The History of Evil in the Early Modern Age

1450–1700CE

Edited by Daniel N. Robinson, Chad Meister, and Charles Taliaferro
Series editors: Chad Meister and Charles Taliaferro

The History of Evil Volume III

ROUTLEDGE

The History of Evil in the Early Modern Age

The third volume of *The History of Evil* encompasses the early modern era from 1450–1700 CE. This revolutionary period exhibited immense change in both secular knowledge and sacred understanding. It saw the fall of Constantinople and the rise of religious violence, the burning of witches and the drowning of Anabaptists, the ill treatment of indigenous peoples from Africa to the Americas, the reframing of formal authorities in religion, philosophy, and science, and it produced profound reflection on good and evil in the genius of Shakespeare, Milton, Bacon, Teresa of Avila, and the Cambridge Platonists.

This superb treatment of the history of evil during a formative period of the early modern era will appeal to those with interests in philosophy, theology, social and political history, and the history of ideas.

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Series introduction

Charles Taliaferro and Chad Meister

This massive project with dozens of original essays in six volumes, in collaborations with six distinguished scholars as volume editors, is intended to be an accessible, international, contribution to the philosophical study of evil in multiple cultures and times. In this project, 'evil' is understood in the broadest sense to cover the widest spectrum of what different philosophical and religious persons and traditions have identified as wrong or bad or unfitting or impediments to the good. More specifically, the concept of 'evil' in the *History of Evil* includes but is not restricted to the concepts of (and thus the history of) sin, pain and suffering, the violation of the good, actions or events that are not in harmony with the Dao, the pursuit of dangerous illusions accompanied by a refusal to seek enlightenment, states of character that are malicious, the desecration of that which is sacred, and more. The work, as a whole, is philosophical insofar as it engages historical and contemporary events (involving social and political history, the history of science, religion, and art) in an effort to philosophically articulate and assess the thought, reasons, values, and emotions involved in thinking about evil in different times and places. The project has not been forged to support a particular account of evil nor to support a particular proposal for the defeat (or elimination) of evil, but three salient themes have emerged in the process of our work on this project that we convey in this brief introduction to all six volumes.

First, we believe that there is some wisdom not to think of 'evil' narrowly as a special category of profoundly heinous wrongdoing. It may seem quite natural to reserve the term 'evil' for genocide, outrageous displays of violence, demonic possession, and so on, and not to lessen its potency if used for minor, human failings. Arguably, it seems odd to use any single term (especially 'evil') to cover both petty, personal wrongdoings with their minimal long-term harms (like a wrongful lie to achieve short-term social gain such as getting a good night sleep rather than experiencing a stodgy party) and such horrific actions as sadistic torture and serial killing. But there is some sensibility to pulling together in a single multi-volume work, a diverse set of chapters with a full spectrum of what persons have found to be wrong (or bad or wicked or sinful or abominable or unfitting). This allows us to take stock of an important question that arises in the study of evil: how 'ordinary' or 'natural' is what many of us call evil and how might the (comparatively) minor

acts or events that we deem merely wrong relate to the acts or events that we find monumentally and unredeemable evil?

Second, the very structure and composition of this project provides some reason to accept a version of the idea that the good (broadly conceived) has a kind of primacy over what is (broadly conceived of as) evil. We do not mean that this six volume work provides evidence for the privation of the good account of evil which may be found in various Platonic traditions, according to which evil is parasitic on the good (that which is evil is what causes good beings to dysfunction or to not enjoy their positive powers). Still, let us assume that the following are marks of what most of us would consider to be the good in scholarship: fairness, impartiality, being collaborative in terms of the giving and receiving of criticism, eschewing professional jealousy and envy, sharing a love for the reliable and charitable treatment of sources and shunning recklessness in scholarship, and so on. This undertaking has been marked from the outset and throughout by a positive goal of doing good scholarship about evil. The opposite (the goal of doing evil scholarship about evil?) would be absurd and a more moderate indebtedness to evil (the goal of producing an account of evil that is not marred with evil) is too anemic to motivate any of us to do what you are reading now. Oddly, each scholar's work on what may be deemed (most broadly) evil in different times and places has been motivated to share what is good work.

Third, while it will not be surprising that because the editorial goal has not been to promote a particular account of evil (Kant's notion of radical evil, for example), we (as editors) have not set out to promote a particular solution or remedy or advice about how we should address evil. And yet this project itself has involved a commitment to the kinds of virtues relevant to any international project of this scope when it comes to addressing evil. Such virtues include those we have just noted: seeking to work impartially, being open to criticism, being charitable with views and thinkers with whom we may not share much initial empathy, and the commitment to not be held sway by the vices of vanity, professional jealousy, envy, and so on.

A further, refined statement of this third point will take us into deep philosophical waters about what is (sometimes) called communication or discourse ethics or the ideal observer theory, and might even require comments on the Enlightenment versus tradition-constituted inquiry, and so on. In keeping with our general editorial policy of not advancing this diverse, multi-volume work as motivated by some specific account of evil, we will leave open-ended a further refinement of our third theme. We will be satisfied, and count this project as being partly successful, if it helps foster impartial, international, collaborative engaged inquiry into the vexing problem of evil.

Introduction

Daniel N. Robinson

Several connected approaches are available to those who would resurrect the understandings of earlier epochs. The one most frequently adopted is intellectual history with its focus on major philosophers. Its chief limitation is that leading philosophers seldom reflect the general perspectives of their age and often treat of their subjects in ways too abstract to illuminate the thinking of their time. The history of law, especially as it pertains to concepts of insanity and responsibility, provides so useful and important a supplement. The law in every epoch must dispose of concrete cases and solve actual problems in ways and words intelligible to disputants and defendants, judges and juries alike. In the essays comprising this volume, 'evil' is examined in the on-going dialogue between legal and extra-legal conceptions of human nature.

The collapse of imperial Rome and the growing authority of the Christian church produced sharp points of conflict between Roman law and the increasingly official religious precepts of a post-classical and Christian world. Considered, too, are the witch-trials and panics that occupied the period from 1400 to 1700. Although legal provisions for dealing with witches and sorcerers appear as early as Rome's *Twelve Tables*, it was only in the Christian West that all forms of witchery were assimilated to the category of *heresy* and thus rendered as evil felonies. Interpreting such judgments calls for caution, as Professor Ruiz states in his essay on evil in the Medieval period. He puts it well: 'Writing a history of evil, or even discussing the "evilness" of a particular medieval institution, as, for example in this instance the Inquisition, strikes me somewhat as a presentist and essentializing enterprise. It is a task fraught with dangerous assumptions about the past and about the methodological imperative of judging what came before us from our own present and historically determined ethical perspective.'

Nonetheless, some theories seem insulated from the usual sources of change. Peter Maxwell-Stuart notes that 'the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were an era of immense change and revolution in both secular knowledge and theology. Magic, however, appeared to remain stable in the face of these changes and the imminence of the Apocalypse now expected by everyone. It was thought that the End Times were nigh because the present was so wicked. Evil's presence in the world was tangible and could be experienced as such. These beliefs and conceptions were shared by learned and unlearned alike. . .'.

Indeed, as Cary J. Nederman & Guillaume Bogiaris note in discussing Niccolò Machiavelli, some advanced a firm '. . . scepticism regarding the objective nature of evil (and Good) as a stable, recognizable set of actions, motivations and/or precepts. Rather, Machiavelli seemed to have thought that it was more accurate to talk of good as opposed to bad rather than of good as opposed to evil'.

