and no one ever will, but everyone tries; trying is the human condition. All anyone can do is ask. Thats why any history of ideas about life and death has to be, like this book, a history of curiosity. How did the game of life begin?, though, isnt an existential question; its a historical one, and you can find answers to historical questions in libraries, museums, and archives, like the U.S. Patent Office. I, MILTON BRADLEY, . . . have invented a new Social Game, Bradley wrote on his patent application. In addition to the amusement and excitement of the game, it is intended to forcibly impress upon the minds of youth the great moral principles of virtue and vice. It was a new game, but the genealogy of the Checkered Game of Life stretches back centuries and across oceans. Bradleys invention is descended from a family of ancient Southeast Asian games members of a genus called square board race games whose common ancestor is probably over a thousand years old. Nepal has the game of karma; Tibet has the game of liberation. In India, Jnana Chaupar, the game of knowledge, is played much like the Checkered Game of Life: land on a virtue and you get to climb a ladder toward the god Vishnu; land on a vice and youre swallowed by a snake. Life has its ups and it has its downs. Then you die, the snake spits you out, and you start again. In the nineteenth century, games from the farthest reaches of the British Empire and beyond found their way into middle-class Victorian parlors. A Persian game of life was collected, probably about 1810, by a British major general serving in northern India. The American firm of Selchow Righter packaged pachisi as the Game of India at least as early as 1867. The New York based McLoughlin Brothers sold the ancient Japanese game of Go as Go-Bang in 1887. Beginning in 1892, Jnana Chaupar was available in Britain as Snakes and Ladders; in the United States it was sold, entirely unhinged from its Indian origins, and decidedly karma-free, as Chutes and Ladders. Unfortunately, although Milton Bradley kept a diary all his life, he never put his papers in an archive, and most of them have been lost, which, notwithstanding his patent application, makes it something of a challenge to know exactly how a young New Englander came, on the eve of the Civil War, to adapt an ancient Southeast Asian game to a red-and-ivory checkerboard featuring an American vision of the good life. He certainly never traveled to India. Still, he didnt have to look half a world away to find what he was after. That lifes a game that can be played well or badly is a very old idea, in the West no less than in the East. The people in Thomas Mores 1516 Utopia play a game of life, not much unlike the chesse, in which vices fyghte wyth vertues, as it were in battell. (The origins of chess are murky. It is thought to have been invented either in India before A.D. 600 or in China about a.d. 800.) How to win and what the rules are whether youre playing against yourself or against God or Satan are matters of much speculation. In 1640, the English poet George Herbert put it this way: Mans lifes a game at tables and he may Mend his bad fortune, by his wiser play; Death plays against us, each disease and sore Are blotts. In Man versus Death, being clever helps, but the best you can hope for is to prolong the game. Death always wins. Death is a bastard. Death cheats. Milton Bradley took a different view. In the Checkered Game of Life, you can win and you can lose and you can even be ruined, but theres no square called Death. Unless you land on Suicide, you cant actually die. Also, you have some control over your fate. The journey of life is governed by a combination of chance and judgment, he explained. Theres what you roll, and theres where you choose to go. The Checkered Game of Life is a game of destiny checked by strategy. This really was new, because Milton Bradley came from a family ruled for generations by nothing so much as an angry God. The Bradleys arrived in New England in 1635, when Daniel Bradley, an apothecarys son, settled in Salem, in Massachusetts Bay, just five years after the Puritans founded their city on a hill. Their sufferings were biblical. Daniel Bradley was killed by Indians in 1689; six years later, his fifteen-year-old son, Isaac, was taken captive. In 1697, another son, his wife, and two of their children died in an attack on the town of Haverhill, during which Hannah Bradley, the wife of still another of Daniels sons, was captured, whereupon her husband, Joseph, trudged after her, through waist-high snows, with his dog and a purse of coin. He meant to ransom her. To be rescued from captivity was to be redeemed. It took Joseph Bradley two years, but he finally redeemed his wife and brought her home. Then, in the winter of 1704, Indians returned to Haverhill and broke into the Bradleys house all over again. This time, Hannah, who was eight months pregnant, fought back. Perceiving the Misery that was attending her, and having boiling Soap on the Fire, she scalded one of them to Death, as the