Knowledge of Good and Evil

According to the book of Genesis, Yahweh created Adam and Eve to live in the Garden of Eden. He commanded them on pain of death not to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. However, Eve was convinced by the Serpent to eat of the tree, and she in turn convinced Adam to do the same. For their disobedience, Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden. The interpretation of this myth has led to the Christian idea that humanity is forever tainted by "Original Sin," and that our only hope for immortality is through the sacrifice of Christ which offers redemption from sin and entry into eternity to those who believe in him. The concept of Original Sin has become dangerously ingrained in Christian thinking, and needs reworking,

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

The book of Genesis contains two narratives of the creation. In the second (*Genesis* 2:4-25), attributed to a writer/editor called *J* (Rosenberg & Bloom, 1990), Yahweh created Adam by breathing into a lump of earth, and placed him in a garden in Eden. He then grew the trees of the garden:

> And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. (*Genesis* 2: 9)

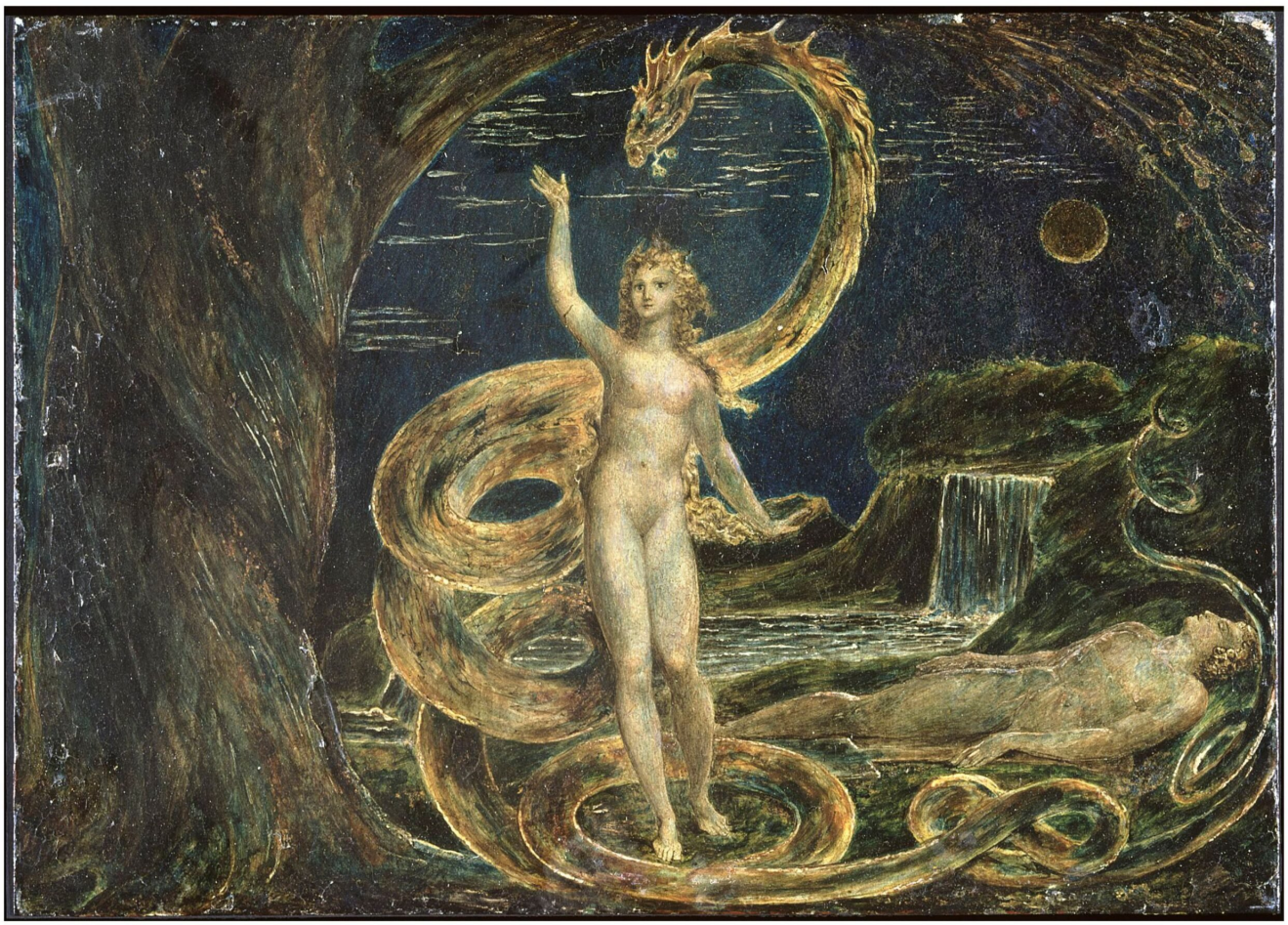
Yahweh enjoined Adam not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil:

> And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat
> But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. (*Genesis* 2: 16-17)

J then tells how God created Eve as a companion for Adam, and narrates the story of man's fall from innocence (*Genesis* 3: 1-24). Eve was asked by the Serpent whether she and Adam must not eat from any of the trees of Eden:

> And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:
> But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. (*Genesis* 3: 2-3)

The Serpent convinces her that eating of the Tree of Knowledge would actually open her eyes to the divine knowledge of good and evil. The interaction between Eve and the Serpent is the subject of many paintings, among which is the tempera painting of William Blake (1800) in the Victoria and Albert Museum. This and the subsequent illustrations are derived from the Blake Archive:



Eve ate the fruit and gave some to Adam who likewise ate. Yahweh quickly realized how Adam and Eve had disobeyed him.

> And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever
> Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.
> So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life. (*Genesis* 3: 22-24)

The expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden is depicted in an 1808 watercolor by William Blake which was to illustrate the ending of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1674). In this telling of the story, the archangel Michael leads Adam and Eve out of Paradise:

For now, too nigh
The Arch-Angel stood; and, from the other hill
To their fixed station, all in bright array

The Cherubim descended; on the ground
Gliding meteorous, as evening-mist
Risen from a river o’er the marish glides,
And gathers ground fast at the labourer’s heel
Homeward returning. High in front advanced,
The brandished sword of God before them blazed,
Fierce as a comet; which with torrid heat,
And vapour as the Libyan air adust,
Began to parch that temperate clime; whereat
In either hand the hastening Angel caught
Our lingering parents, and to the eastern gate
Led them direct, and down the cliff as fast
To the subjected plain; then disappeared.
They, looking back, all the eastern side beheld
Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,
Waved over by that flaming brand; the gate
With dreadful faces thronged, and fiery arms:
Some natural tears they dropt, but wiped them soon;
The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide:
They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitary way.

Though Milton’s words portray the gravity of what has happened to Adam and Eve, they are also touched with hope. They had each other; their eyes were open; they could learn to survive; perhaps they might even thrive. The world was all before them.

The story of Adam and Eve and how they disobeyed Yahweh’s commandment not to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil has been retold again and again in the years since it was first written down in Judeo-Christian scripture (Greenblatt, 2017). In the Christian world it led to the idea of “Original Sin” (Boyce, 2015): because of the transgression of Adam and Eve, all human beings are doomed to die, unless they accept Christ as their savior.

One or Two Trees?

Yahweh's prohibition and Eve's words to the Serpent suggest that there is only one special tree in the garden: the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. One is therefore tempted to re-examine the first mention of the two trees. The conjunction between them may be translated both as "and" and as "that is to say". Thus, the Tree of Life, may just be another name for the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and *Genesis* 2:9 might read

> the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, that is to say, the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

However, when Yahweh condemned Adam and Eve for their transgression, he did so lest they also partake of the Tree of Life and become immortal. Those supporting the existence of only one special tree in Eden have suggested that perhaps the word translated as "also" might actually mean "again." The issues about one or two trees have been discussed by Makowiecki (2021) and Zevelt (2013, Chapter 7).

My preferred interpretation is that there is only one special tree, that eating of that tree opens the mind to knowledge, and that, if our knowledge becomes great enough, we might somehow become immortal.

Good and Evil

The phrase "good and evil" needs two important explications. The first is that it is an example of a merism, "a figure of speech in which opposite extremes imply everything between them" (Robinson, 2024, p 77). When we say that we searched "high and low" we mean that we searched everywhere. The Bible makes frequent use of the device: the expression "heavens and the earth" (*Genesis* 1:1) includes everything between; "evening and morning" (*Genesis* 1:5) means the whole day (including afternoon and night); "alpha and omega" (*Revelations* 22: 13) means the complete alphabet of existence. Thus, the tree of knowledge of good and evil is the tree of all knowledge

characterized by the extremes of good and evil.

The second point of explication concerns the word translated as “evil.” The original Hebrew word can mean both “bad” and “evil” (Kass, 2003, p 63, see also Speiser, 1964, and Rosenberg & Bloom, 1990). Both are value judgements. However, we often conceive of “evil” as pain and suffering that is intentionally rather than naturally caused. Thus, though murder is considered evil, an earthquake is not. However, this distinction becomes fuzzy if we believe the natural world to be controlled by divine intentions. Arnold (2008, p 64) points out that God created both good and evil. In the words of God proclaimed through his prophet Isaiah:

> I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things. (*Isaiah*, 45: 7)

According to our definitions of “evil” and “bad,” knowledge of good and bad could then refer to everything, whereas knowledge of good and evil is primarily concerned with moral judgements (Hartmann, 2002, Chapter V; Laird, 2014, Chapter V). I much prefer to interpret the story of Eden in the latter sense. A moral judgement combines an assessment of what we perceive with a decision about what we should do in the light of the predicted consequences. Morality requires a consciousness of a self that can control one’s actions, or in religious terms, a soul that has free will. The very act of disobeying is an exercise of such free will.

When the eyes or Adam and Eve were opened by the knowledge of good and evil, the first thing that they noted was their shame at being naked. This combines self-consciousness with the idea that one should not unnecessarily incite the lust of others.

Kass (2004, p 68) sums up his discussion of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad:

> The knowledge prohibited is autonomous knowledge of how to live, found in or procured from one’s own garden (nature),

> based on human experience of the visible world. The opposite of obedience, it is the kind of knowledge that is implicit in the act of violating a prohibition, indeed, in any act of choosing for oneself.

He goes on to say that this knowledge may not be sufficient for us to behave as we should. We also require rules such as the Ten Commandments to instruct us how to live:

> But this autonomous knowledge of good and bad is not true knowledge of good and bad; human beings on their own will not find true knowledge of how to live. This must be supplied by what is later called revelation.

I find myself agreeing with his initial statements and disagreeing with those that follow. The commandments were not miraculously revealed to us by Moses: that story is as mythical as the story of Eden. Rather these rules were proposed on the basis of how human beings had learned to live with each other.

Original Sin

Though it is not directly discussed in the Bible, Talmudic and Christian interpretations of the disobedience of Adam and Eve led to the idea that all their descendants were afflicted with their Original Sin and that this explains our mortality and our suffering (Boyce, 2015; Greenblatt, 2017, Chapters 5 and 6; Zevit, 2013, Chapter 1). The apostle Paul wrote

> Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned (*Romans* 5: 12)

Paul proclaimed that Christ died to save us from this fate, and that belief in him can lead to eternal life. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) was the great champion of Original Sin. He argued against the teachings of an English theologian Pelagius (354-413 CE), who proposed that human beings are not born

innately sinful, but rather free to choose between good and evil:

> Day by day, hour by hour, we have to reach decisions; and in each decision, we can choose good or evil. The freedom to choose makes us like God: if we choose evil, that freedom becomes a curse; if we choose good, it becomes our greatest blessing.
>
> When Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge they were exercising their freedom of choice … Before eating the fruit they did not know the difference between good and evil; thus they did not possess the knowledge which enables human beings to exercise freedom of choice. By eating the fruit they acquired this knowledge, and from that moment onwards they were free. Thus the story of their banishment from Eden is in truth the story of how the human race gained its freedom: by eating fruit from the tree of knowledge, Adam and Eve became mature human beings, responsible to God for their actions. (both quotations from Pelagius are in Boyce, 2015, p 15)

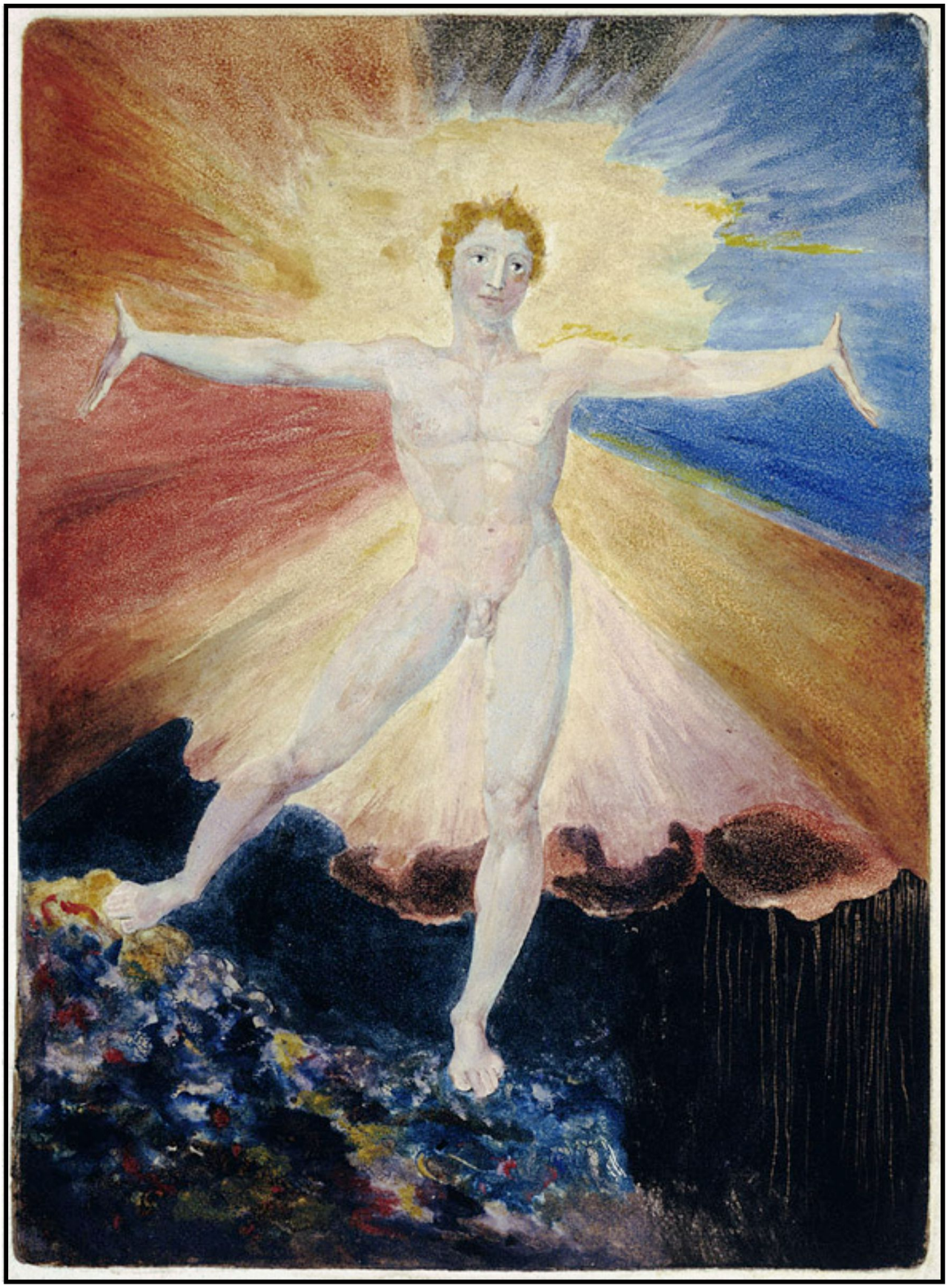
The story of Eden can thus be interpreted as Adam and Eve deciding not to remain in blissful innocence. They could have stayed in the garden, obeyed Yahweh’s commandment and led a life of simplicity and comfort. Instead, by eating of the tree of knowledge they gained insight into the complexities of a life independent of Yahweh’s care, a life wherein they made their own decisions rather than just accepting what Yahweh commanded. Their act of disobedience was an assertion of their freedom.

However, Augustine prevailed over Pelagius. At the Synod of Carthage (418CE), Original Sin became one of the essential doctrines of the Christian Church (Denzinger, 2012, p 223). This was unfortunate. Thinking of humanity as being free to choose, as being able to learn to do what is good, is far more productive than simply considering humanity as doomed to die.

Freedom to Choose

The story of Adam and Eve is not a realistic story of human origins. However, myths often contain true ideas about human nature. During our evolution, human beings gained a special kind of knowledge. We became conscious of ourselves as beings able to decide freely among possible actions on the basis of the good or evil these actions might entail. We also learned that with freedom comes responsibility. We must not act just for our own good for also for the good of others.

On this note I would like to conclude with a third image from the work of William Blake: *Rose Albion* (1795). We do not know exactly what Blake was depicting. A common interpretation is that the image represents man (or more specifically, England) freed from the shackles of materialism. It might also represent the more general idea of humanity as free to choose.



References

Alter, Robert. (2004). *The five books of Moses: a translation with commentary*. W.W. Norton & Co.

Arnold, B. T. (2009). *Genesis*. Cambridge University Press (The New Cambridge Bible Commentary).

Boyce, J. (2015). *Born bad: original sin and the making of the Western world*. Counterpoint Press.

Denzinger, H. (2012). *Compendium of creeds, definitions, and declarations on matters of faith and morals* (P. Hünermann, H. Hoping, R. L. Fastiggi, & A. E. Nash, Eds.; 43rd ed.). Ignatius Press.

Greenblatt, S. (2017). *The rise and fall of Adam and Eve*. W.W. Norton & Company.

Hartmann, N. (1932, reprinted 2002) *Moral Phenomena*. Transaction Publishers.

Kass, Leon. (2003). *The beginning of wisdom: reading Genesis*. Free Press.

Laird, J. (2014). *A study in moral theory*. Routledge.

Makowiecki, M. (2021). Untangled branches: the Edenic tree(s) and the multivocal WAW. *Journal of Theological Studies*, *71*(2), 441–457.

Robinson, M. (2024). *Reading Genesis*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Rosenberg, J., & Bloom, H. (1990). *The book of J*. Grove Weidenfeld.

Speiser, E. A. (1964). *Genesis: introduction, translation, and notes*. Doubleday (Anchor Bible).

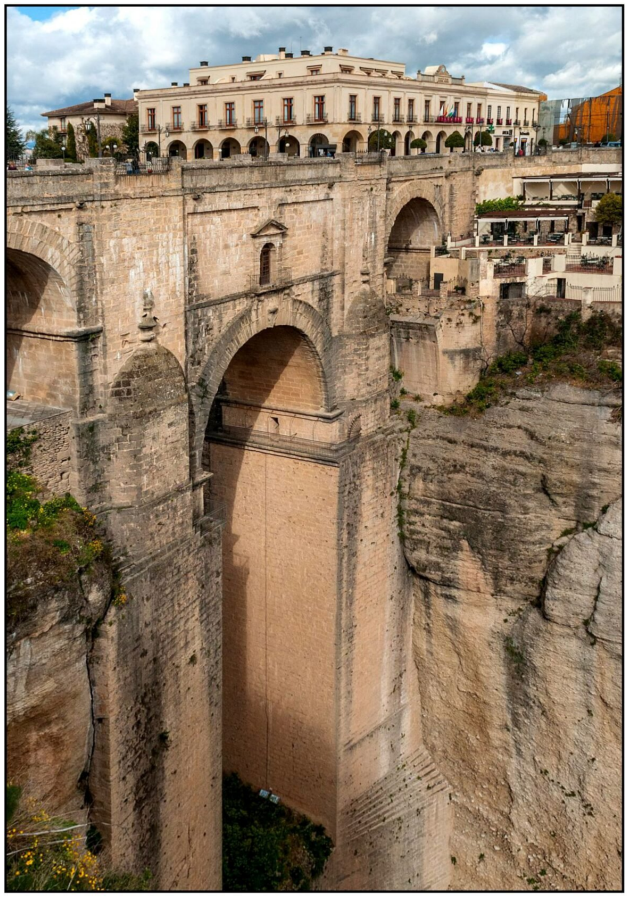
Zevit, Z. (2013). *What really happened in the Garden of Eden?* Yale University Press.

History, Myth and Fiction

This post describes some of the events that occurred in Ronda, a town in southern Spain, during the summer of 1936. After the Spanish Civil War broke out, Anarchists quickly took control of the town, and murdered many supporters of the Nationalist cause. Two months later, advancing Nationalist forces captured Ronda, and drove most of its people from their homes. Those that refused to leave suffered bloody reprisals. These events quickly became mythic rather than historic. In one story, the Anarchists had murdered the town's Falangists by having them beaten to death in the town's plaza and then thrown into the canyon that cuts through the center of the town. Ernest Hemingway recounted this version in his 1940 novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. However, most historians now agree that this never happened.

Ronda

Ronda is one of the most beautiful of the *pueblos blancos* ("white towns") perched on the inland hills of Andalusia. The name comes from the buildings that were white-washed to protect them from the heat of the sun. Through the center of Ronda runs the Guadalevin River, which has carved through the limestone cliffs a steep-walled canyon, *el tajo*, reaching depths of more than 100 meters. The most striking bridge over the river is the *Puente Nuevo* constructed in 1793 at the point where the canyon opens into the huge valley know as *la caldera* (cauldron) The following illustration shows the bridge viewed from the West (left) and from the Southeast (right).



The large building just to the north of the bridge used to be Ronda’s *casa consistorial* (town hall) where the *ayuntamiento* or local council met. In the 1990s this was converted into a *parador* (state-owned luxury hotel). The following illustration shows the old city hall with its arcades facing the large town square. On the far left can be seen a low wall looking over the canyon.

Ronda has many other luxury hotels. The Hotel Reina Victoria, a summer resort for the English stationed in Gibraltar, was built on the cliff overlooking *la caldera* in 1906. The German poet Rainer Maria Rilke stayed there for several months in the winter of 1912-1913. The gardens beside the hotel have a commemorative statue of Rilke gazing out over valley (shown below in a photograph by Bryan Appleyard).

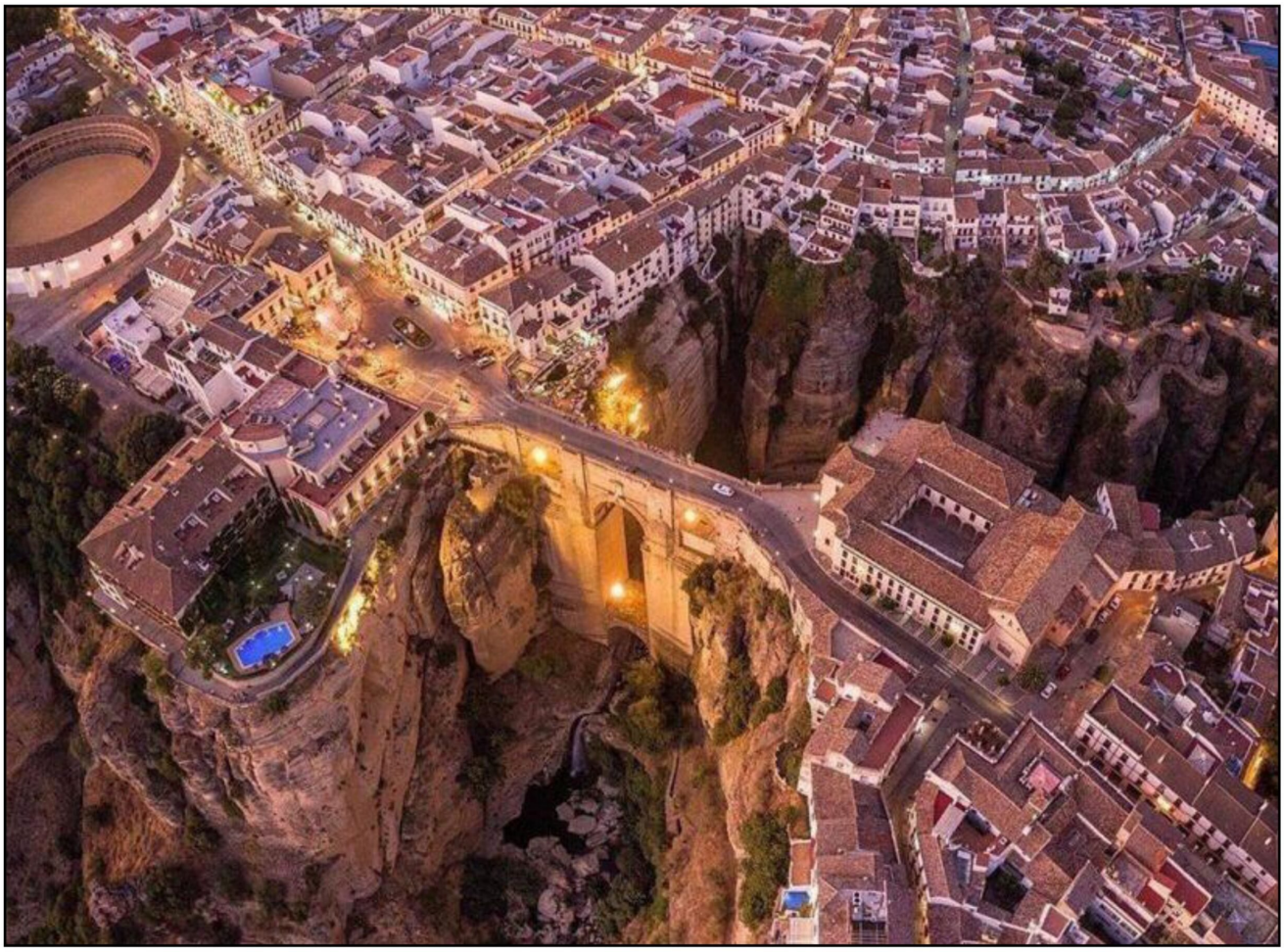
In Ronda, Rilke continued working on a set of poems that would not be complete until ten more years had passed – the *Duino Elegies*. He was also able to compose several poems about Spain. In the third part of a poem called *The Spanish Trilogy* he praised the peasants he could see in the valley, hoping that he might become as attuned to the universe as a simple shepherd:

> Langsamen Schrittes, nicht leicht, nachdenklichen Körpers,
> aber im Stehn ist er herrlich. Noch immer dürfte ein Gott
> heimlich in diese Gestalt und würde nicht minder.
> Abwechselnd weilt er und zieht, wie selber der Tag,
> und Schatten der Wolken
> durchgehn ihn, als dächte der Raum
> langsam Gedanken für ihn.
>
> slow stepping, not light-footed, his body lost in

thought,
but splendid when he stands still. A God might
secretly take his form and not be any the lesser.
By turns he tarries and continues on like the day itself
and the shadows of the clouds
pass through him, as if the vast space
were thinking slow thoughts for him.
(translation Paul Archer)

The poetry is beautiful. However, one cannot help but wonder about how shepherd felt looking up toward the hotel on the cliff. And whether this young shepherd would participate in the revolution some twenty years later.

As well as the canyon and its bridge, Ronda is famous for its *plaza de toros* (bullring) which was built in 1785. The bullring is seen in the upper left of the aerial view of Ronda in the following illustration:



Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) first visited Ronda in 1923 and became enamored of its site and of the bullfights (Buckley, 1997). In his 1932 book on the traditions of bullfighting, *Death in the Afternoon*, he remarked

> There is one town that would be better than Aranjuez to see your first bullfight in if you are only going to see one and that is Ronda.

Hemingway visited Spain during the Civil War, although at that time he could not visit Ronda, which was controlled by the Nationalists. He returned to Ronda many times in the 1950s. For the bullfights, and for the memories.

The Spanish Civil War

In 1931, the Spanish king was deposed and a new government was proclaimed: the Second Spanish Republic, the first having lasted for less than two years (1873-1874) before being aborted by a military coup. The governing coalition of the Second Republic was composed of many separate and feuding parties, among them Anarchists, Communists, Republicans and Catalonian Separatists. The right-wing opposition contained parties favoring the Monarchy or the Catholic Church. The Falangist party, a fascist organization was founded in 1933 in response to the new republic.

The government had to deal with multiple problems

- much of the land was owned by the aristocrats, who managed large tracts of land (*latifundia*), and who treated the peasants as slaves
- the military was far larger and more powerful than necessary for a country that had long ago lost its empire
- the church sided with the generals and the aristocrats, for they were the source of their power and wealth
- the new industries, run by a small number of capitalists, exploited the workers who made the factories run, and who were organizing into unions
- the police force – the *Guardia Civil* – mainly existed to support the landed aristocrats and the capitalists.

The course of the Second Republic was extremely turbulent. The government reduced funds for the military, and closed down the military academy in Zaragoza, run by General Franciso Franco. Strikes occurred and these were put down with excessive force. Attempts to take land away from the *latifundista* were unsuccessful. The government tried to restrict the role of the church in the educational system. Many of the poor, urged on by anarchists and communists, attacked the church. In 1933, Pope Pius XI published an encyclical *Dilectissima Nobis* (“Dear to us”) specifically deploring the anti-clerical violence in Spain.

In the election of January,1936, the left-wing parties in the Popular Front won a majority against a coalition of the right-wing parties named the National Front. Many have suggested that the election was rigged to some extent, and the voting was followed by much violence. Manuel Azana Diaz (1880-1940), who had served in various positions in the preceding government, became the president of the newly elected Republican government.

In July 1936, General Emilio Mola, supported by General Franciso Franco, called for a coup to end the republic and to return the nation to its previous form. The leftist parties reacted by calling for a Revolution of the workers. The country descended into anarchy. The Nationalists (or Rebels) were able to take control the north of the country, but the Republicans (or Loyalists) held off the coup in the south and in the major cities. The Civil War had begun (Thomas, 1961; Graham, 2005: Payne, 2012).

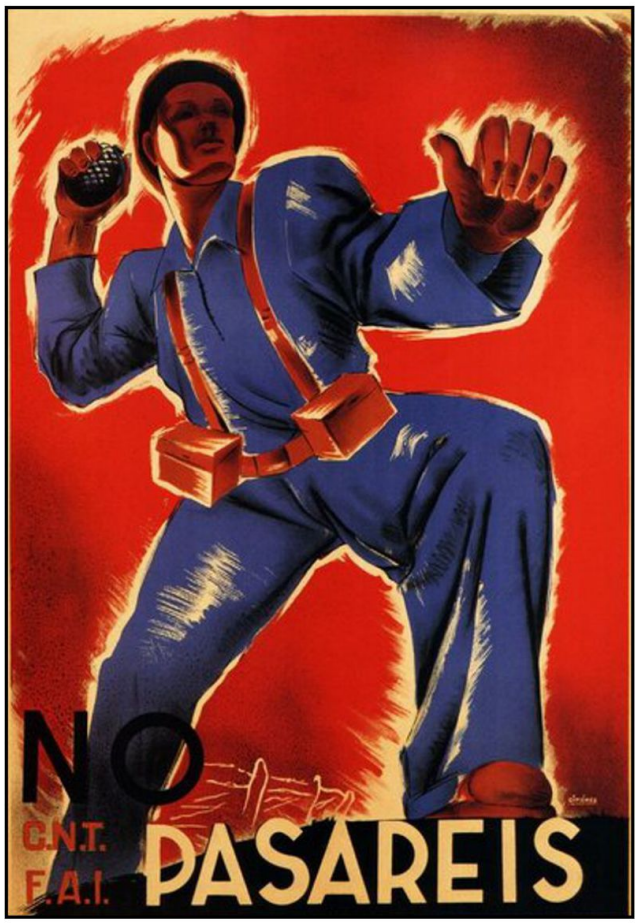
The governments of Germany and Italy immediately provided assistance to the Nationalists, and Russia came in on the side of the Republicans. England and France decided that they should not intervene in the internal politics of Spain. However, volunteers from these and many other countries (even Germany and Italy) began to organize the International Brigades to fight with the Republicans: among them were the Abraham Lincoln Brigade from the United States and the Mackenzie-Papineau Brigade from Canada.

Soon after the coup was declared, Franco borrowed planes from Italy and Germany and transported troops from North Africa to shore up the Nationalists in Seville, a Catholic stronghold. The regions of the country controlled by the Nationalists (blue) and the Republicans (white) in July, 1936) are shown in the following map (derived from Preston, 2012, p 658):

From Seville, General Franco sent troops northward to join up with the Nationalists besieging Madrid. Another key point in the fighting was near Teruel, where Nationalist soldiers were attempting to advance to the sea to cut off Barcelona from Madrid. Franco also sent troops eastward to relieve the city of Granada.

Mola died in a plane crash in June of 1937, and General Franciso Franco Bahamonde (1892-1975) became the supreme leader (*el caudillo*) of the Nationalist forces. The following illustration shows the leaders of the two sides. On the left is a modernist stone statue of Manuel Azena by José Noja and Pablo Serrano that was not erected until 1979. On the right is a bronze equestrian statue of Francisco Franco by José Capuz Mamano initially cast in 1964. Various versions of this statue were erected in several of the major cities of Spain.

The following figure shows propaganda posters from both sides of the civil war. On the left is a poster stating "*No Pasareis*" (You shall not pass). This slogan and its variant "*No Pasaran*" (They shall not pass) was used by the Republicans throughout the war. The Communist politician Dolores Ibarruri Gomez (also known as *La Pasionara* – the passionate one) used the latter version in a famous speech urging on the defenders of Madrid in November 1936. The Republican poster comes from the two parties that were the mainstay of the Popular Front: the CNT (*Confederacion Nacional de Trabajo*) and the FAI (*Federacion Anarquista Iberica*). The right poster is from the Falangists. In the background are the four red arrows held together by a yoke, the Spanish version of the *fasces* (bundle of rods) of the Italian Fascists. Superimposed is a hand on a rifle. The call is "To arms – Homeland, Bread and Justice."



Events in Ronda during 1936ca)

Soon after the military coup was declared in July, 1936, members of the CNT took control in Ronda and many of the small towns in Andalusia. Members of the *Guardia Civil* and many local Nationalist leaders were executed. Similar outbreaks of violence occurred in many regions of Spain. This “red terror” was not condoned by the Republican Government, which had difficulty controlling its many factions.

Once the Nationalists had shored up control of Seville, Franco placed the bloodthirsty General Queipo de Llano in command of retaking Southern Spain. After Granada was relieved, the Nationalists returned to the other cities of Andalusia. Reaching Ronda in September, 1936 they quickly subdued the town, and took bloody revenge. Those killed by the Nationalists far outnumbered those who had been murdered in the summer (Preston, 2012).

Exactly what had happened in Ronda during these early months of the war was not clear. The Nationalists declared that the anarchists had murdered several hundred people and thrown them over the cliff. This claim was used to justify their reprisals.

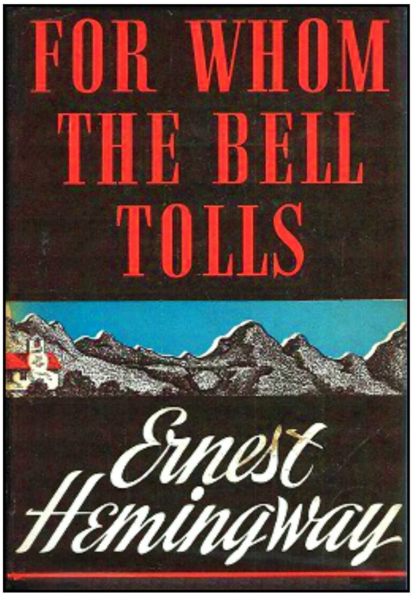
Many of the townspeople left Ronda and fled to Malaga, but this city soon fell to the Nationalists in February 1937. Republicans in Malaga were rounded up and shot. The Nationalists boasted that they executed more Republicans in seven days than the Republicans had killed in the seven months they were in control of the city (Preston, 2012, p 177).

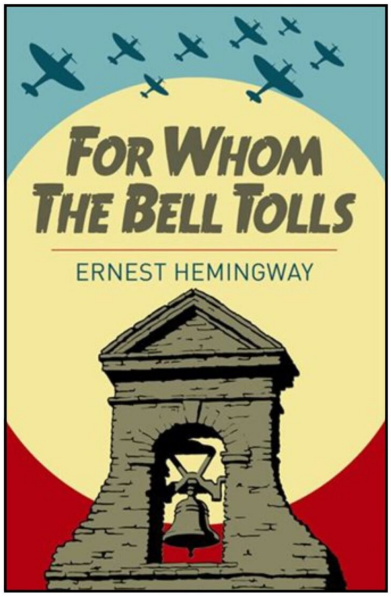
Most of the citizens of Malaga, together with a few surviving Republican soldiers, then tried to reach Almeria along the coastal road – walking, riding donkeys and hanging onto rickety vehicles for a distance of about 200 km. These refugees were strafed and bombed by planes, and shelled by Nationalists warships. The number of people killed in what became known as the Malaga-Almeria Massacre was over 3000. The Canadian physician Norman Bethune used the few vehicles available to him to help the refugees travel to Almeria (Stewart, R., & Majada Neila, 2014), but this had little effect. The following photograph shows the refugees:

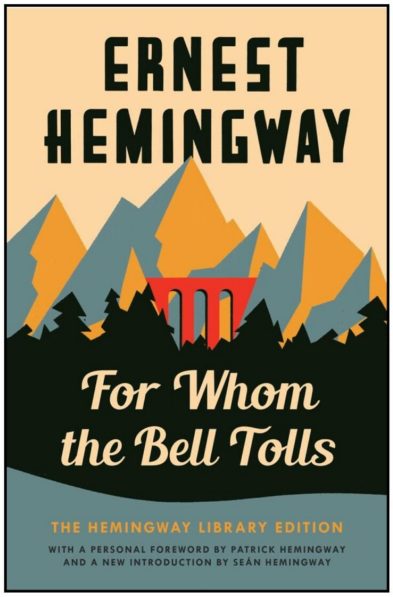
For Whom the Bell Tolls

Ernest Hemingway came to Spain toward the end of 1937 to produce a documentary film on the Civil War – *The Spanish Earth* – to help raise money for the Republicans. The photograph below shows him in the Republican trenches at Teruel (low center) together with the filmmaker Joris Ivens (high center).