With Luther, the timeless perspective is reasserted, now with the benefit of scripture. Luther, as discussed by Jennifer Hockenbery Dragseth, '. . . rejected academic metaphysics as an adequate route to understanding the problem of good and evil . . .'.

With Calvin, as we learn from Paul Helm, and adopting the main Christian tradition, Calvin regards the material creation as good, and mankind's embodiment is also good. God is creator of all things and of created persons who are secondary causes.

> God's sovereignty extends over both good and evil. If there is evil, as there manifestly is, then God ordains it, though he cannot be the author of it, at least in the sense that he is a malefactor, with evil intentions, the 'author of sin'. No, says Calvin, God is not the author of sin in that sense. Let's call it the blanket sense. Yet there is a sense in which God's attitude to good and evil are not the same. For God is holy, and is a permitter of evil.

In her illuminating essay on Shakespeare, Claire Landis notes that 'Shakespeare seldom maintained a clear and consistent position on philosophical issues across (or even within) his plays . . . (but) certain broad themes that permit at least one generalization: that evil is, preeminently, a human choice'.

Hobbes, on the other hand, has a firm position on such matters. Geoffrey Gorham sees Hobbes as 'the first modern philosopher to re-conceive good and evil, and right and wrong, within a thoroughly egoist and materialist framework'. One need look no further than the theory set forth in *Leviathan*: 'Whatsoever is the object of any man's appetite or desire, that is it for which he for his part called good; and the object of his hate and aversion, evil'.

Thus, good and evil exist only in relation to individuals, not absolutely. But Descartes in his *Meditations*, chooses to avoid the question:

> But it is to be noticed, however, that sin – or error that is committed in the pursuit of good and evil – is in no way dealt with there; rather only what occurs in the judging of the true and false is dealt there. And there is no discussion of matters pertaining to faith or the conduct of life, but simply speculative truths that are known by means of the natural light.

On Descartes, Zbigniew Janowski concludes:

> The Ancient Biblical moral of the story of the Garden of Eden, in which God punished Adam and Eve by pain and labor, which are supposed to accompany man in his worldly journey, can be said to have been denied by

Descartes' refusal to accommodate corrupt will as part of his Modern philosophical tool-box.

Marcy Lascano has Leibniz assuring us that this is the best of all possible worlds, but that requires a diversity that leaves room for evil.

The Cambridge Platonists, carefully studied by Charles Taliaferro,

> . . . held that the natural world was created because it is good that there is such a natural world; the emergence of evil in this world was and is contrary to God's will and abhorrent to God's nature. God is at work in creation (through Christ) to provide a way in which evil persons may be redeemed. [Cambridge Platonists'] views and arguments are highlighted in four domains: the role of evil and goodness in philosophical inquiry, the philosophy of human nature, moral realism, and the concept of free agency as the ground for blame and praise . . . Evil is weaker than goodness from a cosmic point of view and, in the end, goodness would triumph over evil.

This is an all too thin sampling of the chapters comprising Volume 3. From Homer to the rise of medical jurisprudence, the problem of evil has engaged the attention of popes and peasants, lawyers and courts, poets and philosophers. Evil has been understood as, e.g., the witch entering into a pact *implicatum* with the devil or as the result of a lesion in the brain. Skepticism really cannot participate here, for it must include evil itself as something of a mythical superstition. But, however hard to define or catalogue, most know evil when they see it.

1 Towards a history of evil

Inquisition and fear in the medieval West

Teofilo F. Ruiz

Writing a history of evil, or even discussing the 'evilness' of a particular medieval institution, as, for example in this instance the Inquisition, strikes me somewhat as a presentist and essentializing enterprise. It is a task fraught with dangerous assumptions about the past and about the methodological imperative of judging what came before us from our own present and historically determined ethical perspective. In many respects, it is, at its very core, another form of Whiggish history. Having grown up as a scholar, as many of my generation did, under Clifford Geertz's considerable shadow, I have always been committed to the relativity of cultures, that is, to the idea that people and institutions as cultural constructs have to be understood within their own specific and peculiar 'webs of significance'.[1] In truth, to brand someone or to depict an entire institution as 'evil' leads more to questions and arguments than to a clear cut statement on the ethics of the past. Evil for whom? Evil according to what ethical (or religious) understanding and standards? Evil understood within what historical contexts?

There is also the great danger of falling – a note of caution I have already raised above – into one of the greatest historical fallacies that is, judging and assessing the past by the mores and ideological leanings of today. Although always keeping in mind Walter Benjamin's acerbic critic of historicism, in doing so, that is judging the past by our own standards, one risks falling into the deeper quandary of assessing the past according to particular Western traditions – always ideologically tainted – of right and wrong that are often alien to contemporary cultures in other parts of the world or, most certainly, that are alien to ethical concerns in the distant past. In many respects, this is not too far from Smail and Shryock's formidable recent critique of how concepts of the 'modern' and the 'pre-modern' are constructed in recent historiography, or John Elliott's recent statement that such concepts as 'modernity' or 'globalization' are Eurocentric.[2]

In this regard it may be useful to invoke, once again, Walter Benjamin's powerful critique of historicisim, and his reminder of the common sense fact that history is often written by the victors.[3] Since we are, meaning in this case most of the Western historians contributing to this volume, the victors, or have been until very recently, are we engaged in a similar historicist practice? While we may somewhat agree – based upon a legal decision undertaken by the Allies when they

set up the Nuremberg trials after their defeat of Nazi Germany – that there are acts against humanity of such horrific character (such as the Nazis genocide policies against the Roma, Jews, Communists, homosexuals, physically handicapped people, and others) that can be truly defined as evils, defining repressive regimes or institutions as evil in retrospect is not always historically accurate. An additional problem is that in the world of nations and religious conflict, institutions and individuals are prompt to note the 'evil' of others while neglecting to see our own peculiar transgressions. Perhaps only Germany has, in recent times, been willing to confront its past in an honest and direct way.

In dealing with the Inquisition in its papal, episcopal, and Spanish variants, most of us in the Western world today would agree that the institution was oppressive and even evil. Many of us who have worked on these histories would also agree that the consequences of inquisitorial trials and practices proved nefarious to medieval and Spanish societies, not to mention to the many who suffered the effects of inquisitorial attention on their own flesh and lives. Yet, the Spanish Inquisition that has been for so long synonymous with 'evil' executed a relative small number of people (around 5,000 according to the latest calculation) over its more than three hundred years history.[4] Clearly that figure pales when compared with early modern attacks against women during the witchcraze in Europe, or compared with the atrocities undertaken throughout the twentieth century and the first decade of the present one. Of course, 'evilness' does not depend only on quantifying the destruction of human life. If that was our sole criterium then such acts as the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki would also join, as they should, the list of unspeakable atrocities committed in the last hundred years or so by nations against civilian populations.

Other perspectives must also be taken into consideration. It is clear that a substantial segment of the Catholic population in thirteenth-century Occitania or late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spain supported the Inquisition's work. So did the most noted early modern scholars and clergymen (Protestants and Catholics alike) in their almost universal support for the persecution and killing of witches. Rather, most people saw the Inquisition and the witch hunt as protecting society and fulfilling the very salutary task of ferreting out heresy and enforcing a welcome orthodoxy.