minister of Bostons North Church, Cotton Mather, described it in an account of her trials and tribulations. She hid her sister and one of her children in the back of the house; eventually, she surrendered. She was then forced to walk, for weeks, over hundreds of miles, northward; she lived on nuts, bark, and wild onions. Once, she was allowed a piece of moose hide. She prayed that the Lord would put an end unto her weary Life! Six weeks into her captivity, she gave birth, with none but the Snow under her, and the Heaven over her. When the baby cried, the Indians threw hot Embers in its Mouth, which rendered its Mouth so sore, that it could not Suck . . . So that it Starvd and Dyd. She endured by faith alone. She had her Mind often Irradiated with Strong

Perswasions and Assurances, that she should yet See the Goodness of God, in this Land of the Living. At last, her tender and Loving Husband . . . found her out, and fetchd her home, a Second time. And what, upon her redemption, did she pray? O magnifie the LORD with me, and let us Exalt his Name together. The next time an Indian came to her door, she shot him. She lived to be ninety. In 1707, when Mather wrote about Bradleys captivity and redemption, he used her story as an allegory for the Puritans errand into the wilderness, quoting Virgil: *Ab una Disce omnes*. From one, learn all. That same year, he delivered a sermon called *The Spirit of Life Entering into the Spiritually Dead*, preaching from the gospel of Luke: He was Dead, and is Alive again. Resurrection is redemption from the captivity of death, but Mather spoke, too, about another kind: redemption from the captivity of sin. Sinners are dead souls, dry bones, but they can be quickened, made alive. There wasnt much you could do to be saved; the Lord would decide, on the Day of Judgment. You can hearken: O ye Dry Bones, Hear the word of the Lord. And you can pray: Lord, I am Dead! I am Dead! Oh! Let me ly no longer among the Dead. Hannah Bradleys life was in Gods hands; her captivity was a blessing, her redemption a lesson. She was far from helpless, but she was pursuing neither happiness nor even happy old age. Hers was a story not of success or failure but of fate: God had chosen to visit her with affliction, and there was nothing she could do but praise him, remembering Psalms 119:50: This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me. Hannah Bradley didnt think of life as a game. There was no game; there was only God, his word, and the quick and the dead. The first game called Life, in English, wasnt Milton Bradleys. It was the *New Game of Human Life*, a board game engraved and inked in 1790 by John Wallis, a London printer and mapmaker. Card and table games were fashionable in eighteenth-century London, which is where Hoyles books of rules were first published. Board games look like maps, and they were made by mapmakers. The first board game sold to children, *Journey Through Europe*, or the *Play of Geography*, was printed in London in 1759. The first jigsaw puzzle, *Europe Divided into Its Kingdoms*, also a map, was sold seven years later. Walliss *New Game of Human Life* is a map, too: its life is a journey along a twisty path from birth to death, with eighty-four stops on the road, one for each year. The notion of life as a voyage goes way back. Plato, in *The Republic*, wrote about old men as travelers who have gone a journey. Francis Bacon, in his *History of Life and Death*, described life as a pilgrimage through the wilderness of this world. (It might be a long trip, Bacon warned, so be careful not to wear your shoes out: you might need them in the after-life.) In Walliss game, life is a voyage to salvation, just as it is in John Bunyans *Pilgrims Progress*, first printed in 1678. (Either salvation or that other place: I saw that there was a way to hell, Bunyan wrote, even from the gates of heaven.) Your progress is speeded up by virtue and slowed down by vice. Each stop is a character. You begin at the Infant. Whoever dies first wins. Your reward is to become, at eighty-four, the Immortal Man. There are setbacks at every turn, Jnana Chaupar all over again. Land on the Married Man, at the square marked 34 (the thirty-fourth year of your life), and you get to advance to the Good Father, at 56; but land on the Duelist, at 22, and youll be sent back to age 3, for acting like a child. There is some slight sense of improvementthe acquisition of wisdom, maybe not unlike that captured in a proverb Benjamin Franklin once printed in *Poor Richards Almanack*: At 20 years of age the Will reigns; at 30 the Wit; at 40 the Judgment. The Benevolent Man, age 52, has much to recommend him. Still, there are rogues and knaves all over the board, from the Thoughtless Boy, a ten-year-old, to the Troublesome Companion, at eighty-one. Every age has its folly. The *New Game of Human Life* borrowed its board and rules from the *Royal Game of Goose*, invented in Florence in the sixteenth century, and one of a class called spiral race games. The oldest spiral race game may be the