After the Spanish Civil War ended in1939, Hemingway wrote *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), a novel based on what he had heard about the violence perpetrated by both sides during the conflict. The following illustration shows some of the covers used by various editions of the book, the original on the left:







The epigraph to the novel is from John Donne’s *Meditations*

upon Emergent Occasions (1624) The quotation ends with:

> any mans *death* diminishes *me*, because I am involved in *Mankinde*; And therefore never send to know for whom the *bell* tolls; It tolls for *thee*.

The novel's central character is Robert Jordan, an American Professor of Spanish, and an explosives expert, now a volunteer serving with the Republicans. In the spring of 1937, he is ordered to blow up a mountain-bridge to prevent Nationalist forces from Segovia from reaching Madrid. For this task he recruits the help of a band of Republican guerillas, led by Pablo and his woman Pilar. Jordan falls in love with Maria, a beautiful young woman serving as the band's cook. Maria's father, the Republican mayor of Valladolid, and her mother had been executed by the Nationalists early in the war. She herself had her head shaved, and was raped and imprisoned, before finally escaping to the mountains.

One evening, Pilar tells Jordan and Maria what had happened in Ronda at the beginning of the war. Pablo, the leader of the local anarchists in the town, had captured the barracks of the *Guardia Civil* and executed all the guards. He had also rounded up the main supporters of the Nationalists and imprisoned them in the city council. Pilar describes the center of the town (see preceding illustrations):

> The town is built on the high bank above the river and there is a square there with a fountain and there are benches and there are big trees that give a shade for the benches. The balconies of the houses look out on the plaza. Six streets enter on the plaza and there is an arcade from the houses that goes around the plaza so that one can walk in the shade of the arcade when the sun is hot. On three sides of the plaza is the arcade and on the fourth side is the walk shaded by the trees beside the edge of the cliff with, far below, the river. It is three hundred feet down to the

> river.

Pilar then describes how the town square was set up for the execution of the fascists:

> Pablo organized it all as he did the attack on the barracks. First he had the entrances to the streets blocked off with carts though to organize the plaza for a *capea*. For an amateur bull fight. The fascists were all held in the *Ayuntamiento*, the city hall, which was the largest building on one side of the plaza. It was there the clock was set in the wall and it was in the buildings under the arcade that the club of the fascists was.

Pablo organized the peasants and workers who had gathered in the square:

> He placed them in two lines as you would place men for a rope pulling contest, or as they stand in a city to watch the ending of a bicycle road race with just room for the cyclists to pass between, or as men stood to allow the passage of a holy image in a procession. Two meters was left between the lines and they ex-tended from the door of the *Avuntamiento* clear across the plaza to the edge of the cliff. So that, from the doorway of the *Ayuntamiento*, looking across the plaza, one coming out would see two solid lines of people waiting.
> They were armed with flails such as are used to beat out the grain and they were a good flail's length apart. All did not have flails, as enough flails could not be obtained. But most had flails obtained from the store of Don Guillermo Martin, who was a fascist and sold all sorts of agricultural implements. And those who did not have flails had heavy herdsman's clubs, or ox-goads, and some had wooden pitchforks; those with wooden tines that are used to fork the chaff and straw into the air after the flailing. Some had sickles and reaping hooks but these Pablo placed at the far end where the lines reached the edge of the cliff.

The assembled crowd was told that they must kill the fascists by beating them to death. One of the peasants asked Pilar why, and she reported the following exchange:

> “To save bullets” I said. “And that each man should have his share in the responsibility”
> “That it should start then. That it should start.” And I looked at him and saw that he was crying. “Why are you crying, Joaquin?” I asked him. “This is not to cry about.”
> “I cannot help it, Pilar,” he said. “I have never killed any one.”

One by one, the fascists were led out of the city hall and made their way through the crowd of peasants. One by one, they were beaten and clubbed to death. And one by one, their bodies were cast over the edge of the cliff into *el tajo*.

This fictional representation of the Anarchist terror in Ronda is extremely powerful. In the novel Hemingway also describes Nationalist atrocities in Valladolid – the summary execution of Maria’s parents and her abuse and rape by the Falangists. This vivid portrayal of the brutality of the war should make us rethink our hatreds. We are all in this life together; we are diminished by the death of any man; the bell tolls for us.

Later in the novel, Jordan and the guerilla band succeed in blowing up the bridge. but Jordan is severely wounded and unable to move. He convinces that the rest of the band to retreat while he stays to delay the advancing Nationalists. He insists that Maria leave with the guerillas. The novel ends with Jordan trying to stay conscious as the soldiers come closer. Talking to himself, he claims

> And if you wait and hold them up even a little while or just get the officer that may make all the difference. One thing well done can make

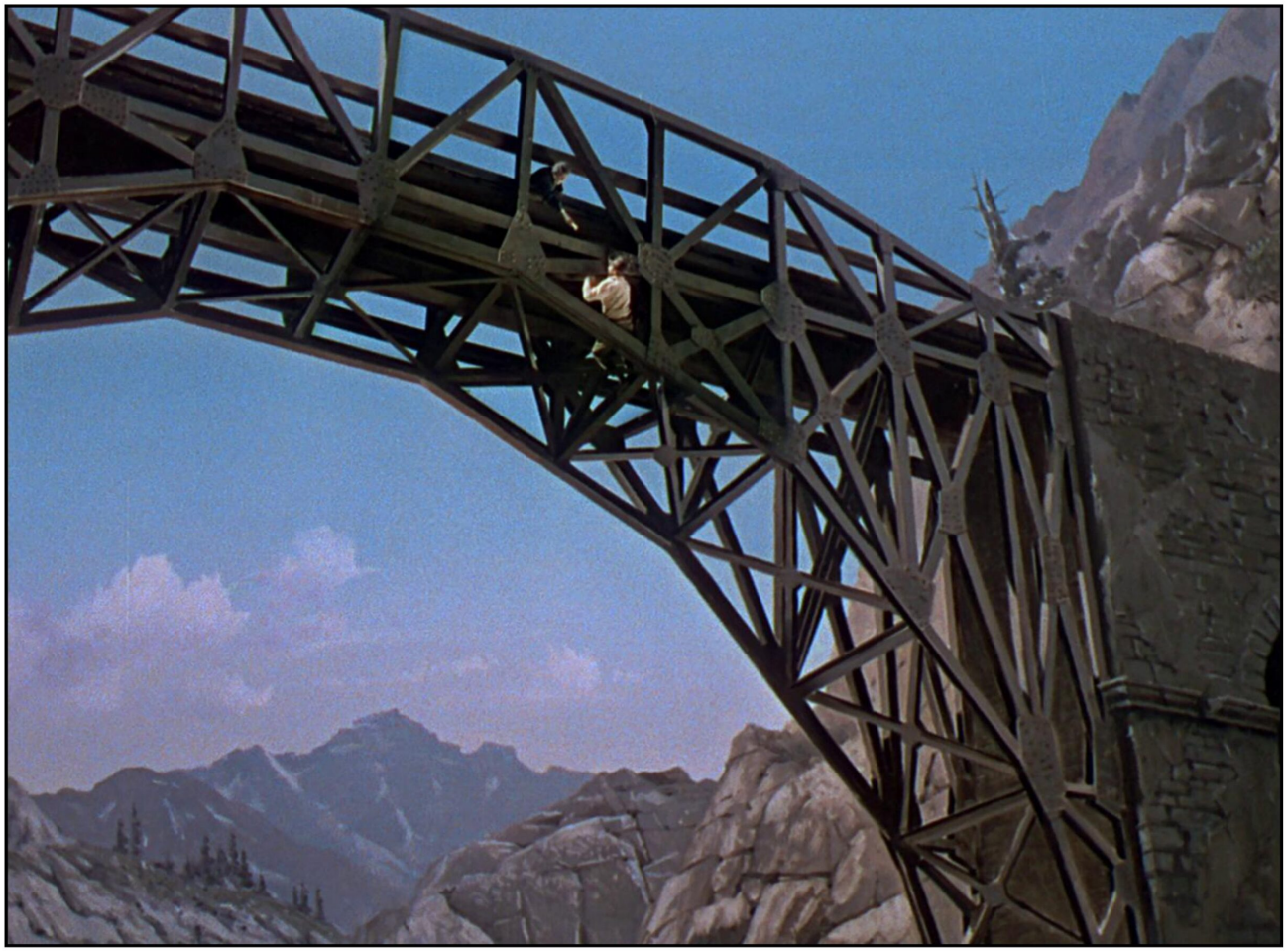
Hemingway leaves the thought unfinished. The novel ends with

an officer of the Nationalist forces riding slowly up toward where Jordan awaits him.

The book sold well, and in 1943 it was made into a film starring Gary Cooper as Jordan, Ingrid Bergman as Maria, Akim Tamiroff as Pablo and Katina Paxinou as Pilar. The film was an international success, although it was not distributed in France or Germany until after World War II (see posters below). The film received multiple nominations for the Academy Awards, with Katina Paxinou winning for best supporting actress.

The film follows the novel quite closely. When Pilar recounts her tale of what happened in Ronda at the beginning of the Civil War, the movie shows in flashback some of the brutal executions in the plaza:

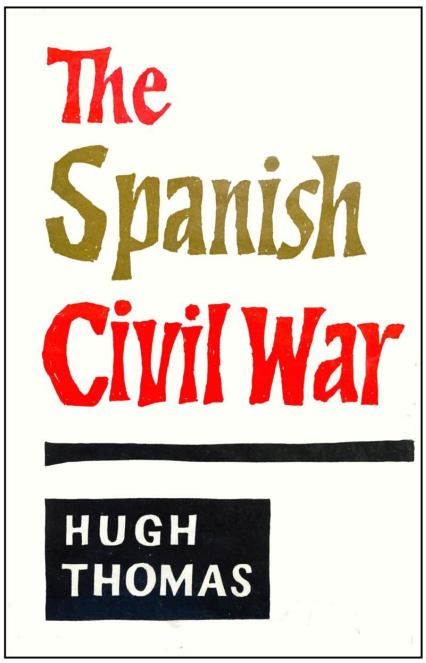
The bridge that Jordan dynamites just before the end of the movie is as high as the Puente Nuevo in Ronda:

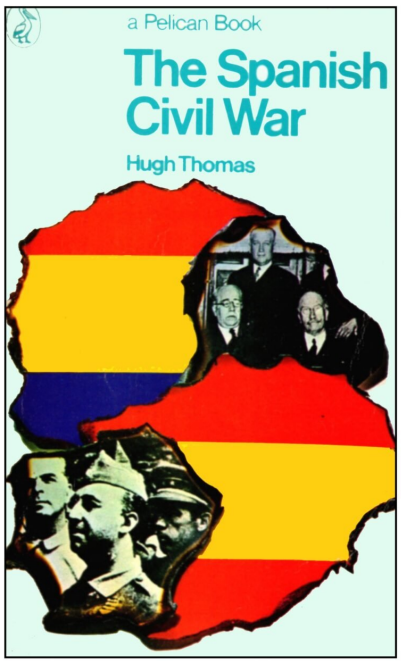


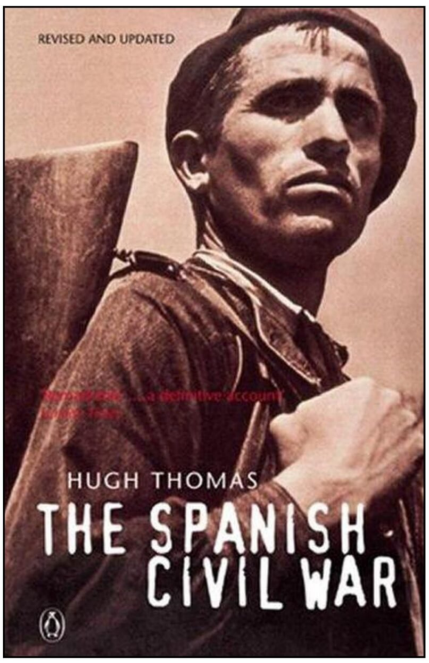
Historical Accounts of the Events in Ronda

The history of *The Spanish Civil War* (1961) by Hugh Thomas was the first major examination of what happened in Spain during

the war. The book became a best seller soon after it was published and it has since gone through two revisions and multiple printings:







Thomas discussed the events in Ronda:

> In country districts. revolution itself often consisted primarily of the murder of the upper classes or the bourgeoisie. Thus the description, in Ernest Hemingway's novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, of how the inhabitants of a small pueblo first beat the male members of the middle class and then flung them over a cliff, is near to the reality of what happened in the famous Andalusian town of Ronda (though the work was the responsibility of a gang from Malaga). There, 512 were murdered in the first month of war. (p 263 in 1989 printing)

Other historians have proposed that the Ronda executions described by Hemingway, although based on accounts he had heard, was completely fictional. Buckley (1997) described what happened in Ronda in the Summer of 1936, according to the records maintained in the town hall:

> On 19 July 1936 the commander of the small army garrison in

Ronda, upon reports of a military uprising in Morocco, went to the Town Hall with a small platoon and demanded that the mayor submit to his authority and publicly announce that the city was under martial law and the army was taking control. The mayor belonged to the left-wing coalition known as the Popular Front. He refused to follow the commander's orders and swiftly disarmed him and his small band of soldiers, heavily outnumbered by the peasant groups beginning to assemble on the plaza outside the town hall. Thus, Ronda remained loyal to the Republican government of Madrid, and did not fall to the fascists until 18 September 1936.

However, it would be would be wrong to assume that during these two months the Republican government in Madrid had any control over the town or its inhabitants. As soon as the reports of a military rising in Africa began to spread, the peasants from neighboring villages poured into Ronda and in effect took control. Although the mayor was nominally in charge, the real power belonged to a "Comite" formed by the peasants themselves, most of whom belonged to CNT (Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo), the Anarchist Labor Union.

The task of this committee was three-fold: first, to arrest all persons suspected of having fascist sympathies; second, to insure that food was evenly distributed to all inhabitants (money was outlawed and vouchers with the CNT rubber-stamp were issued); third, to prepare to defend Ronda from a probable attack by fascist troops stationed in Seville.

The word "revolution" immediately comes to mind when we attempt to describe the situation in Ronda in summer 1936. The Secretary's "Record of Proceedings" for 28 July 1936, preserved in Ronda's Town Hall, displays revolutionary rhetoric: "[W]e are living through a moment of historic transcendence … the fascist coup has spurred the populace to rise to the last man and to demand social justice . . . a new society is being born, based upon liberty, justice and equality … justice has now become `revolutionary justice'

> designed to cleanse the state of all fascist elements as well as to establish the basis for a new social order etc."

Many priests and supporters of the Nationalist cause were executed. However, these victims were not killed in the plaza, but were driven away from the center of the town and shot. It is difficult to determine the number of those killed, but it was likely much less than the 512 claimed by the Nationalists. None of the bodies were thrown into *el tajo*. This story seems to have been invented by General Queipo to inflame his troops as they went about their reprisals.

Corbin (1995) considers the story about the executions in the plaza and the casting of the bodies into *el tajo* as an example of myth-making. Myths have their basis in historical events but the stories become altered in the telling, often to justify the actions of those in power:

> Any story of the past has a double construction and a double truth. The truth of the tale told is its historical truth; the truth of its telling is its mythical truth.

The story of the executions by *el tajo* served the purpose of the Nationalists: it portrayed the class hatred of the anarchists and communists and the violence that they promulgated in the early weeks of the Civil War. This then justified their violent repression. Society must be protected from any recurrence of such revolutionary terror.

In *The Spanish Holocaust* (2012) which describes the repression of the Spanish Republicans during and after the Civil War, Paul Preston summarizes the events in Ronda:

> Famous for its Roman and Arab bridges and its exquisite eighteenth-century bullring, Ronda had suffered a pitiless repression at the hands of anarchists led by a character known as 'El Gitano.' Initially, the CNT committee had maintained a degree of order although churches were sacked and images destroyed, but soon there were murders being

> carried out by anarchists from Malaga and also by locals. However, there is no substance to the claim, first made by Queipo in a broadcast on 18 August and popularized by Ernest Hemingway's novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, that large numbers of prisoners were killed by being thrown into the *tajo*. The many rightist victims were shot in the cemetery. Francoist sources claim that victims of the red terror from Ronda and the nearby pueblos of Gaucin and Arriate numbered over six hundred. On 16 September, when Varela took the town, the defenders fled and his forces suffered only three casualties in the assault. His men stopped and interrogated anyone found in streets and shot many of them. Over half of the population fled towards Malaga. Under the new authorities, those of the town's defenders who had not fled were subjected to a bloody repression and the theft of their property. (p 171)

In the White City

The American poet, Philip Levine, spent time in Spain trying to learn more about the Spanish Civil War and the poets that wrote about it (Levine, 2016). He also wrote about Ronda in a prose-poem entitled *In the White City* (2009).

> From up there—& he points to the bridge high above us—they tossed down the fat barber, the Falangist, to his death. "It is all in the book by the American communist." "The communist?" I say. Yes, the friend of Fidel Castro, Comrade Hemingway "The tourists come because of your Mr. Hemingway, that is why you are here." Who can argue with this young, balding lieutenant of the Guardia Civil who has dared to leave his barracks lacking his tricorne & with only a small sidearm? In felt house slippers he stands at ease on the west streets of his town, Ronda, to show me the world. "On those rocks," he continues, pointing to a ledge half way down the

> gorge, “he first hits & his belly explodes. Then they rape his beautiful daughter, the film star that is Swedish, & when they have finish they shave her head. That is why we execute them all.” Does he mean that is why in the novel the Nationalists executed them. (I am careful not to say “the fascists”; it is 1965.) “No, no, executed them here, in life or death”—he smiles at his little joke—“up there on the bridge”— & he points again,— “by military firing squad one at a time, properly. That is why the whole town must witness & learn. It is educational.” But, I insist, the death of the Falangist was merely in a novel that made no effort to be true to events, *una novela*, a fiction, a best seller. The lieutenant enjoys this repartee, he’s amused by my innocence, he shakes his head, he is discreet & patient with this visitor to his ancient city that boasts the first Plaza de Toros in all the world. “You Americans,” and he suppresses his laughter, “you think because he was a famous red he could not tell the truth. They do not give Noble Prizes to liars.”

The poem illustrates how history becomes mixed up with fiction, with movies, and with photographs to form the myths that we remember about the past. Hemingway was not a communist and, though he spent time in Cuba, he was not a friend of Castro (Michaud, 2012). This idea stems from photographs of the two of them together at a fishing competition, the only time they ever met. The character Maria in Hemingway’s novel, played by the Swedish film-star in the movie, was the daughter of a mayor who was executed in the Civil War, but this was in a different town, and the mayor there was a Republican executed by the Nationalists. The poem ends with the idea that fiction written by a winner of the Noble (sic) Prize has to be true.

The following is an etching of the *Puente Nuevo* in Ronda done by Gary Young for a broadside edition of Levine's poem.

Epilogue

By the spring of 1938, the Nationalists ultimately made their way to the sea, isolating Barcelona from Madrid. After Franco's troops marched into Barcelona in January 1939, Manuel Azana was among the thousands of refugees who fled from Barcelona to France. In March, Madrid was taken and Franco declared victory on April 1, 1939, and became the Prime Minister of Spain, continuing in this office until 1973. During and after the war, many thousands of Republicans were executed by the Nationalists in a repression known as the "white terror" or the "Spanish Holocaust" (Preston, 2012).

Hemingway's novel was translated into Spanish as *Por quién doblan las campanas,* but was not allowed into Spain until 1969. The movie was not shown there until 1978. Hugh Thomas's history of the war was forbidden in Spain until after the death of Franco in 1975. Today Spain continues to unearth the bodies of those executed during and after the war, and to seek some understanding of the violence and brutality of those days (Anderson, 2017). The myths need to be converted back into history.

References

Anderson, P. (2017). Knowing and acknowledging Spain's dark Civil War past. *Journal of Contemporary History*, *52*(1), 129–139.

Buckley, R. (1997): Revolution in Ronda: the facts in Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. *Hemingway Review*, 17(1), 49-57.

Corbin, J. (1995). Truth and myth in history: an example from the Spanish Civil War. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 25(4), 609-625

Graham, H. (2005). *The Spanish Civil War: a very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Hemingway, E. (1932). *Death in the afternoon*. Scribner.

Hemingway, E. (1940). *For whom the bell tolls*. Scribner.

Levine, P. (2009). *News of the world: poems*. Alfred A. Knopf.

Levine, P. (2016). The Spanish Civil War in Poetry. In Levine, P. (edited by Hirsch E., 2016). *My lost poets: a life in poetry*. (pp 139-163). Alfred A. Knopf.

Michaud, J. (2012). Hemingway, Castro, and Cuba. *New Yorker* (May 24, 2012).

Payne, S. G. (2012). *The Spanish Civil War.* Cambridge University Press.

Preston, P. (2012). *The Spanish holocaust: inquisition and extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain*. HarperPress.

Stewart, R., & Majada Neila, J. (2014). *Bethune in Spain*. McGill-Queen's University Press.

Thomas, H. (1961, revised and enlarged, 1989). *The Spanish Civil War*. Harper & Row.

Gauguin

Gauguin

In 1891, Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) left his wife and five children and sailed for Tahiti, where he hoped

> to immerse myself in virgin nature, to see no one but savages, live their life, with no other thought in mind but to render, the way a child would, the concepts formed in my brain and to do this with the aid of nothing but the primitive means of art, the only means that are good and true (letter quoted in Eisenman, 1997, p 77).

His decision to desert his family and follow his art has been considered by philosophers as a case study in ethics. Was his hope of artistic success adequate justification for his behavior? As luck would have it, Gauguin did become a famous artist, albeit posthumously. Can this retrospectively vindicate his flight to Tahiti? These issues are complex – both in the abstract and in terms of Gauguin's actual life.

Life Before Art

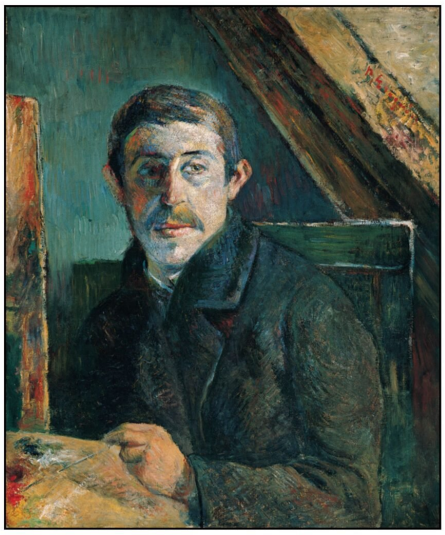
Gauguin was born in France but spent much of his childhood in Peru, where his mother's family had aristocratic connections. His grandmother Flora Tristan (1803-1844), a feminist and socialist, was the niece of Juan Pío Camilo de Tristán y Moscoso, who briefly served as president of South Peru.

Gauguin returned to France to finish his schooling and then spent three years as a merchant sailor and two years in the French Navy, during which time he travelled throughout the world. When he returned to France in 1871, Gauguin was taken in by a rich relative, Gustave Arosa, an avid collector of realist and impressionist paintings. Arosa got Gauguin a job on the stock exchange, and introduced him to Camille Pissarro.

Gauguin became a very successful broker, and took up painting as a hobby. He married a young Danish woman Mette-Sophie Gad (1850–1920), and had five children. Having made a fortune on the stock market, Gauguin became an art collector himself, buying paintings by Pissarro, Cézanne, Manet, Degas, and Sisley (Bretell & Fonsmark, 2005, p 56)

Impressionism

Gauguin had talent and he quickly learned the new Impressionist style. His paintings were included in the Impressionist Exhibitions beginning with the fifth in 1880. Below is one of his paintings from this time – *Vaugirard Market Gardens*, 1879 – together with a self-portrait from 1885.



The Stock Market Crash

In 1882 the Union Générale bank collapsed and the Paris Bourse crashed. By 1883 Gauguin was out of work. The family moved to Rouen where life was less expensive than in Paris. Gauguin decided to paint full time. However, he was not able to sell his paintings. Mette moved back to Denmark with most of the family in 1884, and Gauguin reluctantly followed in 1885. For a brief time, he was a salesman for French tarpaulins in Copenhagen, but he did not speak Danish and the endeavor came to nought. Mette supported the family by giving French lessons. Gauguin's paintings found no market among the Danes. He became depressed, and sometimes was sometimes physically violent with his wife (Mathews, 2001, p 62). Mette's family insisted that he leave.

In 1985 Gauguin returned alone to Paris. He submitted nineteen paintings to the Eighth and Final Exhibition of the Impressionist in1886, but these were not well received by either critics or buyers. Gauguin fled Paris for Pont-Aven in Brittany, an artists' colony where living was cheap. There he worked with Emile Bernard and Louis Anquetin.

Vision after the Sermon (1888)

Gauguin was fascinated by the deep religiosity of the Breton

peasants. He developed a new style of painting to portray their lives. He began using clearly outlined blocks of flat color in the manner of the Japanese prints that had become popular in Paris. He further decided that colors should be based as much upon the imagination as upon reality. This emphasis on the creative imagination derived from the Symbolist movement in literature. Gauguin named his new style of painting "Synthetism." This approach was also called "Cloisonnism" after the technique for decorating metalwork, whereby colored enamels are placed within spaces bordered by metal strips. A masterpiece of this approach was Gauguin's *The Vision after the Sermon*, which portrays Breton peasants experiencing a vision of Jacob wrestling with the angel after a sermon on this episode from Genesis 22: 22-32 (Herban, 1977):

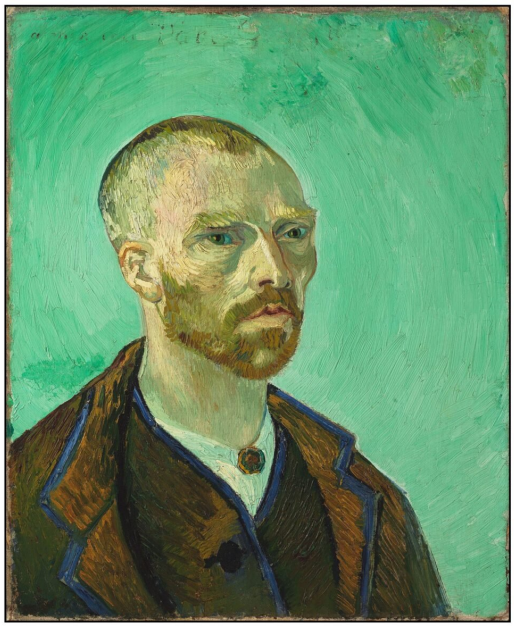
The figure at the lower right is Gauguin. The young peasant at the lower left is likely a portrait of Bernard's sister Madeleine, with whom Gauguin was infatuated. The following is a description of the painting from Vargas Llosa's novel *The Way to Paradise*. Vargas Llosa used the second person narrative as though someone is talking to Gauguin (or Gauguin is talking to himself). "Koké" was the name that the Tahitians called him – their best approximation of his name:

> The true miracle of the painting wasn't the apparition of biblical characters in real life, Paul, or in the minds of those humble peasants. It was the insolent colors, daringly antinaturalist: the vermillion of the earth, the bottle green of Jacob's clothing, the ultramarine blue of the angel, the Prussian black of the women's garments and the pink-, green- and blue-tinted white of the great row of caps and collars interposed between the spectator, the apple tree, and the grappling pair. What was miraculous was the weightlessness reigning at the center of the painting, the space in which the tree, the cow, and the fervent women seemed to levitate under the spell of their faith. The miracle was that you had managed to vanquish prosaic realism by creating a new reality on the canvas, where the objective and the subjective, the real and the supernatural, were mingled, indivisible. Well done, Paul! Your first masterpiece, Koké! (Vargas Llosa, 2003, pp 217-218)

Gauguin also created a striking version of the crucifixion based on his time in Pont-Aven – *The Yellow Christ* (1889):

The Studio of the South

Back in Paris, Gauguin met the dealer Theo van Gogh and through him his brother Vincent. The two artists exchanged self-portraits. Van Gogh’s saw himself as an austere Japanese monk; Gauguin’s portrait is off-center against a floral wallpaper background includes a portrait of Emile Bernard:



Vincent invited Gauguin to stay with him in Arles in Provence. For nine weeks in late 1888 the two artists lived and worked together (Silverman, 2000; Druick et al, 2001). Although their relations were initially amicable, they disagreed on many things and the tension between them increased. If we are to believe what Gauguin later recalled in his journals (Gauguin, 2009, pp 12-14), one evening van Gogh threatened Gauguin with a razor and Gauguin decamped to stay the night in a hotel. Van Gogh then proceeded to cut off his right ear with the razor and presented the ear to one of the prostitutes in Arles. Gauguin fled to Paris and van Gogh was confined to an asylum.

Manao Tupapau

Van Gogh and Gauguin had discussed the book *Rarahu* by Pierre Loti (1880), which described the author’s marriage to a Tahitian girl, and the two artists considered the possibility of painting in the islands of the Pacific. Van Gogh committed suicide in 1890. Gauguin sailed to Tahiti in 1891.

In Tahiti Gauguin took a Tahitian girl aged thirteen, Tehemana (Tehura), as his mistress. One night when returning home late to his hut, he found her lying frightened on the bed:

> Quickly, I struck a match, and I saw. . . . Tehura, immobile, naked, lying face downward flat on the bed with the eyes inordinately large with fear. She looked at me, and seemed not to recognize me. As for myself I stood for some moments strangely uncertain. A contagion emanated from the terror of Tehura. I had the illusion that a phosphorescent light was streaming from her staring eyes. Never had I seen her so beautiful, so tremulously beautiful. And then in this half-light which was surely peopled for her with dangerous apparitions and terrifying suggestions, I was afraid to make any movement which might increase the child's paroxysm of fright. How could I know what at that moment I might seem to her? Might she not with my frightened face take me for one of the demons and specters, one of the Tupapaus, with which the legends of her race people sleepless nights? Did I really know who in truth she was herself? The intensity of fright which had dominated her as the result of the physical and moral power of her superstitions had transformed her into a strange being, entirely different from anything I had known heretofore. (Gauguin, 1919/85, pp 33-34)

In Tahitian legends the Tupapaus were malignant demons. Over the next few days Gauguin painted the scene that he had witnessed, calling it *Manao Tupapau*, "Spirit of the Dead Watching" (1892):

Vargas Llosa imagines his thoughts about the painting:

> Yes, this was truly the painting of a savage. He regarded it with satisfaction when it seemed to him that it was finished. In him, as in the savage mind, the everyday and the fantastic were united in a single reality, somber, forbidding, infused with religiosity and desire, life and death. The lower half of the painting was objective, realist; the upper half subjective and unreal but no less authentic. The naked girl would be obscene without the fear in her eyes and the incipient downturn of her mouth. But fear didn’t diminish her beauty. It augmented it, tightening her buttocks in such an insinuating way, making them an altar of human flesh on which to celebrate a barbaric ceremony, in homage to a cruel and pagan god. And in the upper part of the canvas was the ghost, which was really

> more yours than Tahitian, Koké. It bore no resemblance to those demons with claws and dragon teeth that Moerenhout described. It was an old woman in a hooded cloak, like the crones of Brittany forever fixed in your memory, time-less women who, when you lived in Pont-Aven or Le Pouldu, you would meet on the streets of Finistère. They seemed half dead already, ghosts in life. If a statistical analysis were deemed necessary, the items belonging to the objective world were these: the mattress, jet-black like the girl's hair; the yellow flowers; the greenish sheets of pounded bark; the pale green cushion; and the pink cushion, whose tint seemed to have been transferred to the girl's upper lip. This order of reality was counterbalanced by the painting's upper half: there the floating flowers were sparks, gleams, featherlight phosphorescent meteors aloft in a bluish mauve sky in which the colored brushstrokes suggested a cascade of pointed leaves. The ghost, in profile and very quiet, leaned against a cylindrical post, a totem of delicately colored abstract forms, reddish and glassy blue in tone. This upper half was a mutable, shifting, elusive substance, seeming as if it might evaporate at any minute. From up close, the ghost had a straight nose, swollen lips, and the large fixed eye of a parrot. You had managed to give the whole a flawless harmony, Koké. Funereal music emanated from it, and light shone from the greenish-yellow of the sheet and the orange-tinted yellow of the flowers. (Vargas Llosa, 2003, pp 22-23)

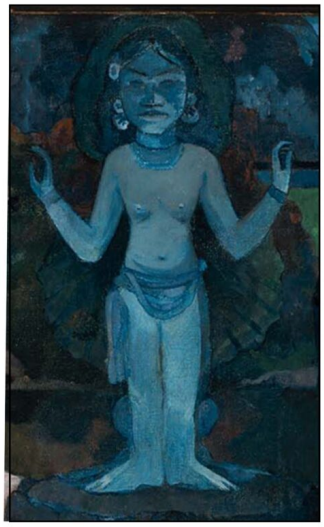
The painting is one of the most discussed of Gauguin's Tahitian pictures. The commentary is ambivalent:

> All this is to put the painting in the best possible light. But there is surely more to it than just a charming anecdote based on local folklore. In blunt terms what we actually see is the interior of a hut at night, with a large couch, covered in a boldly flowered cloth, partially overlaid by a plain white sheet on which lies a naked girl, face down, another of the child-like, yet distinctly erotic figures who

> have appeared before in Gauguin's work – pert buttocks offered invitingly to the spectator. There is even something disturbing about the way the face is half-turned towards the viewer, or rather towards the artist, Gauguin, as if he and not the figure in the background is the spirit of which she is afraid. (Sweetman, 1995, pp 326-327).

Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?

In 1893 Gauguin returned to Paris and arranged to sell some of his Tahitian paintings. He was not happy in Paris and in 1895 he returned to Tahiti. Over the next few years, Gauguin became severely depressed. He had suffered a broken ankle in a brawl in Concarneau near Pont Aven and the fracture had never really healed. He drank excessively – partly to relieve the pain and partly to improve his mood. He had sores on his legs, perhaps related to syphilis or perhaps related to the malnutrition that accompanies alcoholism. In 1897 he attempted to commit suicide with arsenic but failed. After this he worked on his last great painting, *D'où venons-nous? Que sommes-nous? Où allons-nous?* (1898):



Gauguin described his work in a letter to Daniel de Monfried:

> The canvas is 4.50 meters long and 1.70 meters high. The two upper corners are chrome yellow, with the inscription on the

> left and my signature on the right, as if it were a fresco, painted on a gold-colored wall whose corners had worn away. In the bottom right, a sleeping baby, then three seated women. Two figures dressed in purple confide their thoughts to one another; another figure, seated, and deliberately outsized de-spite the perspective, raises one arm in the air and looks with astonishment at these two people who dare to think of their destiny. A figure in the middle picks fruit. Two cats near a child. A white she-goat. The idol, both its arms mysteriously and rhythmically uplifted, seems to point to the next world. The seated figure leaning on her right hand seems to be listening to the idol; and finally an old woman close to death seems to accept, to be resigned [to her fate]; . . . at her feet, a strange white bird holding a lizard in its claw represents the futility of vain words. All this takes place by the edge of a stream in the woods. In the background, the sea, then the mountains of the neighboring island. Although there are different shades of color, the landscape constantly has a blue and Veronese green hue from one end to the other. All of the nude figures stand out from it in a bold orangey tone. If the Beaux-Arts pupils competing for the Prix de Rome were told: "The painting you have to do will be on the theme, 'Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?' " what would they do? I have finished a philosophical treatise comparing that theme with the Gospel. I think it is good. (Gauguin,1990, p. 160; original letter is illustrated in Shackelford & Frèches-Thory, 2004, p 168)

The philosophical treatise he mentioned was likely *The Catholic Church and Modern Times* (Gauguin, 1990, pp 161-173), in which Gauguin decries the hypocrisy of the modern church and urges his readers to return to a more natural theology. His painting is a testament to these ideas.

In a letter to Charles Morrice (Goddard, 2029, p 48) Gauguin describes his painting as proceeding from right to left, with

the answer to “Where do we come from?” on the right, the answer to “What are we?” in the center and the answer to “Where are we going?” on the left. Nevertheless, the painting has no simple interpretation (Shackelford & Frèches-Thory, 2004, pp 167-201). The man plucking fruit from a tree in the center perhaps refers to Adam in a modern version of Eden. The two women in purple may refer to the church and its interpretation of our origins. The idol on the left is the Tahitian Goddess Hina (Gauguin, 1953, pp 11-13). Hina represented the sky, moon, air, and spirit. From the union between Hina and Tefatou, God of matter and earth, came forth man. Hina wished that man might be reborn after death much like the moon returns each month. Tefatou insisted that, although that matter lasts forever, man must die.