Perhaps defining historical events, institutions, and historical agents as evil from the perspective of 'enlightened' Western scholarship or ethics is approaching this inquiry incorrectly. Perhaps the category we are seeking to identify here is not evil but fear, that is, to what an extent the Inquisition or similar systems set up to enforce conformity and orthodoxy thrived within specific historical contexts, while promoting fear as an intrinsic tool for accomplishing their aims. If institutions are or were successful because of fear, then we may ask: to what extent contemporaries and those subjected to such regimes experience enduring fears? What were these institutions' strategies or individual deeds that provoked such widespread fear? What were the consequences of fear? Then one may try to determine whether the nature of that fear qualifies as evil or not.

Fear and evil in the West and the Inquisition

As a former chair of the History and of the Spanish and Portuguese Departments – talk about living in fear – I often told graduating seniors 'to live their lives without fear'. As pious and well-meaning as my remarks may have been, the reality is that almost all of us, both as individuals and as members of communities, always live in fear. Our fears are triggered by a broad range of issues: existential, environmental, social, and political. They are also prompted by a whole variety of other reasons. From fear of the dark (a category we often associate with evil), a common experience of childhood that lasts into adulthood and is part of ancestral memories of nights without fire and predators howling outside, to fear of ill-health, fiscal duress, loneliness, betrayal, old age, and, of course, death, most of us are constantly afraid of life's big and small disasters.[5] Some fears require medical intervention and result in mental illnesses or worse. Some fears come as a response to what we call 'evil'. Others, though a constant part of our lives, do not prevent us from living in the world and to lead what people call a 'normal life'.

Since there are numberless ways in which we, as individuals, experience fear and react to it, these myriad of personal accounts do not offer great promise for historians, except as single case studies or as micro histories. Collective fears, some of them worth describing as manifestations of some forms of pathology, however, provide us with an entry into mentalities, into culture, and into evil. The genesis of collective fears, their development, and, most importantly, their impact on society is perhaps one of the central issues in history. The study of fear is, of course, not new. Long ago when I was a young assistant professor in New York, far more years ago than I care to recollect, one of the most suggestive and engaging books we read was Jean Delumeau's rightly celebrated *La peur en Occident (Fear in the West 1978)*.[6] Delumeau's chronological focus was the very late Middle Ages and the early modern period. His approach had a bit of a functionalist perspective, one with which, on this topic at least, I am fairly sympathetic. In the most elementary of summaries – and there is a lot more to the book than what I describe here – fear was deployed or used by those in power to divert their subjects' attention from the real social, political, and economic problems besetting Western Europe in its transition to modernity. And so does evil. The witch craze and other early modern persecutory phenomena, including the persecution of religious minorities, may have been part of a hegemonic attempt to distract the minds of the ruled and turn their anger and frustrations against well selected marginalized groups. This was done by branding those to be persecuted as evil. Nothing proved their evilness more clearly than their alleged devotion and allegiance to either a hated and discredited faith or to Satan. Those of us who have lived through the cold war, the Iraq invasion, the fear of terrorists, the latest Republican presidential debates, and Trump's early presidency know very well that fear of an atomic holocaust, of supposed Iraqi nuclear capability, of another terrorist attacks, of homosexuals, immigrants, and others (all of them branded as evil) could be, and has been, used by our leaders to justify all kinds of policies, from funding of new weapon systems, curtailment of our civil liberties, torture,

and the like, while our school systems collapse, the humanities and social sciences are de-funded, and our infra-structure rapidly sinks, or has already done so, to the level of a third world country. This is not however to exclude other factors that lead to fear, mistrust, and evil. Representations of others, difference, discourses of persecution (all of them based however on fear) have played a significant role in the constructions of institutions that had at its main function the cleansing of Christian society in the West and the restoration of order.

The first Inquisition

How did these collective fears work in the Middle Ages in the particular case of the Inquisition? What was the nature (or diverse natures) of these fears? What were society's responses to widespread social anxiety? Or, to express it more accurately in terms of the politics and functionality of evil, who benefitted from collective fear, who suffered from it? In discussing fear and or 'evil' in the medieval West, one should begin by offering a typology of all the different reasons capable of triggering widespread fear and, consequently, widespread or harsh responses. Clearly, ranging over the entire course of medieval Western history or to the long and complicated history of Inquisitions is beyond my abilities or possible in the space allotted. This is after all a contribution as to the role of the Inquisition in a history of evil. Thus, I will focus on two different types of Inquisition: the early thirteenth-century papal inquisition and the late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Spanish Inquisition. These are the periods I know best and when the Inquisition was at its most active. The possibilities for research on these themes are endless. One should also begin, as I have already outlined before, by distinguishing between two distinct types of events that triggered (and still trigger) fear: natural and man-made disasters. These categories may be, and often are, intimately related.

In the Middle Ages, plagues and other sicknesses and famines (as well as other agricultural disasters, most famously the 1315–21 Great Famine) were at the forefront of these natural catastrophes that periodically swept the West and unmasked the inability of medieval rulers to deal with crises. Of course, it was common to attribute these natural disasters to God's wrath and as forms of punishment for sinful behavior. It seems to me that we have not progressed a great deal since the Middle Ages. Today, among religious communities such events are often seen as part of divine retribution for a sinning nation, as has been the case with aids and homosexuality in the US.

Of the man-made variety or fear producing cultural constructs, religion has pride of place. Clearly religion often served (and still serves today) as a remedy for fear, as palliative for all kinds of disasters, or, as I argued in a recent book, as a way of making meaning in the face of catastrophes or to escape from them. Nonetheless, in the medieval West, the Church sought to impose and police orthodoxy. What happened when heresy spread, bringing with it fears about one's own salvation or the well-being of the Christian community?[7] As Russell Jacoby, one of my cherished colleagues at UCLA, has recently shown in a wonderful book,

Bloodlust, small differences in religious observances, dogma, or doctrinal ortho-
doxy often led and, still lead, to very violent outcomes.[8] This was most evident
during the religious wars that plagued Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth
centuries, evident in the attitude towards religious minorities in places such as the
Iberian realms, above all, against Conversos, and in the great bouts of heresy that
swept most of the Mediterranean West in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The fear that these heterodox forms of belief brought about was not entirely
irrational, certainly not in the context of medieval learned and popular religious
culture. What was at stake was, after all, the salvation of one's own soul and the
survival of the Christian community. Heterodox practices were attacks not only
against the sacred but also against secular society and established secular author-
ity, or if the term secular is too anachronistic to be used this early, a threat to the
hegemonic political groups within the realm. This is why these heterodox beliefs
and movements were often branded as evil by the same people or institution we
are examining here as part of the history of evil.