Hyena Game, played for centuries by Arabs in Sudan, in a groove traced in the sand with a stick. It involves a race between pebbles representing the players mothers, who leave their village and head to a well at the spirals center, where they must wash their clothes and return home before a hyena catches them. (A similar game, from ancient Egypt, is known as *Hounds and Jackal*.) Wallis adapted the spiral race game to the idea that life is a voyage in which travelers are buffeted between vice and virtue. It was this allegory that gave the *New Game of Human Life* its UTILITY and MORAL TENDENCY. Parents were instructed to play with their children and request their attention to a few moral and judicious observations explanatory of each Character as they proceed contrast the happiness of a Virtuous well-spent life with the fatal consequences arriving from Vicious Immoral pursuits. The game is a creed: life is a voyage that begins at birth and ends at death, God is at the helm, fate is cruel, and your reward lies beyond the grave. Nevertheless, to Puritans, who considered gambling the work of the devil, playing a game of life was, itself, an immoral pursuit. As the English poet Nathaniel Cotton put it, in 1794: That lifes a game, divines confess; This says at cards, and that at chess; But if our views be centerd here, Tis all a losing game, I fear. The *New Game of Human Life* showed up in the United States not long after George Washington was inaugurated, and it was still being played as late as the 1870s; although, by then, an essayist who wrote about it made it sound quaint, an antique game played on a queer old parchment. The fearsome hand of providence made the *New Game of Human Life*, by latter-day board game standards, unbearably dull. There is no strategy, just dutiful to-ing and fro-ing, in abject obedience to the roll of the die and the rules of the game. Even worse, there is a dispiriting absence of adversaries; youre racing against other players, but youre not competing with them, not the way you are in, say, *Monopoly*, when you get to charge them exorbitant rents. And, as for parents offering up a few moral and judicious observations at each square, I have tried this giving my best impression of an eighteenth-century father and all I can say is: no dice. When my six-year-old landed on the Docile Boy, I asked him, Do you know what docile means? No. It means you should do what I say, you

little blister. Oh yeah? He narrowed his eyes. Your roll. Two more games of life, the Mansion of Bliss and the Mansion of Happiness, were both produced in England beginning around 1800. They look a lot like the New Game of Human Life: spiral race games adapted to the pilgrimage of life. Both represent immortality, lifes final destination, as a heavenly mansion; this was then a popular Christian conceit, taken from John 14:2: In my Fathers house are many mansions. O Lord! deliver us from sin, prayed one American evangelical in 1814, and when we shall have finished our earthly course, admit us to the mansion of bliss and happiness. Or, as the rules to the Mansion of Bliss had it: Who enter the mansion of bliss, Will have cause to rejoice at his claim; So well has he travelld thro life, He has happily ended the game. In the United States, the Mansion of Bliss never really made a mark, maybe because the phrase the mansion of bliss was also used by Americans to refer to an especially alluring womans breasts. But the Mansion of Happiness, the most popular board game in Britain, had an extraordinarily successful American career. It was sold in the United States at least as early as 1806. In 1843, an American edition, based on revisions to the English game made by Anne Wales Abbott, the editor of a Boston-based juvenile magazine called the Childs Friend, was offered by W. and S. B. Ives, a printing company in Salem. In ten months, Ives sold nearly four thousand of what went on to become the centurys most enduring game. It became a staple of Victorian parlors; it made its way west on the Overland Trail. The Mansion of Happiness is abundantly pious. Its rules begin: At this amusement each will find A moral fit timprove the mind; It gives to those their proper due, Who various paths of vice pursue, And shows (while vice destruction brings) That good from every virtue springs. Be virtuous then and forward press, To gain the seat of happiness. You can hear, in these lines, echoes of the earliest Puritan primers: In Adams fall, we sinned all. And the last couplet alludes, quite particularly, to the beginning of John Miltons Paradise Lost (1667), in which Man waits for the son of God to Restore us, and regain the blissful seat. No game is more didactic: At this amusement each will find / A moral fit timprove the mind. Whether its amusing is difficult to say. The Mansion of Happiness is hard to finish, mostly because the wages of sin are so harsh. Whoever becomes a SABBATH BREAKER must be taken to the WHIPPING POST and whipt (a retreat of six squares) that youre forever going backward and losing turns. However