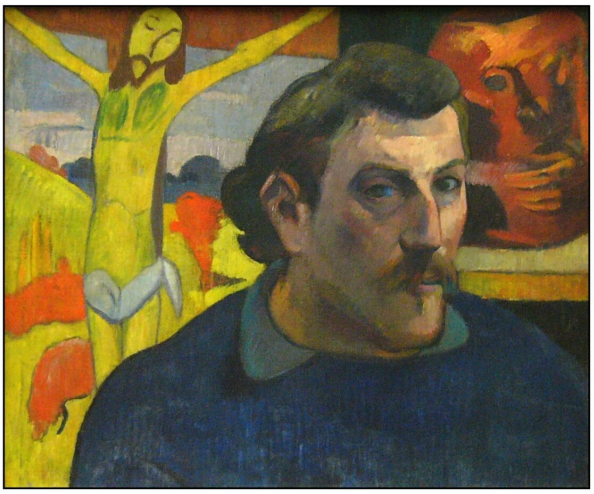
The painting stands at the cusp between earlier paintings like that of the neo-classical *Between Art and Nature* (1895) of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, which Gauguin has seen on his visit back to Paris, and the Fauvist *La Bonheur de Vivre* (1905) of Henri Matisse. Both paintings are smaller than Gauguin’s masterpiece.

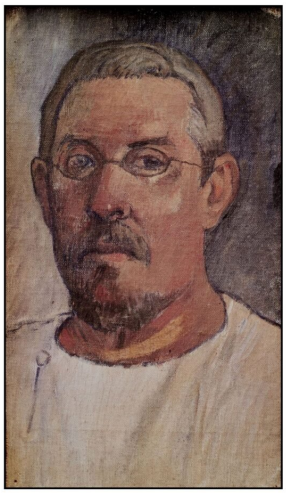
La Maison de Jouir

Gauguin decided that Tahiti was too tainted with Western civilization and decided in 1901 to move to the Marquesa Islands, about 1500 km northeast of Tahiti. There he again took a young Polynesian girl for his mistress and built himself a home that he called *La Maison de Jouir*. This is

usually translated as the “House of Pleasure” but more precisely means the “House of Orgasm.” He continued to paint and to write, and he created many striking woodcuts and drawings. One of his paintings from 1902 was the *Riders on the Beach*. The pink color of the beach is in the imagination of the artist and nowhere near reality.

In these last years, Gauguin was wracked by pain and became more and more depressed. His last *Self Portrait* (1903) from just before his death shows the ravages of alcohol and morphine. It is presented below together with two earlier portraits, one from 1889 alluding to his time in Pont-Aven, and one from 1893 referring to his first visit to Tahiti:





Acclaim

Gauguin was never recognized in his lifetime as a painter of significance. His death in 1903 warranted only a few lines in the Paris newspapers. It was not until 1906 that his friends arranged a retrospective exhibition at the Salon d'Automne in Paris. His fame has grown since then. Art historians now consider Cézanne, van Gogh and Gauguin as the "guiding lights" (Hook, 2021, p. 21) of the modernist revolution in art that occurred in the first decades of the 20th Century. This assessment is borne out by the high prices that Gauguin's paintings now command at auction.

Isabelle Cahn (in Shackelford & Frèches-Thory, 2004, pp 300-1) writes

> He was the one who had dared take all the liberties, sparking the most advanced research, particularly in the domain of color . . . Gauguin had perceived the decline of the West and revolted against the dictatorship of Greco-Roman culture. In his wake, other artists had tried to surpass the traditional boundaries of thought and, seeking regeneration, had taken an interest in primitive arts, children's drawings, folk art and outsider art. An interest in the unconscious had also opened new vistas. By giving shape to his internal world, Gauguin exposed the anxiety of

> the modern soul and its questions about its fate, leading us to edge of our own enigma, but not weighing it down with explanations.

Bretell (1988, p 396) remarks about the effects of Gauguin's work on later painters:

> Picasso was clearly devastated by the power and raw, crude strength of the printed drawings. Matisse was overcome by the color and the apparently casual draftsmanship of the late paintings. Indeed, if one can measure the strength of an artist by that of his most brilliant followers, Gauguin would be among the very greatest from the late nineteenth century.

Moral Luck

In 1976 Bernard Williams presented a paper on "Moral Luck," in which he dealt extensively with the

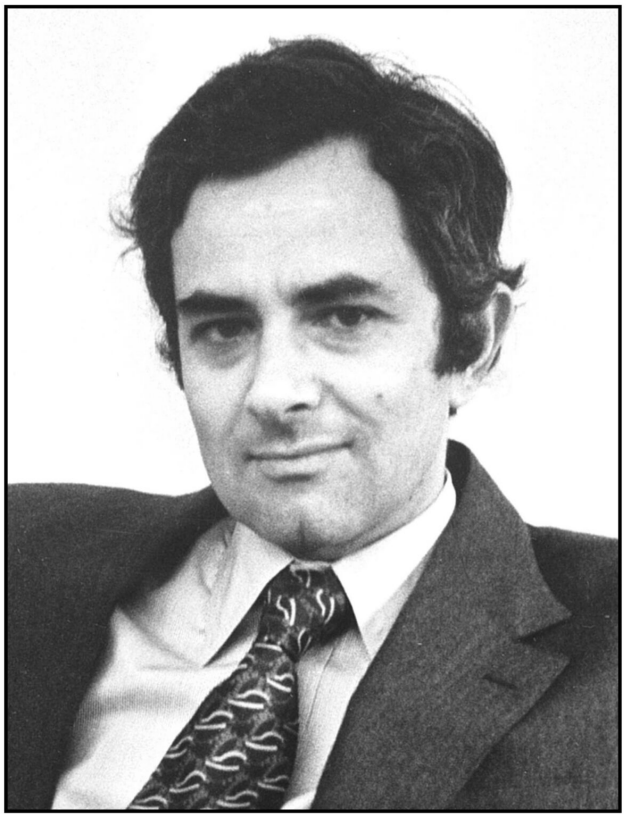
> example of the creative artist who turns away from the definite and pressing human claims on him in order to live a life in which, as he supposes, he can pursue his art.

For simplicity he calls the artist Gauguin, but he considers the case abstractly without being limited by historical facts. The main issue is that when Gauguin decided to desert his family, the only justification for his action was his hope that he would fulfil his destiny (and become a great artist), and that his art would contribute significantly to human culture. The concept of moral luck is that we cannot predict the future with any certainty. Gauguin may have died in a shipwreck before he reached Tahiti. In this event, his actions would have no justification. As chance (or "luck") would have it, Gauguin did live to paint his greatest works in Tahiti, and did contribute significantly to the history of modern art. The problem is whether such an outcome can retrospectively justify the desertion of his family. Certainly not from the point of view of his family; probably not from the point of

view of those with little interest in modern art. A secondary issue is whether aesthetic values can be used as justification for behavior that is, in itself, unethical.

Thomas Nagel commented on Williams's ideas and discussed moral luck in a more general way. Both authors thereafter updated their papers (Nagel, 1979; Williams, 1981), and there has been much further discussion in the literature (e.g., Lang, 2019; Nelkin 2019). Nagel described moral luck as that which occurs between the intention to act and the outcome of the intended action. Though we might profess, like Kant, that moral guilt or acclaim depends upon the intension (or "will") rather than the outcome, in actuality, the outcome largely determines our sense of an action's moral worth. For example, a person who drives while impaired and winds up killing a pedestrian is considered much more blameworthy than one who was similarly impaired but, as luck would have it, did not kill anyone. Moral luck points to the issue that we do not completely control the outcomes of our actions.

The following illustrations shows Williams on the left and Nagel on the right.



The Crimes of a Colonist

At the time of Gauguin's sojourn, Tahiti and the Marquesas were French colonies. The administrators of the colonies exploited the native Polynesians; the church taught them that their own culture was worthless and that they must convert to Christianity; whatever was worthwhile in their life was appropriated and made part of European culture. It was impossible for Gauguin not to be part of this process – he was a European and French Polynesia was a colony. However, he did not act in the same way as most of the Europeans. He lived with the natives, and tried to understand their language and their ideas. He was aware of the problems:

> Circumstances exposed him to the effects of recent colonization; he saw the depredation and the irrecoverable loss first-hand. He also spoke out about colonization – and thereby earned the animus of the colonial and church authorities who hounded him until the end of his life (Maleuvre, 2018).

Gauguin called the Polynesians “savages.” However, for him this was a term of praise rather than contempt. As quoted in the opening paragraph of this post, Gauguin aspired to become a savage.

Sex Tourist

Gauguin’s mistresses in Tahiti and in the Marquesas were young girls of 13 or 14 years. Although it was normal at that time for Polynesian girls of that age to have sexual relations with men, it is impossible not to deplore Gauguin’s taking advantage of them for his own sexual pleasure. Reading about these girls in his book *Noa Noa* (“Fragrance”) is terribly disconcerting:

> Indeed, it is soon clear that he is not just the average Westerner exploring for the sake of broadening his understanding of the world—he is, more than anything, a sexual tourist. Even the title *Noa Noa*, which means “fragrance,” is used by Gauguin to indicate the aroma of a human body particularly in sexual situations. Although sexual liaisons similar to those described by Gauguin were regularly reported in other contemporary travel accounts, Gauguin makes them central to the story and, in doing so, transforms the normally pedestrian Tahitian sojourn into an erotic holiday. (Mathews, 2001, p 178).

Most historians believe that the sores on Gauguin’s legs and the heart problems that led to his death were caused by advanced syphilis. However, since the discovery of the causative agent (*Treponema pallidum*) and the definitive Wassermann test did not occur until after his death, we cannot be sure. A recent examination of Gauguin’s teeth did not show evidence that he had taken the mercurial compounds that normally were used to treat the disease at that time (Mueller & Turner, 2018). Nevertheless, the prevalence of syphilis then was high – about 10% in urban populations and likely much more in those who frequented prostitutes. If Gauguin did have

syphilis, he almost certainly gave the disease to his young mistresses.

The following is from a poem Guys like Gauguin (2009) by Selina Tusitala Marsh. Louis Antoine de Bougainville was a French naval captain who explored the Pacific Ocean in the late 18th century:

> thanks Bougainville
> for desiring ’em young
> so guys like Gauguin could dream
> and dream
> then take his syphilitic body
> downstream to the tropics
> to test his artistic hypothesis
> about how the uncivilised
> ripen like pawpaw
> are best slightly raw
> delectably firm
> dangling like golden prepubescent buds
> seeding nymphomania
> for guys like Gauguin

The Artist as Monster

Gauguin as a person was not easy to like. He was concerned only with his own presumed genius. He treated his family and his mistresses egregiously. Does this mean that we should not consider his paintings – that he should be, in our modern idiom, “cancelled” (e.g., Nayeri, 2019)? Many artists have done monstrous things (Dederer, 2003), and it is often difficult to consider their art independently of their immoral lives. We should not shy away from their sins. We should not call Gauguin’s Polysnesian mistresses “young women” but clearly state that they were girls who were seduced by a sexual predator. Nevertheless, we must consider the art for its own sake. Gauguin’s paintings are powerful: they make us experience things differently.

References

Brettell, R. R. (1988). *The Art of Paul Gauguin*. National Gallery of Art.

Brettell, R. R., & Fonsmark, A.-B. (2005). *Gauguin and Impressionism*. Yale University Press.

Dederer, C. (2023). *Monsters: a fan's dilemma*. Alfred A. Knopf.

Druick, D. W., Zegers, P., Salvesen, B., Lister, K. H., & Weaver, M. C. (2001). *Van Gogh and Gauguin: the studio of the south*. Thames & Hudson.

Eisenman, S. (1997). *Gauguin's skirt*. Thames &Hudson.

Gauguin, P. (translated by O. F. Theis, 1919, reprinted 1985). *Noa Noa: the Tahitian journal*. Dover Publications.

Gauguin, P. (edited and annotated by R. Huyghe, 1951). *Ancien culte mahorie.* La Palme

Gauguin, P. (translated by E. Levieux and edited by D. Guérin, 1990). *The writings of a savage*. Paragon House.

Gauguin, P. (edited K. O'Connor, 2009) *The intimate journals*. Routledge.

Goddard, L. (2019). *Savage tales: the writings of Paul Gauguin*. Yale University Press.

Herban, M. (1977). The origin of Paul Gauguin's Vision after the Sermon: Jacob Wrestling with the Angel (1888). *The Art Bulletin*, *59*(3), 415–420.

Hook, P. (2021). *Art of the extreme, 1905-1914*. Profile Books.

Lang, G. (2019). Gauguin's lucky escape: Moral luck and the morality system. In S. G. Chappell & M. van Ackeren (Eds.) *Ethics Beyond the Limits.* (pp. 129–147). Routledge.

Maleuvre, D. (2018). The trial of Paul Gauguin. *Mosaic, 51*(1), 197–213.

Marsh, S. T. (2009). *Fast talking PI*. Auckland University Press.

Mathews, N. M. (2001). *Paul Gauguin: an erotic life*. Yale University Press.

Mueller, W. A., & Turner, C. B. (2018). Gauguin's Teeth. *Anthropology*, 6: 198.

Nagel, T. (1979). Moral Luck. In *Mortal Questions*. (pp. 24–38) Cambridge University Press.

Nayeri, F. (November 18, 2019). Is it time Gauguin got canceled? *New York Times.*

Nelkin, D. N. (2019) Moral Luck. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

Silverman, D. (2000). *Van Gogh and Gauguin: the search for sacred art*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Shackleford, G. T. M., & Frèches-Thory, C. (2004). *Gauguin Tahiti: the studio of the South Seas*. Thames & Hudson.

Sweetman, D. (1995). *Paul Gauguin: a life*. Simon & Schuster.

Vargas Llosa, M. (translated by N. Wimmer, 2003). *The way to paradise*. Farrar Straus & Giroux.

Williams, B. A. O. (1981). Moral Luck. In *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*. (pp. 20–39) Cambridge University Press.

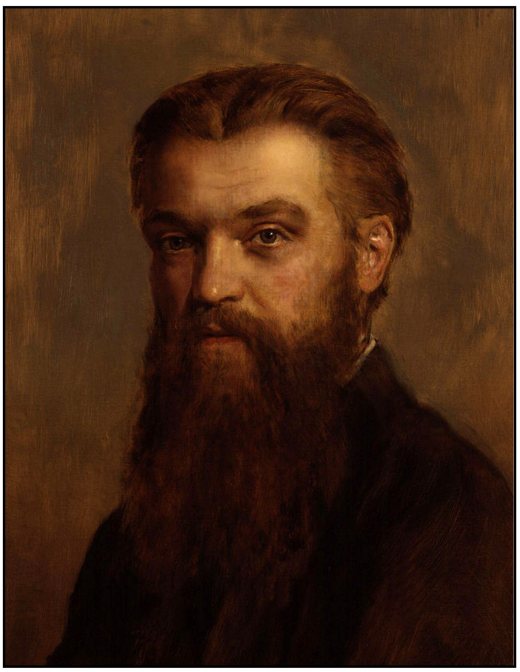
Williams, B. A. O., & Nagel, T. (1976). Moral Luck. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, *Supplementary Volume, 50*(1), 115–151.

The Ethics of Belief

In the 19th-Century religious belief came under scientific scrutiny. In 1877, William Kingdon Clifford, an English mathematician and philosopher, proposed that

> it is wrong always, everywhere and for any one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.

Without good supporting evidence, one should refrain from believing: it is wrong to take anything on faith. This proposal was disputed by the American philosopher and psychologist William James in an 1896 lecture entitled *The Will to Believe*. James argued that under certain conditions we must form beliefs and act on them, even though the evidence is insufficient. The main requirements were that the believer must choose between two “genuine” possibilities, and that the choice must be sufficiently “momentous” that not choosing would entail significant risk. The latter condition hearkens back to the “wager” of Blaise Pascal, wherein a person decides what to believe based on the consequences of these beliefs rather than the evidence for them.



William Kingdon Clifford (1845-79)

William Clifford, a professor of mathematics and mechanics at the University of London, made significant contributions to algebra and to geometry, his ideas in the latter foreshadowing Einstein's *Theory of General Relativity*. He was also interested in the philosophical implications of science, publishing essays on *The Scientific Basis of Morals* and *The Ethics of Belief*.

Clifford begins the latter essay with a story about a shipwreck:

> A shipowner was about to send to sea an emigrant-ship. He knew that she was old, and not over-well built at the first; that she had seen many seas and climes, and often had needed repairs. Doubts had been suggested to him that possibly she was not seaworthy. These doubts preyed upon his mind, and made him unhappy; he thought that perhaps he ought to have her thoroughly overhauled and refitted, even though this should put him to great expense. Before the ship sailed, however, he succeeded in overcoming these melancholy reflections. He said to himself that she had gone safely

> through so many voyages and weathered so many storms that it was idle to suppose she would not come safely home from this trip also. He would put his trust in Providence, which could hardly fail to protect all these unhappy families that were leaving their fatherland to seek for better times elsewhere. He would dismiss from his mind all ungenerous suspicions about the honesty of builders and contractors. In such ways he acquired a sincere and comfortable conviction that his vessel was thoroughly safe and seaworthy; he watched her departure with a light heart, and benevolent wishes for the success of the exiles in their strange new home that was to be; and he got his insurance-money when she went down in mid-ocean and told no tales.

Clifford insisted that the ship-owner was responsible for the deaths of all who drowned. He may have sincerely believed in the soundness of his ship, but he had no right to so believe on the basis of the evidence before him. Clifford insisted further that had the ship not foundered, its owner was still guilty. From such examples he proposed the principle ("later known as Clifford's principle") that

> it is wrong always, everywhere and for any one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.

He expounded:

> If a man, holding a belief which he was taught in childhood or persuaded of afterward, keeps down and pushes away any doubts which arise about it in his mind, purposely avoids the reading of books and the company of men that call in question or discuss it, and regards as impious those questions which cannot easily be asked without disturbing it – the life of that man is one long sin against mankind.

Chignell (2018) noted that this approach to belief is similar to that of John Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690)

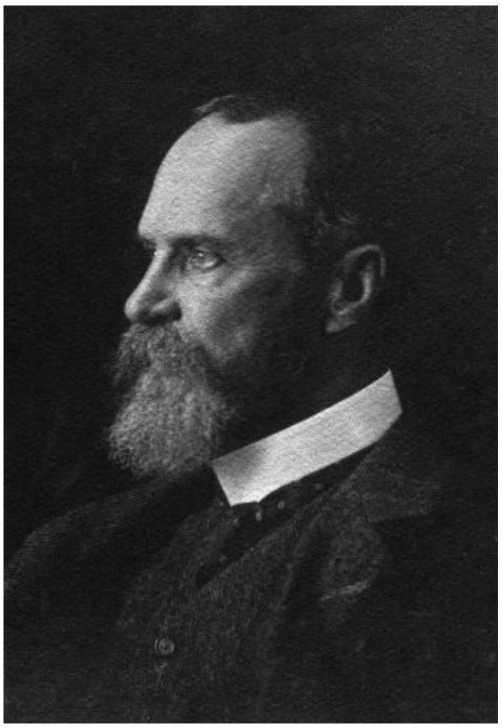
> He that believes without having any Reason for believing, may be in love with his own Fancies; but neither seeks Truth as he ought, nor pays the Obedience due to his Maker, who would have him use those discerning Faculties he has given him, to keep him out of Mistake and Error.

Clifford realized that a single person cannot sift through all the evidence for everything she needs to believe. Some beliefs must be based on the *authority* of others. However, the believer should make some rational assessment of that authority. The proposers of the beliefs must be honest; the beliefs must be such that they can be or have been verified by those who have the time and experience to verify them; their acceptance should be independent of any personal profit to those that propose the beliefs.

Clifford also considered the *limits of inference*. Most of what we know is inferred from what we and others have experienced. The fact that the sun has risen daily throughout our lives and throughout all the lives of others leads us to believe that it will continue to do so. Clifford proposed

> We may believe what goes beyond our experience, only when it is inferred from that experience by the assumption that what we do not know is like what we know.

In passing Clifford noted that we have no *a priori* right to believe that nature is universally uniform – that the future will always follow the rules of the past. This is itself a belief – one that has worked so far. Some beliefs we need to accept.



William James (1842-1910)

William James trained as a physician but never practised medicine. Rather he pursued his interests in psychology, religion, and philosophy. In each of these fields he published books that have become essential to their respective disciplines: *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), and *Pragmatism* (1907).

In a talk to the Philosophical Clubs of Yale and Brown Universities –later published as *The Will to Believe* (1896) – James proposed that there are situations in which we should believe even when the evidence is insufficient. He describes three necessary conditions. First, the belief should involve a choice between two *live* options, i.e. ones that personally meaningful. Choosing between theosophy or Islam was likely not meaningful to his audience. Second, the choice must be *unavoidable*. Deciding to love or hate someone is easily avoidable – we can just be indifferent. However, accepting or denying the truth of a statement is unavoidable – the

statement must be either true or false. Third and most importantly, the choice must be *momentous*. James used the example of joining Nansen's expedition to the North Pole. To do so could lead to fame and glory; not to do so leaves one with nothing:

> He who refuses to embrace a unique opportunity loses the prize as surely as if he tried and failed. Per contra, the option is trivial when the opportunity is not unique, when the stake is insignificant, or when the decision is reversible if it later prove unwise.

James assumed that deciding to believe is much like deciding to act. However, choosing to believe in God is not the same as choosing to join Nansen's polar expedition. One can (and does) choose to act in certain ways. However, one does not usually choose between beliefs if there is no evidence preferring one over the other (see the criticisms of Bertrand Russell, below).

James noted that his idea of the "momentousness" of a belief is related to Pascals famous wager. Pascal proposed that it is better to believe in God than to remain an agnostic: if we are right, we are granted "eternal beatitude," and, if we are wrong, we lose nothing. James did not enjoy considering religious belief in the "language of the gaming-table." Nevertheless, he was apparently convinced by Pascal's logic. When things are that important, we must believe one way or another or risk losing all. James therefore proposed that

> Our passional nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds; for to say, under such circumstances, "Do not decide, but leave the question open," is itself a passional decision, – just like deciding yes or no, – and is attended with the same risk of losing the truth.

James concludes his lecture with a rousing quotation from the English Jurist, James Fitzjames Stephens (1829-1894):

> In all important transactions of life we have to take a leap in the dark…. If we decide to leave the riddles unanswered, that is a choice; if we waver in our answer, that, too, is a choice: but whatever choice we make, we make it at our peril. If a man chooses to turn his back altogether on God and the future, no one can prevent him; no one can show beyond reasonable doubt that he is mistaken. If a man thinks otherwise and acts as he thinks, I do not see that any one can prove that he is mistaken. Each must act as he thinks best; and if he is wrong, so much the worse for him. We stand on a mountain pass in the midst of whirling snow and blinding mist through which we get glimpses now and then of paths which may be deceptive. If we stand still we shall be frozen to death. If we take the wrong road we shall be dashed to pieces. We do not certainly know whether there is any right one. What must we do? Be strong and of a good courage. Act for the best, hope for the best, and take what comes. . . .

The image is wildly romantic. It brings to mind Casper David

Friedreich's *Wanderer over a Sea of Fog* (1812). The concept of the "leap of faith" – the act of believing something despite the lack of convincing evidence – was commonly used in the 19th Century to counter the objections of religious skeptics. The term is often attributed to Kierkegaard though he never used it (McKinnon, 1983).

James had used the image of the Alpine Climber in an earlier essay written in French on the "subjective method" (1877, discussed in Wernham, 1987, Chapter 2):

> I find myself in a difficult place from which I can only escape by making a bold and dangerous leap. Though I wish to make the leap, I have never done so before, and I do not know if I have the ability. Let us suppose I use the subjective method: I believe what I desire. My confidence gives me strength and makes possible something which otherwise might not have been. I leap across the space and find myself out of danger. But suppose I doubt my ability because it has never before been demonstrated in such a situation: then I waver; I hesitate; at last, weak and trembling, I am compelled to an attempt by sheer despair; I miss my goal; I fall into the abyss. (my translation).

It is not clear whether James was proclaiming a right to believe when there is insufficient evidence, or whether he was asserting a duty to believe. Most people would support a general right to believe with the proviso that the belief does not harm others. Few, however, would say that we ought to believe something even though the evidence is not convincing.

James has been criticized for indulging in wishful thinking (reviewed in Koopman, 2017). When we decide to believe without any evidence, we run the clear risk of entering a fantasy world. On the other hand, perhaps we should try out new world-views. Provided they cause no harm. Crusades are not allowed.

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

Blaise Pascal was a French mathematician, physicist, and philosopher. He is most famous for his studies of probability, his experiments on atmospheric pressure and his proposal that beliefs might me determined based on what they entail rather than on the empirical evidence – Pascal's wager.

In in the posthumously published *Pensées* (1670 Section III), Pascal points out that believing in God leads to a promise of Heaven whereas not believing in God has no long-term benefit. We must either believe or not. So

> Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is. Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation that He is.

The following illustration presents the premises that lead to Pascal's wager, and the decision matrix that urges us to believe in God. The estimated benefit of believing or not is

the sum (along the row in the decision matrix) of the probability-weighted benefits when God exists or not. The infinite rewards of belief in God completely outweigh the minor inconvenience of living life as a believer (Cg – a negative value). Similarly, the infinite penalties of not believing are far worse than the transient benefit of a life of indulgence (Bn – a positive value).

Pascal's Wager

A. Premises

1. The probability (Pg) that God exists is not zero
2. Either God exists or God does not exist: the probability of the latter is therefore 1-Pg
3. The benefit for believing that God exists is infinite - eternal life in Heaven.
4. The cost (Cg) of believing in God is finite - a life of being good and abstaining from sin.
5. The benefit (Bn) of not believing in God is finite - a lifetime of indulgence.
6. The cost of not believing in God is infinite - death and damnation.

B. Decision Table

	God Exists	God Does Not Exist
Believe in God	Pg* ∞	(1-Pg)*Cg
Not Believe	Pg*(- ∞)	(1-Pg)*Bn

Pascal's logic falls apart in two ways (Bartha & Pasternack, 2018; Hájek, 2003, 2022). First, it does not discriminate among which of many possible Gods one should believe in. If there is a non-zero possibility of an Islamic God who rewards his followers with heaven and casts infidel Christians into hell, the infinite rewards and penalties associated with the Christian God are cancelled out. This is illustrated in the below. The astute observer will note that while the infinite

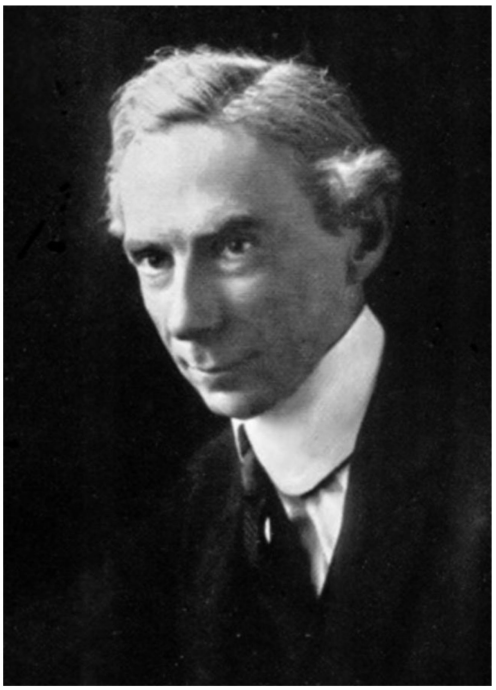
benefits and costs of believing in a particular God are cancelled out, the atheist is still stuck with probabilities of death and damnation regardless of which God exists. Perhaps, this is the human lot. The atheist, however, simply assumes that both Pg and Pa are zero.

Pascal's Wager with more than one God, e.g. there is a non-zero probability (Pa) of the Islamic God Allah as well as a non-zero probability (Pg) of the Christian God:

Decision Table

	Christian God Exists	Islamic God Exists	No God Exists
Christian Belief	Pg* ∞	Pa*(- ∞)	(1-Pg-Pa)*Cg
Islamic Belief	Pg*(- ∞)	Pa* ∞	(1-Pg-Pa)*Ca
Atheism	Pg*(- ∞)	Pa*(- ∞)	(1-Pg-Pa)*Bn

A second objection to Pascal's wager is that it presupposes not only that God might exist but also that God would reward the believer with heaven and damn the non-believer to hell. Among the credible possibilities are a benevolent God who would forgive the non-believer, and a strict God who would damn those that professed belief simply to get to heaven as hypocrites who did not "truly" believe in their hearts.



Bertrand Russell (1872-1970)

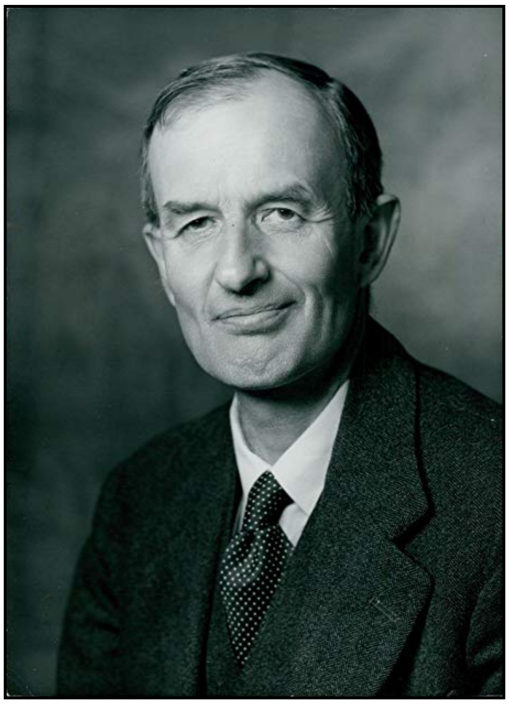
Bertrand Russell was an English philosopher, mathematician, and logician. He is most famous for the *Principia Mathematica* (1913) written together with A. N. Whitehead. This attempted to describe the basic axioms and rules underlying human logic and mathematics. Russell was also known for his pacifism and his agnosticism.

Russell was one of the first major critics of James' *The Will to Believe.* In an essay on *Pragmatism* (1910), he pointed out the James' arguments are appropriate to actions but have no real relevance to belief. He uses the example of a traveler at a fork in the road:

> I come to a fork where there is no signpost and no passer-by, I have, from the point of view of action, a 'forced' option. I must take one road or other if I am to have any chance of reaching my destination; and I may have no evidence whatever as to which is the right road. I then *act* on one or other of the two possible hypotheses, until I find someone of whom I can ask the way. But I do not *believe* either hypothesis. My action is either right or wrong, but

> my belief is neither, since I do not entertain either of the two possible beliefs. The pragmatist assumption that I believe the road I have chosen to be the right one is erroneous.

However, belief can mean different things to different people. Religious thinkers do not consider belief in the same way as a scientist or logician. In a religious context, one can decide to believe based upon the consequents that the belief will have – salvation, heaven, etc. – rather than on the evidence for the belief.



Henry Habberley Price (1899-1984)

H. H. Price was a Welsh philosopher with a major interest in perception and belief, and a minor interest in parapsychology. His 1961 Gifford lectures on *Belief* (published in 1969) analyzed the many ways in which we can believe.

He proposed that belief can be considered in two main ways – as an occurrence (a mental event) and as an attitude (a mental

state). The occurrence of belief is the moment when a person decides that something is true (based on evidence or on desire) or assents to consider it true. With respect to Russell's criticism that belief is not usually chosen, Price noted that we often come to a belief ("make up our minds") in much the same way as we decide to act. He uses as an example:

> After waiting for him for over 1½ hours I decided that John had missed the train.

Belief can also be considered as an attitude: to believe a proposition is to be disposed to act as if that proposition were true. Other attitudes are hoping, desiring, and knowing. Having an attitude may be either conscious of not. An attitude is not necessary associated with any overt behavior: it simply represents a tendency to respond in a certain way.

As I discussed in a previous post on Belief and Heresy, Price also pointed out that "believing that" differs from "believing in" (Price, 1965). Believing-that is used with a proposition: it considers that a proposition is true based on the evidence. Believing-in is used with things, persons, or ideas: it not only claims that these exist (existed or will exist) but also affirms many other related propositions. Christ stated

> I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:
> And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. (*John* 11: 25-26)

Simply asserting that Christ existed is clearly not sufficient for a person to "believe in" Christ. One must also believe that he is divine, that he died so that those who believe in him do not have to die, that he was resurrected from death, and that he lives forever. Challenging requirements for one of a skeptical disposition. However, the reward is invaluable: eternal life.

Peter van Inwagen (1942-)

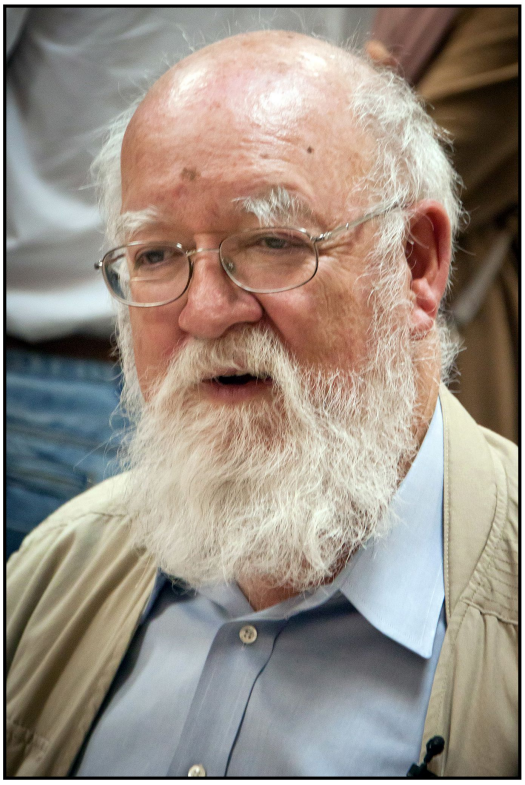
Peter van Inwagen is an American Christian philosopher who has written extensively on the philosophy of religion: *An Essay on Free Will* (1983), *The Problem of Evil* (2006), *Metaphysics* (2002).

In 1996 van Inwagen published a paper commenting Clifford's principle that we should not believe anything based upon insufficient evidence. He initially remarks that although all beliefs need to be based on evidence

> a strict adherence to the terms of the principle would lead to a chain of requests for further evidence that would terminate only in such presumably unanswerable questions as What evidence have you for supposing that your sensory apparatus is reliable? or Yes, but what considerations can you adduce in support of the hypothesis that the future will resemble the past?

More importantly, he points out that Clifford's principle has mainly been applied in criticizing religious beliefs. He notes that for complicated issues in philosophy, politics, economics, and psychiatry, the available evidence even when

properly scrutinised often leads to a diversity of opinion. Each of us may have our own insight or intuition as to what is true. Just as we do not consider it morally wrong to have these individual beliefs in philosophy, politics, etc., so we should allow religious beliefs even when the evidence for them is (necessarily) incomplete.



Daniel C. Dennett (1942-)

Daniel Dennett is an American philosopher and cognitive scientist. He has written extensively on psychology (*Consciousness Explained*,1992), evolution (*Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 1996) and religion (*Breaking the Spell*, 2006). Together with Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris, he is considered one of "The Four Horsemen of the New Atheism."

One way to consider belief is as an interpretation of reality. Dennett has proposed that our brains are continually modelling what is going on in the world. What we are conscious of at any moment is as the "best draft" of our interpretive model

(Dennett, 1992). Our consciousness of our selves is an abstract “center of narrative gravity” that we use to interpret our experience.

Some philosophers and psychologists have denied the existence of beliefs (see Schwitzgel, 2019, for a review of “eliminativism”). Dennett considers beliefs (and other mental states) as helpful in interpreting the behavior of others who might have mental states similar to our own. He describes this mode of interpreting and predicting behavior as the “intentional stance:”

> Here is how it works: first you decide to treat the object whose behavior is to be predicted as a rational agent; then you figure out what beliefs that agent ought to have, given its place in the world and its purpose. Then you figure out what desires it ought to have, on the same considerations, and finally you predict that this rational agent will act to further its goals in the light of its beliefs. A little practical reasoning from the chosen set of beliefs and desires will in most instances yield a decision about what the agent ought to do; that is what you predict the agent will do. (Dennett, 1987, p 17)

Whatever Gets You Thru the Night

We have touched on what various philosophers have thought about belief. What can we conclude?

To survive, human beings must understand what they can about the world in which they find themselves. In some contexts, our understanding has become highly accurate. Our perceptions tell us what things are and predict what they will do; our actions manipulate the world. In other contexts – in philosophy, politics and psychiatry, for example – we often have little understanding. We do not know whether the world has a purpose, how society could be optimally organized, or why our thinking

can become disordered. Rather than just accept these uncertainties, we try out possibilities – to see whether they both fit the world and give us comfort. Often these ideas are just hunches; sometimes they become considered opinions; occasionally they become beliefs. Our beliefs are the way we make sense of the world.

Are there ethical principles that determine what we can believe (Chignell, 2018; Schmidt & Ernst, 2020)? We should base our beliefs as much as possible on the evidence available to us. However, we should not retire to an attitude of universal skepticism. We must try out hypotheses about the what we do not know about world. We remain responsible for the consequences of our actions, even if we sincerely believed those actions appropriate.