Most of Western history, the American political scene today included as well,
provide us with clues about the nefarious overlapping of religion and politics.
Religious fundamentalists' fears of non-believers, environmentalists, leftist, intel-
lectuals, homosexuals, Californians in general, or eccentric old people like me
have been made to appear as threats too often during the last presidential cam-
paign to need glossing. The same principles applied to the Middle Ages. Deeply
linked to religious beliefs in the medieval West and, especially in the Mediter-
ranean world, was also the fear of contamination or pollution due to contacts
with, or proximity to non-Christians, sick people (mostly Jews, those suffering
from leprosy, and, to a lesser extent, Muslims), and other marginal groups. And
of all these fears of pollution none was as powerful or deeply rooted as fear of
sexual pollution, as fears of miscegenation. I am of course not saying anything
new. David Nirenberg and others have already illustrated how this fear of bod-
ily contact, whether sexual or with those suffering from illnesses (leprosy) led to
extreme measures.[9]

The striking thing about these types of fear of course is that, whether prompted
by religious heterodoxy or by bodily pollution, the outcomes are never the same
and are fairly unpredictable. People who have lived together in relative peace,
even though of diverse religious persuasion or ethnicity, or where the sexual
boundaries have been fairly porous and not strictly policed, may, in a short while
and triggered by a series of changes in the historical contexts, turn into each other
with a vengeance. Albigensians (the so-called 'Cathars') and Catholics lived in
rather amicable ways in twelfth-century Occitania until Dominicans and others
came to disturb the peace. Hutus and Tutsies married each other and shared a ter-
ritorial space, until the massacres occurred. These are moments of convergence,
or the old *annaliste* word, conjuncture. The term serves here as well, that is, those
moments in which evil is articulated and its consequences felt by those on the
losing side. These are, after all, the themes that are particularly important for
historians to identify. We must ask what prompt these changes? And, far more
important, what are the consequences of such changing mentalities and attitudes

to those who are either different or perceived as different? That is, as Nirenberg correctly emphasized in his paradigmatic book, *Communities of Violence*, the context makes all the difference. Contexts also shaped the consequences.[10]

But contexts are also often multivocal. They do not emerge out of nothing. They are part of complex historical processes. There is of course the danger of eternal regressions or of teleologies that may take us back to the Big Bang. I, for one, do not believe in teleologies, but it is these points of convergence or encounters, each of them resulting from a variety of factors and having their peculiar history and ancestry, that are of interest. But, perhaps, it is time to move from these general observations, familiar to all, and focus on a few case studies that portrait the effects of fear in the medieval West, that identify these points of conjuncture, and that, most of all, attempt to explicate, howsoever briefly, the historical consequences of fear and its place, in the case of the Inquisition, in a history of evil.

Religious heterodoxy: Albigensians

The spread of the so-called 'Catharism' or Albigensian beliefs throughout most of Occitania in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries has long attracted considerable scholarly attention. My own mentor at Princeton, Joseph R. Strayer, wrote a very good synthesis on the subject many years ago. Malcolm Barber, the great R. I. Moore, and, most recently, Mark Pegg have written compellingly on the subject.[11] How does fear fit into this topic? How widespread fears about heresy were manufactured? And how did these fears lead to the emergence of the Inquisition? Albegensian beliefs were quite peculiar, reflecting, as they did, their Manichean origins, as inquisitors believed. In truth, Catharism may have not been a heresy at all but a different religion. Its rejection of the body and the material world – at least for their spiritual elite, the perfect or Cathar – was, to a large extent, antagonistic to traditional Catholic doctrines and practices. Yet, the Albigensians prospered in Occitania, above all in the region around Toulouse, without provoking fear or noticeable discontent among the general population. Albigensians and Christians co-existed (as I noted earlier) in the benign climate of southern France. They traded with each other and engaged with their opposites in a civil fashion. Yet, as was pointed out long ago by Friedrich Heer, and most recently by R.I Moore, the late twelfth century witnessed a closing down of the fairly open society of the medieval West.[12] The rise of regional political entities, the development of wider regional identities, though still embryonic, had a hardening attitude towards those who, because of their religion (Jews, Muslims), heterodoxy (Waldensians, Albigensians), or illness (leprosy) were seen as different. The rise of education as a formal path to knowledge through cathedral schools and universities served also as an overlapping context for ruptures in the relations between orthodox and heterodox.

Of course, sometimes our causes and consequences get all mixed up. What is clear is that during the late twelfth century a number of social, political, economic, and cultural transformations were triggering developments that culminated in the preaching of a crusade against the Albigensians, the edicts of the influential IV

Lateran Council, the emergence of ever greater ecclesiastical and secular bureaucracies, antagonism against the doctrines of courtly love, and a growing desire to define Christianity, the liturgy of the mass, the language of worship, and the role of the blood of Christ in transubstantiation in new and more strict forms. We must also remember that, as Thomas Bisson has shown in a recent book on the crisis of the twelfth century, the period, for all of its paradigmatic Renaissance, was also a century of appalling lordly abuse.[13] But you would ask, where is the fear? How was it triggered? Who benefitted from the fear for their own political gains? How did fear lead to 'evil'?

In 1203/04 Dominic of Guzmán and other Castilian Church dignitaries traveled through Occitania on a diplomatic mission to Denmark. Coming from a very different understanding of Christianity – one grounded in Dominic's rural monastic experiences and of a combative Christianity engaged in war against Islam – Dominic could not be but shocked by the perceived heterodoxy of the Albigensians, but even more so by the lax behavior of orthodox Christians in the region.[14] Returning by way of Rome, Dominic and others reported on conditions in southern France, pressing the Pope to take action. Dominic's fear here was not just for the souls of heretics. His fear was also triggered by the manner in which heresy would drag all of society, even orthodox Christianity into hell. Fear here was that God in her/ his/its justified wrath for the sin of heterodoxy would punish the world for the inequities of the few. When, for example, evangelicals in this country establish a connection between homosexuality and the decline of the country, or when Cato the elder saw the influx of immigrants and of commerce into Rome as a fundamental threat to Roman values – as many do in this country in regards to recent immigrants – we are close to the sentiments articulated in late twelfth and early thirteenth-century Occitania, that is, that the sins of the heterodox damned all!

The key here is the act of articulating this fear or threat, of naming it, of describing it and integrating it into preaching. It led to the actions of papal legates seeking to turn the tide of heresy and to re-convert Albigensians (and Waldensians) back to orthodox Christianity. Something similar took place with the outburst of witchcraft persecution at the end of the Middle Ages (a topic which I will mention later in some detail) when Mendicant preachers formalized an anti-witch discourse, powerfully rendered into words in the *Malleus maleficarum*.[15] In Occitania, early peaceful attempts to turn heretics away from their misguided ways led inexorably to violence on both side of the religious divide. In return, Innocent III, as forceful a pope as Catholic Europe would ever know, preached a crusade against the Albigensians. Heretics were thus lumped together with Muslims, and the use of violence against them seen, as the Crusades had been, as a deeply religious act.[16]

I do not need to linger here on the complex religious and cultural elements of Crusade ideology, but it seems to me that at the heart of all Crusades in general, and the Albigensian crusade in particular, is a sense that these movements, beyond their economic and geopolitical causes and aims, were always triggered by fear of others and of different beliefs. If one is religious, certainly in the religions of the Book, then there must always be the fear that the existence of competing forms of belief – all of them based upon a shared textual tradition – threatened

one's sense of self and the expectation for one's salvation. What I mean by this is that, were I a convinced believer, were I certain that those who do not adhere to my faith will burn in hell for ever more (as medieval people believed), there is nonetheless often a latent fear provoked by the reality that, after all, many others who believed differently from me endured and even prospered. What can be more effective than wiping them out? And in that act of wiping them out, I, and other believers like me, confirm the validity of my/our faith. At the taking of Beziers, when it was difficult to distinguish between orthodox Christians and heretics – since they had joined together to defend the city from northern invaders and to prevent the naked play for control of the Languedoc by the French – the commander of the crusading army has been quoted with the by now famous words: 'kill them all, God will know his own'. At the very heart of evil, there is often the well ingrained belief that one is right and others are wrong. At the very heart of evil is the idea of difference, of orthodoxy and heterodoxy.