popular the Mansion of Happiness was with the parents who purchased it, the game boards that survive in archives are in such suspiciously good condition that at least one historian has wondered whether children who must, invariably, have been given the game as a gift could ever bear to play it. Its rules read like a sermon: Whoever possesses AUDACITY, CRUELTY, IMMODESTY, or INGRATITUDE, must return to his former situation till his turn comes to spin again, and not even think of Happiness, much less partake of it. Milton Bradley was born in Vienna, Maine, in 1836, two centuries after Daniel Bradley crossed the Atlantic, by which time the Bradleys had not yet begun to think of happiness, much less partake of it. He was the great-great-grandson of Jonathan Bradley, one of the many members of the Bradley family killed by Indians. He was his parents only son. He was named after the Puritan author of Paradise Lost. As a boy, he read Pilgrims Progress. When he was ten, his family moved to Lowell, Massachusetts, so that his father, Lewis, an insolvent, itinerant craftsman, could work in the textile mills. The nineteenth century was an age of machines: the steam engine, the cotton gin, the power loom. Inventors abounded; the patent office could barely keep up. Men of progress they were called, and conquerors of nature. Their machines were better than poetry. The genius of Eli Whitney was said to rival that of Shakespeare. The head of the U.S. Patent Office declared the steamship a mightier epic than the Iliad, and any fool could see that James Watt had a thing or two over Cicero. Machines were thought to be the engines of progress, the index of the degree in which the benefits of civilization are anywhere enjoyed, as James Mill, John Stuart Mills father, put it, in his six-volume History of British India. (Having never been to India proved no obstacle to Millss claiming that Indians were stalled on the march to progress, as measured by their great want of ingenuity and completeness in instruments and machinery.) But the age of machines had its critics. Thomas Carlyle considered faith in machines a kind of spiritual bondage, something akin to a religious fallacy but worse, and every bit as much a delusion as seventeenth-century New Englanders belief in witchcraft. Faith in progress is faith in the future, but if we think that machines liberate us from the past, Carlyle argued, we are wrong; it is we who are their prisoners. Practically considered, he wrote, our creed is Fatalism; and, free in hand and foot, we are shackled in heart and soul with far straighter than feudal chains. We may be blind to those shackles, blinded by a fog as thick as Londons, as he put it, but we are just as surely fettered by chains of our own forging. What Carlyle was describing, and what the Bradleys, like everyone else, were caught up in, was a quite extraordinary transition, a shift in where people were seeking answers to questions about the meaning of life: from 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 changed. Answers you used to find in the past you were now expected to find in the future. And you were supposed to find them yourself. The secularization of progress and the rise of individualism had a great deal to do with another transformation: the shape of a life was changing. Life used to begin where it ended; it ended where it began. A lot of other things used to be circular, too. Everything went round and round: day and night, the seasons, the crops in the field, fate. In an unraveling that had begun even before Daniel Bradley sailed to Salem, all those circles were turning into lines. The sun still set at the end of every day, but now you could turn on the lights and day would never end. The very idea of history came to a kind of close. The world of tomorrow was infinitely more interesting than the world of yesterday. Novelty replaced redemption. While his father worked in the mills, Milton Bradley attended

Lowells grammar and high schools. Then he went to the Lawrence Scientific School at Harvard, where he likely studied with Jacob Bigelow, Harvards Rumford Professor of Physical and Mathematical Science. In a widely read treatise called *Elements of Technology*, Bigelow used the word technology to describe the application of the sciences to the useful arts. (Before that, technology was something you made by hand. Bigelows usage soon found a place in the name of a new school: the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.) Technology, Bigelow said, was promoting the progress and happiness of our race. Thats neither what Bunyan meant by progress nor Milton by bliss. No machine can take you into the mansion of happiness or even to the gate of heaven. Lewis Bradley did not find happiness shackled to a new and improved loom. He left Lowell for Hartford, in search of better work, which meant that his son had to drop out of school. Here, though, was yet another novelty: the Bradleys could travel from Lowell to Hartford by train. At the time, the locomotive was the symbol of progress, pictured, in