Contemplating the smallness of humanity in the immensity of the universe is frightening. Our beliefs provide us with some way to handle this fear. In the words of John Lennon's 1974 song, they are "Whatever gets you thru the night."

References

Schmidt, S., & Ernst, G. (2020). *The ethics of belief and beyond: understanding mental normativity*. Routledge.

Bartha, P. F. A. & Pasternack, L (Eds) (2018). *Pascal's wager* Cambridge University Press.

Chignell, A. (2018) The ethics of belief. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

Clifford, W. K. (1877). The ethics of belief. *The Contemporary Review* 29, 289-309. Reprinted in Clifford, W. K. (1884). *The scientific basis of morals and other essays*. (pp. 25–36). J. Fitzgerald (New York).

Dennett, D. C. (1987). *The intentional stance*. MIT Press.

Dennett, D. C. (1991). *Consciousness explained*. Little, Brown.

James, W. (1877). Quelques considérations sur la méthode subjective. *Critique philosophique*, 2, 407-413. Reprinted in James W. (1978; Ed. Burkhardt, F., Bowers, F., & Skrupskelis, I. K.) *Essays in Philosophy*. Harvard University Press.

James, W. (1896) The will to believe. *The New World*, 5, 327-347. Reprinted in W. James (1897) The will to believe and other essays in popular philosophy. (pp. 1-31). Longmans Green.

Hájek, A. (2003). Waging war on Pascal's wager. *Philosophical Review*, 112: 27–56.

Hájek, A. (2022). Pascal's Wager. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

Koopman, C. (2017). The Will, the Will to Believe, and William James: an ethics of freedom as self-transformation. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, *55*(3), 491–512.

McKinnon, A. (1993). Kierkegaard and "The Leap of Faith." *Kierkegaardiana* 16.

Pascal, B. (1670, translated by W. F. Trotter, 1958) Pensées/Thoughts. Dutton

Price, H. H. (1965). Belief 'in' and belief 'that.' *Religious Studies,* 1, 5-27

Price, H. H., 1969, *Belief*. Allen & Unwin.

Russell, B. (1910). *Philosophical essays*. Longmans, Green, and Co.

Schwitzgel, E. (2019). Belief. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.*

van Inwagen, P. (1996). "It is wrong, everywhere, always, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence" In

J. Jordan & D. Howard-Snyder (eds.), *Faith, freedom and rationality* (pp 137–153). Rowman and Littlefield. Available online.

Wernham, J. C. S. (1987). *James's will-to-believe doctrine: a heretical view*. McGill-Queen's University Press.

The Cathars

The Cathars

From the 12th to 15th Centuries groups of people called the Cathars lived quietly in various regions of Western Europe – Northern Italy, the Rhineland and, most especially, Southern France. They followed the moral teachings of Jesus, forsaking worldly goods and loving one another, but they did not believe in the basic theology of Christianity. They considered that the world was evil, that human beings were spirits imprisoned in the flesh, and that the soul could only be set free at death if one had lived a life of purity. The Catholic Church considered these beliefs heretical, and in 1208 Pope Innocent III called for a crusade to eradicate the heresy. Named after the inhabitants of the city of Albi which had a flourishing Cathar population, the Albigensian Crusade lasted from 1209 until 1229. After years of terrible violence and cruelty, most of those who professed Cathar beliefs were dead. All that now remains of these peaceful people are the ruins of the hilltop castles in which they sought refuge.

Heresy and Dissent in the Middle Ages

The increasing secular power and the ostentatious luxury the Catholic Church were far from the life of poverty and compassion taught by Jesus. This contrast triggered dissent in

various forms (Moore, 1985). In 1098 a group of monks left the Benedictine monastery and founded the order of the Cistercians. In 1135, Henry of Lausanne, who had taught throughout the South of France that the individual believer was more important than the church, was condemned as heretical. In 1143 and again in 1163, small groups of heretics who denied the authority of the Catholic Church were burned at the stake in Cologne. In 1173 in Lyons, a merchant named Valdes (also known as Waldo) began preaching a life of apostolic poverty as the way to salvation. His followers, who became known as the Waldensians, were initially tolerated but later considered heretics.

The monk Eberwin of Steinfeld Abbey near Cologne wrote to Bernard of Clairvaux about the heretics of 1143. He was astounded by their fortitude in accepting death rather than disavowing their beliefs, and he tried to understand them:

> This is their heresy: They say that the Church exists among them only, since they alone follow closely in the footsteps of Christ, and remain the true followers of the manner of life observed by the Apostles, inasmuch as they possess neither houses, nor fields, nor property of any kind. They declare that, as Christ did not possess any of these Himself, so He did not permit His disciples to possess them. 'But you,' they say to us, 'add house to house, and field to field, and seek the things of this world. So completely is this the case, that even those among you who are considered most perfect, such as the monks and regular canons, possess these things, if not as their private property, yet as belonging to their community.' Of themselves they say: 'We are the poor of Christ; we have no settled dwelling-place; we flee from city to city, as sheep in the midst of wolves; we endure persecution, as did the Apostles and the martyrs: yet we lead a holy and austere life in fasting and abstinence, continuing day and night in labours and prayers, and seeking from these only what is necessary to sustain

> life. We endure all this,' they say,'because we are not of this world.' (Mabillon & Eales, 1896, p 390).

Bernard considered the danger of these apparently innocent heretics, and in his series of sermons on the *Song of Songs* (also known as the *Song of Solomon*), he expounded upon the verse

> Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes. (*Song of Solomon* 2:15)

He proposed that the vines are those of the Church and the little foxes are the heretics. He described the ways of their deceit:

> They study, then, to appear good in order to do injury to the good, and shrink from appearing evil that they may thus give their evil designs fuller scope. For they do not care to cultivate virtues, but only to colour their vices with a delusive tinge of virtues. Under the veil of religion, they conceal an impious superstition; they regard the mere refraining from doing wrong openly as innocence, and thus take for themselves an outward appearance of goodness only. For a cloak to their infamy they make a vow of continence. (Mabillon & Eales, 1896, p 390)

In 1145 Bernard journeyed to Toulouse to challenge the teachings of the Henricians and to bring them heretics back to the teachings of the Church. The heretics refused to listen to him.

In 1184, Pope Lucius III, dismayed by the prevalence of heresy, issued the bull *Ad abolendam diversam haeresium pravitatem* (To abolish diverse malignant heresies). This initiated (or formalized) the Episcopal Inquisition: local bishops were empowered to try suspected heretics. Once convicted, heretics were handed over to secular authorities for appropriate punishment. The church did not wish to sully itself with their death.

Heretics were executed in various ways. However, the most common sentence was burning. The first such sentence to be carried out since ancient times was at Orleans in 1022 under Robert II (also known as the “pious”), King of the Francs. The fire gave the heretics a foretaste of hell “enacting in miniature the fate that awaited all those who failed to take their place within a united Christian society” (Barbezat, 2014; see also Barbezat 2018). An illumination from the *Chroniques de France* (1487) in the British Library shows the burning of the heretics. Noteworthy is the idyllic landscape in the backgound, and the complacency of the king and his followers.

Catharism

Many of the heretics, such as those in Cologne and in the

South of France, were called “Cathars.” The name perhaps derives from the Greek *katharoi* (pure ones), but the word may also have described the worship of Satan in the form of a cat. The heretics did not use the term; rather, they considered themselves “good men” (*bons omes* in the Occitan language of the South of France).

Most of what we know about the Cathars comes from the writings of the Inquisitors. The books and manuals that the heretics may have followed were burned. In recent years there has been much discussion and dispute (e.g., Frassetto, 2006; Sennis, 2016) about whether the Cathars were a linked group of believers (in essence a church) or whether that idea was a paranoid construct of the Inquisition used to establish terror and maintain the power of the established Church. Skeptics thus believe that a Cathar was anyone who disagreed with the teachings of the Catholic Church (Moore, 1987, 2012; Pegg, 2001). The more traditional view, followed in this posting, is that the Cathars were a specific congregation of beleivers linked to other sects such as the Bogomils in Bulgaria (e.g. Hamilton, 2006; Frassetto, 2008).

The Cathars were dualists, both ontologically – spirit and matter were distinct and antithetical – and theologically – one god created the spiritual world and a separate god created the material universe. In these beliefs they followed a long line of Christian heretics. The Gnostics of the 2nd Century CE often considered the world in these terms. In the 3rd Century CE the Parthian prophet Mani taught that the spiritual world of light was separate from the material world of darkness. His followers believed that he was the reincarnation of earlier teachers such as Zoroaster, Buddha and Jesus. Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) was a Manichaean before he converted to orthodox Christianity. In the 8th and 9th Centuries CE, a group of dualists called the Paulicians flourished in Armenia. In the 10th Century CE, followers of the priest Bogomil (“dear to

God” in Slavic) established in Bulgaria a sect of dualist believers that called themselves by the name of their leader (or vice versa). The Bogomils (Frassetto, 2007, Chapter 1) were condemned as heretics by both the Roman and the Eastern Churches but they persisted in their beliefs, and some of them travelled to Italy, Germany and France. A lost manuscript purportedly describes a meeting in 1167 between a Bogomil priest named Nicetas from Constantinople and several Cathar believers in Saint Félix near Toulouse (Frassetto, 2007, p 78). The authenticity of the document has been questioned, but the idea rings true.

The main beliefs of the Cathars were described by the Cistercian monk Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay who was with the army of Simon de Montfort during the Albigensian Crusade (Wakefield & Evans, 1991, pp 235-241), and are detailed in the 1245 testimony of Rainerius Sacconi, an Italian Cathar who converted and became a Dominican (Wakefield & Evans, 1991, pp 329-346) and in *The Book of Two Principles* written by an Italian Cathar, John of Lugio in the mid 13th Century CE (Wakefield & Evans, 1991, pp 522-591). Oldenbourg (1961), Roquebert (1999), O’Shea (2000), Smith (2015) and McDonald (2017) provide modern summaries:

(i) **Dualism**: The Cathars believed that there were two worlds – spiritual and material – and that each world had its own god. Human beings were spiritual entities imprisoned in the flesh. The spiritual world was the “Kingdom of Heaven” that Jesus described in his beatitudes and parables. In answer to Pilate’s asking him whether he was King of the Jews, Jesus had stated “My kingdom is not of the world.” (*John* 18:26)

(ii) **Reincarnation**. At death the soul migrated in another body. Such an idea is widespread in the religions of the East. There is no separate afterlife, no heaven or hell. Although the life of the flesh may itself be considered hell.

(iii) ***Consolamentum.*** If a believer wished to escape the eternal cycle of reincarnation, he or she could decide to live a pure life, abstaining completely from material goods and desires. Such people were called Perfects. The decision to become a Perfect was enacted through the ceremony of *consolamentum*, wherein one already a Perfect laid hands on the head of a believer who aspired to the life of purity. This was the baptism of fire. The illustration at the right shows an illumination from a 13th Century Bible in the Bibliothèque nationale de France: two Franciscan monks stand aghast at witnessing a ceremony of consolamentum.

If the Perfects maintained their state of purity, at death they would be released from reincarnation and united with the spirit of the good God. However, any lapse from the pure life – eating meat or any of the products of procreation (milk, eggs), indulging in sexual intercourse – would render them (and whomever they had provided *consolamentum*) no longer Perfect.

(iv) **Apostolic Life:** The Cathars followed in the basic teachings of Jesus. They used the Lord's prayer. They believed a compassionate life dedicated to the benefit of their fellows and in the rejection of all worldly possessions. In the latter they followed the injunctions of Jesus:

> Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:
> But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:
> For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (*Matthew* 6: 19-21)

(v) **Denial of Church Dogma**: Although they believed in the ethical teachings of Jesus, the Cathars rejected most of the teachings and sacraments of the Catholic Church. They denied the baptism by water, preferring the true baptism by fire. They refused the sacrament of marriage since they thought that procreation only served to maintain the endless cycle of reincarnation. They had no patience with the Trinity, and were uncertain about whether Jesus was God incarnate. Many of the Cathars in the South of France believed that Jesus was human and was married to Mary Magdalene.

(vi) **Oaths:** The Cathars refused to take oaths. In this they were following the instructions of Jesus

> But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne:
> Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.
> Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.
> But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. (*Matthew* 5: 34-37)

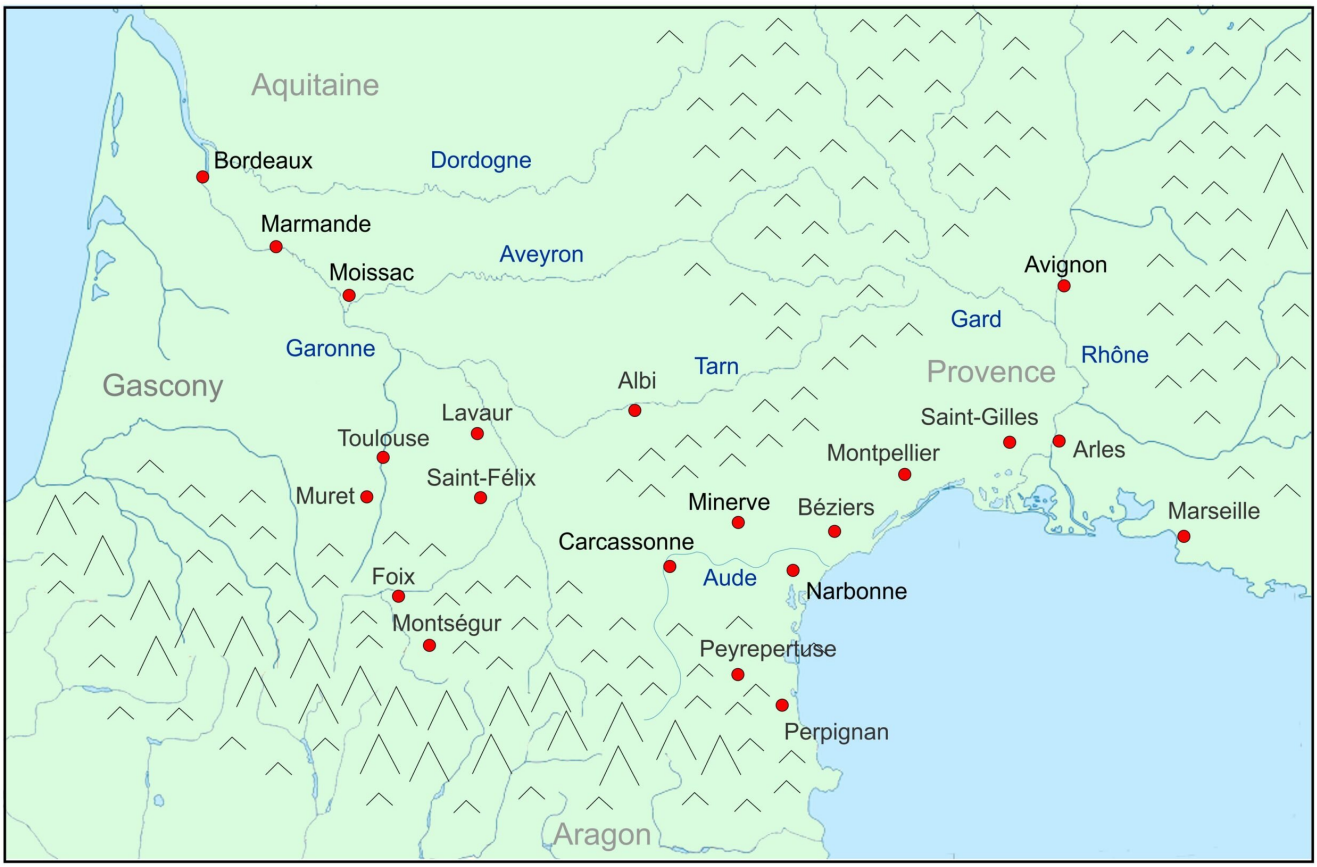
This was a severe problem in a feudal society, wherein all relations depended upon oaths of fealty.

(vii) **Role of women:** The Cathars denied that women should be subordinate to men. Many Cathar Perfects were women.

Languedoc

By the end of the 12th Century the Cathar heresy had become widespread in the South of France. The language spoken in this region was Occitan or the *langue d'oc.* This Romance language used *oc* to mean "yes," unlike French or *langue d'oïl* which used *oïl* (later *oui*) or Spanish which used *si.* Each region spoke its own dialect of Occitan, the most prominent of these being Provençal in the east and Gascon in the west.

At that time, the Languedoc region, named after the language, was a patchwork of different political entities. The most prominent leader was Raymond VI of the Saint-Gilles family which controlled Toulouse and regions in Provence. Raymond-Roger II Trencavel governed the region of Carcassonne and Bézier. Raymond-Roger of Foix in the foothills of the Pyrenees was an important ally of Toulouse. His wife and sister had both become Cathar Perfects. All these leaders had feudal ties to Pedro II, King of Aragon in Northern Spain. The illustration below shows a map of the region:



Languedoc was flourishing. The land produced a bounty of wine, olive oil, and wool. Weavers abounded and cloth merchants became rich. The region was a major trading crossroads linking Spain and the Mediterranean to the North and West of France. Its leaders fostered tolerance. A large Jewish society fostered both trade and new learning. Much of the medieval development of the Kabbalah occurred in Provence and in Northern Spain (Boboc, 2009).

Life was to be enjoyed. Time was available for chivalry and courtly love. The poetry of the troubadours (Chaytor,1912; Paterson, 1993) brought the rhymes and rhythms of Arabic poetry into the literature of romance languages. Dante called the Occitan poet Arnaut Daniel *il miglior fabbro* (the best [word]smith), and Petrarch called him the *gran maestre d'amore.* The following are a few lines with translation by Ezra Pound:

Tot quant es gela Though all

things freeze here
Mas ieu non puesc frezir I can naught feel the cold
C'amors novela For new love sees here
Mi fal cor reverdir My heart's new leaf unfold.

Pope Innocent III

In 1198 Lotario dei Conti di Segni became Pope Innocent III. He was aware of the dissension in the church and initially sympathetic to those who criticized priestly affluence. During his reign (1198-1216), he founded two new medicant orders: the Franciscans led by Francis of Assisi in 1209 and the Dominicans led by Domingo Félix de Guzman in 1216. The illustration below shows frescoes of Saint Francis (by a follower of Giotto c. 1300; Innocent III by and anonymous artist, c 1225 and Saint Dominic by Fra Angelico, c. 1440).

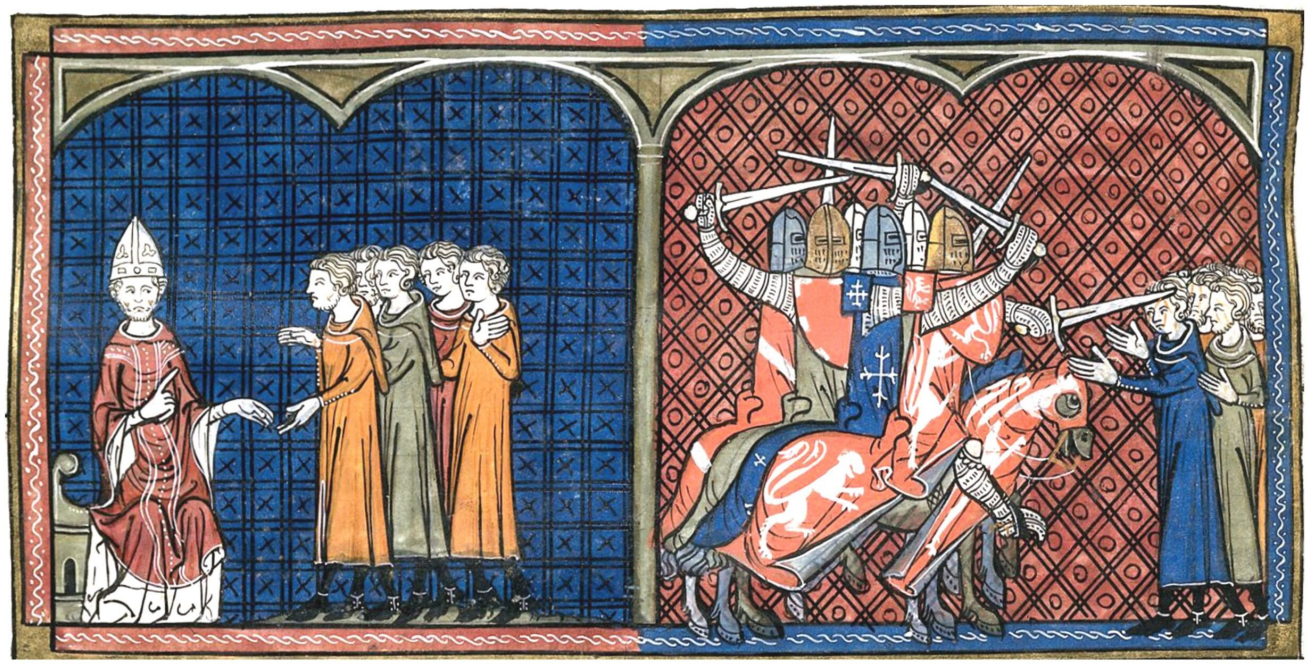


In 1202 Innocent III initiated the disastrous Fourth Crusade to the Holy Land. The crusaders, attracted by the hope of plunder and egged on by the Venetians, sacked Constantinople instead of freeing the Holy Land. Only a few crusaders refused to participate in the sack and travelled on to Palestine, among them Simon de Montfort.

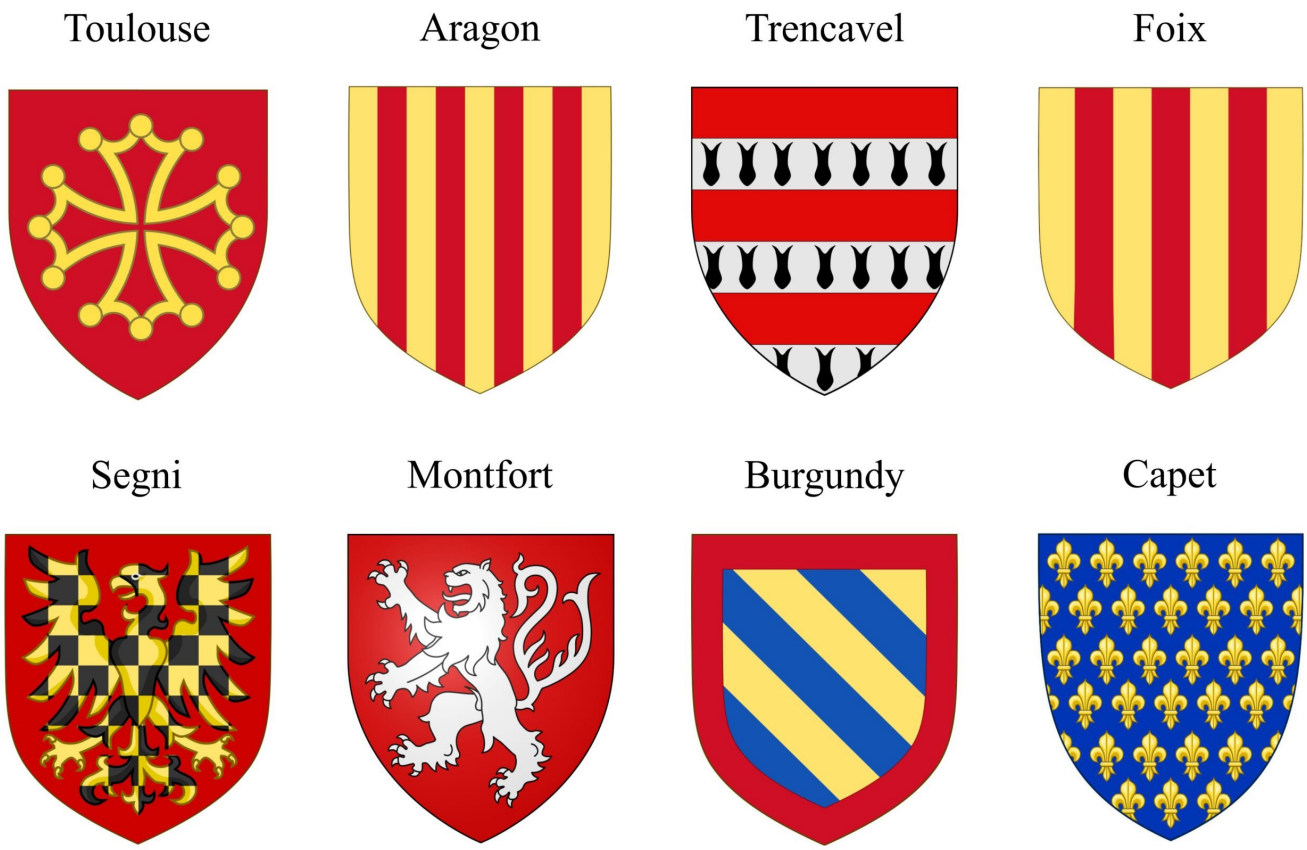
Innocent III was particularly concerned by the Cathars in Languedoc and urged Raymond VI of Toulouse to contain their heresy. He sent many priests, among them Saint Dominic, to dispute with the heretics and to urge them to return to the church. Their efforts were to no avail. The following illustration shows two paintings by Pedro Berruguete from about 1495. The left represents a legendary meeting between Dominic and the Cathars. Books of Cathar and Catholic teachings were submitted to trial by fire. Only the teachings of the Catholic Church were miraculously preserved and rose above the assembled disputants. On the right Dominic presides over an *auto-da-fé* (Portuguese, act of faith) for the burning of heretics. However, there is no evidence that the saint participated in any trials of the heretics: he died in 1221 long before the Papal Inquisition was established in 1231. Berruguete's paintings were commissioned by the Spanish Inquisition founded in 1475. That institution with its frequent autos-da-fé was sorely in need of a founding saint, and was more concerned with terror than with truth.

In 1207 the papal legate, Pierre de Castelnau, excommunicated Raymond VI of Toulouse. In January of 1208 Pierre negotiated with Raymond at Saint-Gilles but refused to absolve him. Pierre was then murdered at the Rhône River as he travelled back to Rome. No one knows who ordered his assassination but Raymond was held responsible. Raymond submitted to being scourged as penance for the death in June of 1209. However, by then the Pope had already called for a Crusade against the Cathars (or Albigensians) and Christian knights from the North of France had rallied to the cause, driven as much in hope for power and plunder as by desire to defend the faith. The Crusaders were led by the knight Simon IV de Montfort and by Arnaud Amaury (or Almaric), the 17th abbot of Cîteaux, mother house of the Cistercians. The following illustration from the

Les Grandes chroniques de France (14th Century, folio 374) now in the British Library shows Innocent III excommunicating the Cathars and the subsequent Albigensian Crusade.



Below are shown the coats of arms for the participants in the Albigensian Crusade. The upper line shows the powers of Languedoc and Aragon; the lower line the crusaders. The Pope’s arms would have added a papal tiara and the keys of Saint Peter to the basic arms of the house of Segni. The kings of the Francs were from the house of Capet.



Béziers

The first engagement of the Crusaders was the siege of Béziers, whose citizens were Catholic Cathar and Jew. The huge army encamped outside the city walls on July 22, 1209, the feast day of Mary Magdalene. The following picture is from the manuscript of the *Canso de la Crozada* (Shirley 2016). This epic poem was begun by Guillaume de Tudela and completed by another anonymous troubadour. The writing was likely finished by 1219 (the date of the last event it records), but the only extant manuscript comes from 1275. The illustrations were outlined in preparation for painting but, although the decorated initials beginning each section (or *laisse*) were illuminated, the outlines never were. (The actual illustration is from an engraving based on the drawing – the manuscript drawing is very faint):

The text in Occitan can be translated as:

> On the feast of St Mary Magdalen, the abbot of Cîteaux brought his huge army to Béziers and encamped it on the sandy plains around the city. Great, I am sure, was the terror inside the walls, for never in the host of Menelaus, from whom Paris stole Helena, were so many tents set up on the plains below Mycenae (Shirley, 2016, laisse 18)

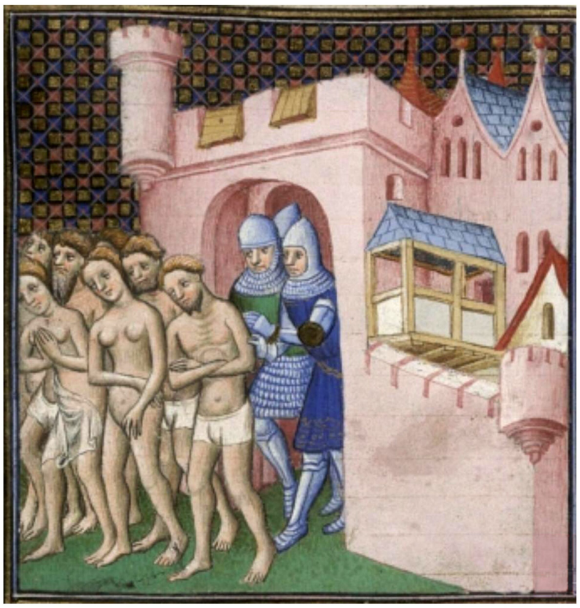
A minor skirmish between the defenders and the besiegers led to the gates of the city being left open. The camp followers and mercenaries stormed through and began looting the city. The knights followed. The result was a massacre. Various reports numbered the dead as anywhere between 10,000 and 20,000 people. No distinction was made between Catholic and Cathar. Everyone died.

A Cistercian chronicler later reported that Arnaud Amaury was

afraid that the Cathars in the city would falsely claim to be pious Catholics and escape to spread their heresy. When asked how to distinguish between believer and heretic, he is reported to have said *Caedite eos. Novit Dominus qui sunt eius* (Kill them all. The lord knows those that are his own). This may not be true, but he would have been familiar with the words, which derive from a verse in the New Testament describing how only true believers go to heaven.

> Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. (II Timothy 2:19)

Carcassonne



The Crusaders then moved on and laid siege to Carcassonne on the banks of the Aude River. The city lacked its own supply of water and could not hold out for long. Under promise of safe conduct Raymond-Roger Trencavel therefore negotiated the surrender of the city. All the citizens of the city were spared but they were forced to leave without taking anything with them. The illustration on the right from *Les Grandes chroniques de France* shows them leaving the city without even the clothes on their back. Simon de Montfort was granted dominion over Carcassonne and Béziers. Raymond-Roger was imprisoned in his own dungeon in Carcassonne and died there within a few months.

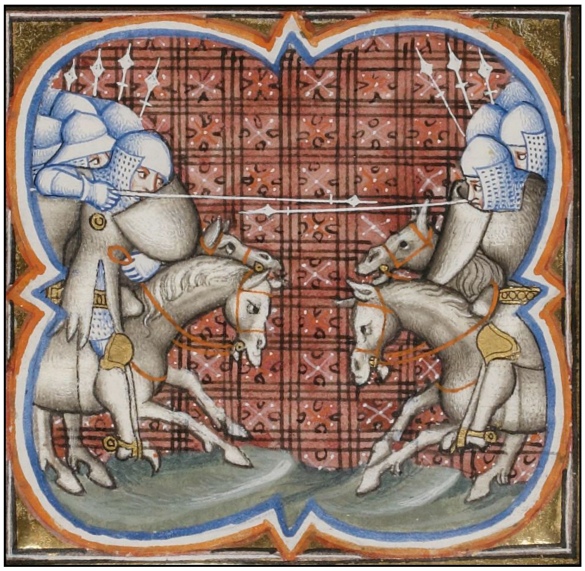
Mass Burnings

After Carcassonne, the army moved on to besiege other Languedoc towns and cities. After a month of siege in 1210, Simon de Montfort accepted the surrender of Minerve, and agreed to spare its inhabitants. However, Arnaud Amaury insisted that they should all be asked to swear allegiance to the Catholic Church. One hundred and forty Cathar Perfects refused and were burned at the stake outside the town. This was the first of the many mass immolations that would recur throughout the crusade. Among the most heinous of these executions, four hundred Cathar Perfects were burned at Lavaur

in 1211.

The Battle of Muret

Simon de Montfort continued to take various towns and cities in Languedoc, but stayed away from Toulouse, which was large and well defended. Raymond VI of Toulouse negotiated support from Pedro II of Aragon and from Raymond-Roger of Foix and in 1213 a large army assembled on the plain outside the city walls of Muret just south of Toulouse, where the forces of Simon de Montfort were garrisoned. The crusaders were vastly outnumbered. Some reported a ratio of 10 to 1 although it was more likely 3 to 1.



Early in the morning of September 12, 1213, Simon de Montfort said his prayers and led his knights out along the Garonne River away from the encampment of the besiegers. After a while he turned and led a ferocious charge against the besiegers (see illustration on the right from *Les Grandes chroniques de France*). The southerners turned toward them but the knights of the Crusaders hit the besiegers at full speed shattering their defenses and breaking through their lines (O'Shea, 2000, pp 141-149). The result was a complete rout. Among the thousands of Toulousian and Aragonese dead was Pedro II. Less than one hundred Crusaders died.

Toulouse

Toulouse remained unconquered. In 1215, the Pope convened the Fourth Lateran Council to broker disputes within the Christian lands. Raymond VI journeyed to Rome to plead the case for an independent Toulouse, but the council ultimately granted Simon de Montfort dominion over all of Languedoc. The crusaders, recently reinforced by prince Louis of France (later to become King Louis VIII), came to take up residence in Toulouse. In 1216, Raymond VI returned to regain his patrimony. Over the next two years the city changed hands several times.

On June 25, 1218, Simon de Montfort coming to the aid of his brother Guy who had been wounded in an assault on the city walls, was struck by a boulder launched by a catapult from within the city walls (illustration on the right from a 19th-Century engraving):

> This was worked by noblewomen, by little girls and men's wives, and now a stone arrived just where it was needed and struck Count Simon on his steel helmet, shattering his eyes,

brains back teeth, forehead and jaw. Bleeding and black the count dropped dead on the ground (Shirley 2016, p 172)

The poet who wrote the latter parts of the *Canso de la Crozada* (Shirley, 2016) did not grieve the death of Simon. He reported that the crusaders took Simon's body to Carcassonne for burial, and imagined a fitting epitaph. The original version in Occitan gives a flavor of the rhyming of troubadour poetry:

> Tot dreit a Carcassona l'en portan sebelhir
> El moster S. Nazari celebrar et ufrir,
> E ditz el epictafi, cel quil sab ben legir :
> Qu'el es sans ez es martirs, e que deu resperir,
> E dins el gaug mirable heretar e florir,
> E portar la corona e el regne sezir;
> Ez ieu ai auzit dire c'aisis deu avenir:
> Si per homes aucirre ni per sanc espandir,
> Ni per esperitz perdre ni per mortz cosentir,
> E per mals cosselhs creire, e per focs abrandir,
> E per baros destruire, e per Paratge aunir,
> E per las terras toldre, e per orgolh suffrir,
> E per los mals escendre, e pel[s] bes escantir,
> E per donas aucirre e per efans delir,
> Pot hom en aquest segle Jhesu Crist comquerir,
> El deu portar corona e el cel resplandir!

[Straight to Carcassonne they carried it and buried it with masses and offerings in the church of St Nazaire. The epitaph says, for those who can read it, that he is a saint and martyr who shall breathe again and shall in wondrous joy inherit and flourish, shall wear a crown and be seated in the kingdom. And I have heard it said that this must be so – if by killing men and shedding blood, by damning souls and causing deaths, by trusting evil counsels, by setting fires, destroying men, dishonouring *paratge*, seizing lands and encouraging pride, by kindling evil and quenching good, by killing women and slaughtering children, a man can in this world win Jesus Christ, certainly Count Simon wears a crown

and shines in heaven above. (Shirley, 2016, laisse 208)]

The word *paratge* in Occitan is difficult to translate. It derives from the Latin *par* (equal) and is thus similar to the English word "peerage." However, it had come to mean all that was good in Occitan society: equality, honor, chivalry, hospitality, *joie de vivre*.

The End of the Crusade

After the death of Simon de Montfort, the crusade continued intermittently. Various strongholds in the domain of Toulouse were conquered by the crusaders. Louis VIII of France became the main leader of the crusade. He conquered the city of Marmande in 1219 but was unable to take Toulouse. Many of the Cathars retreated to mountain strongholds. Raymond VI died in 1222; Raymond-Roger of Foix died in 1223. Their heirs lacked their strength and charisma. Most historians date the end of the Crusade to 1229 when the Treaty of Paris was signed in Meaux, granting the Kingdom of France dominion over all the lands previously held by Toulouse.

In order to root out the remaining Cathars in Languedoc, Pope Gregory IX established the Papal Inquisition in 1231. Instead of allowing local bishops investigate heretics, the pope appointed itinerant inquisitors from among the ranks of the Dominicans and the Franciscans. Accompanied by clerks and lawyers, these inquisitors travelled throughout the region of Languedoc, seeking out heretics, bringing them to trial, and handing them over to the secular authorities for burning (Deane, 2011, Chapter 3) For their faithful service the Dominicans became known as the Dogs of God (*Domini canes*).

One of the last Cathar refuges to fall was Montségur (Occitan for "safe hill") a castle built on top of a steep and isolated peak known in Occitan as a *puog* (illustrated below). The castle was 170 m above the plain and the stronghold was virtually impregnable. In 1242 two inquisitors were murdered

by Cathars from Montségur. The French forces (now under Louis IX) began the siege of the isolated mountain stronghold in May 1243. Slowly and inexorably the French came closer to city until it was within range of their catapults. The castle finally surrendered in March 1244. About 220 Cathar Perfects were burned to death on the field below the puog. This became known as the *Plat dels Cremats* (field of the burned).