Whether apocryphal or not, the statement attributed to the victors at Beziers captures perfectly what I have been seeking to explain. Those who were heretics represented a fatal danger. Those who consorted with heretics were as easily damnable and a target for the victors. The crusaders' smashing defeat of Albigensian supporters at Muret in 1213, a battle in which Peter the Catholic, king of the Crown of Aragon, lost his life fighting on the side of the heretics or, far more accurate, attempting to maintain an Arago-Catalan influence in the region, did not quell the fears of those in power now in Occitania nor of the leadership of the Church.[17] The Cathars had been defeated in the battlefield, most of their strongholds taken, the independent and cantankerous southern lords brought under the sphere of influence of the Capetian kings of France, a prelude to the annexation of the Languedoc into the French royal domain in the 1270s. It was not enough. The Albigensians and an earlier heretical movement, the Waldensians, proved to be quite resilient to orthodox efforts to bring them into the fold. More stern measure were needed.

In the 1220s, the enduring heterodoxy of Albigensians and Waldensians led to the emergence of the Inquisition. I should perhaps rephrase this, for it seems like blaming the victims. In the 1220s, the Church authorities, with the complicity of secular rulers, sought to create better mechanisms to patrol the boundaries of orthodoxy. The Inquisition was, first and foremost, an institution born out of fear (and power) and, itself, an instrument of, and cause for, fear. The Inquisition, not just the papal version that scourged the Languedoc in the early thirteenth century and afterwards, but also its darker relative, the Spanish Inquisition in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, were indeed instruments for channeling social fears of damnation and contamination into highly efficacious repressive actions. Thus, the Inquisition in early thirteenth-century Languedoc fostered a system of secret accusations, torture, death by burning, and other niceties that did transform European society.

Although the Inquisition in Languedoc or even the Inquisition in Spain were limited in their ability to kill people because of their complex judicial procedures, cost, and limited technologies of execution (the issue was not to just kill people

but to do so in an exemplary fashion), their power and ability to punish fed from widespread social and religious fears. The institution, in turn, deployed fear as is most potent weapon. The theatricality of the auto de fe or inquisitorial trials which, as Henry C. Lea pointed out long ago, was very effective in moving the passions of those in attendance, were complemented by highly symbolic and ritual gestures that codified the fear of heresy, the fear of the accused, and the fear of the Inquisition itself into performance. The burning of the mortal remains of heretics in the thirteenth century, of Judaizers in fifteenth-century Spain, of the bones of those who had been accused and had the fortune of dying before being tried, the degrading processions, the identifying clothing worn by the guilty, all of these acts conveyed the ability of the Inquisition to spread fear among the population and to exercise its authority. As heretic or Converso, you never knew for sure who may accuse you of heterodox practices. Often members of your own family were the accusers, your neighbors, your supposed friends. We are not fully in George Orwell's *1984*, his dark study of the relationship between fear and power, but the patterns of rule by fear are already quite discernable in early thirteenth century Occitania.

Beginning as an instrument to identify and punish heretics, after a long process of defining and articulating what that specific heterodoxy was, the Inquisition became part of European society and part of its long and troubled history. Its practices, already listed above – secret denunciation, torture, burning at the stake, and other forms of discipline particular to the Inquisition – were not necessarily new. Torture, the most objectionable of these practices, was firmly grounded in Roman Law and common throughout most of pre-modern Europe. Its use was widespread throughout most of continental Europe (and today throughout the world) until recent memory. It was a form of questioning sanctioned by law. Inquisitorial tactics were also seen by most people in society as a rightful exercise of force against those who undermined Christian society. Where was then the evil? If we wish to describe the medieval Inquisition as evil, then we must do so because its tactics, while legal and sanctioned by popular support, had consequences that were over *la longue durée* detrimental to the well-being of the society as a whole. Inquisitorial disciplining prospered through the deployment of fear. Fear and even hatred of heretics was grounded in the real or perceived sense of difference from the orthodox and by the reality that one could consort with a heretic without realizing one's misdeeds.

The Spanish Inquisition

Unlike the Languedoc papal Inquisition, the Spanish version was fundamentally different in the selection of its targets. Most of its early victims were so because their ancestry and, in some cases, behavior, eating habits, and the like became associated with heretical practices. Unlike the early thirteenth century Inquisition, the Spanish one was firmly under royal jurisdiction. Although there had been diocesan and papal inquisitorial activity in the lands of the Crown of Aragon, the kings of Castile has staunchly resisted any papal interference on questions of orthodoxy in the affairs of their realm. When the Inquisition began its work in

Castile in 1478 and, officially in 1484, it is not surprising that many throughout the Eastern kingdoms (Aragon, Catalonia, Valencia) saw the Inquisition for what it really was: another attempt of Castile's rulers to extend their power and curtail the liberties of their non-Castilian subjects.[18] More strikingly, in the first forty years of Inquisitorial activity in the Iberian realms (roughly until the 1550s), the target of accusations, trials, and punishment were almost exclusively Conversos, that is, those who had converted from Judaism to Christianity or, more often, the descendants of those Jews who had converted in 1391 and in the aftermath of the Tortosa Debate in 1413. That is to say, the targets of the Inquisition were most often people who had practiced Christianity, whether faithfully or not, for almost a century. Those who had converted in 1492 to avoid the decree of expulsion were exempted from Inquisitorial surveillance for a substantial period of time.

Unlike the Languedoc Inquisition, in the Spanish realm, though the charge was in principle heresy, the driving force for repressive measures turned on questions of blood and association, however remote, with a Jewish past. This was of course part of a long and troubled history. The Inquisition also formalized attitudes and fears present in society. The relations with, and representations of, religious minorities often brought about fear mixed with loathing for their very presence within Christian society. These antagonistic relations between Jews and Christians were of course not limited to Spain in the Middle Ages. Their expulsion from England and the kingdom of Naples in the late thirteenth century, from northern France in the early fourteenth century, and from Spain in 1492 were only the most visible markers of the crescendo of antagonism against Jews, a hatred, fear, and loathing often articulated in wanton acts of violence.

In Spain, these sentiments encompassed the Conversos, most of them suspected of practicing their ancestral religion in secret. Andrés Bernáldez, an ecclesiastical chronicler of the reign of the Catholic Monarchs, articulated these sentiments in lapidary language. The Conversos and the Jews, Bernáldez wrote, transgressed against Christianity, had a peculiar bad smell, engaged in sexually abhorrent behavior, lived in cities, rejecting the purer rural life, and were lazy. If we deconstruct Bernáldez's statements, one can easily see the role of both fear and loathing in these utterances. The body of the Converso, which for many inquisitors was the same as the body of the Jew, smells in ways that were peculiar to them, an odor easily noticeable to Christians, a bad odor. The trope of the smell of the Jewish body was of course common throughout medieval Christendom. Bernáldez adds other charges. The Jews, as was the case with Muslims, were highly sexualized. A whiff of irregular sexual behavior, of sodomitic activities, and fears of miscegenation underlines Bernáldez's charges, as they did most accusations of heresy. This is most famously present in the charges against the Templars, where heresy and sodomy were often two faces of the same charge. Finally Bernáldez accused the Conversos of being urban dwellers. This is part of a very Castilian discourse on blood that idealized country and mountain people as having pure blood.[19]

But there is much more here than just Bernáldez's rather nasty contribution to the heated debate on purity of blood, religion, and geographical location. The

Jews and Conversos were, as Bernáldez reminds us, usually engaged in trade. They dealt with money. They engaged in loathsome activities. If I have paraphrased Bernáldez here at such length is to remind the reader of the popular and intellectual atmosphere that served as context for the establishment of the Inquisition in Castile in the late fifteenth century and its spread throughout the Iberian realms and its ultramarine possessions shortly afterwards. Historians do not agree on why the Catholic Monarchs sponsored the establishment of the Inquisition in Castile. Most of the early leaders of the Inquisition, the famous or infamous Torquemada as the best example, were themselves from prominent Converso families. The most vitriolic attacks against Jews came often from former co-religionists. There were racial, religious, economic, and numerous other reasons that we may advance to explain both the establishment of the Inquisition, its frightful activities, resistance to, and support for, inquisitorial deeds.