prints and paintings, chugging across the continent, conquering nature, unstoppable. You could measure it: each mile of railroad track was another mile of progress. In the 1840s, train tracks reached across Massachusetts, much to the distress of Henry David Thoreau, who had built on the banks of a pond in Concord a very different mansion of happiness: a cabin in the woods. While the train to Fitchburg rode by, its whistle screeching, its smokestack puffing, Thoreau wrote that all those machines were merely improved means to an unimproved end: We boast that we belong to the nineteenth century and are making the most rapid strides of any nation, but that, he believed, was humbug. We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us. Thoreau planted a hill of beans and spent his time hoeing, reading, writing, picking huckleberries, and listening to bullfrogs trumping, hawks screaming, and whip-poor-wills singing vespers. Mr. Thoreau is thus at war with the political economy of the age, one reviewer of *Walden* complained in 1854. But Thoreau wasnt so much battling progress as dodging it. He had the idea not to live in this restless, nervous, bustling, trivial Nineteenth Century, but stand or sit thoughtfully while it goes by. No one can manage that. Ralph Waldo Emerson drafted a letter, never sent: My dear Henry, A frog was made to live in a swamp, but a man was not made to live in a swamp. Yours ever, R. Milton Bradley, no frog he, did not sit out the restless, nervous, bustling, trivial nineteenth century. He kept striving. He left Hartford. By 1856, he had made his way to Springfield, Massachusetts, where, two years later, he opened his own business: MILTON BRADLEY Mechanical Draftsman Patent Solicitor. In an age of machines, he would write not poems or prayers but patents. The next year, when Said Pasha, the Ottoman viceroy of Egypt, hired a Springfield firm to build a \$300,000 railroad train on which he might travel the newly laid tracks between Cairo and Alexandria, it was Milton Bradley who designed and supervised the construction of a rosewood-and-mahogany observation car, from sketches supplied by an Egyptian artist. In 1860, Bradley started a lithography business and brought out an immensely popular election-year lithograph of a clean-shaven Abraham Lincoln. But then, just when it seemed the young striver had finally crawled his way to Success, he nearly sank into Ruin: Lincoln grew a beard, making Bradleys inventory worthless. One evening, a friend came over to cheer him up, bringing with him a board game; from descriptions, it sounds as though this must have been the Mansion of Bliss or a near knockoff. Bradley loved it. He decided to invent his own game, with materials he had near to hand: a chessboard and wooden men. He always claimed to have invented the Checkered Game of Life from scratch, but thats not strictly true. Most of its ideas were, by then, hack-neyed. Life is a kind of chess, Benjamin Franklin once wrote. By playing chess, you could learn foresight, circumspection, caution, and perseverance. An 1834 engraving called *The Chess Players; Or, The Game of Life*, by the German artist Moritz Retzsch, depicted life as a game of chess between Man and Satan, held in the nave of a Gothic cathedral. Americans reenacted Retzschs engraving in tableaux vivants. It inspired short stories, novels, and plays. In 1848, one abolitionist complained about compromises with slaveholding states by arguing, The North is as unequally matched with the South in this Game of Life as the youth in Retzschs chess-players, with his Satanic adversary. In Bradleys game, you dont play against the devil; you play against other men. And you dont play for your soul; you play for success. Bradley found more in Franklin than in Retzsch. Born in Boston in 1706 into a family much like Hannah Bradleys, Franklin grew up listening to Cotton Mathers sermons. But the story of his life, as he told it, wasnt the story of dry bones quickening; it was the story of a voyage from the Poverty and Obscurity in which I was born and bred, to a state of Affluence and some degree of Reputation in the World. It was the story of the way to wealth. This, then, was the genius of Milton Bradleys invention: he took a game imported from India and made it into the story of America. He turned a game of knowledge into the path to prosperity. He wrote a set of rules and lithographed a board. After he had manufactured enough boxes to make a sales trip, he took a train to New York, walked into a stationery store, and said to the manager, How do you do, sir. I am Milton Bradley of the Milton Bradley Company of Springfield. I have come to New York with some samples of a new and most amazing game, sir. A highly moral game, may I say, that encourages children to lead exemplary lives and entertains both old and young with the spirit of friendly competition. May I demonstrate how it is played? He sold out his stock, went back to Springfield, and, with a pocketful of cash, got engaged. He was married later that year. He was twenty-four. The Checkered Game of Life is deceptively simple. Twirl the teetotum, a numbered, six-sided top, and move your wooden man around the board, collecting points by landing on any of the eight point-value squares. Whoever earns 100 points first wins. Some squares help you along, little lithographed hands pointing the way, as when Perseverance leads you to Success, worth 5 points. (Very Franklinian, that.) Spinning a 2 from the red square between Ruin and Fat Office forces you to land on Suicide, where, ignominiously, you die, but