Saint Peter Martyr

The Inquisition moved on from Languedoc to the Northern Italy. In 1852, Peter of Verona, a Dominican friar, was appointed Inquisitor in Lombardy. When returning from Como to Milan, Peter and his companion Domenic were assassinated by assassins hired by the Milanese Cathars. This is illustrated in a 1507 painting by Giovanni Bellini (see below). Despite the foreground violence one can see in the distance a countryside of peace and beauty. The woodsmen go about their work. The light from the harvest shines through the trees.

Albi

In 1282 work was begun on the new Cathedral Basilica of Saint Cecilia in Albi, which was to become the largest brick building in the world. With its narrow windows and huge tower, it dominates the city like a fortress, a true bastion against heresy (see below). Above the high altar a vast fresco of the Last Judgement reminds the people of Languedoc of the torments that await those that do not follow the true teachings.

Peyrepertuse

The history of the Cathars should not end with the formidable Cathedral of Albi. More fitting is the Cathar castle of Peyrepertuse (from Occitan *pèirapertusa*, pierced rock). It was finally surrendered to the French in 1240, and later became part of the French border defences.

References

Barbezat, M. D. (2014) The fires of hell and the burning of heretics in the accounts of the executions at Orleans in 1022. *Journal of Medieval History*, 40(4), 399-420,

Barbezat, M. D. (2018). *Burning Bodies: Communities, Eschatology, and the Punishment of Heresy in the Middle Ages*. Cornell University Pres

Boboc, R. (2009). Kabbalists, Cathars and Ismailis: Forms of Gnosis in the 11th–13th Century. *Studia Hebraica*, *9-10*, 267–293.

Chaytor, H. J. (1912). *The troubadours*. Cambridge University Press.

Deane, J. K. (2022). *A history of medieval heresy and inquisition*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Frassetto, M. (Ed.) (2006). *Heresy and the Persecuting Society in the Middle Ages: Essays on the Work of R. I. Moore*. Brill.

Frassetto, M. (2008). *The great medieval heretics: five centuries of religious dissent*. BlueBridge.

Hamilton, B. (2006). Bogomil influences on Western heresy. In Frassetto, M. (ed.) *Heresy and the Persecuting Society in the Middle Ages: Essays on the Work of R. I. Moore*. (pp 93-114) Brill.

Leglu, C., Rist, R., & Taylor, C. (2014). *The Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade: a sourcebook*. Routledge.

Mabillon, J., & Eales, S.J. (1896) Collected works of Bernard of Clairvaux. Volume IV. Cantica canticorum. Eighty-six sermons on the Song of Songs. John Hodges

Marvin, L. W. (2008). *The Occitan War: a military and political history of the Albigensian Crusade, 1209-1218*. Cambridge University Press.

McDonald, J. (2017). Cathars and Cathar Beliefs in the Languedoc (Informative website).

Moore, R. I. (1985). *The origins of European dissent*. Blackwell.

Moore, R. I. (1987, revised 2007). *The formation of a persecuting society authority and deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250*. Blackwell.

Moore, R. I. (2012). *The war on heresy*. Belknap Press

Oldenbourg, Z. (1959, translated by P. Green, 1961). *Massacre at Montségur: a history of the Albigensian Crusade.* Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

O’Shea, S. (2000). *The perfect heresy: the revolutionary life and death of the medieval Cathars*. Walker

Paterson, L. M. (1993). *The world of the troubadours: medieval Occitan society, c. 1100-c. 1300*. Cambridge University Press.

Pegg, M. G. (2001). On Cathars, Albigenses, and good men of Languedoc. *Journal of Medieval History*, *27*(2), 181–195.

Roquebert, M. (1999). *Histoire des cathares: hérésie, croisade, Inquisition du XIe au XIVe siècle*. Perrin.

Sennis, A. C. (Ed.) (2016). *Cathars in question*. York Medieval Press.

Shirley, J. (2016). *The song of the Cathar wars: a history of the Albigensian Crusade*. Routledge.

Sioen, G. & Roquebert, M. (2001). *Cathares: la terre et les hommes*. Place des Victoires.

Smith, A. P. (2015). *The lost teachings of the Cathars: their beliefs and practices*. Watkins.

Wakefield, W. L., & Evans, A. P. (1991). *Heresies of the high Middle Ages*. Columbia University Press.

Wakefield, W. L. (1974). *Heresy, Crusade, and Inquisition in Southern France, 1100–1250*. University of California Press

---

Thoughts on the Kaballah

The Kabbalah is a body of Jewish thought based on mystical insight into the nature of God and an imaginative

interpretation of the Torah. The word itself means “received.” According to legend this special knowledge was imparted by God either to Adam in Eden or to Moses on Sinai, and handed down thereafter from generation to generation to an enlightened few, who preserved the received wisdom and taught it to their students. This post presents some thoughts about the Kabbalah from someone who, though neither Jewish nor fluent in Hebrew, is fascinated by the intricacy of its ideas.

Early Origins of the Kabbalah

Since at the beginning the Kabbalah was largely unwritten, we have no clear ideas about its origins. However, in the centuries following the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, various books on the Kabbalah were written down using the Aramaic language in the region of Syria-Palestine (Dan & Kiener, 1986; Dan, 2007; Hoffman, 2010; Matt, 1996a, Ogden, 2016).

One of these foundational texts of the Kabbalah is the *Sefir Yetzirah* – the “Book of the Creation,” or “Book of Formation.” The universe was created by God engraving in light upon the darkness the 32 letters and numbers of the Hebrew language (*Sefir Yetzirah* I:1, Kaplan translation, 1990):

```
With 32 mystical paths of Wisdom
     engraved Yah
          the Lord of Hosts
          the God of Israel
     the living God
          King of the universe
     El Shaddai
          Merciful and Gracious
          High and Exalted
          Dwelling in eternity
          Whose name is Holy –
               He is lofty and holy –
And He created His universe
```

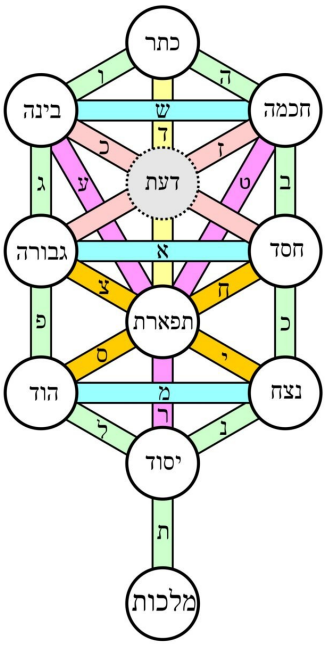
with three books (Sepharim),
with text (Sepher)
with number (Sephar)
and with communication (Sippur).

Text and number define the nature of the universe. Its qualities are described by language, and the quantities of its components are described by number. Communication allows the universe to exist – as divine speech. Note that the Hebrew root S-F-R using the letters *samech* (s), *pay* (p/f) and *resh* (r) is the basis of many words denoting writing and books, counting and numbers.

Another text probably written in that period, the *Sefer HaBahir* – the "Book of Illumination" –associated the ten numbers with ten different ways that God was manifest in the universe that He created: the *Sefirot* (Verses 124-193, Kaplan translation, 1979). These divine emanations became a way to understand all things.

The following illustration shows the 10 *Sefirot* (singular *Sefirah*) together with 22 linkages, each denoted by one of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. As well as the 10 *Sefirot*, the idea of *Da'at* or "knowledge" is represented in the upper half of the diagram. Originally this was not directly connected to any of the *Sefirot*. Rather it appeared to be entangled in the network: knowledge develops through the study of the *Sefirot* and their interactions. Kaplan (1990, p 25) suggests that it is "the point of confluence between Wisdom and Understanding." Other interpretations consider *Da'at* to be one of the 10 *Sefirot*, and consider *Keter* as the Divine Will that infuses the whole underlying structure of the universe.

כתר	Keter	Crown
חכמה	Chochmah	Wisdom
בינה	Binah	Understanding
דעת	Da'at	Knowledge
חסד	Chesed	Love
גבורה	Gevurah	Power
תפארת	Tif'eret	Beauty
נצח	Netzach	Endurance
הוד	Hod	Splendor
יסוד	Yesod	Foundation
מלכות	Malkhut	Kingdom



א	Alef (a)	1	Ox
ב	Bet (b/v)	2	House
ג	Gimel (g)	3	Camel
ד	Dalet (d)	4	Door
ה	He (h)	5	Window
ו	Vav (v)	6	Nail
ז	Zayin (z)	7	Sword
ח	Chet (ch)	8	Fence
ט	Tet (t)	9	Serpent
י	Yod (y)	10	Hand
כ	Kaf (k)	20	Palm (hand)
ל	Lamed (l)	30	Goad
מ	Mem (m)	40	Water
נ	Nun (n)	50	Fish
ס	Samech (s)	60	Support
ע	Ayin (o)	70	Eye
פ	Pe (p/f)	80	Mouth
צ	Tsadi (ts)	90	Hook
ק	Qof (q)	100	Back of Head
ר	Resh (r)	200	Head
ש	Shin (sh/s)	300	Tooth
ת	Tav (t)	400	Cross

The Sefirot are arranged in three linked columns. The middle column represents the main flow of energy from the Creator to the Creation. The left column tends toward the female aspect of the Divine, and the right column toward its male aspect (Kaplan, 1990, p 34). However, in some formulations, *Malkhut* is also considered as the female aspect (*Shekhinah*) of *Keter.* We shall return to this idea when we examine the *Zohar*.

The numbers and letters in this representation of creation could be used in various ways – to explain the nature of things, to predict the future, to ward off disease and to exert magical control. The practice of *Gematria* (a Hebrew word likely deriving from the Greek *grammateia*, knowledge of writing) represents words by the sum of their letters according to the alphanumeric cipher given in the preceding figure. Thus, the word for father *av* can be considered as 3 – the sum of *alef* (1) and *bet* (2): Similarly, mother *em* can be considered as 41 – the sum of *alef* (1) and *mem* (40). Adding father and mother together leads to the word for child *yeled* which has a value of 44 – the sum of *yod* (10), *lamed* (30) and *dalet* (4). (I am indebted to Tokarczuk, 2022, p 579 for this example).

The use of Creation's numbers and letters in magic was the basis of *Kaballah Ma'asit* (practical), as compared to *Kaballah Iyunit* (contemplative). Amulets containing magical words were used to treat or prevent disease. The legendary Prague Golem (illustrated on the right by Philippe Semeria) was formed out of clay and brought to life by writing the Hebrew letters *alef*, *met* and *tav* upon his forehead – these make the word *emet*, "life." Once the Golem became dangerous, he was returned to clay by erasing the first of these letters so that the word became *met*, "death" (Scholem, 1965/1996, pp 158-204)

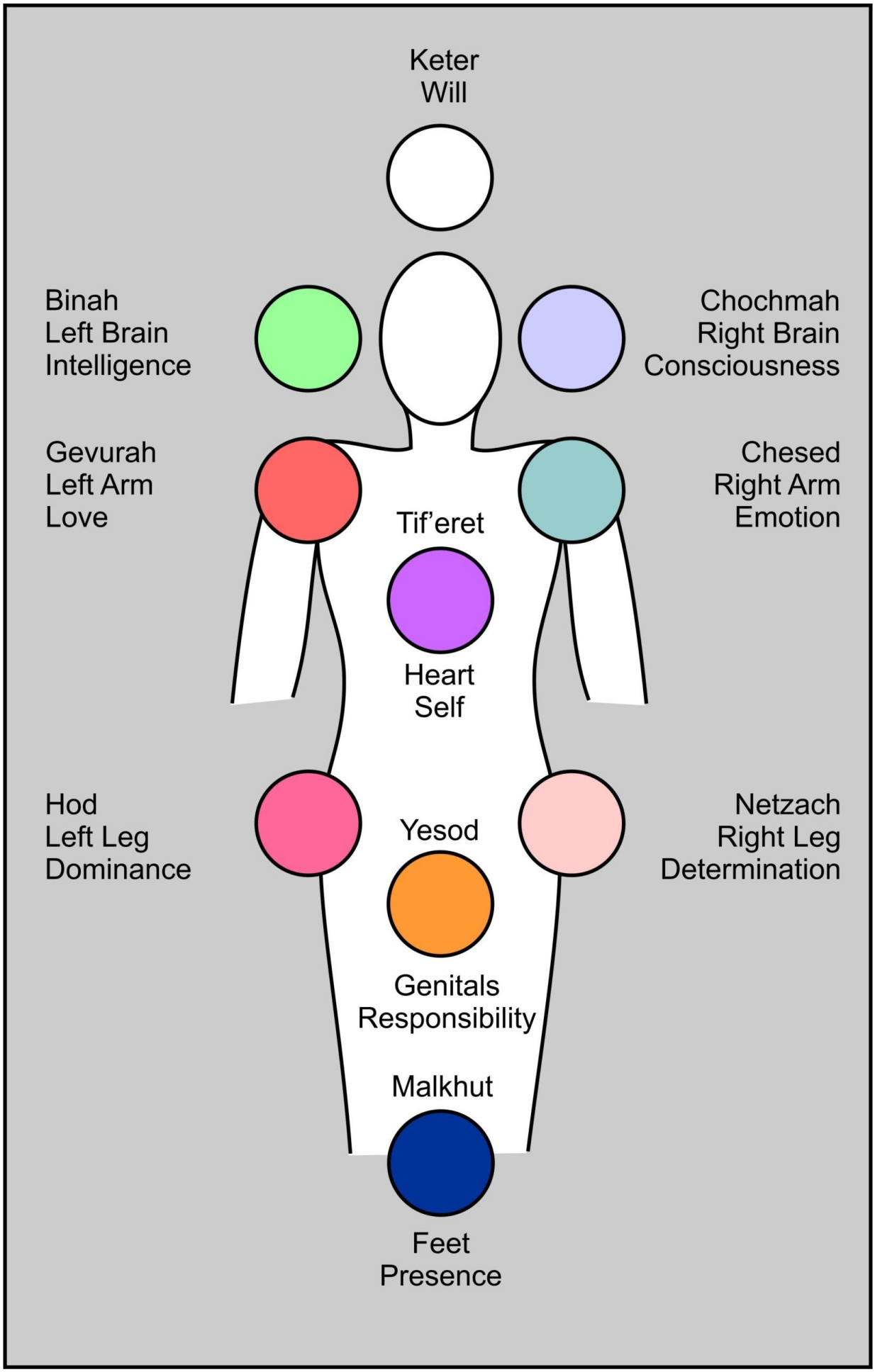
Many are the ways in which the world and its history can be mapped onto the *Sephirot*. One analysis relates these different emanations to the sayings of God as reported in the first chapter of *Genesis* (Kaplan, 1990, pp 6-7). God spoke and the universe came into being. The following are the words introduced by "And God said…" as they flow from Keter into the other nine emanations

> 3 Let there be light (*Chochmah*, Wisdom)
> 6 Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters (*Binah*, Understanding)
> 9 Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear (*Chesed,* Love)

> 11 Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind (*Gevurah*, Power)
> 14 Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night (*Tif'eret*, Beauty)
> 20 Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. (*Netzach*, Endurance)
> 24 Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind (*Hod*, Splendor)
> 26 Let us make man in our image, after our likeness (*Yesod*, Foundation)
> 28 Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth (*Malkhut,* Kingdom)

Likewise, each of the ten commandments as given in Exodus 20 may relate to a particular *Sefirah* (Bar-Asher, 2022). However, exactly which commandment goes with which *Sefirah* varies from one commentary to the next. Most accept that the first commandment ("I am the Lord thy God …. Thou shalt have no other gods before me") relates to *Keter*.

The ten *Sefirot* can be mapped to the primordial human body in many ways. The following illustration shows an amalgam of several (Kaplan, 1990, p. 151; Berenson-Perkins, 2000; Atzmon, 2003). These relations are in keeping with the idea that "God created man in his own image" (*Genesis* 1:27).


Keter
Will
Binah
Left Brain
Intelligence
Chochmah
Right Brain
Consciousness
Gevurah
Left Arm
Love
Chesed
Right Arm
Emotion
Tif'eret
Heart
Self
Hod
Left Leg
Dominance
Netzach
Right Leg
Determination
Yesod
Genitals
Responsibility
Malkhut
Feet
Presence

Little definite is known about the history of Kabbalah scholarship between these early origins in Palestine and the 13th Century in Provence, France, where Rabbi Isaac the Blind (about 1160-1235 CE) wrote a commentary on the *Sefer Yetzirah* (Scholem, 1987, Dan & Kiener, 1986; Dan, 2007). He and his colleagues were the first to organize the 10 *Sefirot* in the way (see preceding figure) in which they are now most commonly considered (Dan & Kiener, 1986, pp 32, 73-86). He described the *Sefirot* as the emanations of a boundless God – *Ein Sof,* words meaning "no limit" and denoting that which is both infinite in space and eternal in time (Valabregue-Parry, 2012). *Ein Sof* is everything but is also nothing because it is not anything in particular. The concept of *Ein Sof* is therefore related to the idea of *Ayin* or "nothingness" (Matt, 1990). The words *Ein* and *Ayin* use the same Hebrew letters. *Ayin* and *Ein Sof* work through he first *Sephirah – Keter* – to create the other *Sefirot*.

The study of the Kaballah then spread from Southern France to the Jewish communities in Spain. In Gerona, Rabbi Azriel (about 1160-1238 CE), who had studied with Rabbi Isaac the Blind, wrote

> Anything visible, and anything that can be grasped by thought, is bounded. Anything bounded is finite. Anything finite is not undifferentiated. Conversely, the boundless is called *Ein Sof*, Infinite. It is absolute undifferentiation in perfect, changeless oneness. Since it is boundless, there is nothing outside of it. Since it transcends and conceals itself, it is the essence of everything hidden and revealed. Since it is concealed, it is the root of faith and the root of rebellion. As it is written, "One who is righteous lives by his faith." The philosophers acknowledge that we comprehend it only by way of no.
> Emanating from *Ein Sof* are the ten sefirot. They constitute the process by which all things come into being and pass away. They energize every existent thing that can be

> quantified. Since all things come into being by means of the sefirot, they differ from one another; yet they all derive from one root. Everything is from *Ein Sof*; there is nothing outside of it. (quotation from Matt, 1996a, p. 29)

The Spanish Rabbi Josef Gikatilla (about 1248-1305), whose name comes from the Spanish *Chiquitilla* (little one) wrote in his *Sha'are Orah* ("The Gates of Light," translated by Weinstein, 1994):

> The depth of primordial being is called Boundless (*Ein Sof*). Because of its concealment from all creatures above and below, it is also called Nothingness (*Ayin*). If one asks, "What is it?" the answer is, "Nothing," meaning: No one can understand anything about it. It is negated of every conception. No one can know anything about it—except the belief that it exists. Its existence cannot be grasped by anyone other than it. Therefore its name is "I am becoming."

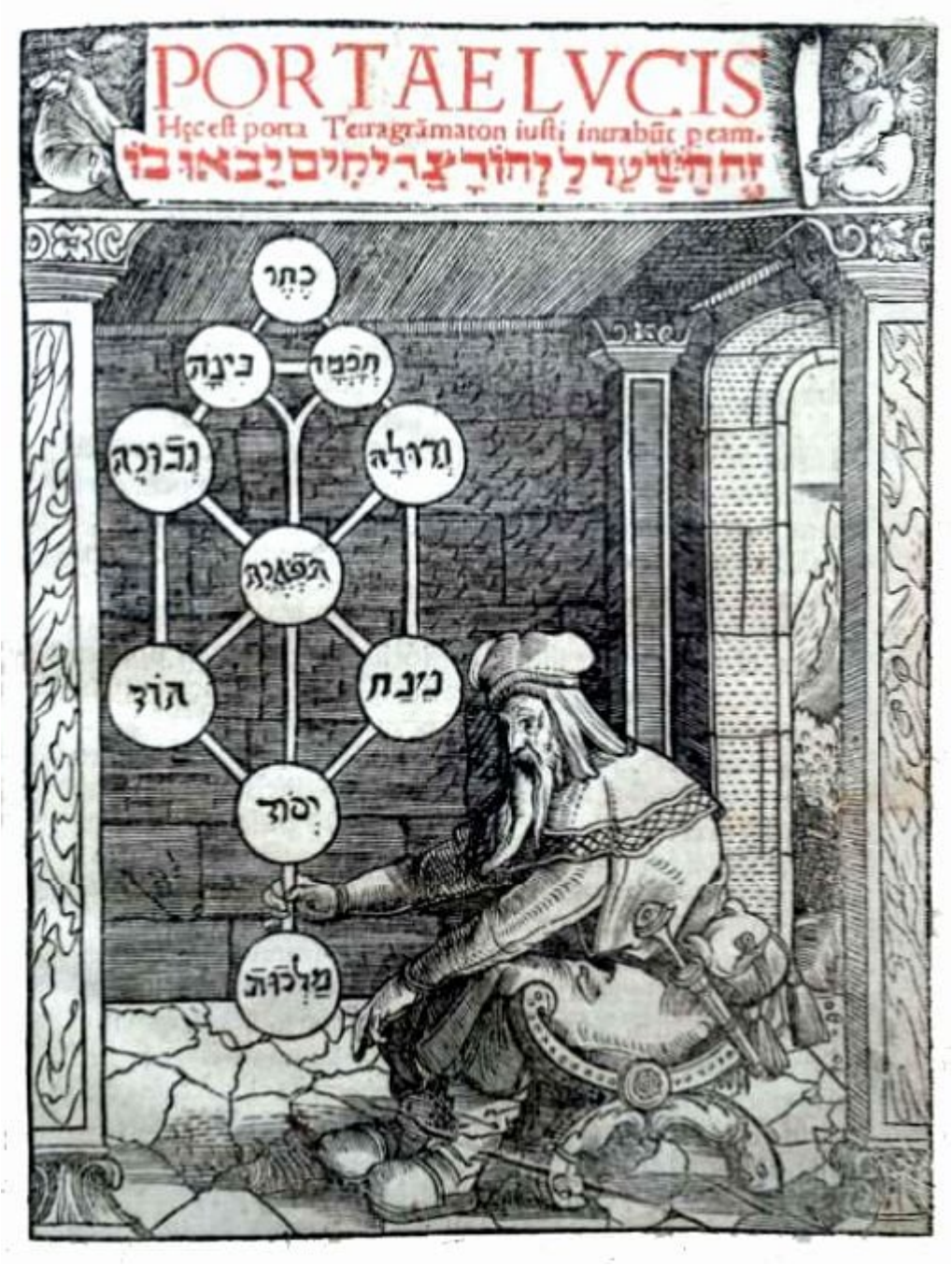
The final comment refers to the name "I am that I am" – *Eheyeh asher eheyeh* – of God in the burning bush in Exodus 3:14. Since Hebrew does not clearly indicate the tense of the verb, this can also be translated as "I am who I shall be" or "I shall be who I am."

In the *Sha'are Orah*, Gikatilla related the ten Sefirot to the various names of God in the Torah (this table derives from the Wikipedia article on Gikatilla):

SEPHIROT AND THE NAMES OF GOD

Sephirah	Holy Name
כתר, *Keter*, "Crown"	אהי"ה, *Eheye*, "I AM"
חכמה, *Chokhmah*, "Wisdom"	יה, *Yah*, "LORD"
בינה, *Binah*, "Understanding"	יהו"ה, *Havayah*, "LORD"
חסד, *Chesed*, "Kindness"	אל, *El*, "God"
גבורה, *Gevurah*, "Severity"	אלהים, *Elohim*, "God"
תפארת, *Tiferet*, "Beauty"	יהו"ה, *Havayah*, "LORD"
נצח, *Netzach*, "Eternity"	יהו"ה צבאות, *Havayah Tsevaot*, "LORD of hosts"
הוד, *Hod*, "Splendor"	אלהים צבאות, *Elohim Tsevaot*, "God of hosts"
יסוד, *Yesod*, "Foundation"	אל חי, *El Chai*, "the living God"
מלכות, *Malkuth*, "Kingship"	אדני, *Adonai*, "my Lord"

The illustration below shows the frontispiece of a Latin translation of the *Sha'are Orah* (*Portae Lucis*) by Paulus Ricius, published in Augsburg in 1516, from the collection of the British Museum. The engraving shows a Kabbalist meditating on the *Sefirot.*



Mystic meditation on the ten Sefirot allows one to gain access to the nothingness of *Ein Sof*. Matt (1996a, p 119) quotes an anonymous Kabbalist from 13th Century Gerona:

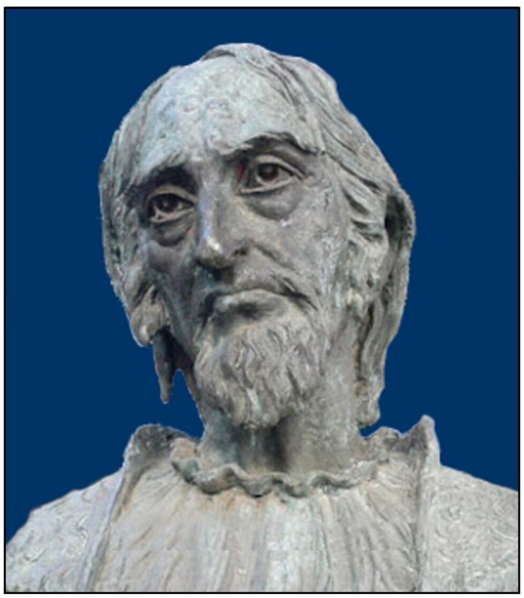
> When the soul comes into the One, entering into pure loss of self, it finds God as in nothingness. It seemed to a man that he had a dream, a waking dream, that he became pregnant with nothingness as a woman with child. In this nothingness God was born. He was the fruit of nothingness; God was born in nothingness. (quoted in McGinn, 1981).

The Zohar

Toward the end of the 13th Century, Moses de León (1240-1305), a Kabbalah scholar in Guadalajara, began to publish a set of Aramaic writings that he claimed had been written by the great Hebrew sage Shimon bar Yochai (also known as Rashbi) in the 2nd Century C.E. Rabbi Shimon is buried in Meron, Galilee, the sight of an annual ecstatic gathering of his adherents. The collection of these texts came to be known as the *Sefer ha-Zohar* (Book of Radiance), or more simply the *Zohar.* The legend has that Rashbi withdrew to a cave for 13 years and there, under the inspiration of the prophet Elijah, wrote the *Zohar*. Various lines of evidence suggest, however, that these texts were actually written by Moses de León, and that the Zohar is an example of religious *pseudoepigrapha*, works falsely attributed to a past author:

> The quest for truth knows of adventures that are all its own, and in a vast number of cases has arrayed itself in pseudoepigraphic garb. the further a man progresses along his own road in this quest for truth, the more he might become convinced that his own road must have been trodden by others, ages before him. to the streak of adventurousness which was in moses de leon, no less than to his genius, we owe one of the most remarkable works of jewish literature. (Scholem, 1945/1995, p 204)

We have no contemporary portrait of Moses de León. The following illustration shows two modern representations: on the left a print by Arnold Belkin and on the right a bust by Luis Sanguino:



The following is the Zohar's commentary on the first verse of *Genesis*. I have used Matt's 2004 translation but I have in some places used the explanatory annotations in Matt (2002, 2004) instead of the literal translation:

> On the authority of the King (i.e., *Ein Sof*), He engraved engravings in luster on high. A spark of impenetrable darkness flashed within the concealed of the concealed (i.e., the first and most hidden *Sefirah*, *Keter*) from the head of *Ein Sof* – a cluster of vapor forming in formlessness, thrust in a ring, not white, not black, not red, not green, no color at all. As a measuring line, yielding radiant colors. Deep within the spark gushed a flow, splaying colors below, concealed within the concealed of the mystery of *Ein Sof*. It split and did not split its aura, was not known at all, until under the impact of splitting, a single, concealed, supernal point shone. Beyond that point, nothing is known, so it is called *Reshit* (Beginning), first command of all.
>
> *The enlightened will shine like the Zohar (radiance, brilliance, splendor) of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever* (Daniel 12: 3)

> Zohar! Concealed of concealed struck its aura, which touched and did not touch this point. Then this beginning expanded, building itself a palace worthy of glorious praise. There it sowed seed to give birth, availing worlds. The secret is: Her stock is seed of holiness (*Hokhmah*) (Isaiah 6:13). Zohar! Sowing seed for its glory, like the seed of fine purple silk wrapping itself within, weaving itself a palace, constituting its praise, availing all.
>
> With this beginning, the unknown concealed one created the palace. this palace is called *elohim*, god. the secret is: *Be-reshit bara Elohim*, With beginning, ___ created God.

The final lines in this section propose a complete re-interpretation of Creation. Rather than the usual translation ("In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth"), the new interpretation proposes that God is created (together with the heaven and the earth) by the unknowable and unnameable force of *Ein Sof*. The Zohar proposes that since *Elohim* follows the verb *bara*, it is the object rather than the subject of the act of creation. This would fit with modern colloquial Hebrew, although there are many examples in the Hebrew of the Torah where the subject follows the verb, e.g. Genesis 1:4, *Wayyar Elohim et-ha'owr*, God saw the light.

Some scholars have remarked about how the expansion of the universe from a "single concealed supernal point" at the beginning of Creation might represent the Big Bang (Friedman, 1995; Matt, 1996b). we should be very cautious in relating science to scripture. Early Kabbalah ideas related the ten *sefirot* to the now obsolete idea that the earth is the centre of a universe surrounded by the sky and eight crystalline spheres carrying the moon, sun, the five known planets, the fixed stars, and the empyrean heaven (Chajes, 2020).

The *Zohar* (Matt, 2004, sections i: 53ab) makes some intriguing comments on the sin of Adam and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. The tenth *Sefirah* is called *Malkhut*

(kingdom) and represents the actual world which contains both good and evil. However, the Sefirah also represents *Shekhinah*. This word means “dwelling,” or “presence,” and as such it has come to mean the presence of God within the real world. At another level of interpretation, *Shekhinah* is the female counterpart of *Keter* or the bride of *Tif’eret*. Adam’s eating of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil brought evil and death into the world and distanced *Shekhinah* from the other *Sefirot*. It was not that God drove Adam out of Eden, but that Adam drove *Shekhinah* out of God. The goal of Judaism is then to repair this cleavage between the Creator and his Creation, to join male and female back together. These concepts were to be expanded in the teachings of Isaac Luria, which will be considered later.

Christian Kabbalah

In the 15th and early 16th centuries, Renaissance scholars began once again to study scientific, philosophical and religious works written by the Ancients but long unread by teachers only concerned with Christian Scripture. Early Kabbalah writings such as the *Sefir Yetzirah* were some of the sources of knowledge that were thus “reborn” during the Renaissance. Placing these ancient Hebrew writings in the context of Christian philosophy led to the formulation of a Christian Kaballah (Forshaw, 2016).

Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522) in Germany published *De Arte Cabbalistica* in 1517. He tried to reconcile some of the ideas of the Kabbalah with Christian theology, and mapped the Christian Trinity to the upper levels of the *Sefirot*. The early 16th Century saw the beginning of a campaign to facilitate the conversion of the Jews in the Holy Roman Empire by burning all their books. Reuchlin successfully argued against this (Price, 2011).

The other famous Renaissance scholar of the Kabbalah was

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) (Copenhaver, 2019, 2020; Howlett, 2021; Hanegraaff, 2012, pp 53-68). This young nobleman studied at the universities of Ferrara, Padua and Paris, becoming proficient in French, Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic. He then became a member of the Medici court of Lorenzo the Magnificent in Florence. His beautiful face and long chestnut hair was widely depicted in renaissance art. The illustration below shows him represented (posthumously) in Raphael's *School of Athens* (1511) in the Vatican (upper left), in Cosimo Rosselli's fresco *Niracle of the Sacrament* (1486) (lower left), and holding a medallion of Cosimo de' Medici in an anonymous engraving (right).

In 1486 Pico published a set of 900 *Conclusiones philosophicae, cabalasticae et theologicae* in Rome, and offered to defend these propositions in debate with any scholar who wished to challenge them. He also published a general defense of his conclusions in his *oration on the dignity of man*, which became the foundational text of the new humanism, wherein man became the measure of all things:

> For, raised to the most eminent height of theology, whence we shall be able to measure with the rod of indivisible eternity all things that are and that have been. (Caponigri translation, p 27).

Many of Pico's *Conclusions* derived from his readings in the Kabbalah. The following are three examples (from Copenhaver, 2019, Appendix C):

> *Ein Sof* is not to be numbered along with other Numerations (*Sefira*) because it is the unity of those Numerations, removed and uncommunicated, not a coordinated unity.
>
> Someone with a deep knowledge of Kabbalah can understand that the three great fourfold names of God contained in the secrets of Kabbalists ought to be assigned to the three persons of the Trinity by a wondrous allocation so that the name □□□□ (*Ehyeh*, I am) belongs to the Father, the name □□□□ (the tetragrammaton, *Yahweh*) to the Son, the name □□□□ (*Adonai*) to the Holy Spirit.
>
> One who has thought deeply about the novenary number of beatitudes that Matthew writes about in the Gospel *(Matthew* 5: 3:12) will see that they fit wonderfully with the novenary of nine Numerations (*Sefirot*) that come beneath the first, which is the unapproachable abyss of the Deity.

Pope Innocent VII considered many of Pico's proposals, particularly those related to the Kabbalah, as heretical. He forbad the proposed debate and banned any subsequent publication of the *Conclusions*.

Pico treated all his different sources – Greek philosophers, Christian theologians, Egyptian magicians and Hebrew sages – as equal. His was a philosophy of "syncretism" (from the Greek *syn* together and *krasis* mix). The Christian Kabbalah thenceforth became part of a tradition of secret knowledge, a strange amalgam of Gnosticism, Hermetism, Alchemy, Astrology, Freemasonry, and Kabbalah. The word "cabal" entered the lexicon to denote a secret society conspiring to bring about political change by means of intrigue.

Hanegraaff (2012) characterized those systems of knowledge that are rejected by the majority yet followed by a secret few as "esotericism" – the "academy's dustbin of rejected knowledge" (Hanegraaff, 2013, p 13). The popularity of such esoteric systems waxes and wanes. In the late 19th and early 20th Century various aspects of the occult – spiritualism, Tarot, theosophy – became popular. Later in the 20th Century various "New Age" religions made their impact.

Safed

In 1492 the Jews were expelled from Spain and the great flowering of Spanish Kabbalah ceased. Kabbalah scholars moved to other regions of Europe and the Middle East. The city of Safed in in Galilee, then part of Ottoman Syria, soon became an important center of Kabbalah learning. Moses ben Jacob Cordovero (1522-1570), also known as Remak, was one of the most important scholars in Safed. His name indicates that his family originally came from Cordoba in Spain. The following is from Cordovero's *Pardes Rimonim*, "Orchard of Pomegranates" (1548):

> In the beginning *Ein Sof* emanated ten *sefirot*, which are of its essence, united with it. It and they are entirely one. There is no change or division in the emanator that would

> justify saying it is divided into parts in these various sefirot. … Imagine a ray of sunlight shining through a stained-glass window of ten different colors. The sunlight possesses no color at all but appears to change hue as it passes through the different colors of glass. Colored light radiates through the window. The light has not essentially changed, though so it seems to the viewer. Just so with the *sefirot*. The light that clothes itself in the vessels of the sefirot is the essence, like the ray of sunlight. That essence does not change color at all, neither judgment nor compassion, neither right nor left. Yet by emanating through the *sefirot*—the variegated stained glass—judgment or compassion prevails. (quoted in Matt, 1996a, p 38).

Cordovero was followed by Isaac ben Solomon Luria (1532-1572), also known as *HaARI*, "the lion." He did not leave any writings of his own, but his teachings were later recorded by his disciples. He proposed that during Creation *Ein Sof* initially contracted (*tsimtsum*) so as to make space for the universe, and that when light was emanated into the *Sefirot* there was some unavoidable fragmentation (*shevirah*). The task of the faithful is to repair (*tikkun*) what was broken by means of good works, charity, social justice and prayer (Drob, 2000, pp 384-433). Matt (1996a, p 15) summarized these concepts:

> Luria taught that the first divine act was not emanation, but withdrawal. *Ein Sof* withdrew its presence "from itself to itself," withdrawing in all directions away from one point at the center" of its infinity, as it were, thereby creating a vacuum. This vacuum served as the site of creation. . . . Into the vacuum *Ein Sof* emanated a ray of light, channeled through vessels. At first, everything went smoothly; but as the emanation proceeded, some of the vessels could not withstand the power of the light, and they shattered. Most of the light returned to its infinite source, but the rest fell as sparks, along with the shards of the vessels. Eventually, these sparks became trapped in

material existence. The human task is to liberate, or raise, these sparks, to restore them to divinity. This process of *tikkun* (repair or mending) is accomplished through living a life of holiness. All human actions either promote or impede *tikkun*, thus hastening or delaying the arrival of the Messiah.

Final Thoughts

There is much that is foolish in the teachings of the Kaballah. The use of the Kaballah in magic makes for wonderful stories but in reality is nonsense. The use of the Kaballah to predict the future is foolish. Sabattai Zevi (1626-1676) used the Kabbalah to claim that he was the Messiah. After gathering together thousands of followers, he was imprisoned by Sultan Mehmed IV and ultimately converted to Islam. He augmented rather than decreased the sum of human suffering.