As was the case in the Languedoc, secret accusations, torture, public execution in ever more dramatic and theatrical autos de fe served the dual (and contradictory purpose) of excluding some (because of their heretical behavior) from the communal body and from the body of the Church, and, through the public performance of repentance at the moment of death, re-integrating them into the community of Christians and the saved. In that respect, the Inquisition, as is the case with repressive systems and totalitarian regimes, was evil. It sought to cleanse society of those who did not adhere, whether because of ancestral ties and religion (Conversos and Moriscos), differences in faith (Protestants), or deviant behavior (blasphemers and sodomites). At the same time, through the act of repentance and the public display of that repentance at Inquisitorial trials, the Inquisition sought to assert the rightfulness of the faith and of the institutions that underpinned that faith. We are here truly in an Orwellian world, and that is what made the institution evil.

What else can we give as an example of the workings of fear in late medieval society? How may we choose the right methodological approach to explore the manner in which fear and evil shaped Western medieval mentalities? No other episode in the history of late medieval and early modern Europe is as paradigmatic of the workings of fear as the so-called witchcraze. Contemporary with some of the high points of European civilization – the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution – the witchcraze was a very puzzling phenomenon. Although an anti-witch discourse and the linking of witchcraft and the devil had been evolving from the late thirteenth century onwards, or if we are to depend on texts, from Aquinas to the *Malleus malificarum*, it was Jacob Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer's writing and publication of the *Malleus* in 1486 that served as a catalyst for the unleashing of a violent persecution of mostly elderly women. Perhaps as many as 80,000 to 100,000 people died at the hand of Catholic and Protestant witch hunters, most of the victims elderly women. It is clear that the overlapping social, economic, political, and cultural changes sweeping Europe in the transition to modernity created fears and anxieties that made carnage of vulnerable people not only acceptable but desirable. Intellectuals, some of them the greatest minds of the West, as well as common folk embraced the belief that witches were devil worshipers

and engaged in lewd and unspeakable acts (including cannibalism) at their illicit nocturnal gatherings. Bent, as they were believed to be, on the destruction of both Christianity and the secular world, the witches were hunted down for more than a century and a half until the context changed. Europe then simply moved on, leaving witchcraft beliefs and fears behind. But for over 150 years, great evil was perpetrated on mostly innocent victims.

What is obvious however is that this is one of the rare occasions in which a learned discourse on malefic acts swept the popular imagination, was incorporated into popular culture, and made to work for the benefit of those in power. In a world torn by extraordinary brutal sectarian warfare, by the Ottoman threat, by the death throes of feudal society, by the birth pangs of a global economy and capitalism, and, last but not least, by the centralizing monarchies aiming for what Max Weber described as the 'monopoly of legalized violence', what most people worried about was the evil deeds of marginalized old women, of their alleged sexual intercourse with devils, and of the corruption of Christian society. Delumeau was, I think, on target. Oppress the people, conscript them into armies, tax them, but also give them release by burning witches, heretics, and Conversos.

I could go on piling examples after examples, but I think that some clues are evident as to what prompted these attacks of collective fears in the late medieval West. What then were the most obvious under laying reasons for fear and for the evil that fear generated during this period?

1) Religion

Fear, wrote Lucretius, is the maker of gods. And thus, from very early on in Western thought, we had already the established relationship between religion and fear and, by implication, the relations between fear and evil, here defined as heterodox conduct. Even earlier, fear already appears prominently in the opening chapters of Plato's *Republic* as one of the agents that animate his discussion of the perfect society. The desire to live without fear, the desire to be happy become the driving forces for re-structuring society. For Plato, the greatest fear for base men were those dealing with death or with the system of rewards and punishments by which religion kept, and still keeps, human in thrall. Religion and fear were intimately linked in the Middle Ages. My views on religion are no secret, but it is undeniable that in the Middle Ages or even today religious fears, manifested as fear and loathing for the heterodox or for the sinful, or the polluting presence of other religious groups in the midst of a dominant religious majority were powerful forces leading to the articulation of fear and loathing through violence. Thus, evil.

2) Sex

Sexual relations with those who are different from oneself often triggered universal fears and had dire consequences. It was seen as an evil act and thus punished severely. In medieval Iberia, to give just an example, sexual relations between Christians, Muslims, and Jews were punishable with death. Although one should

note that what matters here was the female body. That is a Christian could have a Muslim or Jewish mistress or concubine, but Jewish or Muslim males could not have intercourse with a Christian woman, even if she was a prostitute. One should remember that Bernáldez's attacks on Conversos and Jews, one that fitted perfectly with the Inquisition's program, depended to a large extent on their sexual behavior.

3) War

It is not that I wish to pick up on religion again and again, but, as Norman Housley argued several years ago, there is a close relationship between religion and war in the late Middle Ages and the early modern period. War was of course one of the greatest reasons for fear in the West, and, together with religion, the greatest culprit for the evil that plagued medieval and early modern societies. No wonder that in medieval and early modern iconography, war is represented as one of the four horsemen of Apocalypse. Anyone who has ever seen Bruegel's stunning painting, *The Triumph of Death*, knows well the relationship between war and fear.

4) Time

Time was, and remains, a source of fear. In the Middle Ages, time was closely linked to religion. Living, as most people did in the Western Middle Ages, within an endlessly repeated cycle of sacred time, medieval men and women had to face the inexorable demise of the world and the end of time, while also keenly aware of their own mortality. Think for a moment on the paradox and contradictions inherent in these two diametrically opposed awareness of time. Every great Church festivals, from Christmas to Easter, repeated itself in cyclical patterns that brought reassurance as to the stability of the world, so did the seasons and the rituals and gestures of an agricultural cycle that temporarily preceded Christianity by thousands of years. This knowledge of the renewable patterns of the world was deeply imbedded in ancient pre-Christian beliefs that survived in Europe to and beyond the Middle Ages.

Yet, an alternate reality, preached by the Church and experientially lived told a complete different story. Jesus' birth and resurrection set history and time in a lineal progression from creation to final judgement. Men and women's lives paralleled this grand narrative. We are born, we grow old, we die. Should we be surprised that a sense of the end of time and history unleashed potent fears, violence, and chaos? Around the year 1000 AD, in 1266, in 1348 in the wake of the Plague, in the years leading to the great peasant uprising in 1525, in the 1660s with Sabbatai Zevi, men and women abandoned their normal routines in the expectation of the world to come.