almost any spin from nearly every other square involves a decision, a choice among as many as eight possible moves. Unlike *The New Game of Human Life* or *The Mansion of Happiness*, the *Checkered Game of Life* requires you to make decisions, lots of them. Nothing is in Gods hands. Its best to have a plan. Most players, I find, try to go to School, and then to College (worth 5 points), heading slowly toward the top of the board and *Happy Old Age*, on worth a whopping 50 points. But your chances of going to School are not good: from your starting position, at *Infancy*, you have to spin either a 3 or a 6. Youre quite likely to end up at *Poverty* instead. Despair not. It will be seen that poverty lies near the cradle, Bradley wrote in the rules of the game, explaining why he had placed *Poverty* just two squares from *Infancy*. But because in starting life, it is not necessarily a fact that poverty will be a disadvantage, so in the game it causes the player no loss. Even if you skip *School* altogether, you may be rewarded by landing on *Honesty*, and sent from there directly to *Happiness*. Its possible to win the *Checkered Game of Life* without ever reaching *Happy Old Age* after all, people do die young but its not easy. And, as Bradley warned, *Happy Old Age* is surrounded by many difficulties: land on *Idleness*, and youll be sent to *Disgrace*, at the very bottom of the board, which means that you have to climb back up all over again. Ignore Bradleys warning at your peril. Heres another word of advice: dont enter *Politics*, if you can possibly avoid it. Youll go to *Congress* and earn 5 points, but youll be carried away from *Happy Old Age* and youll woefully increase your chances of landing on *Crime* and ending up in *Prison*, where you lose a turn, for any person who is sent to prison is interrupted in his pursuit of happiness. When Bradley brought out his *Checkered Game of Life*, in 1860, parents, apparently, greeted it as merely a new form of the game dear to children as *The Mansion of Happiness*. In his patent application, Bradley himself insisted that his game was intended to forcibly impress upon the minds of youth the great moral principles of virtue and vice. But the *Checkered Game of Life* is vastly darker and more ruthless than its predecessors. In the *Mansion of Happiness*, landing on *Truth* which you cant avoid, if a spin of the teetotum sends you there advances you six squares; in the *Checkered Game of Life*, *Truth* exists, and you can choose to seek it out, but it has no value whatsoever. (Thoreau would not have approved: Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth.) Bradleys game rewards only those virtues that lead to *Wealth and Success*, like *Industry* and *Perseverance*. It has no use for *Patience* or *Charity*, which arent even on the board. By 1866, the game even promoted betting on the stock market, on a square called *Speculation*. In sixty-four squares, Bradleys game both celebrated and made possible his own rags-to-riches rise. The *Checkered Game of Life* isnt a race to heaven; its a series of calculations about the best route to collect the most points, fastest. Accumulate or fail. Bradley accumulated. He sold forty thousand copies of his game in its first year, and made his fortune when he decided to sell *Games for Soldiers*, a portable box of games (the *Checkered Game of Life*, backgammon, checkers, and chess), just as the Civil War broke out. The *Checkered Game of Life* found a place in the knapsack of nearly every Union soldier. *Poverty . . . Industry . . . Perseverance . . . Success*. Not long afterward, Mark Twain wrote a piece for the *New York Tribune* called *The Revised Catechism*: What is the chief end of man? A. To get rich. In what way? A. Dishonestly if we can, honestly if we must. Who is God, the only one and True? A. Money is God. . . . Do we progress? A. You bet your life. And that, in nineteenth-century America, was how you played the checkered game. You could never in a million years sell it today, Mel Taft told me. Taft used to be vice president of research and development at the Milton Bradley Company. In 1959, when Taft and his colleagues were preparing for the companys centennial, they wisely never considered reviving Bradleys original game. It was quaint; it was old-fashioned; good grief, it even had a square for *Intemperance*. They decided, instead, to hire a California company that had started the hula hoop craze to develop a new game of life. When Taft first saw what theyd come up with, he knew it was a doozy: It looked like a million bucks. What it doesnt look like is the *Checkered Game of Life*, but, curiously, it does rather resemble the *Mansion of Happiness*, just with lots of pieces of plastic attached to it. The 1960 *Game of Life* is a spiral race, its serpentine path representing the voyage of life, from high school graduation to retirement. (In *Life*, you never die; you just quit working.) Some squares offer rewards: *Contest Winner!