The great Kaballah texts are magnificent works of the imagination. They present a view of a universe infused with number and language. In the general sense that we cannot understand or control anything without number and language, these teachings are true. The writings of the Kaballah also provide meditative tools to facilitate individual mystical encounters with the infinite.

Over the past century we have come to consider particular things as dependent on universal principles. Noam Chomsky has shown that different human languages are all related to a universal grammar; Claude Lévi-Strauss has proposed that different human societies all follow some basic rules for how human beings interact with each other. Perhaps the ideas of the Kaballah can provide us with a general structure with which to understand things – a template for the infinite. These issues are well discussed (though ultimately not resolved) in Levi's 2009 paper "Structuralism and Kabbalah:

Sciences of mysticism or mystifications of science?”

> Structural anthropology and Kabbalah, although on cursory appraisal having nothing in common—insofar as they stem from entirely different intellectual domains, the one being a modern social science and the other an ancient form of jewish mysticism—on deeper examination actually share a number of epistemological and ontological postulates. These include, but are not limited to, the idea that surface diversity conceals an underlying unity, specifically truth is discoverable within a layered model of reality, and that space, time, and matter are characterized by entropy and fragmentation.

Perhaps we might end this post with the concept of *tikkun olam* (“repair of the world”) as proposed in the Kabbalah teachings of Isaac Luria. this is one of the most powerful justifications of human ethics: we should be good not to benefit ourselves but to make the world a better place.

References

Atzmon, L. (2003). A visual analysis of anthropomorphism in the Kabbalah: dissecting the Hebrew alphabet and Sephirotic diagram. *Visual Communication* 2(1), 97-114.

Bar-Asher, A. (2022) Decoding the Decalogue: Theosophical re-engraving of the Ten Commandments in Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah. In Brown, J. P. & Herman, M. (Eds). *Accounting for the commandments in medieval Judaism: studies in law, philosophy, pietism, and Kabbalah*. (pp. 156-174). Brill.

Berenson-Perkins, J. (2000). *Kaballah decoder: Revealing the messages of the ancient mystics.* Barrons.

Chajes, J. H. (2020). Spheres, *Sefirot*, and the imaginal astronomical discourse of classical Kabbalah. *Harvard Theological Review*, 113 (2), 230-262.

Copenhaver, B. (2019). *Magic and the dignity of man: Pico della Mirandola and his Oration in modern memory*. Harvard University Press.

Copenhaver, B. (2020). Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Dan, J., & Kiener, R. C. (1986). *The Early Kabbalah*. Paulist Press.

Dan, J. (2007). *Kabbalah: a very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Drob, S. (2000). *Symbols of the Kabbalah : philosophical and psychological perspectives*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Forshaw, P. J. (2016). Christian Kabbalah. In Magee, G. A. (Ed). *The Cambridge handbook of western mysticism and esotericism*. (pp. 143-155). Cambridge University Press.

Friedman, R. E. (1995) Chapter 10: Big Bang and Kabbalah. In *The disappearance of God: a divine mystery.* Little Brown.

Gikatilla, J. (translated by Weinstein, A., 1994). *Gates of light = Sha'are orah*. HarperCollins.

Hanegraaff. W. J. (2012). *Esotericism and the academy: rejected knowledge in western culture*. Cambridge University Press.

Hanegraaff. (2013). *Western esotericism: a guide for the perplexed*. Bloomsbury.

Hoffman, E. (2010). *The Kabbalah reader: a sourcebook of visionary Judaism*. Shambala.

Howlett, S. (2021). *Re-evaluating Pico: Critical political theory and radical practice.* Springer.

Kaplan, A. (1979, 1989). *The Bahir*. Weiser Books

Kaplan, A. (1990, revised 1997). *Sefer Yetzirah (The book of Creation)*. Weiser Books.

Levi, J. M. (2009). Structuralism and Kabbalah: Sciences of mysticism or mystifications of science? *Anthropological Quarterly,* 82(4), 929–984.

Matt, D. C. (1990). *Ayin:* the concept of nothingness in Jewish mysticism. In Forman, R. K. C. (Ed). *The problem of pure consciousness: mysticism and philosophy.* (pp. 121-159). Oxford University Press.

Matt, D. C. (1996a). *The essential Kabbalah: the heart of Jewish mysticism*. Harper.

Matt, D. C. (1996b). *God and the big bang: discovering harmony between science and spirituality*. Jewish Lights.

Matt, D. C. (2002). *Zohar: annotated & explained*. SkyLight Paths

Matt, D. C. (2004-2017). *The Zohar* (Pritzker edition.). Stanford University Press. (12 volumes).

McGinn, B. (1981) The God beyond God: Theology and mysticism in the thought of Meister Eckhart. *Journal of Religion*, 61(1), 1-19

Pico della Mirandola, G. (1486, translated by Caponigri, A. R., 1956). *Oration on the dignity of Man*. Gateway Books.

Price, D. H. (2011). *Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books.* Oxford University Press.

Tokarczuk, O. (2014, translated by Croft, J. 2022). *The books of Jacob .* Fitzcarraldo Editions.

Scholem, G. (1941, reprinted 1995). *Major trends in Jewish mysticism*. Schocken Books.

Scholem, G. (1965, reprinted 1996). *On the Kabbalah and its*

symbolism. Schocken Books.

Scholem, G. (1987). *Origins of the Kabbalah*. Princeton University Press.

Shokek, S. (2001). *Kabbalah and the art of being: the Smithsonian lectures*. Routledge.

Valabregue-Parry, S. (2012). The concept of infinity (*Eyn-sof*) and the rise of theosophical Kabbalah. *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 102(3), 405-430.

Marcus Aurelius

Marcus Aurelius (121-180 CE) is one of the most famous of the Roman Emperors. Some of his renown is related to the many representations of the Emperor that have persisted to the present day: the Aurelian Column documenting the Marcomannic Wars he waged on the Northern frontiers of the Empire; the bas-reliefs that were initially mounted on a triumphal arch in Rome, and later preserved when the arch was destroyed; and the equestrian statue that, from the Renaissance, was displayed in Rome's Piazza de Campidoglio on a pedestal designed by Michelangelo. Most of Marcus' fame, however, derives from the book that he wrote during the many years when he campaigned against the Germanic Tribes who threatened to cross the Danube and invade the Empire. This book, which has come to be known as the *Meditations*, presents a philosophy that derives from Greek Stoicism: to live each day as if it were one's last, to act in accord with nature, not to become upset by whatever happens, and to help others as best one can.

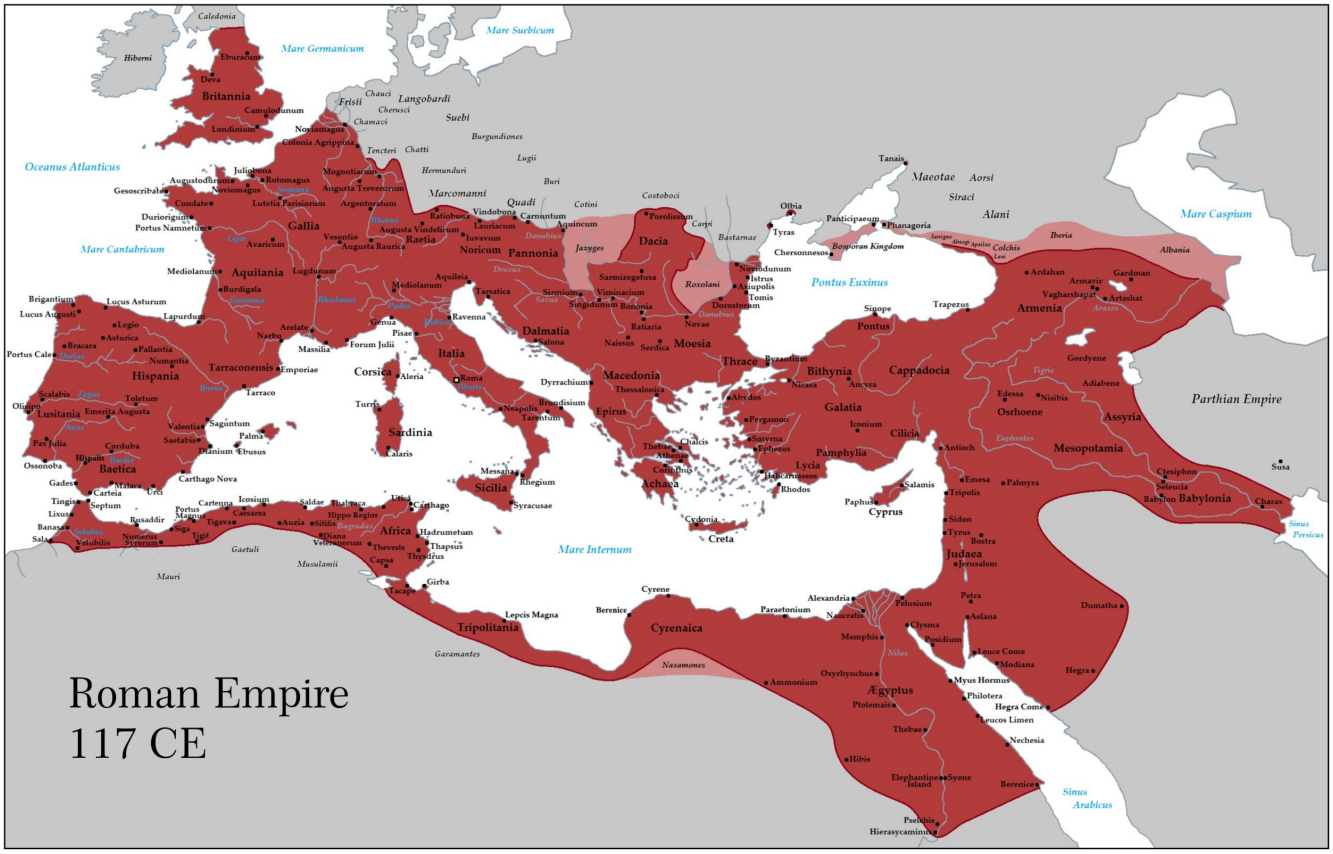
The Life of Marcus Aurelius

Marcus was born in 121CE, the son of Emperor Hadrian's nephew. After his father's death in 124 CE, Marcus was adopted by his grandfather Marcus Annius Verus.

Marcus was educated by a series of prominent tutors, whom he thanks in the first section of the *Meditations*. From Diognetus, he learned "about not getting carried away by empty enthusiasm;" from Rusticus "understanding the importance of correction and treatment of one's character;" from Apollonius "self-reliance and indisputable immunity to the dice-rolls of fortune;" from Sextus "the true meaning of living in accord with nature;" and from Fronto "understanding the nature of despotic malice and hypocrisy."

In 138 CE Marcus was adopted by his uncle, the Emperor Antoninus Pius, as his heir, and assumed the name Marcus Aurelius ("golden") Antoninus. From his adoptive father, he learned "calmness and an unshakeable adherence to deliberately made decisions" (this and preceding quotations from the Waterfield translation, 2021). In 145 CE Marcus married Faustina, the daughter of Antoninus.

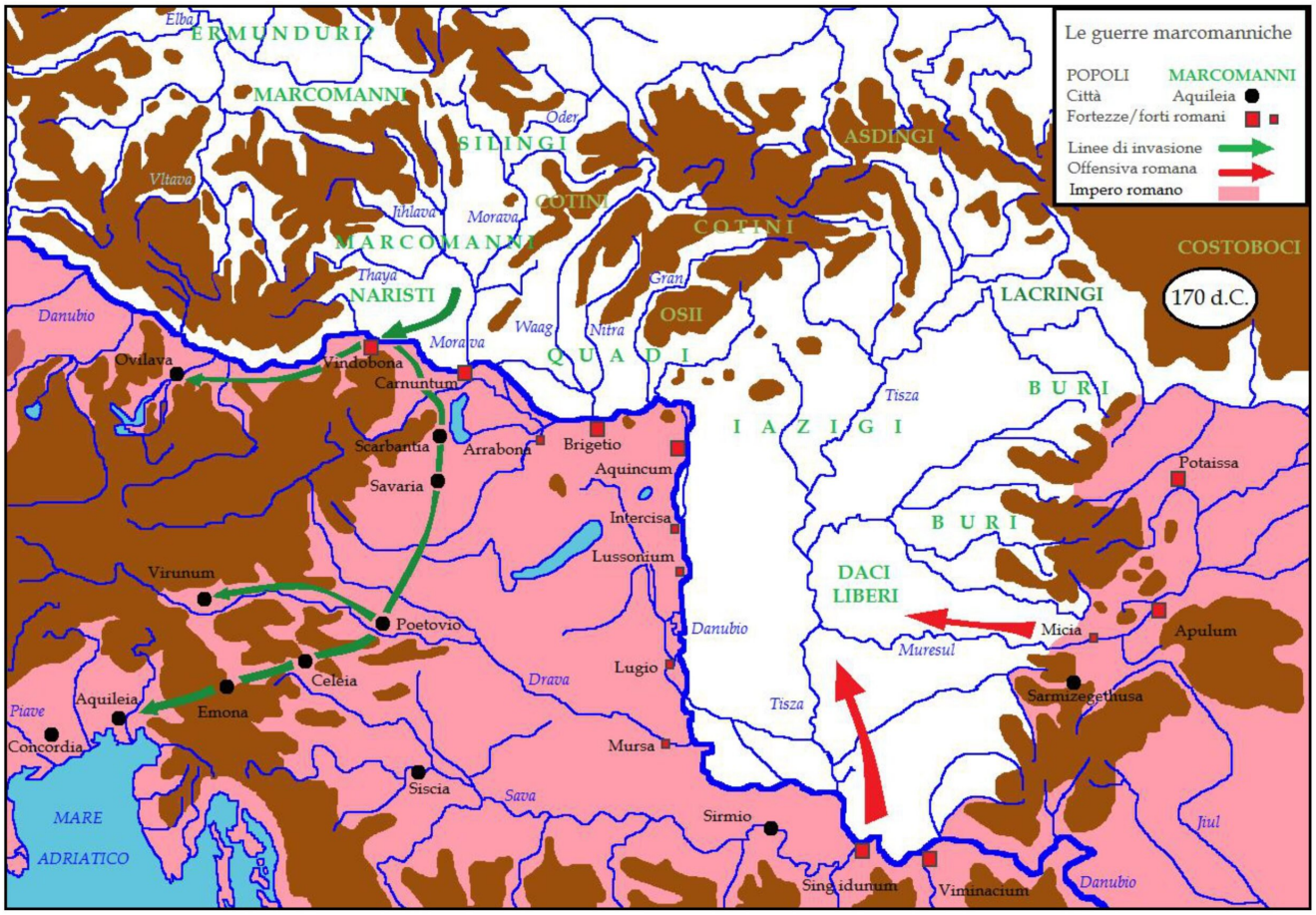
With the death of Antoninus Pius in 161 CE, Marcus became joint Emperor with Lucius Verus, whom Antoninus had also adopted. Together they assumed rule over the huge Roman Empire, which, since the days of the Emperor Trajan (53 -117 CE), extended from Portugal in the West to Syria in the East, and from Britain in the North to North Africa in the South:



At the accession of Marcus and Lucius, the empire was in turmoil. Rebellions were breaking out in Britain, and the Germanic tribes were harassing the Empire’s frontier on the Danube. Most importantly, the Parthian king, Vologases III, had invaded the Eastern province of Armenia, and threatened to enter Syria. Marcus dispatched generals to Britain and the Danube, and Lucius led an army against the Parthians. The Northern troubles were quickly subdued, and after some initial defeats, the Roman legions finally repulsed the Parthians and invaded Mesopotamia. By 165 CE the empire was once again secure. Lucius returned home to Roma, and Avidius Cassius, one of the most successful of the Roman generals in the East, was made governor of Syria.

However, soldiers returning from the Eastern wars brought with them the Antonine Plague which spread throughout the Roman Empire from165 to 180 CE, killing about 10% of the population. No one is absolutely sure of the nature of the disease. Most believe that it was a virulent strain of smallpox (*Variola*).

In 166 CE the Marcomanni (derived from proto-Germanic “men of the border”) crossed the Danube and invaded the province of Pannonia (present-day Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Hungary) – see map below. Marcus and Lucius led the Roman legions against the invaders, but the Marcomannic Wars dragged on until Marcus’ death. In 168 CE, Lucius Verus succumbed to the Antonine Plague on the way home from one of the Northern campaigns, leaving Marcus as sole Emperor.



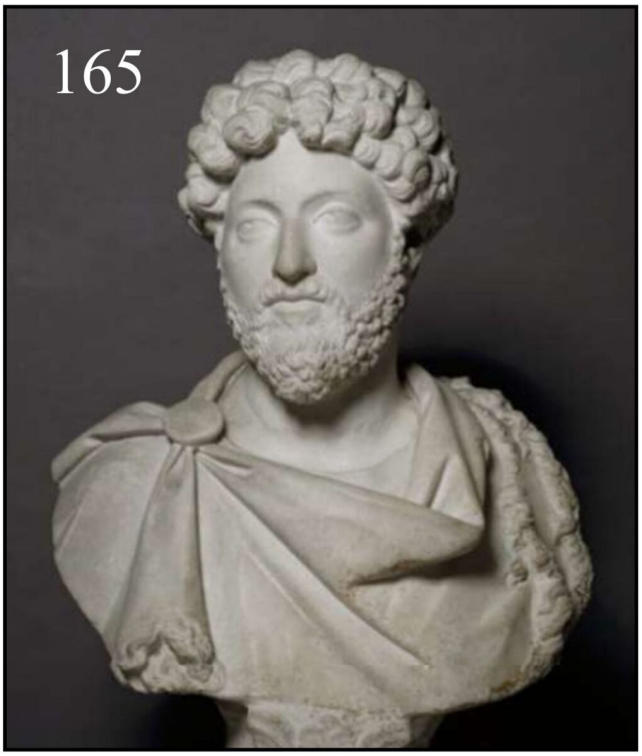
In 175 CE Avidius Cassius, by then the Supreme Commander in the East, having been misinformed that Marcus Aurelius was near death, declared himself Emperor. Marcus Aurelius and the Roman Senate planned an expedition to the East to put down the usurper. However, there was no need. One of Cassius’ centurions murdered him, and sent his head to Rome. Marcus refused to see it and had it properly buried.

For the last decade of his life, Marcus was primarily involved

in the Marcomannic Wars. He spent little time in Rome, apparently preferring the rigor and solitude of the campaigns to the pleasures of the capital. Slowly, he brought peace to the Empire's Northern frontier. The Aurelian Column in Rome (planned in the late 170s and finally constructed just after Marcus' death) portrays various episodes from the wars (Beckmann 2011). The scenes illustrated below show (in counter-clockwise order from the lower left): the legions crossing the Danube River on a bridge of boats; the "Rain Miracle" when the surrounded Roman soldiers, lacking food and water, were rescued by a tremendous downpour represented by the Rain God; the siege of a Barbarian fort using the *testudo* (turtle), wherein the Roman soldiers attacked under cover of their interlocked shields; and Marcus (at the center, perhaps with his son Commodus on the left and a Roman General on the right) accepting the surrender of two Barbarian chieftains, one of whom who offers the Emperor his mantle.

Marcus died in 180 CE in Sirmium, (presently Sremska Mitrovica in Serbia) a Roman settlement about 25 km south of the Danube. Sirmium was later to become a major capital in the Easter Empire, but at the time of Marcus' death it was likely only a small fortified settlement. Marcus had been spitting up blood, and may have suffered from tuberculosis. It is also possible that he was another victim of the Antonine Plague. Some rumors suggested that his doctors had hastened his death in order to curry favor with his son and heir, Commodus, but there is no clear evidence for this.

Many portrait busts were made of Marcus Aurelius (Boschung 2012a). Below are a selection of these busts with approximate dates. The upper busts are from the Capitoline Museum in Rome and Farnborough Hall in Warwickshire, UK; the lower busts are from the British Museum and from the Metropolitan Museum in New York.



The reign of Commodus, the son and successor of Marcus Aurelius, marked the end of the greatest years of the Roman Empire. In his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776), Gibbon describes the 84 years between the death of Domitian in 96 to the death of Marcus in 180 CE as the time when the Roman Empire truly flourished. The Emperors of this

time (Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius – often considered the “Good Emperors,” a term originating with Machiavelli) tempered their power with virtue. However, this could not last when all that stopped an Emperor from abusing his absolute power was his own sense of what was good:

> The labors of these monarchs were overpaid by the immense reward that inseparably waited on their success; by the honest pride of virtue, and by the exquisite delight of beholding the general happiness of which they were the authors. A just but melancholy reflection imbittered, however, the noblest of human enjoyments. They must often have recollected the instability of a happiness which depended on the character of single man. The fatal moment was perhaps approaching, when some licentious youth, or some jealous tyrant, would abuse, to the destruction, that absolute power, which they had exerted for the benefit of their people. The ideal restraints of the senate and the laws might serve to display the virtues, but could never correct the vices, of the emperor. The military force was a blind and irresistible instrument of oppression; and the corruption of Roman manners would always supply flatterers eager to applaud, and ministers prepared to serve, the fear or the avarice, the lust or the cruelty, of their master. (Gibbon, 1776, Chapter III)

Commodus was just such a cruel master.

The Arch of Triumph

Towards the end of the reign of Marcus Aurelius, a monumental arch was erected in Rome to commemorate his triumph over the Barbarians (Boschung, 2012b). No one is sure where the arch was constructed or when it was taken down. Of the eleven known bas-reliefs on the arch, eight were re-used on the Arch of Constantine which was built in 315 CE. Three other reliefs are now in the Capitoline Museum in Rome. One of these (on the right) shows Marcus offering mercy to the conquered Barbarians. The other two (below) show Marcus in his triumphal chariot with a Nike of Victory on his shoulders, and Marcus making a sacrifice to the Gods in gratitude for his success.

The Equestrian Statue

The equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius was likely cast at about the same time as the monumental arch (Stewart, 2012). The statue is made of gilded bronze, as befits the name “Aurelius.” Its survival through the late Roman years and medieval period has been attributed to its being mistakenly considered a representation of Constantine the Great (272-337 CE), the Emperor who made Christianity the religion of the Empire.

Joseph Brodsky provided a marvelous description of the statue in his Homage to Marcus Aurelius (1995):

> The Romans, superstitious like all Italians, maintain that when the bronze Marcus hits the ground, the end of the world will occur. Whatever the origin of this superstition, it stands to reason if one bears in mind that Marcus' motto was Equanimity. The word suggests balance, composure under pressure, evenness of mental disposition; literally: equation of the animus, i.e., keeping the soul—and thus the world—in check. Give this formula of the Stoic posture a possible mis-spelling and you'll get the monument's definition: Equinimity. The horseman tilts, though, somewhat, as if leaning toward his subjects, and his hand is stretched out in a gesture that is a cross between a greeting and a blessing. So much so that for a while some insisted that this was not Marcus Aurelius but Constantine, who converted Rome to Christianity. For that, however, the horseman's face is too serene, too free of zeal or ardor, too uninvolved. It is the face of detachment, not of love—and detachment is precisely what Christianity never could manage. No, this is no Constantine, and no Christian. The face is devoid of any sentiment; it is a postscript to passions, and the lowered corners of the mouth bespeak the lack of illusion. Had there been a smile, you could think perhaps of the Buddha; but the Stoics knew too much about physics to toy with the finality of human existence in any fashion. The face shines with the bronze's original gold, but the hair and the beard have oxidized and turned green, the way one turns gray. All thought aspires to the condition of metal; and the bronze denies you any entry, including interpretation or touch. What you've got here, then, is detachment per se. And out of this detachment the Emperor leans toward you slightly, extending his right hand either to greet you or to bless you—which is to say, acknowledge your presence. For where he is, there is no you, and vice versa. The left hand theoretically holds the reins, which

> are either missing now or were never there in the first place: a horse would obey this rider no matter what. Especially it it represented Nature. For he represents Reason.

Brodsky notes that the fact that Marcus Aurelius has been so long remembered on horseback plays counterpoint to what the Emperor wrote about the transience of life, and quotes his own translation of Book VII Chapter 23 of *The Meditations*.

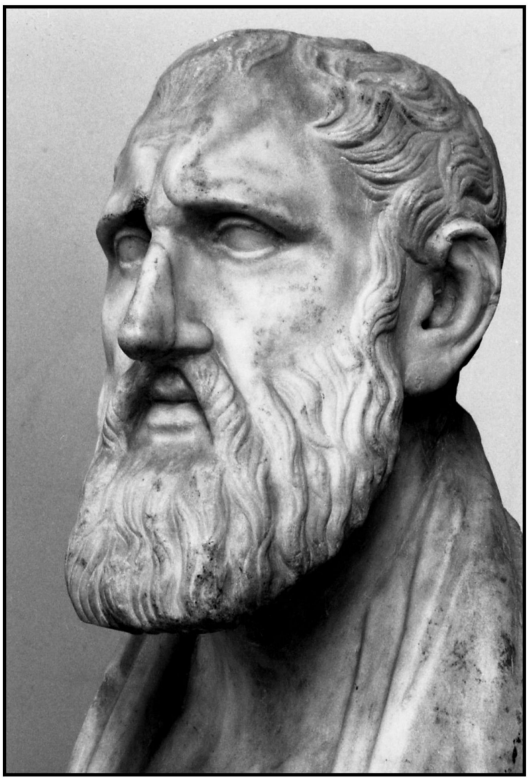
> The universal nature out of the universal substance, as if it were wax, now molds the figure of a horse, then melting this down uses the material for a tree, next for a man, next for something else; and each of these things subsists for a very short time. Yet it is no hard-ship for a box to be broken up, as it was none for it to be nailed together.

Stoicism

The success of Marcus Aurelius as an Emperor owed much to his Stoicism. Gibbon (1776, Chapter III) remarked

> At the age of twelve years he embraced the rigid system of the Stoics, which taught him to submit his body to his mind, his passions to his reason; to consider virtue as the only good, vice as the only evil, all things external as things indifferent. His meditations, composed in the tumult of the camp, are still extant; and he even condescended to give lessons of philosophy, in a more public manner than was perhaps consistent with the modesty of sage, or the dignity of an emperor. But his life was the noblest commentary on the precepts of Zeno. He was severe to himself, indulgent to the imperfections of others, just and beneficent to all mankind. … War he detested, as the disgrace and calamity of human nature; but when the necessity of a just defence called upon him to take up arms, he readily exposed his person to eight winter campaigns, on the frozen banks of the Danube, the severity of which was at last fatal to the

weakness of his constitution.



Any understanding of the Emperor's philosophy and writings will require at least some brief acquaintance with Stoicism, the philosophical system initially proposed by philosophers in Athens, most importantly by Zeno of Citium (344-262 BCE). The illustration on the right shows a Roman copy of an Hellenic portrait bust of Zeno, now in the National Archaeological Museum of Naples.

The name derives from the *Stoa poikile* (painted porch) on the Northern edge of the *Agora* (gathering place) in the center of Athens, where Zeno and his follows met to discuss philosophy. Stoicism was one of several schools of philosophy Hellenistic Athens. Epicureanism and Skepticism were others.

Stoicism was mainly concerned with three areas of knowledge: logic, physics and ethics. According to Diogenes Laertius' *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* (3rd Century CE, quoted in Inwood & Gerson, p 110)

> They compare philosophy to an animal, likening logic to the bones and sinews, ethics to the fleshier parts and physics to the soul. … Or to a productive field, of which logic is the wall surrounding it, ethics the fruit and physics is the land and trees.

a) logic

The Stoics, particularly Chrysippus of Soli (279-206 BCE made significant advances in formalizing our logic. Aristotle had given us term (or predicate) logic of the form

> All men are mortal
> Socrates is a man
> Therefore Socrates is mortal

The Stoics described the principles of propositional (or statement) logic of which the following syllogisms are examples

If p then q	If p then q
Given p	Given Not q
Therefore q	Therefore Not p
(modus ponens)	(modus tollens)

Term logic deals with what things are; propositional logic deals with how things are related. Term logic provides us with classifications and definitions; propositional logic gives us causes and their effects.

b) physics

Stoic studies of logic had shown how the parts of the world were closely connected, and how reason could organize events according to cause and effect. The Stoics then proposed that

the whole universe is pervaded by an intelligence, called *logos* (word, thought, discourse, reason), that arranges everything to ensure the maximum benefit for all its components. The idea of a universe directed toward the good by Providence (from *pro+videre* to foresee) clearly differentiated the Stoics from the Epicureans, who proposed a universe composed of atoms that interact without purpose.

The ideas of the Stoics were later taken up by the early Christians, who proposed that Christ was the physical representation of the *logos*. The Apostle Paul gave a sermon in Athens to an assembly of philosophers, many of them Stoics, relating the new religion to their ideas:

> God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;
> Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;
> And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;
> That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:
> For in him we live, and move, and have our being (*Acts* 17: 24-28)

c) ethics

Ethics was the essence of stoicism. Philosophy should be considered as a way of life rather than a body of knowledge. Stoics proposed that we should act in "accord" with Nature – living our lives the way that the *logos* intended us to live, and thereby fulfilling our own human nature. Their goal was not the happiness sought by the Epicureans but the virtue attained by doing good. Nevertheless, virtue brings happiness

(or tranquility) through the knowledge that we are acting our part in the divine purpose of the universe.

The Stoics believed that things of themselves do not cause pain or happiness. These effects occur only if we allow our governing soul to be affected by them. The true stoic would not allow his or her inner self to be upset by pain or carried away by lust. Many have therefore concluded that the Stoic suppresses all emotion, but this is not true. As pointed out by Waterfield (2021, p lii) Stoics can experience three good feelings (*eupatheia*):

> Volition (the rational pursuit of something), caution (the rational avoidance of something) and joy (rational elation).

Acting in accord with Nature means that we must do what we can to benefit our fellows. Stoics were drawn to formal public service. In this they once again distinguished themselves from the Epicureans who eschewed politics.

d) Roman Stoicism

The Romans took to Greek philosophy with enthusiasm. Although the poets were more likely to side with the Epicureans and live only for the moment, those in government found more comfort in Stoicism. They followed the ethics of Stoicism but cared little for the physics. It mattered not whether the universe was purposeful or random, one must still aspire to virtue. Seneca the Younger (4 BCE – 65 CE) wrote

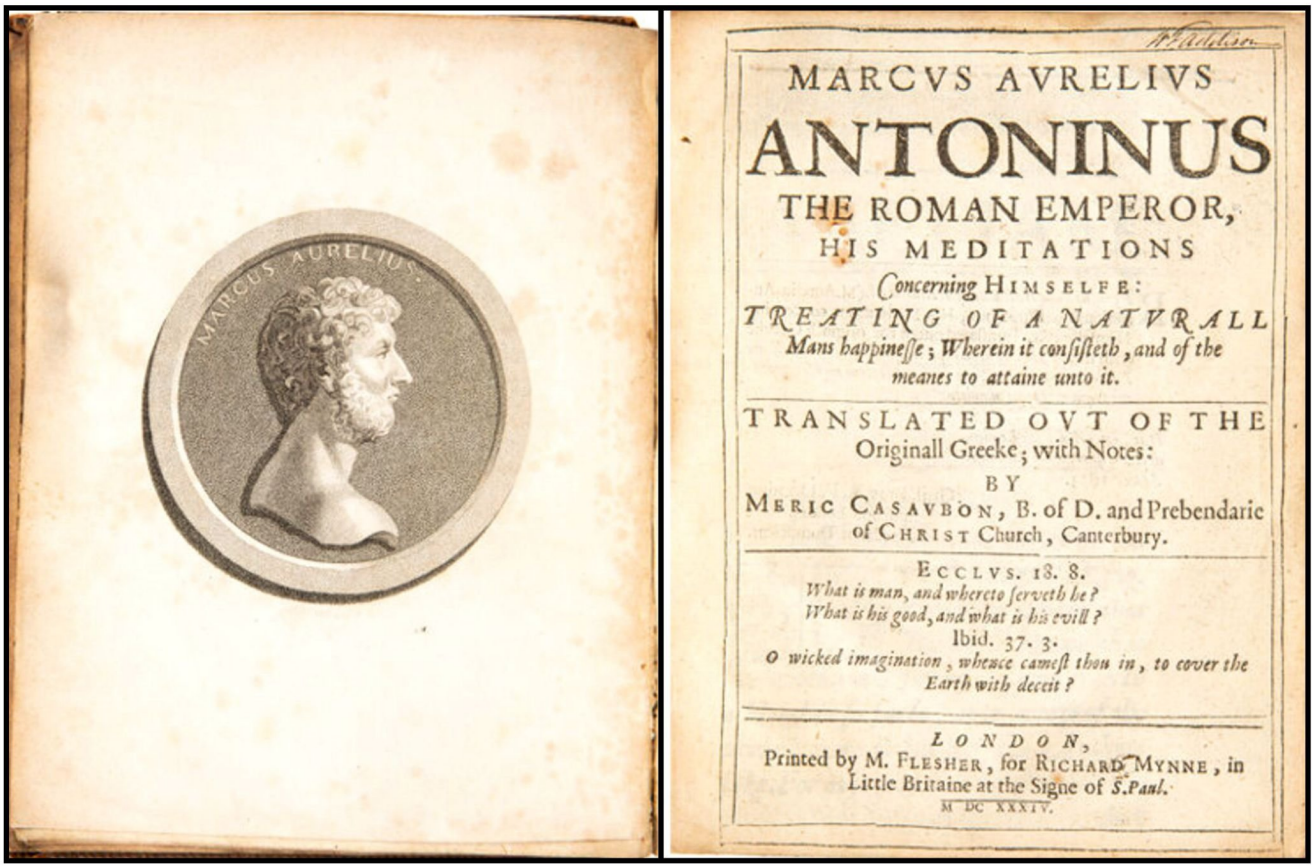
> Someone will say, “What use is philosophy to me if there is fate? What use is it if God is in charge? What use, if chance has the mastery? For what is certain cannot be changed, and against what is uncertain there is no way to prepare oneself. Either God has pre-empted my planning and decreed what I should do, or fortune has left nothing for my planning to achieve.” No matter which is true, Lucilius, or even if they all are, we must still practice philosophy. Perhaps the inexorable law of fate constrains us; perhaps

> God, the universal arbiter, governs all events; perhaps it is chance that drives human affairs, and disrupts them: all the same, it is philosophy that must preserve us. Philosophy will urge us to give willing obedience to God, and but a grudging obedience to fortune. It will teach you to follow God; to cope with chance. (*Letters to Lucilius* 16: 4-5)

The *Meditations*

During the last years of his life, Marcus would retire by himself in his army tent near the Danube to contemplate and to write about what he was thinking. As befitting their philosophical nature, these thoughts were written in Greek, even though Marcus was not completely fluent in this language. After his death Marcus' notes were compiled by his secretaries into a book called Τὰ εἰς ἑαυτόν (*Ta Eis Heauton*, "Things to oneself"). Meric Casaubon entitled his translation of the book *Meditations* (1634), and this title has become widely accepted in English German uses *Selbstbetrachtungen*, self-examinations, and French uses the simple *Pensées*, thoughts. The illustration below shows the title page of Casaubon's translation. He uses as an epigraph a quotation from *Ecclesiasticus* 18:8

> What is man, and whereto serveth he? What is his good, and what is his evil?



In the first section (Book I) Marcus thanks those who helped him during his life. The next sections (Books II to XII) contain a variety of thoughts, questions, quotations, aphorisms, and longer discussions. Each of these sections is a combination of a diary of his thoughts and a “commonplace book” – a trove of ideas to be evaluated and remembered. The writing has no overall organizing principle, is very repetitious and occasionally contradicts itself. The ideas are easier to read intermittently and randomly rather than in sequence.

The book is not easy to translate. Marcus’ Greek “is not noted for its elegance; it can be crabbed and awkward” (Hard, 2011). His “writing is often concise, occasionally even to the point of being no more than notes and jottings” (Waterfield, 2021). The “expressions are often obscure and he uses awkward and unusual construction” (Staniforth 1964). As an example of the difficulties, we can look at the various translations of the famous first sentence of Book II Chapter11:

> Ὡς ἤδη δυνατοῦ ὄντος ἐξιέναι τοῦ βίου, οὕτως ἕκαστα ποιεῖν καὶ λέγειν καὶ διανοεῖσθαι.
>
> However/by now/mighty/truly/sum/any/life,/therefore/each/action/and/word/and/be minded.

Casaubon (1634): Whatsoever thou dost affect, whatsoever thou dost project, so do, and so project all, as one who, for aught thou knowest, may at this very present depart out of this life.

Long (1862): Since it is possible that you may depart from life this very moment, regulate every act and thought accordingly.

Haines (1916): Let thine every deed and word and thought be those of a man who can depart from life this moment.

Staniforth (1964): In all you do or say or think, recollect that at any time the power of withdrawal from life is in your own hands.

Hard (2011): Let your every action, word and thought be those of one who could depart from life at any moment.

Dewinetz (2019): You could die right now, so act like it.

Waterfield (2021): Everything you do and say and think should be predicated on the possibility of your imminent departure from life.

Other than this famous exhortation to live as if one were about to die, the following are some of the main ideas proposed in *The Meditations*:

(i) assent

The universe is proceeding as it must. The mind must live in accord with the universe, accepting its ends and not worrying

about its means.