Individuals could embrace the idea of the resurrection of the flesh at the end of time. Yet, they were not fooled. The body died. It rots and stinks quickly. The body, as Augustine of Hippo reminded us, is evil. It perishes. I have always present in my mind Alyosha in the *Brothers Karamazov*. He is disturbed and wounded

by the realization that his beloved monastic superior began to stink shortly after death instead of remaining uncorrupted by holiness. How very depressing! How very fearful! How loathsome! Have you ever seen what age does to the body even in the world of botox? Have you ever seen or felt how the body breaks down, how the most elementary functions become embarrassing, loathsome? Today you can count on a fairly vital life into your 70s, 80s, and even 90s. In the Middle Ages, you were already quite old by your mid-thirties, the middle of the road of one's life. We are here at a point of understanding that is very old and not restricted to the Middle Ages. In the epic of Gilgamesh, the foundational text of human culture, the eponymous protagonist embarks on a quest prompted by Enkidu's death and by the fear of his own death. In the end, when the quest fails, he is only comforted by the list of his deeds inscribed on a lapilazuli obelisk before the gates of Uruk.

   In the life of the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama is propelled to his search for Nirvana by successive encounters with, and fear of, old age, illness, and death. Thus there is no history without fear. What propels most historical developments is often fear. And fear is, by its very definition, evil. When combined with religion, existential awareness, and the appropriate convergence of events, the results are often catastrophic. Such was the fate of heretics in late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries Occitania, of Jews and Conversos in Western Europe in general and in the Iberian peninsula in particular, of those accused of witchcraft in most of early modern Europe. And fear and evil, as agents of historical change, are present with us to this very day in our political discourse and actions.

Notes

1 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), especially chapter 1.
2 Daniel Smail and Andrew Shryock, "History and the *Pre*," forthcoming in the *American Historical Review*. Presented as a paper at a workshop on Biology and History. UCLA 19 August 2012. Sir John H. Elliott, *History in the Making* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 209ff.
3 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 256.
4 See Gustav Henningsen, *El "banco de datos" del Santo Oficio: las relaciones de causas de la Inquisición española (1550–1700)* (Copenhagen: Dansk Folkemindesamling, 1978); see also his edition with John Tedeschi and Charles Amiel of *The Inquisition in Early Modern Europe: Studies on Sources and Methods* (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986).
5 See my recent book, *The Terror of History. On the Uncertainties of Life in Western Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).
6 Jean Delumeau, *La peur en Occident, XIVe–XVIIIe siécles: une cité assiégée* (Paris: Fayard, 1978).
7 On the role of religion as an agent of war see Ruiz, *The Terror of History* and Norman Housley, *Religious Warfare in Europe, 1400–1536* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
8 Russell Jacoby, *Bloodlust: On the Roots of Violence from Cain and Abel to the Present* (New York: Free Press, 2011).
9 David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

10 Ibid.

11 Joseph R. Strayer, *The Albigensians Crusades* (New York: Dial Press, 1971); Malcolm Barber, *The Cathars: Dualist Heretics in Languedoc in the High Middle Ages* (Harlow, Eng. and New York: Longman, 2000); Robert I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe, 950–1250*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007); Mark Pegg, *The Corruption of Angels: The Great Inquisition of 1245–1246* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), and his recent *A Most Holy War: The Albigensian Crusade and the Battle for Christendom* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

12 Ibid.

13 Friedrich Heer, *The Medieval World: Europe, 1100–1350*, trans. Janet Sondheimer (Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1962). See also R. I. Moore's books cited on note 11.

14 See Thomas N. Bisson, *The Crisis of the Twelfth Century: Power, Lordship, and the Origins of European Government* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

15 On the life of St. Dominic and his role in the launching of the Albigensian preaching and crusade, see Marie-Humbert Vicaire, *Histoire de Saint Dominique* (Paris: Edition du Cerf, 1957).

16 On the witch hunt or witch craze the most comprehensive synthesis is by Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd edn. (Harlow, Eng. and New York: Longman, 2006).

17 On Innocent III's preaching of the Crusade and his life the old but still formidable study by Achille Luchaire, *Innocent III*, 2 vols (Paris: Hachette, 1906–8).

18 On Muret and the relations between the Albigensian Crusade and the Crown of Aragon see Damian J. Smith, *Innocent III and the Crown of Aragon: The Limits of Papal Authority* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).

19 On the Spanish Inquisition, one must begin with Henry C. Lea's monumental work, *A History of the Inquisition of Spain*, 4 vols. (New York: The Macmillan company, 1906–7); Henry A. F. Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998); Joseph Perez, *The Spanish Inquisition: A History* (London: Profile, 2004). Also a collection of essays edited by Angel Alcalá, *The Spanish Inquisition and the Inquisitorial Mind* (Highland Lakes, NJ: Atlantic Research and Publications, distributed by Columbia University Press, 1987).

Further Reading

Beyond the books referred in the endnotes, these titles may illuminate some of the issues discussed here.

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2 Witchcraft

Daniel N. Robinson

Notwithstanding great variation in expression and in grounding assumptions, belief in demons and witches is a common feature of human history, abandoned only recently. In many African countries, the belief is held by very large majorities. In 2009, Gallup Poll, for example, asking whether one person really believes in witchcraft, recorded 95% affirmative replies in the Ivory Coast, 80% in Senegal, and more than two thirds of those questioned in Mali, Cameroon, and Kinshasa.[1] Nor are these idle beliefs. In those same countries, those judged as practicing witchcraft have subjected to talk sure, disfigurement and death.

Different ages and peoples offer different conceptions of the nature and influences of the occult. Each adapts inherited folk wisdom, bequeathing new versions thereupon refashioned by the flux of history. Ancient Greece and Rome both accepted that some possess supernatural powers or might serve as a medium for the divinities. Thus, in the Homeric epics, a wary Diomedes in the pitch of battle, asks his adversary, Glaucus, if he is a god disguised. Consider Rome's *Twelve Tables* with this threat to practitioners of the occult: 'Anyone who, by means of incantations and magic arts, prevents grain or crops of any kind belonging to another from growing, shall be sacrificed to Ceres' (Table VII).[2]

With the advent and increased authority of Christianity in the West, ecclesiastical courts would blunt the ancient distinctions between harmless and 'black' magic. In time, all witchcraft was taken as proof of a covenant with satan and a heresy. This shift would come to be catastrophic in many European communities, but only after the merging of secular and religious thought.

Contributing here were changes in legal procedure. The *accusatorial* procedures of early medieval law required that complaints and charges originate with the aggrieved or injured party. It was not the judge or the jurisdictional authority who prosecuted. Rather, such authorities *heard* the complaints, weighed the evidence, and then ruled. Where the weight of evidence was insufficient to support a ruling, the contestants in a criminal action were called upon to face one another in *ordeal*. The principle on which the practice depended is that of *judicium Dei*, God's judgment which was presumed to spare the innocent. In a criminal or a civil action, especially among Germanic people, ordeal called for hand-to-hand battle. A later refinement allowed a nobleman, if accused, to summon reliable oath-helpers (*compurgators*) whose ritual utterances and attestations

might well vindicate by establishing the honor of the accused. The ordeal of toting red-hot objects some specified distance or of immersion in cold water – the innocent would sink, the guilty would float – was customary. But the accuser in such actions faced severe penalties were his charges to prove groundless; severe enough to discourage frivolous or spiteful litigation. The general rationale behind ordeal was that divine assistance must be solicited in hard cases. According to the theory, God favors the innocent, and punishes the wicked and even introduces the miraculous when needed.