* Collect \$5,000. Others mete out penalties: *Buy Furniture*. Pay \$2,000. But neither is morally freighted; instead of a battle between virtue and vice, its an accounting of income and expenses. The games most important squares are those that announce, in red letters, *Pay Day!* What you earn depends on a choice you make on your very first move: Will you go to college or take a job? The *Checkered Game* brought together choice and chance, but *Life* has only one real fork in the road: work or study. If you start work, you can collect paychecks right away; if you go to college, you have to take out loans and pay them back, but you earn more when you eventually do start getting paychecks. After that there are occasional financial decisions to be made: do you want to buy life insurance? would you like to invest in the stock market? but these, and the piles of paper and the cars full of babies, serve mainly as a distraction from the plays passivity. Like the *Mansion of Happiness*, *Life* is a journey along a fixed path, where only one thing matters. At *Lifes Day of Reckoning*, you count your cash, not your good deeds. Like all earlier spiral race games of life, *Life* is about fate: not whether youre fated to become an *Immortal Man*, but whether youre fated to retire to *Millionaire Acres*. By 1960, the *mansion of happiness* was a five-thousand-square-foot house in a swank retirement community. The 1960 *Game of Life* was a smash. Children liked it because its like playing dress-up; you get to pretend to be a grown-up. One speaks, of course, only for oneself, but this game is just for kids unless youre eight, its a drag. And, as the years passed, it drew criticism: it is, after all, relentlessly amoral and shamelessly cash-conscious. In the *Wall Street* 1990s, a team of designers charged with updating it gave up; whenever

they tried to make the game less about having the most money, it made no sense. All they could come up with was to add life tiles, which allowed players to do good deeds. But the only way to be rewarded for your virtue was in the game's sole currency: cash. Save an endangered species: collect \$200,000. Solution to pollution: \$250,000. In 2007, just before a global financial meltdown involving securities fraud, subprime mortgages, and bad debt, Hasbro introduced a wholly reimagined game: the Game of Life: Twists and Turns. In this version, life is . . . aimless. There's a place to begin, but it's called Start, not Infancy or High School Graduation. There's no place on the board called Happy Old Age and no Millionaire Acres, either. Plainly, the Gate to Heaven is out of the question. The game board is divided into four squares: Learn It, Live It, Love It, and Earn It, through each of which a colored path snakes its way. (The game is a mishmash of a square board and a spiral one.) You decide how you want to spend your time: go to school, have kids, hang out, travel the world. Whatever. You begin using a tiny plastic skateboard as a game piece; if you want, you can convert it to a car. You can buy a house, from Modest, for \$200,000, to Mansion, for \$1,000,000. You pay 10 percent a year on your mortgage. The rules advise: Because houses increase in value by 6% a year, higher-priced homes earn more over time than lower-priced homes. Just be sure to offset these earnings by any debt you carry. How players (ages nine and up) would do that is unclear. This game is paperless. Instead of cash, each player gets a Visa-brand credit card made out in Milton Bradley's name to swipe in the game's electronic Life Pod. Only the computer-a battery-powered mechanical deity knows how much money you have.<sup>48</sup> Accused of wantonly advertising credit cards to kids through the Hasbro-Visa deal, a Visa spokesman insisted, We are not marketing to kids. We are helping to educate kids. It's never too early. Suffice it to say, Twists and Turns has a remarkably forgiving attitude toward the highly leveraged player. If you're in debt in Monopoly, George Burtch, vice president of Hasbro's games division, told me, you're watching. But in this game, you can be hugely in debt but you're still playing, and no one knows it! In the Mansion of Happiness, there's a square for that kind of thing. It's called the Road to Folly. What is the meaning of life? In Twists and Turns, whoever ends up with the most Life Points wins, although, technically, the object of the game is to experience all that LIFE has to offer! With Milton Bradley's Visa card in hand, you can do whatever the hell you want. A THOUSAND WAYS TO LIVE YOUR