> Always think of the universe as one living organism, with a single substance and a single soul: and observe how all things are submitted to the single perceptivity of this one whole, all are moved by its single impulse, and all play their part in the causation of every event that happens. Remark the intricacy of the skein, the complexity of the web. (IV: 40, Staniforth)

> There are thus two reasons why you should be contented with whatever happens to you. Firstly, that it was for you that it came about, and it was prescribed for you and stands in a special relationship to you as something that was woven into your destiny from the beginning …and secondly that, for the power which governs the whole that which comes to each of us individually contributes to its own well-being and perfection. (V: 48, Hard)

> We are all working together to one end, some with knowledge and design, and others without knowing what they do. (VI: 42, Long)

(ii) tranquility

The person has three parts – the body, the spirit and the mind (or ruling center). The impressions from the world affect the body and activate the spirit. Yet one must not let the mind be ruled by these reflex activations. One must keep oneself beyond the reach of the passions by retreating into the mind and acting only according to reason:

> Be like a headland: the waves beat against it continuously, but it stands fast and around it the boiling water dies down. (IV: 49, Waterfield)

> An intelligence free of passions is a mighty citadel, for man has no stronghold more secure to which he can retreat. (VIII: 48, Hard)

(iii) benevolence

One should help others as best one can.

> That which is not in the interests of the hive cannot be in the interests of the bee (VI: 53, Haines)

> Men exist for the sake of one another. Teach them or bear with them. (VIII: 59, Long).

> Precisely because you personally are part of the whole that is the body politic, every one of your actions should contribute to a life the purpose of which is to improve society (IX: 23, Waterfield)

> First, never act without plan and purpose. Second, set your sights on no other goal but the common good. (XII: 20, Waterfield)

Epilogue

Throughout The Meditations, Marcus Aurelius insists that his own life was but a tiny moment in the life of the universe and that he would not be remembered beyond his death:

> Soon you will have forgotten the world, and soon the world will have forgotten you (VII;21, Staniforth).

> Keep all time and all being constantly before your mind, and see that, in terms of being, every individual thing is no more than a fig seed, and in terms of time no more than a twist of a drill (X: 17, Waterfield)

Despite these comments, Marcus Aurelius has been remembered and revered for almost two millennia. I shall complete the post with a longer quotation from *The Meditations* about the passage of time, and with a photograph of the one of his best-preserved portrait busts, now in the Musée Saint-Raymond in Toulouse.

A person’s lifetime is a moment, his existence a flowing

> stream, his perception dull, the entire fabric of his body readily subject to decay, his soul an aimless wanderer, his fortune erratic, his fame uncertain. In short: the body is nothing but a river; the soul is dream and delusion; life is war and a sojourn in a strange land; and oblivion is all there is to posthumous fame. What, then, can escort us safely on our way? Only one thing: philosophy. This consists in keeping the guardian spirit within us safe from assault and harm, never swayed by pleasure or pain, purposeful when it acts, free from dishonesty or dissemblance, and never dependent on action or inaction from anyone else. It also consists in accepting what happens, the lot one has been assigned, as coming from the same source as oneself, and in always awaiting death with a serene mind, understanding that it's no more than the disintegration of the elements of which every living creature is a compound. If there's nothing unusual in the elements themselves changing moment by moment one into another, why should the alteration and disintegration of them all be a cause for anxiety? It's in accord with nature, and nothing that's in accord with nature is bad. Book II:17 (Waterfield, 2021)

Translations of the *Meditations*

The original Greek is available at the Perseus Website.

Casaubon, M. (1634). *Marcus Aurelius Antoninus the Roman emperor, his meditations concerning himselfe treating of a naturall mans happinesse; wherein it consisteth, and of the meanes to attaine unto it.* London: Flesher and Mynne. (A modernized version of this translation edited and introduced by W. H. Rouse was published by Dent under the title *The Golden Book of Marcus Aurelius* in 1906. Available at archive.org.)

Long, G. (1862, revised 1874). *The meditations of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus.* New York: Lovell and Coryell (This translation has been extensively republished in various

formats). Available at archive.org.

Haines, C. R. (1916). *Marcus Aurelius*. Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press.

Staniforth, M. (1964). *Meditations*. *Marcus Aurelius, Emperor of Rome, 121-180*. London: Penguin.

Hard, R. (2011). *Marcus Aurelius. Meditations with selected correspondence*. Oxford World Classics.

Dewinetz, J. (2019). *Marcus Aurelius, Sort of*. Vernon, BC, Canada: Greenboathouse Press. (A loose translation (or transmogrification) of Book II of *The Meditations*).

Waterfield, R. (2021). *Marcus Aurelius. Meditations: The Annotated Edition.* New York: Basic Books.

References

Baltzly, D. (2019). Stoicism. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* Edward N. Zalta (ed.)

Beckmann, M. (2011). *The Column of Marcus Aurelius: the genesis & meaning of a Roman imperial monument*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Birley, A. (1993)*. Marcus Aurelius: A Biography* (2nd ed., Revised). Routledge.

Boschung, D. (2012a). The portraits: a short introduction. In van Ackeren, M. (Ed) *A companion to Marcus Aurelius*. (pp 294-304). Wiley-Blackwell.

Boschung, D. (2012b). The reliefs: representation of Marcus Aurelius' deeds. In van Ackeren, M. (Ed) *A companion to Marcus Aurelius*. (pp 305-314). Wiley-Blackwell.

Brodsky, J. (1995). Homage to Marcus Aurelius. In Brodsky, J. *On grief and reason: essays*. (pp 267-298). New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.

Gibbon, E. (1776, revised 1845). *History of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire.* Volume I. London: Strahan and Cadell. Available at gutenberg.org

Hadot, P. (1992). *La citadelle intérieure: introduction aux Pensées de Marc Aurèle*. Paris: Fayard. (translated by M. Chase, 1998). *The Inner Citadel: The* Meditations *of Marcus Aurelius.* Harvard University Press.

Inwood, B. (2018). *Stoicism: a very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Inwood, B., & Gerson, L. P. (1998). *Hellenistic Philosophy Introductory Readings* (2nd ed.). Hackett Publishing Company

Kamtekar, R. (2018). Marcus Aurelius. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* Edward N. Zalta (ed.)

McLynn. F. (2009). *Marcus Aurelius: warrior, philosopher, emperor*. London: Bodley Head.

Sellars, J. (2006). *Stoicism*. University of California Press.

Seneca the Younger (65 CE, translated by Graver, M., & Long, A. A., 2015). *Letters on ethics to Lucilius.* University of Chicago Press.

Stephens, W. O. (2012). *Marcus Aurelius: a guide for the perplexed*. Continuum International Pub. Group.

Stewart, P. (2012). The Equestrian Statue of Marcus Aurelius. In van Ackeren, M. (Ed) *A companion to Marcus Aurelius*. (pp 263-277). Wiley-Blackwell.

Condemned to be Free

When Paris was liberated in August, 1944, everything was possible. A new world needed to be created to protect their regained freedom. The philosophy that epitomized this desire for freedom was “existentialism.” The term, originally used in a derogatory sense to characterize those who followed the philosophical concept of the primacy of “being,” was grudgingly accepted by Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir as a description of their thinking. Existentialism fitted easily with the idea of the absurd proposed by Albert Camus. These concepts became the main focus of both art and philosophy in the decade that followed the end of World War II.

Existentialism

Although there were precursors, existentialism was largely the work of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986). They met in 1929 and became lifelong companions, although they were never married and never monogamous (Bakewell, 2016; Seymour-Jones, 2008). Women should be just as free as men (de Beauvoir, 1949). In the a*grégation en philosophie* of 1930, a national exam organized by the French civil service, Sartre and de Beauvoir placed first and second. Sartre was short – about 5 feet – and the exotropia of his right eye (caused by a childhood infection) gave him a disconcerting appearance; de Beauvoir was tall – about 5 feet 10 inches – and elegant.

Sartre and de Beauvoir were the leading intellectuals of France during the war. In a break with tradition, they were as much creative artists as philosophers. The theory of Sartre's *L'Être et le Néant (Being and Nothingness)* was illustrated in the novel *La Nausée* (1938), and in the plays and *Les Mouches* (1943) and *Huis Clos* (1944). Since art is far more convincing than theory y, existentialism became more popular than any previous philosophy.

The main tenets of existentialism were summarized by Sartre in a lecture in October 1945, subsequently published as *Existentialisme est un humanism* (1946). The key to the philosophy is the idea that "existence precedes essence:"

> What do we mean here by "existence precedes essence"? We mean that man first exists: he materializes in the world, encounters himself, and onlv afterward defines himself. If man as existentialists conceive of him cannot be defined, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature since there is no God to conceive of it. Man is not only that which he conceives himself to be, but that which he wills himself to be, and since he conceives of himself only after he exists, iust as he wills himself to be after being thrown into existence, man is nothing other than what he makes of himself. This is the first principle of existentialism. (Sartre, 1946)

We could therefore not look to God for guidance as to what was right. Instead, we must create our own morality. In her essay *Existentialisme et la sagesse des nations* (1945), de Beauvoir wrote:

> I throw myself without help and without guidance into a world where I am not installed ahead of time waiting for myself. I am free, and my projects are not defined by pre-existing interests; they posit their own ends. … Man may not be naturally good, but he is not naturally bad either; he is nothing at first. It is up to him to make himself good or bad depending on whether he assumes his freedom or renounces it. (de Beauvoir, 1945).

In addition to being responsible for his own actions, a person must by his or her example be responsible for the actions of others. The recognition of others is part and parcel of the

existential being:

> Therefore, the man who becomes aware of himself directly in the *cogito* also perceives all others, and he does so as the condition of his own existence. He realizes that he cannot be anything (in the sense in which we say someone is spiritual, or cruel, or jealous) unless others acknowledge him as such. I cannot discover any truth whatsoever about myself except through the mediation of another. The other is essential to my existence, as well as to the knowledge I have of myself. (Sartre, 1946).

And so, we are "condemned to be free:"

> If, however, God does not exist, we will encounter no values or orders that can legitimize our conduct. Thus, we have neither behind us, nor before us, in the luminous realm of values, any means of justification or excuse. We are left alone and without excuse. That is what I mean when I say that man is condemned to be free: condemned, because he did not create himself, yet nonetheless free, because once cast into the world, he is responsible for everything he does. (Sartre, 1946).

The existentialism of Sartre was atheistic. If there is no Creator, there is no design that defines the essence of man and that determines how he should act. Man defines his own essence. However, although most existentialists tended to atheism, several religious thinkers promulgated a Christian variant of existentialism (Marcel, 1949,1951; Macquarrie, 1965). In this philosophy existence is a gift – we are allowed rather than condemned to be free. Faith is an act of freedom.

Being

Sartre had studied the philosophy of Husserl and Heidegger in the period when he was appointed to the *Institut français*

d'Allemagne in Berlin (1933-34). The title of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943) clearly alluded to Martin Heidegger's, *Being and Time* (1927). The concept of existence preceding essence was likely derived from Heidegger's philosophy, which distinguished man from other beings in terms of his freedom. Heidegger (§10) did claim that *existentia* preceded *essentia,* but for him the latter was simply the properties of a being, without Sartre's connotation of a design used in the creation of particular examples (Flynn, 2014, p 237; Webber, 2018, p 8). For Heidegger, human beings were distinct from other beings since their consciousness granted them a particular point of view within the world – a *Da-Sein* or "being-there." One of Heidegger's numerous neologisms described this as *Jemeinigkeit* – always being my own being. *Da-Sein* was characterized by embodiment, location in space and time, and an awareness of mortality. Heidegger denied that he was an existentialist, though many have so described him (e.g., Kaufmann, 1963; Macquarie, 1965; Flynn, 2006).

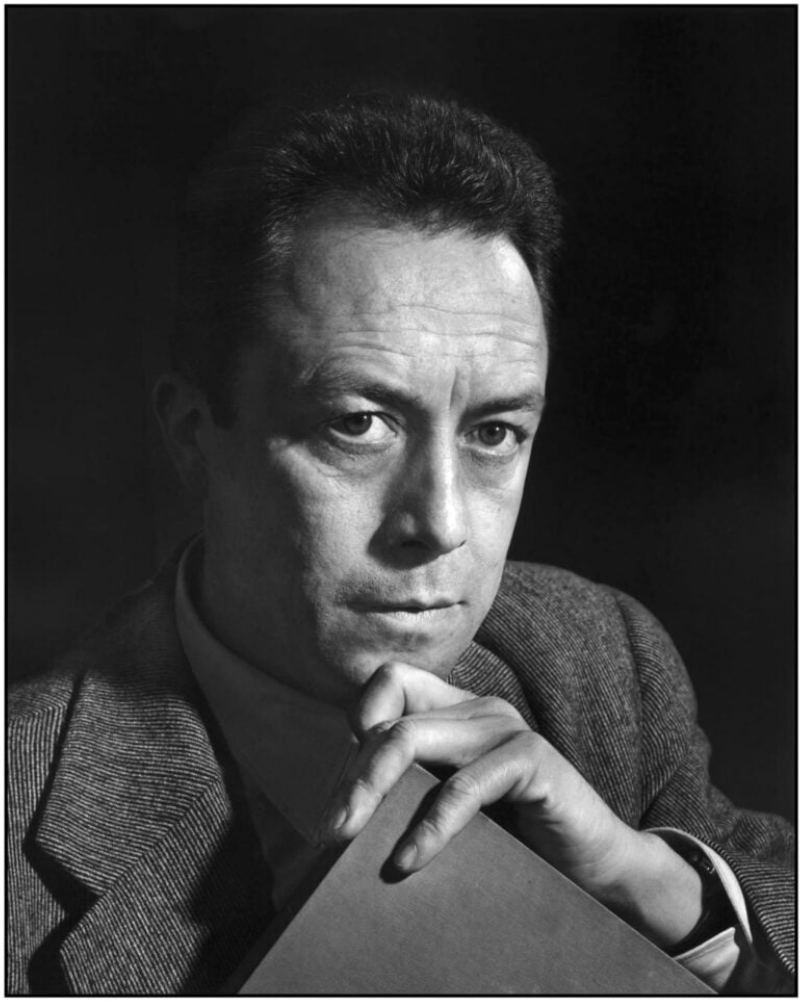
Heidegger (1889-1976) had become Professor of Philosophy at the University of Freiburg in 1928, and was elected Rector in 1933, the year that Hitler came to power. Heidegger was entranced by the idea of the German *Volk* and became an enthusiastic member of the Nazi Party. He claimed to have been blind to the racism and warmongering of the party, but his reputation was forever tainted by his support of Hitler. Heidegger was a philosopher who recognized the importance of being, and realized the freedom it entailed. Yet he failed to exercise that freedom with responsibility. One of the main ideas of the existentialism proposed by Sartre and de Beauvoir was the necessity that actions freely chosen must be held accountable.

The Absurd

At the opening night of *Les Mouches* in 1943, Albert Camus (1913-1960) introduced himself to Sartre. Camus had just published a novel *L'Étranger* and a book of philosophical

essays entitled *Le mythe de Sisyphe*. Sartre had been impressed by these works, and he was charmed by the young author. Sartre and Camus became fast friends (Aronson, 2004; Zaretsky, 2013).

Camus was an Algerian of French origin (derogatively known as a "pied noir," though no one is completely sure of the origin of the term). After graduating from university, he joined the Algerian Communist Party and wrote for a leftist newspaper in Algiers. When this was banned by the new government of occupied France in 1940, Camus moved to Paris. There he worked for *Combat*, the clandestine newspaper of the French Resistance, becoming its editor in 1944. Throughout his life he suffered from chronic tuberculosis. The 1954 portrait below is by Karsh.



Camus' *Le Mythe of Sisyphe* has the most striking opening of any work of philosophy:

> There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest – whether or not the world has three dimensions whether the mind has nine of twelve categories – comes afterwards. These are games; one must first answer.

Camus points out the paradox of the question. What makes life worth living – whether it be freedom, truth, love, beauty –is also that for which one is willing to die. The absurd rests at the heart of the human condition (Carroll, 2007). The word derives from the Latin *ab* (from, out of) and *surdus* which means deaf (and by association, silent) and generally means lacking in reason or meaning. Nagel (1971) describes our sense of the absurd as the discrepancy between how seriously we attempt to understand the universe and how arbitrarily the universe actually proceeds. Camus describes it:

> What, then, is that incalculable feeling that deprives the mind of the sleep necessary to life? A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity. (Camus, 1942).

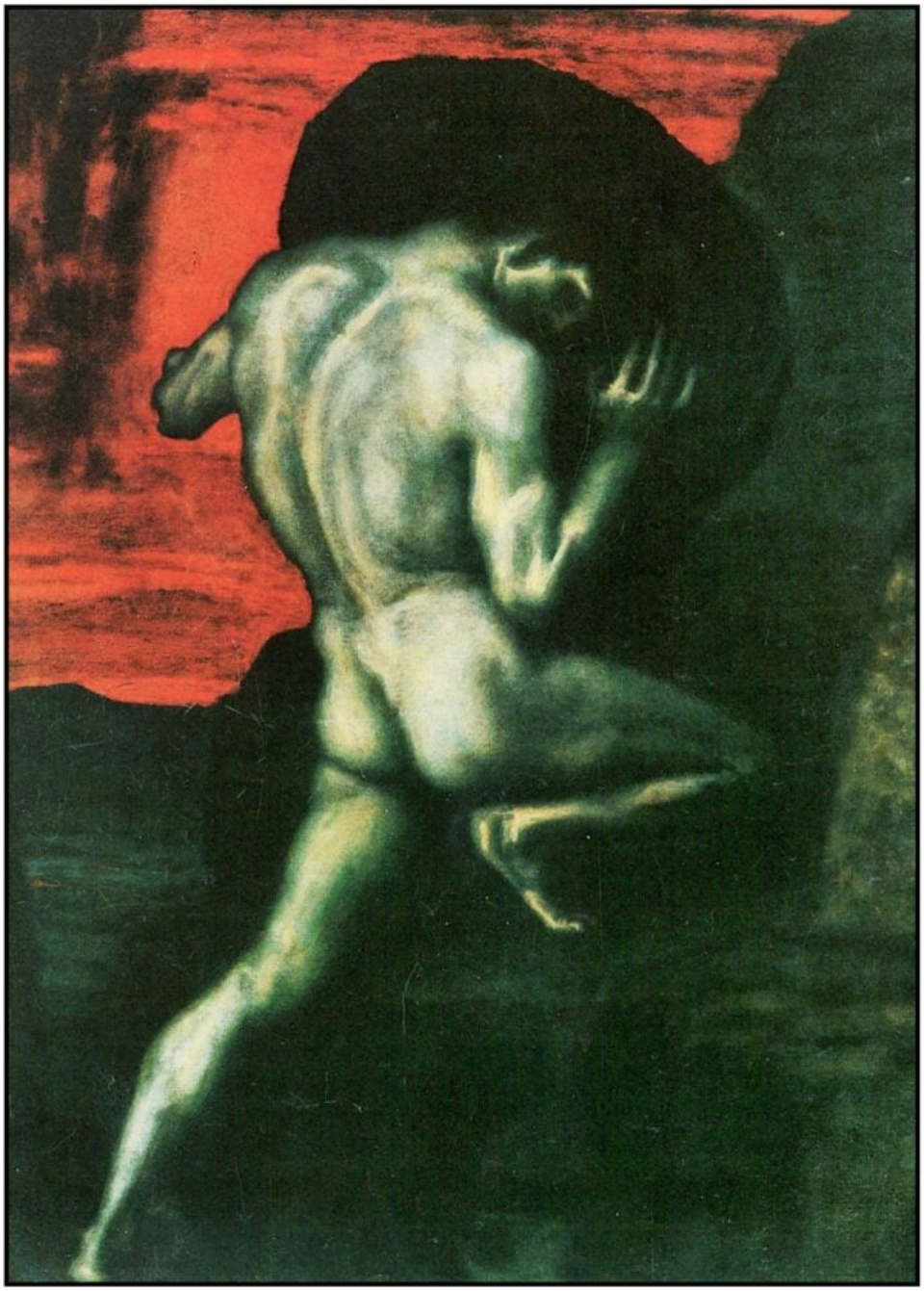
Camus traces the idea of absurdity in Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche and Kafka. (The chapter on Kafka was removed from the initial edition of the book by the censors since Kafka was Jewish). Camus finds that the absurdity of the human condition is what makes artistic creation necessary. He quotes Nietzsche (from the *Nachlass*)

> We have art in order not to die of the truth.

And proceeds to describe the process of art in an absurd world:

> The problem for the absurd artist is to acquire this savoir-vivre which transcends savoir-faire. And in the end, the great artist under this climate is, above all, a great living being, it being understood that living in this case is just as much experiencing as reflecting. The work then embodies an intellectual drama. The absurd work illustrates thought’s renouncing of its prestige and its resignation to being no more than the intelligence that works up appearances and covers with images what has no reason. If the world were clear, art would not exist.

Camus concludes his book with an essay on Sisyphus. The illustration below shows a 1920 painting by Franz von Stuck. Sisyphus refused to accept death and insisted on living. For this love of life, the gods condemned him forever to roll an immense boulder up a hill only to have it roll back as soon as it reached the top, so that he must continuously begin again. Camus sees in Sisyphus the artist in an absurd world:



I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one’s burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.

Darkness at Noon

Between the liberation and the elections leading to the Fourth Republic in 1946, France was governed by the Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Française, consisting of representatives from the communist party, the socialists, and the Christian democrats. Given the economic debacle of the 1930s and the war against the fascists, politics tended toward the left and many considered the possibility of joining the international communist revolution. However, the institution of the Marshall Plan in 1947 led the French government to exclude the communists from the governing coalition. The Cold war was beginning.

Everyone remembered Stalin's Great Purge of 1937 and 1938, wherein countless members of the military and the government were put on trial for being traitors to the revolution, and either executed or sent to forced-labor camps in the Gulag. The most striking of these trials was that of Nikolai Bukharin, who had written *The ABC of Communism* (the "communist bible"), and who had served on the Politburo and the Comintern. The illustration below shows Bukharin with Stalin in 1929 on the tribune of the Lenin Mausoleum on Red Square in Moscow.

At his trial Bukharin confessed to his crimes against the Revolution, but did not acknowledge any specific acts of treason. His confession is often interpreted as the last act of a true believer – one who willingly sacrificed himself so that the revolution might prosper.

In 1940, Arthur Koestler published *Darkness at Noon*, a novel that is based on the interrogation and trial of Bukharin. The title, derived from Job 5:14 by Koestler's translator and mistress, Daphne Hardy, described the state of moral confusion that surrounded the trial.

> They meet with darkness in the day time, and grope in the noonday as in the night.

The novel's main character, Rubashov, undergoes three interrogations and finally admits to betraying the revolution, and is executed. The issue is whether it is justified to

abrogate present morality for the sake of a future utopia. Should one deny truth and justice in order to bring about a paradise promised, but certainly not guaranteed, by the revolution. As the epitaph for the second interrogation Koestler quoted from Dietrich von Nieheim's 1410 history of the Avignon papacy:

> When the existence of the Church is threatened, she is released from the commandments of morality. With unity as the end, the use of every means is sanctified, even deceit, treachery, violence, usury, prison, and death. Because order serves the good of the community, the individual must be sacrificed for the common good.

When published in France in 1944, Koestler's novel initiated extensive discussion. Could the show trials, the executions and the labor camps of the USSR be justified by the goals of the communist revolution? How far can the ends justify the means? In the years that followed World War II, the USSR continued to restrict the freedom of its artists, and to conduct show trials of those who had supposedly betrayed the revolution. In his 1947 essay on *Humanism and Terror*, Merleau-Ponty attempted to justify the purges and the labor camps. Merleau-Ponty later recanted, but Sartre continued his steadfast support of the communists, despite the Berlin blockade (1948-9) and the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution (1956). Only when the USSR invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968, did he finally renounce the USSR's claim to represent the true course of history

Man in Revolt

In 1951, Camus published *L'homme révolté*. The title is usually translated as *The Rebel*, though Camus is more concerned with revolution than rebellion – with changing society for the future rather than reacting against the past. In this work, Camus considered whether violence can be justified in order to

alter the course of history toward a better future. The book poses a question complementary to that posed in *Le mythe de Sisyphe*:

> In the age of negation, it was to some avail to examine one's position concerning suicide. In the age of ideologies, we must examine our position in relation to murder.

In his book Camus reviews the history of revolution and terror as treated by philosophers and writers. He considers Ivan's story of the "Grand Inquisitor" in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* as representative of how revolutions end with loss of freedom:

> the Grand Inquisitors who imprison Christ and come to tell Him that His method is not correct, that universal happiness cannot be achieved by the immediate freedom of choosing between good and evil, but by the domination and unification of the world. The first step is to conquer and rule. The kingdom of heaven will, in fact, appear on earth, but it will be ruled over by men – a mere handful to begin with, who will be the Caesars, because they were the first to understand – and later, with time, by all men. (Camus, 1951).

Camus castigates the totalitarian movements of the 20th Century – communism and fascism – for promising freedom but, in reality, making the people mindless slaves. The future must not be used to justify violence in the present. In opposition to totalitarianism he proposed, albeit not very forcefully, the need for solidarity and moderation.

Camus, the one-time communist, had come to realize that the cult of history can support crimes against humanity. He had thus distanced himself from many of his intellectual friends who supported the ideals of the communist revolution. His book was lauded by right-wing critics, and led to a complete

rupture with Sartre (Aronson, 2004; Forsdick, 2007)

Sartre, the editor of *Les Temps Modernes* disliked the book's conclusions, but did not wish to review it personally because of his friendship with Camus. Ultimately, he arranged for a very negative review by Francis Jeanson to be published in the journal. Jeanson's critique infuriated Camus, who immediately wrote a rebuttal. He felt it inappropriate to be described as "being separated from reality" given his activity with the Résistance:

> I am beginning to get a little tired of seeing myself – and even more, of seeing former militants who have never refused the struggles of their time – endlessly receive lessons in efficacy from critics who have never done anything more than turn their seats in the direction of history.

Jeanson replied to Camus, and Sartre then published a patronizing public letter to Camus, beginning "My dear Camus," wherein he accuses him of a "dismal self-importance" and claimed:

> If you really hope to prevent any movement of the people from degenerating into tyranny, don't begin by condemning it without appeal, and threatening to retreat to a desert.

Camus and Sartre never talked again.

The Death of Camus

On January 4, 1960, Camus died in a car accident. After celebrating the New Year in Lourmarin, he accepted a ride back to Paris with his publisher Michel Gallimard. Gallimard was driving, Camus was in the front and Gallimard’s wife and daughter were in the back. The car suffered a punctured tire at high speed and crashed into a tree. Camus was killed instantly and Michel Gallimard died several days later. Gallimard’s wife and daughter survived.

There has been some speculation that the tire was sabotaged by the KGB to silence Camus as a critic of international communism (Catelli, 2020). However, there is little hard evidence. It is easier to accept the crash as another example of the arbitrary absurdity of human life. Camus had intended

to take the train back to Paris, before Michel Gallimard offered him a ride in his luxurious Facel Vega.

In his eulogy for his old friend, Sartre, who had not been in contact with Camus since 1952 wrote:

> He represented in our time the latest example of that long line of *moralistes* whose works constitute perhaps the most original element in French letters. His obstinate humanism, narrow and pure, austere and sensual, waged an uncertain war against the massive and formless events of the time. (Sartre, 1960).

References

Aronson, R. (2004). *Camus and Sartre: the story of a friendship and the quarrel that ended it.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bakewell, S. (2016). *At the existentialist café: freedom, being and apricot cocktails with Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and others*. London: Chatto & Windus.

de Beauvoir, S. (1945). L'existentialisme et la sagesse des nations. *Les Temps Modernes*, 1(3): 385–404. [translated by M Timmerman in by Simons, M. A. (Ed.) (2005). *Beauvoir, Simone de: Philosophical Writings*, Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press].

de Beauvoir, S. (1949). *Le deuxième sexe.* 1*, Les faits et les mythes 2 L'expérience vécue*. Paris: Gallimard. [translated by C. Borde and S. Malovany-Chevallier, 2010, *The Second Sex*. New York Vintage (Random House)].

Camus, A. (1942). *L'Étranger*. Paris:Gallimard.

Camus, A. (1942). *Le mythe de Sisyphe: essai sur l'absurde*.

Paris: Gallimard. [English translation: J. O'Brien (1955). The myth of Sisyphus. London: Hamish Hamilton.]

Camus, A. (1951). *L'homme révolté*. Paris: Gallimard. [English translation: A. Bower (1954). *The rebel: an essay on man in revolt*. New York: Knopf]

Carroll, D. (2007). Rethinking the absurd: Le mythe de Sisyphe. In E. J. Hughes (Ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Camus.* (pp 53-56). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Catelli, G., (translated by Tanzi, A., 2020). *The death of Camus*. London: Hurst & Company.

Dostoyevsky, F., (1880, translated by Pevear, R., & Volokhonsky, L., 1992). *The brothers Karamazov*. New York: Knopf

Flynn, T. (2006). *Existentialism: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Flynn, T. (2014). *Sartre: a philosophical biography*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Forsdick, C. (2007). Camus and Sartre: the great quarrel. In E. J. Hughes (Ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Camus.* (pp 118-130). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Heidegger, M. (1927, translated by Stambaugh, J., 1996). *Being and time: a translation of Sein und Zeit*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Kaufmann, W. (1963). *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre.* Cleveland: World Publishing.

Koestler, A. (translated by Hardy, D. 1940). *Darkness at noon*. London: Macmillan.

Macquarrie, J. (1965). *Studies in Christian Existentialism*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press.

Marcel, G. (1949). *The philosophy of existence*. New York: Philosophical Library.

Marcel, G. (1951). *The Mystery of Being*, vol.1, *Reflection and Mystery*, translated by G. S. Fraser, vol.2, *Faith and Reality*, translated by René Hague. London: The Harvill Press.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1947, translated by J. O'Neill, 1969). *Humanism and terror: an essay on the Communist problem.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Nagel, T. (1971). The absurd. *Journal of Philosophy*, 68, 716-727.

Sartre, J-P. (1938). *La nausée*. Paris: Gallimard.

Sartre, J-P. (1943). *L'être et le néant, essai d'ontologie phénoménologique.* Paris: Gallimard. [translated by Barnes, H. (1956). *Being and nothingness: a phenomenological essay on ontology*. New York: Washington Square Press.]

Sartre, J-P. (1946/1996). *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*. Paris: Gallimard. [translated and edited by Macomber, C., Cohen-Solal, A., & Elkaïm-Sartre, A. (2007). *Existentialism is a Humanism*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.]

Sartre, J-P. (1947). *Huis clos; suivi de Les mouches*. Paris: Gallimard.

Sartre, J-P. (1960). Tribute to Albert Camus. *The Reporter*, February 4, 1960, p. 34

Seymour-Jones, C. (2008). *A dangerous liaison: Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre*. London: Century.

Webber, J. (2018). *Rethinking Existentialism*. Oxford University Press.

Zaretsky, R. (2013). *A life worth living: Albert Camus and the quest for meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

The Axial Age

In his 1949 book *Vom Ursprung und Ziel des Geschichte* (translated in 1953 as *The Origin and Goal of History*), Karl Jaspers proposed that the millennium before the time of Christ (or more specifically 800-200 BCE) could be considered an *Achsenzeit* or "Axial Age." During this period, in five isolated regions of the world (China, India, Persia, Israel/Palestine, and Greece), human society and thought changed radically and irreversibly. A world that had until then been understood in terms of legends (*mythos*) was now examined in the light of reason (*logos*). During this time, "hitherto unconsciously accepted ideas, customs and conditions were subjected to examination, questioned and liquidated." A multiplicity of gods and demons ceded their power to one universal god or life force. Sages, prophets and philosophers proposed rules for how we should behave. Though the axial age passed long ago, we still return to these teachings for moral guidance.

Karl Jaspers (1883-1969)

Jaspers trained in medicine and spent his early years as a psychiatrist. Due to his chronic lung disease, he found the demands of the clinic exhausting, and switched his interest to psychology and philosophy. Since he was married to a Jew, he lost his teaching position at Heidelberg University in 1937, and barely survived World War II without being arrested. After the war he moved to Basel, Switzerland, and presented an influential set of lectures on *The Question of German Guilt* in 1947.

Though he disliked the term, Jaspers became one of the existentialists. Confronted with the reality of a world that is beyond our powers of understanding, we have no recourse but to proclaim our own existence and connect with that which transcends reality. The following two quotations (via Walraff, 1970) from Jaspers' *Philosophie*, originally published in 1932, are noteworthy since they foreshadow his later thinking on the Axial Age:

> *Every limit encountered by scientific investigation provides an opportunity to transcend. There are two kinds of limits. On the negative side appears the irrationality of the*

> *incalculable—the unintelligibility manifested by physical "constants," atomic movements, and the so-called contingency of natural laws. On this side we are confronted by matter—the other that is not permeated by Logos. On the positive side it is freedom that appears as a limit. The sort of independently existing being that, because of its resistance, physical science could determine, though only negatively [as an unknown and unknowable thing-in-itself], now is assuredly present. The natural sciences (Naturwissenschaften) undertake to capture the cognitively impenetrable with their laws and theories; the humanistic disciplines (Geisteswissenschaften) submit the results and appearances of freedom to interpretation in terms of their own laws, norms, and meanings. But the final boundary is, for the natural sciences, the dark absolutely other, and for the humanistic disciplines the freedom of Existenz as a source of communication. This latter leads me to myself.*
>
> *If everything that cognitive orientation yields in the form of universally and necessarily valid knowledge is to be called "world," then the question arises as to whether being extends beyond the world, and thought beyond orientation within the world. The soul and God—or Existenz and Transcendence as we say when we exchange the language of mythology for that of philosophy—lie outside of the world. We cannot know them in the sense in which we know things within the world. . . . Although they are not known, they are not nothing, and while they are not accessible to science they can still be thought of.*

The Origin and Goal of History (1949/1953)

Jasper devoted the first section of his book on history to the *Achsenzeit* or Axial Age (which was also considered in a brief paper for *Commentary* in 1948). The German word *Achse* can mean "axis" (a reference line about which a vector can rotate, or

which serves as a basis for measurement), “axle” (about which wheels rotate), or “pivot” (a point about which something turns). Jasper was likely using all of these meanings, though the idea of the pivot seems most salient.

> *This axis would be situated at the point in history which gave birth to everything which, since then, man has been able to be, the point most overwhelmingly fruitful in fashioning humanity (p 1)*

The Axial Age gave birth both to our modern rational way of thinking and to the major world religions:

> *What is new about this age, in all three areas of the world, is that man becomes conscious of Being as a whole, of himself and his limitations. He experiences the terror of the world and his own powerlessness. He asks radical questions. Face to face with the void he strives for liberation and redemption. By consciously recognising his limits he sets himself the highest goals. He experiences absoluteness in the depths of selfhood and in the lucidity of transcendence. (p 2)*

In comparison Pre-Axial cultures appear unawakened – “as though man had not really come of himself” (p 7). Mythical narratives that were part of the pre-axial culture were sometimes maintained, but these were interpreted as parables rather than as fact.

Jaspers identified five cultures as participating in the Axial Age: China with the teachings of Confucius and Lao Tze, India with the Upanishads and the Buddha, Iran/Persia with Zoroaster/Zarathustra, Israel/Palestine with the prophets Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah, and Greece with their philosophers and tragedians. These regions developed the new Axial way of thinking synchronously and independently. The changes likely resulted from the fact that these societies were in a state of war and turmoil, and people were avidly

seeking respite from the chaos (pp 17-18).