With the evolution of more refined (classical) procedures and the greater centralization of power, the accusatorial method was replaced by the *inquisitorial*, the judge or clergy now centrally involved in trying the case. With these developments burdens imposed on accusers were now all but eliminated. A court finding the charges at all credible would take up the case, the officers of the court having the power to obtain and weigh the evidence, determine guilt or innocence and set the penalties. Prior to the witch-panic, the net effect of these developments was salutary, for the rules of evidence were clearly biased in favor of the defendant. Successful prosecution required either admission of guilt by the defendant or two eye-witnesses to the offense vigorously examined under oath. The major gain in these procedural developments was the elimination of savage and juridically meaningless practices, and their replacement by rules of evidence applied by competent jurists acting in behalf of Church or Crown. But the major liability, during the long season of the witch-hunt, was that a successful prosecution for a crime such as heresy or the otherwise harmless 'white magic' of witchcraft would require the defendant's confession; a defendant no longer possessing the power of counter-suit.

Within the evolving Christian theory of human nature were numerous subsidiary and corollary theories, among them one that Christina Larner dubbed 'the Christian witch theory' which included the assumption that: 'The power of the witch sprang from the demonic pact and was therefore evil, whether it was used for healing or harming'.[3] The melding of the civil offense of *maleficium* with that of heresy greatly enlarged the pool of potential suspects. Predictably the hardships wrought by these developments would be greatest for those whose medical or social or psychological conditions resulted in signs or symptoms not readily explicable in the primitive medical idiom of the day. Where natural causes were not readily apparent, symptoms proved to be especially congenial to demon-based or possession-based explanations. Then, too, the crime of witchcraft was declared to be the *crimen exceptum* for which standard procedures were ill-suited. The wiles and resources of the devil being what they are, ordinary rules of evidence or testimony from citizens and relations were simply not up to the task.

The infamous *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) of the Dominican Fathers Heinrich Kramer (Institoris) and Jakob Sprenger carefully noted the special procedures that had to be adapted and applied to such cases.[4] In time, the secular courts would have the monopoly of witch-trials, many jurisdictions coming to declare witchcraft to be a secular crime on the order of treason, with torture now an increasingly permissible option. Initially, torture was based on scholastic arguments that also

imposed unequivocal limitations. The latter would be gradually disregarded by the less patient judges of later centuries. In most jurisdictions throughout the High Middle Ages repeated torture was prohibited, as was the torture or a pregnant woman, or of any defendant in a case not involving an actual crime. Had these limitations been honored in 1631, the hangman of Dreissigacker would not have made this promise to a pregnant defendant:

> I do not take you for one, two, three, not for eight days, not for a few weeks, but for half a year, or a year, for your whole life, until you confess: and if you will not confess, I shall torture you to death, and you shall be burned after all.[5]

The papal Bull (*Summis desiderantes affectibus*, 1484) issued to Fathers Kramer and Sprenger carried forward the urgent tradition of fighting the devil and defending the Faith, and declared that any who opposed this war on witches would bring down upon himself the wrath of Almighty God. *Malleus Maleficarum* was *the* book. The theological positions presented in it were 'correct'; the scriptural research and interpretation sound and accessible. What is clear in the *Malleus Maleficarum* is that the authors are aware of the difficulty of teasing out those effects which an emerging natural science is able to produce, and those that come about through the intervention of satanic forces. Eager to avoid the taint of heresy themselves, they withhold from Satan any of the creative powers properly reserved to God, but still must account for the transmutation of persons into animals or one species of animal into another. Such problems call for subtle conceptual analysis; e.g., the different senses of 'making', 'likeness' and 'created'. No, the devil cannot make a perfect creature (e.g., man, sheep, horse, etc.), but he can create such imperfect ones as serpents, frogs and mice for these '. . . can also be generated from putrefaction'. If one is to make the necessary distinctions between scientific and satanic practices, it becomes important to know about each genre.

Even as the witch-hunts proceeded, scientific workers and commentators, loyal to the ancient traditions of natural science, made their own contributions to theories of possession. Nonetheless, the Renaissance did not make any sharp distinction between natural science and natural magic, for it did not host a developed conception of the former. Thus, in 1466, the faculty of University of Paris is deputized by the King to determine whether a collection of magic books were 'consonant with the Christian faith'. A judgment against them is made owing to their inclusion of 'many superstitions, many manifest and horrible conjurations and invocations of demons . . .'.[6]

Less the daring entry into the modern world, the Renaissance is an age in transition between a perspective tied to natural magic and one that will embrace natural science. The fifteenth-century revival of *Hermeticism* is indicative. It is the figure of *Hermes Trismegistus* that stands at the forefront of much of Renaissance science. As the legend would have it, the great achievements of ancient Egypt were inspired by the teaching of Hermes. This was then passed on to the Tigris and then to Plato, only to be lost during the intervening centuries. Great excitement surrounded what was thought to be the recovery of this truly ancient wisdom. In

the form of a manuscript, these teachings of Hermes were translated by Marcilio Ficino and promulgated in a work titled *Pimander*. The Hermetic texts, with commentary, were prepared early in the twentieth century by Walter Scott whose characterization of Hermes is informing. Relying on the Renaissance account given by Vergicius, Scott writes,

> They say that this Hermes left his own country and traveled all over the world . . . to teach men to revere and worship one God alone . . . and that he lived a very wise and pious life, occupied in intellectual contemplation . . ., and giving no heed to the gross things of the material world . . .; and that having returned to his own country, he wrote at the time many books of mystical theology and philosophy.
>
> (Vol.1, p. 33)[7]

Even among those who would make lasting contributions to science, these legends were accorded the status of truths. Thus is Copernicus found pausing in his *De revolutionibus orbium caelestium* to acknowledge the perfect connection between the location and the function of the sun, and how ancient wisdom has long respected this fact:

> *In medio vero omnium residet sol. Quis enim in hoc pulcherrimo templo lampadem hanc in alio vel meliori loco poneret, quam unde totum simul possit illuminare?*

The sun actually resides in the center of everything. What other or better place within this most beautiful temple to put this torch than where it can illuminate the whole? Then, after noting how informed persons acknowledge this by the names they give to the sun, he concludes, *Trimegistus {sic} visibilem deum*. Hermes Trismegistus calls it *the visible god*. Copernicus at least liberated his mathematics from Hermeticism, even if ancient mystical elements still guided his overall perspective on astronomy. Giordano Bruno, however, this ardent defender of the heliocentric theory, would show, in the words of Frances Yates, '. . . most strikingly how shifting and uncertain were the borders between genuine science and Hermeticism in the Renaissance'.[8]

Giordano Bruno was thoroughly committed to Hermeticism specifically and, more generally, to the proposition that the 'oriental' wisdom of the Nile valley was purer and more powerful than all the systems it spawned. For Bruno the march of ideas resulted in successive dilutions and corruptions. The movement toward truth should proceed from Aristotle back to Plato, to Socrates, to Pythagoras, to Aglaophemus, to Orpheus, and ultimately to that great priest and prophet, *Hermes Trismegistus*, three times great.

Note, then, that the Renaissance did not make sharp distinctions between natural science and natural magic, for it did not host a developed conception of the former. What is instructive in the writings of the greats and the near greats of this period are just those 'shifting and uncertain borders' cited by Yates. The scholarly