LIFE! the game box screams. YOU CHOOSE! No one dies; no one grows old; no one even grows up. You can play for five minutes or five hours. Or you can just quit, which, all things considered, I recommend. Men have an indistinct notion that if they keep up this activity of joint stocks and spades long enough all will at length ride somewhere, Thoreau wrote. But where? Twists and Turns failed, not because it was aimless, but because it wasn't aimless enough. By the time it came out, kids were busy leading virtual lives online, some of them in a place called Second Life, a simulated world where you could live your life all over again, or instead, forever. If the history of games of life tells a story, it's a story about a voyage to nowhere. God, machines, markets, science: each new faith, even faith in uncertainty, is its own creed. Each has its philosophers, each its hucksters, and between them lies a history of beliefs about the beginning, meaning, and end of life. Twists and Turns is the aimless, endless game of secular, liberal modernity. How does life begin? What does it mean? What happens when you're dead? Who knows. YOU CHOOSE! History can't answer existential questions about life and death; it can only investigate and use evidence to tell stories that make arguments about the relationship between the living and the dead, like the story of Milton Bradley. After the Checkered Game of Life, Bradley lost interest in games. In an age when success made the man when to fail was to be a failure he spurned his own achievement.<sup>54</sup> He reached Fat Office, and then he walked out. Beginning in the 1870s, he devoted his energies not to board games but to the nascent kindergarten movement, a plan to offer free education to four-, five-, and six-year-olds, and especially to the children of the poor. Increased wealth brought increased want, as Henry George pointed out in *Progress and Poverty*, in 1879: Discovery upon discovery, and invention after invention, have neither lessened the toil of those who most need respite, nor brought plenty to the poor. What could be done? The restless, nervous, steam-powered nineteenth century had this how-the-other-half-lives underside: social welfare efforts aimed to rescue the people who were being ridden over by the engine of progress. Enthralled by the idea that very young children could learn through art, a kind of learning that would set them up not only for future academic success but for happiness, too, Bradley started manufacturing crayons, colored paper, color wheels, flash cards, and watercolors, for classrooms. He invented the one-armed paper cutter. He set up a printing shop in Springfield in order to publish, in 1887, *The Paradise of Childhood*, a lavishly illustrated manual for kindergarten teachers, adapted from the writing of the movement's German founder, Friedrich Froebel. Soon he was printing a monthly journal, the *Kindergarten*. Then he entered his decrepitude and, next, his dotage. He began falling asleep at his desk. He started taking naps in his office; he ordered the presses in his factory stopped for half an hour after lunch every day, so as not to disturb his rest. He retired in 1907; he was seventy-one. In 1910, his colleagues toasted him and gave him the gift of a book of tribute essays titled *Milton Bradley: A Successful Man*. But, writing in the *Kindergarten*, Bradley reflected that, of all he had done, he was most proud of his educational inventions, which had earned him barely any money at all. In using the word success, I do not wish to confine its meaning to that cheap interpretation which sees only the glitter of gold or the glamour of elusive fame. In my case, I cannot overestimate the feeling of satisfaction which has been with me all these years at the thought that I have done something, if only something prosaic in character, to place the kindergarten on its present solid foundation. It was a lesson any clever child might have drawn from playing the Checkered Game of Life: Beware of Ambition. It sounds good, but if you

land there, you are promptly sent to Fame, a square that not only has no value, in itself, but also puts you perilously close to Jail, Prison, and Suicide. Success isn't everything. The journey of life is governed by a combination of chance and judgment, Bradley had written, in his rules for the game, while still a young man. In starting life, it is not necessarily a fact that poverty will be a disadvantage, so in the game it causes the player no loss. But the older he grew, the better Bradley came to see that he had been wrong. Some people are given better chances than others. There are such things as lousy starts, rotten luck, and bad cards. Maybe he even regretted that he had placed Poverty so close to Infancy and made the chances of getting to School no better than one in three. The kindergarten movement was about beating those odds. Maybe, as he neared the mansion of happiness, Milton Bradley saw in making crayons for kindergartners not only their second chance but his, too: redemption, at last.