According to Jaspers the importance of the Axial Age (pp18-20) was that

a) it was related to humanity in general rather than to specific groups:

> *It is one thing to see the unity of history from one's own ground and in the light of one's own faith, another to think of it in communication with every other human ground, linking one's own consciousness to the alien consciousness (p 19)*

b) it promoted communication and discussion, with an acknowledgement that no one has an exclusive grasp of the truth.

c) it was pre-eminent in its creativity – the writings of the sages of this period have become a yardstick against which all later creations are measured:

> *Until today mankind has lived by what happened during the Axial Period, by what was thought and created during that period. In each new upward flight it returns in recollection to this period and is fired anew by it. (p 7)*

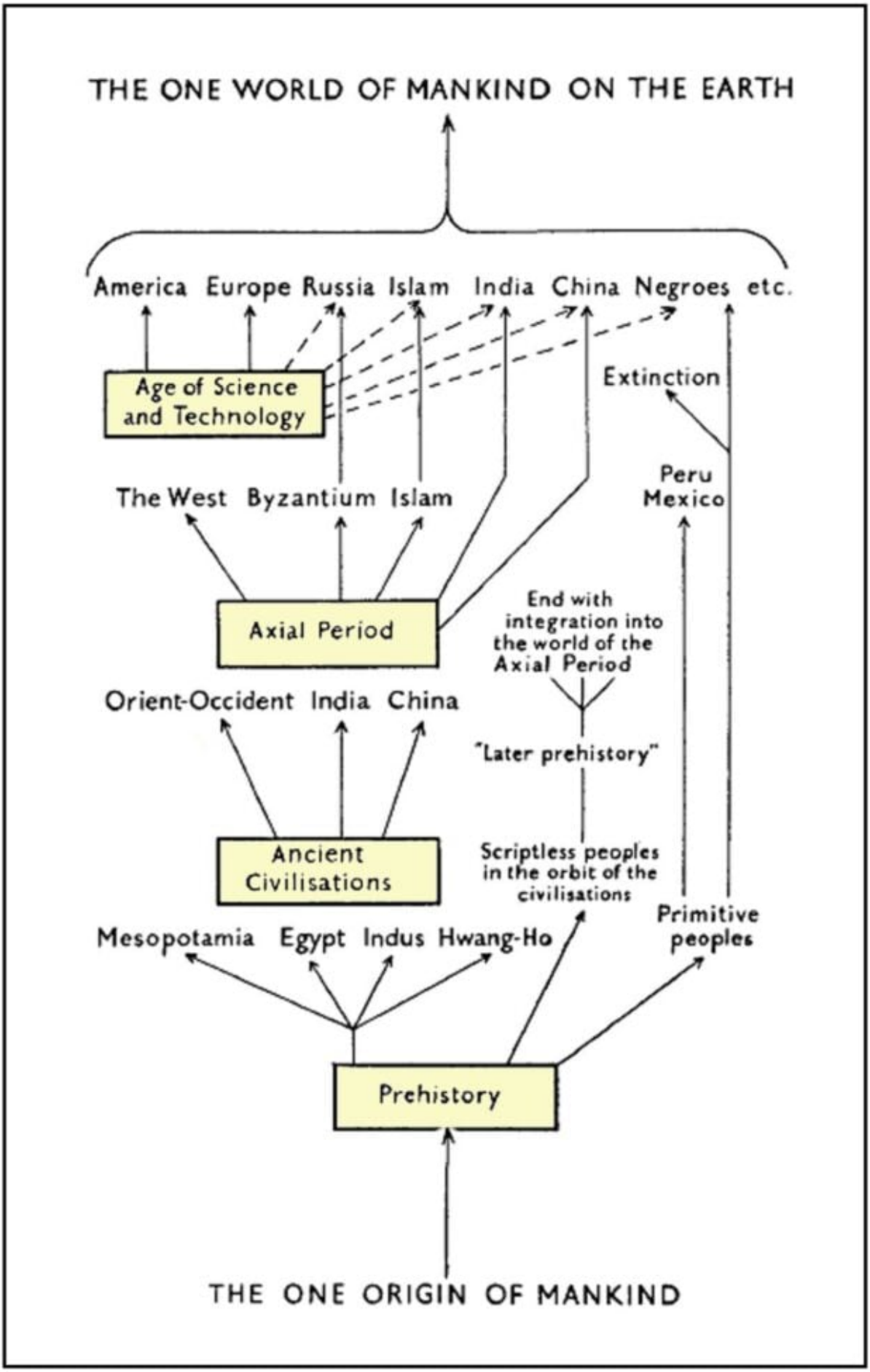
The Axial Age was essential to Jaspers' schema of human history (pp 24-26) which proposed with three main stages in human development:

(i) the foundation of the major ancient civilizations in Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, Northern India (valley of the Indus River) and Northern China (valley of the Huang-Ho/YellowRiver)

(ii) the Axial Age in five particular regions (China, India, Persia, Palestine, Greece) wherein civilization was allowed to grow spiritually

(iii) the age of science and technology initiated and

developed in the West (Europe and North America) and then transferred (dashed lines) to other regions of the globe


THE ONE WORLD OF MANKIND ON THE EARTH
America Europe Russia Islam India China Negroes etc.
Age of Science and Technology
Extinction
The West Byzantium Islam
Peru Mexico
Axial Period
End with integration into the world of the Axial Period
Orient-Occident India China
"Later prehistory"
Ancient Civilisations
Scriptless peoples in the orbit of the civilisations
Primitive peoples
Mesopotamia Egypt Indus Hwang-Ho
Prehistory
THE ONE ORIGIN OF MANKIND

Jaspers' thinking about the Axial Age was far from precise, and has been criticized extensively (see Mullins et al, 2018). His characterization of Axial thinking appears more of a post hoc description of the cultures that he chose to include in his survey than any defining criteria for Axiality.

It is unclear why the cultures of Egypt under Akhenaten (14th Century BCE), or of Mesopotamia in the time of Hammurabi (18th Century BCE) were not considered Axial. Perhaps these cultures were too transient to be considered Axial. However, as Jaspers points out, the cultures that he included in his Axial Age also did not last.

Among the cultures that he does include, some definitely predate his Axial Period. Although the life of Zarathustra is impossible to date, his teachings appear to come from the Second Millennium BCE (Boyce, 1984; Rose, 2011). Jewish thought may have been formally written down during the Axial period but its basic ideas originated before the time of Solomon (10th Century BCE).

Although Jaspers stresses the importance of the 1st Millennium BCE to the origin of the major world religions, Christianity and Islam – the two religions with the most adherents in the modern world – began after the Axial Period. The interpretation that

> *Christianity and Islam fall outside the axial age chronologically, but are historically intelligible only as developments of Israel's axial breakthrough (Bellah, 2072)*

inappropriately discounts their clear origins in the 1st and 7th Centuries CE.

Nevertheless, Jaspers' concept of an Axial Age was enthusiastically taken up by many scholars of religion

(Armstrong, 2004, 2005, 2006; Bellah, 2005, 2011; Eisenstadt, 1986; Schwartz, 1975). The period has been given several other names: the Moral Revolution (Halton, 2014); the Great Transformation (Armstrong, 2006); the Age of Transcendence (Schwartz, 1975), and the theoretic age (Donald, 1991).

Extension of the Idea of Axiality

Each of those who followed Jasper fleshed out the description of the Axial Age to include some defining features:

a) the formulation of an ethical rather than coercive morality. People should do what is right and not what those in power demand. Leaders may be necessary but their powers must not be absolute. Every person should have equal opportunities for success in life.

b) the idea of a "moralizing god," a supreme force who (or which) requires human beings to live a good life, rewards virtuous behavior, punishes the sinful (typically in an afterlife), and always knows when laws are being transgressed.

c) the replacement of the ritual of animal (or human) sacrifice by the life of religious devotion. The divine does not require the sacrifice of animals but rather the dedication of a believer's life to compassion and service.

d) the creation of concepts not immediately related to the external world. The Axial Age addressed questions such as what happens after death and whether the world was exactly how it appears. As Schwartz (1975) stated this "transcendent" type of thinking was "a kind of standing back and looking beyond – a kind of critical, reflective questioning of the actual and a new vision of what lies beyond."

e) the use of external memory devices such as written records (Donald, 1991). This allowed culture and technology to be transmitted from one generation to another without the need for their continual rediscovery.

Seshat History of the Axial Age (2019)

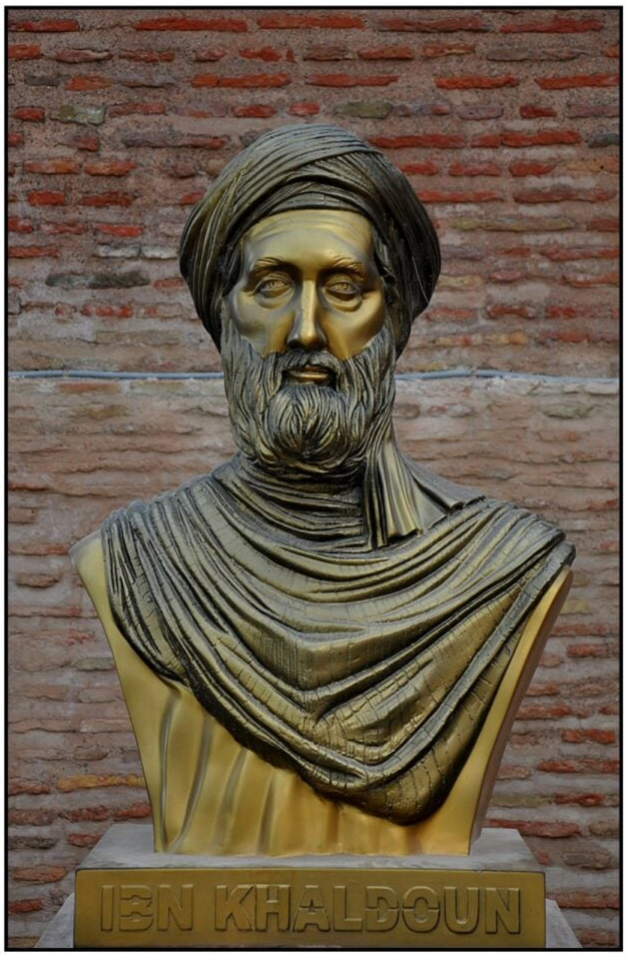
The Seshat (Turchin, 2015) is a data bank of global history, founded in 2011 and used by many different investigators to examine questions about human cultural evolution, economic development and sociological change. These studies support the new field of “cliodynamics” – the science of historical change – a term deriving from the Greek Goddess of History. The data bank itself is named after Seshat, the Egyptian Goddess of Wisdom and Knowledge. Seshat is usually depicted holding a palm stem on which she notches the passage of time. She wears a leopard skin, the pattern of which denotes the stars and eternity. Above her head is a seven-pointed emblem, the meaning of which is not known, but may signify enlightenment.

In 2019, Hoyer and Reddish edited the results of a *Seshat History of the Axial Age*. The study looked at societies in

multiple regions of the world and at multiple times in order to determine when the characteristics of the Axial Age became apparent. Because it is relatively easy to document, the study focussed on the origins of defined moral principles, such as the definition of moral norms often in terms of a legal code, the setting of punishments for the violation of moral rules, the conceptualization of an omniscient and omnipotent supernatural force or being that required obedience to the law, and constraints on the power of social leaders. The study confirmed that these principles began during the 1st millennium BCE in the regions named in Jaspers' book. However, the principles also became evident in other regions at other times.

The conclusion was therefore that axiality was not an age but rather a "stage" in the evolution of a complex society:

> *the initial rise of archaic states led to the distortion and repression of at least some components of natural morality and that axiality provided a way of restoring those principles, and especially their cohesion-building effects, under the guise of a more benevolent regime of supernatural enforcement in ways that applied equally to rich and poor, the powerful and the meek. Such a restoration, we have argued, was necessary for political systems to evolve beyond the megasociety threshold. (pp 406-7)*



Turchin (2018) has proposed that as states or empires reach a particular size (in terms of population) and level of complexity (in terms of the different factions within that population) dissension arises between those who lead the state and those who are its subjects. The state may then fail, either through external forces taking advantage of the internal divisions in the state, or through the rebellion of its constituent parts. Developing a sense of “group feeling” or “collective solidarity” can prevent the internal dissension and help fight against external forces. This group felling was present in early small bands of human beings, but needed to be reinstated when the groups became larger and more susceptible to despotic rule. Turchin names this solidarity *asabiya* – a word used by the Islamic scholar Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) in his studies of the peoples of the Maghreb (Northern Africa). A bust of Ibn Khaldun on the right is located at the Casbah of Bejaia in Algeria.

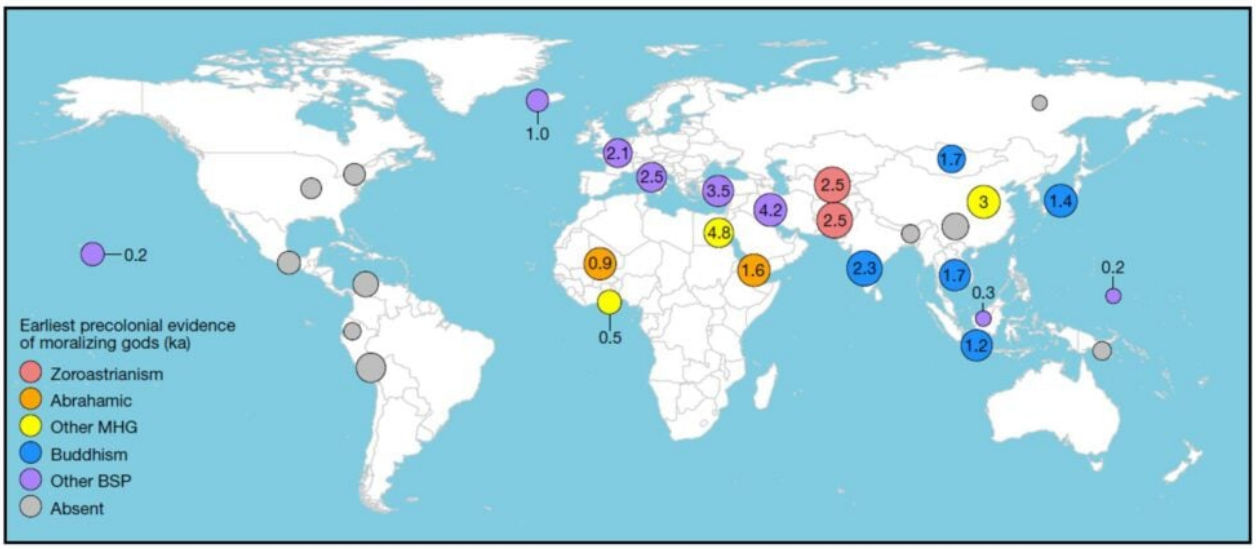
The Seshat data bank has allowed scholars to relate the rise of such moral principles as “moralizing high gods” and “broad supernatural punishment” (heaven and hell) to the level of social complexity, as measured using the principal component of an analysis of 51 measurements of government levels, infrastructure, written records, religious texts, financial instruments, etc. Whitehouse et al. (2019) examined 30 different regions of the world and found that these moral principles only occurred after a significant increase in social complexity.

> *powerful moralizing ‘big gods’ and prosocial supernatural punishment tend to appear only after the emergence of ‘megasocieties’ with populations of more than around one million people. Moralizing gods are not a prerequisite for the evolution of social complexity, but they may help to sustain and expand complex multi-ethnic empires after they have become established.*

The authors therefore suggest that

> *if moralizing gods do not cause the evolution of complex societies, they may represent a cultural adaptation that is necessary to maintain cooperation in such societies once they have exceeded a certain size, perhaps owing to the need to subject diverse populations in multi-ethnic empires to a common higher-level power.*

A map of the 30 different regions that they evaluated shows that the first occurrence of moralizing high gods (MHG) was in ancient Egypt when the idea of *maat* – universal justice – was first proposed 4.8 ka (thousand years before the present). The size of the circles represents the relative complexity of the society in that region.



Jaspers' axial societies are represented by Confucianism in Northern China 3 ka, Zoroastrianism in Persia 2.5 ka and Buddhism in India 2.3 ka. This particular Seshat survey did not include Jaspers' other two axial regions – Greece and Palestine. Although Christianity was and is one of the great religions with a moralizing high God and broad supernatural punishment (BSP), regions of Europe (early Rome and Celtic France) developed such ideas prior to their actual conversion to Christianity. Although large societies developed in the Americas, these were not characterized by moralizing high gods and this (in addition to their technological inferiority) may have rendered them susceptible to colonization by the Christian countries.

Conclusion

Modern religions are characterized by a moral code that promotes the social virtues of compassion and temperance and a concept of justice administered either by an omnipotent deity or by a universal force. These religions originated when societies became sufficiently complex that they needed their citizens to feel solidarity with each other. A sense of morality was a tool for survival when humans lived in small groups. Codified and intensified by the sages and prophets of more complex societies, morality then became the glue that held together empires. Several of our modern religions

originated in the 1st Millennium BCE in what Jaspers described as the Axial Age. However, others originated at other times and we must consider axiality as a stage in the development of any human society rather than as a particular age

References

Armstrong, K. (2004). *A history of God: The 4000-year quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Armstrong, K. (2005). *A short history of myth*. Edinburgh: Canongate.

Armstrong, K. (2006). *The great transformation: The beginning of our religious traditions*. New York: Knopf.

Bellah, R. N. (2005). What is Axial about the Axial Age? *Archives of European Sociology,* 46, 69-87.

Bellah, R. N. (2011). *Religion in human evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (Belknap).

Boyce, M. (1984). *Zoroastrians, their religious beliefs and practices*. London: Routledge & K. Paul.

Donald, M. (1991). *Origins of the modern mind: three stages in the evolution of culture and cognition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Eisenstadt, S.N. (ed.) (1986). *The origins and diversity of axial age civilizations*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Halton, E. (2014). *From the axial age to the moral revolution: John Stuart-Glennie, Karl*

Jaspers, and a new understanding of the idea. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hoyer, D. & Reddish, J. (eds) (2019). *Seshat history of the axial age.* Chaplin, CT, USA*:* Beresta Books.

Jaspers, K. (translated by Manheim, R., 1948). The axial age of human history. *Commentary,* 6, 430-435.

Jaspers, K. (1949, translated by Bullock, M., 1953). *The Origin and Goal of History,* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Jaspers, K. (1947, reprinted 1965). *The question of German guilt*. Fordham University Press.

Mullins, D. A., Hoyer, D., Collins, C., Currie, T., Feeney, K, François, P., Savage1, P. E., Whitehouse, H., & Turchin, P. (2018). A systematic assessment of 'Axial Age' proposals using global comparative historical evidence. *American Sociological Review, 83*, 596–626

Rose, J. (2011). *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*. I. B. Tauris & Company.

Schwartz, B. I. (ed) (1975). Wisdom, revelation, and doubt: Perspectives on the First Millennium B.C. *Daedalus*, 104, Special Issue, 1-172.

Turchin, P. (2018). *Historical Dynamics : Why States Rise and Fall*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Turchin, P., Brennan, R., Currie, T., Feeney, K., Francois, P. et al. (2015). Seshat: The Global History Databank. *Cliodynamics* 6: 77–107

Wallraff, C. (1970). *Karl Jaspers: An Introduction to His Philosophy*. Princeton University Press.

Whitehouse, H., François, P., Savage, P., Currie, T., Feeney, K., Cioni, E., Purcell, R., Ross, R., Larson, J., Baines, J., Ter Haar, B., Covey, A., & Turchin, P. (2019). Complex societies precede moralizing gods throughout world history. *Nature*, *568*(7751), 226–229.

Antisemitism

Hatred is directed anger. Though we can claim metaphorically to hate
unconscious objects or abstractions, hatred is typically directed at another person or persons. Hatred is evoked by suffering that we perceive they caused. Since it leads to actions against these persons, hatred can also be described as "ill
will."

Emotions can overwhelm reason. Passion is not logical. We often hate
without any justification. Hatred must then be maintained by fictions that describe the evil nature of those we hate.

Antisemitism is the most enduring and most unjustified of human hatreds.
The ill will suffered by the Jewish people has lasted for thousands of years, and has led to countless crimes, the most terrible of which was the Holocaust wherein 6 million Jews were put to death by the Nazi Government of Germany (Bauer, 2001; Marrus, 1987). ;

Antisemitism has been inspired by many fictions. This posting considers the unfortunate power of some of the stories that paved the way to the Holocaust.

Some Simple Psychology

Anger arises when we experience suffering, especially when we believe it

to be unwarranted, and when we are thwarted from achieving what we desire,
especially when we believe that we entitled to it. Anger seeks to attack these causes: to hit out at those who strike us; to break those who obstruct us.

We tend to think of events as caused by persons. Even when forces of
nature act against us we may attribute them to a divinity or a devil, or to
those who worship them. Only in that way can anger find a target for its
release.

Sometimes the causes of our anger are too complicated to understand or too powerful to fight against. In these cases, we may vent our anger elsewhere and attack other human beings, while inventing plausible (though fictional) reasons for so doing.

…every instance of suffering, every feeling of displeasure, by whomsoever and in whatsoever way it may have been caused, whether it arises from the guilt or from the lawful activity of another person, or through the sufferer's own fault, or without any fault, or even without any human influence, tends to transform itself into a feeling of enmity, to direct itself against fellow-humans and if possible to express itself against them. (Bernstein, 1951, p 85)

As we were growing up during childhood, we realized – at about the age
of three – that we can exert some control over our environment. We therefore created a self as the agent of this control. At about the same time we realized that the world contains other agents. These could either help us or hinder us. We became comfortable with those that helped and learned to cooperate with them. We feared the others.

The group appears to be a curious form of extension of the individual. It seems as if under the influence of the necessities of human communal life, human beings who need love and produce hate combine into new, collective and collectively selfish individualities of a higher order; directing their love inwards, their hate outward, their social instincts towards the insider, their anti-social tendencies toward the outsider. (Bernstein, 1951, p 109-110)

Those who cooperated in groups came to have similar desires and modes of behavior. They followed the same rules and sought the same goals. Those who were different became isolated. These “others” challenge our group-identification (Chanes, 2004, p 3). In our search for where to vent our anger, we often light upon those that are different from us. Especially if these people are small in number and not inclined to violence.

While for normal group enmity a certain regularity in the mutual expression of enmity is characteristic, the antagonism between a powerful majority and a powerless minority is characterised by a onesidedness of hostile actions which is fatal for the minority. For the latter is exposed to continual attacks and must confine itself to laborious attempts to maintain its existence, without a chance to resist actively to any extent; even its passive means of defense are totally inadequate and its existence often has to rely on nothing but periodical flight from place to place. This onesided relation of permanent attack and failing defense is called persecution. Weak minority groups are usually persecuted more or less emphatically. (Bernstein, 1951, p 224)

The actual psychological mechanisms that lead to antisemitism are not

really understood. Some believe that there are personality-types that are more easily convinced to vent their hatred on minorities. The role of authority and power is undoubtedly a factor (Morse & Allport, 1952; Milgram, 1974). Those who seek power or wish to maintain it gain great support by fomenting hatred. Propaganda – invented stories – have a tremendous power. For some reason the more incredible the story the more easily it is believed (Baum, 2012). Dehumanization of the victims serves to attenuate our inherent tendency to help our fellows. (Bandura et al., 1975)

For millennia the Jewish people have allowed us to vent our hatred. For
millennia we have invented reasons for our violence.

The hostility toward a minority exacerbates the feelings that initially triggered. When persecuted, a minority does not fare well in society and often comes to appear even more deserving of denigration and oppression (Beller, 2007, p 5).

Antisemitism is not caused by the Jews but by the inadequacy of those who need to hate them.

…two psychological characteristics are present in the individual antisemite: excessive hostility and the need (and a capacity) to project one's aggression on other groups. Persons who have these traits generally suffer from feelings of inadequacy and from the feeling that their own personal borders, psychologically speaking, are easily invaded by others (Chanes, 2004, p 7)

We can perhaps conclude this section with two epigrams from Jean-Paul Sartre (1948):

If the Jew did not exist, the anti-Semite would invent him (p 13)
Antisemitism is not a Jewish problem: it is our problem. (p

152)

The People of the Covenant

The Jews consider themselves God’s chosen people. In the Hebrew scripture Yahweh made a covenant with Abraham, and then renewed the covenant with Jacob and with Moses. The Jews were to worship Yahweh as the one true God and to follow his commandments. The Jews would then serve as an example for the rest of humanity

I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6).

In return, the Jews would be considered special

For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth. (Deuteronomy 14:2)

And were promised as their home the land containing what is now the country of Israel

In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates (Genesis 15:18)

לֹא תִּרְצָח

לֹא תִּנְאָף

לֹא תִּגְנֹב

God’s covenant with the Jews was based on their keeping the commandments that he revealed to Moses. Rembrandt’s 1659 painting *Moses with the Tablets of the Law* shows Moses holding aloft the stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments had been written. These were engraved on two separate stones (Exodus 31:18, 32:15). In the painting, only the second tablet is completely visible giving the 6th to 10th commandments (Exodus 20:13-17). These begin with: “Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal:” (Hebrew illustrated on the right).

No one is sure what moment in the story of the tablets Rembrandt is representing. Is it when he first displays these to the Hebrews? or when he is about to shatter them on the ground because the Hebrews had been worshipping the Golden Calf while he had been on Mount Sinai with God (Exodus 32:19)? or is it when he returns to God and brings a second set of

tablets back to the chastised Hebrews (Exodus 34:1). Moses' face is shining with revelation rather than angry. Perhaps, Rembrandt has painted the moment when Moses first displays the commandments.

No group of people is perfect. However, the Jews have contributed more than their share to the human endeavor – in philosophy, science, medicine, politics, art, music, literature. And for the most part the, laws that they accepted as part of their covenant with God have served them well. They are indeed an example to other people.

So why were and are they so often reviled? It is unlikely a reaction to their chutzpah in claiming to be God's chosen. In the Middle Ages this was called the *Insolentia Judaeorum*. Yet every one of the world's many religions claims to be just as special.

One defining aspect of the Jewish religion is that it is monotheistic. The first commandments state that a Jew must obey Jehovah and not even pay lip-service to any other god or idol:

> I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.
> Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
> Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.
> Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them (Exodus 20:2-5).

The Jewish religion thus combines the worship of one god with strict obedience to his commandments. As Prager and Telushkin (2003) have suggested, this ethical monotheism may have offended those who followed other gods. Jews refused to follow the proverbial injunction that when in Rome do as the Romans do. For example, the outburst of violence against the Jews in

Alexandria in 38 CE (then part of the Roman Empire) was triggered by their refusal to place statues of the Emperor Caligula in their temples (Goldstein, 2012).

One should respect the beliefs of others. However, respect does not mean obeying rules that go against one's own moral principles. The Jewish people's refusal to acknowledge or worship other gods has continued to the present. In particular Jews do not recognize the divinity of Jesus Christ.

In addition to the Ten Commandments, Yahweh's covenant with the Jewish people involved numerous other rules of behavior. These included strict stipulations about the types of food that they might eat and the methods in which this food should be prepared. Over the ages observant Jews have thus been unable to share meals with those of other faiths. And although some of the ancient Jewish philosophers – Hillel and Maimonides for example – were open to ideas beyond the Covenant, strict Judaism limited itself to the study of the Torah and its interpretations.

The Covenant with Yahweh thus isolated the Jewish people from the rest of humanity. They could not share the beliefs, the food or the thoughts of others. They antagonized others by their claim to be the chosen people.

So we have the idea that antisemitism is in part caused by the very character of the Jewish religion. This would explain why the Jews have been reviled by so many different people in so many different countries. The following was written Bernard Lazare in 1894. He was a Jewish polemicist who wrote the first defense of Captain Alfred Dreyfus. Yet even he thought that the Jews were partly to blame for antisemitism.

> Inasmuch as the enemies of the Jews belonged to divers races; as they dwelled far apart from one another, were ruled by different laws and governed by opposite principles; as they had not the same customs and differed in spirit from

> one another, so that they could not possibly judge alike of any subject, it must needs be that the general causes of antisemitism have always resided in Israel itself, and not in those who antagonized it…. Which virtues or which vices have earned for the Jew this universal enmity? Why was he ill-treated and hated alike and in turn by the Alexandrians and the Romans, by the Persians and the Arabs, by the Turks and the Christian nations? Because, everywhere up to our own days the Jew was an unsociable being. (Lazare, 1894/1903, pp 8-9)

This seems so reasonable. Yet it is false. It does not explain the cause of antisemitism. It is just an excuse. It blames the victim for the crime.

The Crucifixion of Christ

In the early decades of the Common Era, Jesus, a Jewish teacher from Nazareth, brought new insight to the interpretation of Jewish law. He simplified the commandments by expressing them as the need to love the Lord and to love one's neighbor as oneself. He criticized the rigid adherence to the Sabbath, and the commercialization of the Temple. He proclaimed the idea of a Kingdom of Heaven. Many of the more observant Jews were disconcerted by his teachings. The Romans were upset that he was proposing a new kingdom. Jesus was arraigned before Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, condemned and crucified.

A few days after his death and burial, the tomb of Jesus was found empty. Many of his followers claimed that they afterwards saw him in person. They therefore believed that he had been resurrected. They continued to meet and discuss his teachings. They were either tolerated by other Jews or condemned as heretics.

A learned Jew named Saul was one of those that persecuted the followers of Jesus. However, on the road to Damascus he had a

vision of Jesus that completely altered his thinking. He changed his name to Paul, and began to provide an over-arching theory about the death and resurrection of Jesus. His main ideas were that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah prophesied in the scriptures, that he died to release us from our sins, and that we shall all be saved from death by having faith in Jesus called Christ (the “anointed”).

> For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;
> And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures (I Corinthians 15:3-4)

Paul’s major teaching was that one could never attain salvation by following the Mosaic laws. No one is perfect. Everyone breaks the law. However, Christ offers salvation if we repent our sins and have faith in him.

> Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. (Galatians 2:16).

Paul’s letters describing these ideas are the earliest of the Christian scriptures. Written in the years 50-60 CE these predate by 20 to 50 years the four gospels, which describe the life and teachings of Jesus.

The followers of Jesus in the 1st Century CE differed in their opinion about his relationship to the Jews. Some thought that the message of Jesus was for the Jews; others that it was for both Jews and Gentiles. Most of Paul’s teaching was directed to the Gentiles. In some of his letters he laments the inability of many of his Jewish colleagues to understand God’s new covenant.

> For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews:
> Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men:
> Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.
> (I Thessalonians 2:14-16)

Some of the gospels continued this criticism of the Jews (Crossan, 1995). This is perhaps most evident in the gospel of Matthew. He describes how the Jews forced Pilate to crucify Jesus, and willingly accepted the responsibility for his death:

> When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.
> Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our
> children. (Matthew 27: 24-25)

The major event in Jewish history of the 1st Century CE was the Great Revolt of the Jews against Roman rule. This began in 66 CE and culminated in the Destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. The illustration below shows a representation in the Arch of Titus of the Romans carrying the spoils from the temple. Among the spoils is the great Menorah that once gave light to the Tabernacle.

At this time many Jews fled their homeland and settled in other countries. The Jewish people have been exiled at many times in its history – the Assyrian conquest (733 BCE), the Babylonian captivity (597 BCE), the Great Revolt (70 CE), the later Bar Kokhba Rebellion (132 CE). Though some Jews remained in Israel, most lived in the Diaspora ("scattering") – far from the land that from the days of Moses they had considered their God-given home.

The Destruction of the Temple seemed to many Christians a divine response to the action of the Jews in crucifying their Lord. Though the Romans crucified Jesus, some of the early Christians considered the Jews responsible. The Jews were thus guilty of deicide and should be reviled and cast out from Christian society. Even if they were not guilty, they should be chastised for not recognizing the salvation offered by Christ – for staying with the old dispensation rather than following the new.

These ideas have long permeated the thinking of the Christian Church. Many of the cathedrals illustrate these concepts by contrasting sculptures of *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga*. The statues

on the south portail of the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Strasbourg from the 13th Century CE are particularly impressive. Legend has it that these were created by a female sculptor Sabina von Steinbach, though there is no real evidence for this. Ecclesia with her crown, holds in her hands the cross and the chalice. She looks with pity on Synagoga, who is blindfolded and cannot see the truth. She holds in her hands the tablets of the law and the lance that the centurion used to bring the crucifixion to an end. The lance was shattered by the resurrection.

The following illustration shows the complete portail. Ecclesia and Synagoga are on the left and right sides. In the center sits Solomon in judgement between the old covenant and the new. Above him is Christ, *Salvator Mundi* (savior of the world). The carvings in the tympanums represent the dormition, assumption and coronation of the Virgin Mary.

The statues of Ecclesia and Synagoga are impressive examples of gothic art. Though superficially beautiful, they obscure rather than convey the truth. The feelings against the Jews that they evoke are a complete betrayal of Jesus, a Jew who

taught in the synagogues of Palestine.

One might have hoped that the antisemitism of the Christian Church would have been excised by the Reformation. But this was not to be. Martin Luther was virulently antisemitic. In his *The Jews and Their Lies* (1543, pp 39-42) he advises Christians to burn their synagogues of the Jews, their houses, and their books, prohibit their Rabbis from teaching, not allow them to travel on the highways, and prohibit them from lending money. Luther was a harbinger of *Kristallnacht.*

Wild Accusations

During the Middle Ages people could not understand why life was so often brutal. An easy way to explain the various disasters was to attribute them to the Jews. If the Jews could kill God, there was no telling what other crimes they were capable of.

On Good Friday in 1144 the body of a child called William was discovered in the woods near Norwich in England. The Jews were accused of murdering the child. No credible evidence was ever found. However, a monk who had just converted from Judaism to Christianity claimed that the Jews had decided to sacrifice a Christian child to re-enact the death of Christ. Several Jews were slaughtered. William was declared a martyr. Pilgrims flocked to his tomb. Miracles occurred.

William of Norwich was the first documented case of Jews being accused of ritual murder. As the years went by similar accusations arose in multiple different regions of Europe (Goldstein, 2012). Many of these cases included the idea that the Jews used the blood of their victims to make the unleavened bread used in the celebration of Passover. This particular accusation was called the “blood libel.” It makes no sense. Kosher regulations require that observant Jews never eat food contaminated with blood. Jews go to great lengths to remove blood from meat before it can be eaten.

The Christian Bible contains the Hebrew scriptures in what it calls the Old Testament. Some of these writings described how the blood of sacrificed animals played an important role in the ceremonies of the ancient Hebrews, e.g.

> And he shall kill the bullock before the Lord: and the priests, Aaron’s sons, shall bring the blood, and sprinkle the blood round about upon the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. (Leviticus 1:5).

Other ancient Hebrew writings are even more disconcerting. One of the foundational stories of Judaism is the Akedah (“binding”), wherein the Patriarch Abraham, at the request of Jehovah, takes his son Isaac to Mount Moriah to sacrifice him (Genesis 22). Although an angel stays Abraham’s hand at the last moment, this fails to attenuate the story’s horror. The illustration below shows Rembrandt’s 1655 etching.

The Old Testament contains other stories wherein children were sacrificed. To defeat the Ammonites, Jephthah promised the Lord that he would sacrifice whatever came out of his house when he returned from battle. Jehovah gave the victory to the Israelites. When Jephthah returned home, his daughter came to

greet him, dancing and playing the tambourine (Judges 11).

There is also a suggestion that King Manasseh sacrificed his son – the wording is “he made his son pass through the fire” (2 Kings 21:6). These events and the idea that the terrible place near Jerusalem called Gehenna or Tophet was actually a site of human sacrifice are discussed at length by Stavrakopoulou (2004). The practice was banned by Yahweh speaking through his prophet Jeremiah:

> And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not; neither came it into my heart. (Jeremiah 7:31).

One can perhaps imagine how such stories from the Old Testament might have allowed credulous people to accept the idea that the Jews might sacrifice Christian children and use their blood for their ceremonies. When one’s faith requires a belief in miracles, wild rumors are not easily contradicted.

The main sacrament of the Christian Church is the Eucharist, wherein the congregation partakes of bread and wine that have been especially blessed. According to the church, these had been miraculously “transubstantiated” to the body of Jesus, who was sacrificed to save the world. The sacramental bread is called the host (from the Latin *hostia* for sacrificial victim). In many places and at many times the Jews were accused of “desecrating” the host. The following illustration shows a 1469 sequence of paintings by Paolo Uccello that tell the story of the *Miracle of the Desecrated Host*. Both the full sequence and the particular panels illustrating the second and fifth episodes are shown. The paintings were on the predella to the altar in the Corpus Domin church in Urbino. The retable painting above the predella by Justus van Gent presented the *Institution of the Eucharist*.

The six episodes in the predella show

1. a woman sells a portion of the consecrated host to a Jewish merchant
2. when the Jew tries to burn the host, it starts to bleed, alerting the city guards
3. a holy procession is needed to re-consecrate the host
4. the woman is burned at the stake; she repents and an angel descends from heaven to save her
5. the Jew and his family are burned at the stake; no angel intervenes
6. two angels and two devils argue over the woman's body

As the Black Death (Bubonic Plague) spread across Europe in the 14th Century, Jews were accused of poisoning wells and spreading the disease. Many Jews were condemned to death by fire fort these crimes. No one noticed that Jews died from the pandemic just as frequently as their Christian neighbors. Nor that burning Jews at the stake had no effect on the spread of the disease. A half century later, Jacob von Königshofen wrote a critical history of these times. The following is his description of the massacre of the Jews in Strasbourg at the height of the Black Death in 1349:

> In the matter of this plague the Jews throughout the world were reviled and accused in all lands of having caused it

> through the poison which they are said to have put into the water and the wells – that is what they were accused of – and for this reason the Jews were burnt all the way from the Mediterranean into Germany, but not in Avignon, for the pope protected them there. On Saturday-that was St. Valentine's Day, they burnt the Jews on a wooden platform in their cemetery. There were about two thousand people of them. Those who wanted to baptize themselves were spared. Many small children were taken out of the fire and baptized against the will of their fathers and mothers. And everything that was owed to the Jews was cancelled, and the Jews had to surrender all pledges and notes that they had taken for debts. The council, however, took the direct cash that the Jews possessed and divided it among the working men proportionately. The money was indeed the thing that killed the Jews. If they had been poor and if the feudal lords had not been in debt to them, they would not have been burnt. After this wealth was divided among the artisans some gave their share to the Cathedral or to the Church on the advice of their confessors. Thus were the Jews burnt at Strasbourg. (quoted in Marcus, 1938, p.47)

Forces other than the plague were at play. Debt caused as much suffering as disease. As the historian notes, "The money was indeed the thing that killed the Jews."

Usury

The Old Testament contains several injunctions against usury. Originally "usury" was simply any interest charged on loans. The meaning of the term has changed as the relations between religion and commerce have developed. At present, usury is generally limited to exorbitant interest.

In one of the earliest mentions of usury in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Jewish people are forbidden to charge interest on loans to fellow-Jews although they may so charge strangers:

> Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury (Deuteronomy 23:20).

In the New Testament usury is only occasionally considered:

> But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing
> again (Luke 6:35).

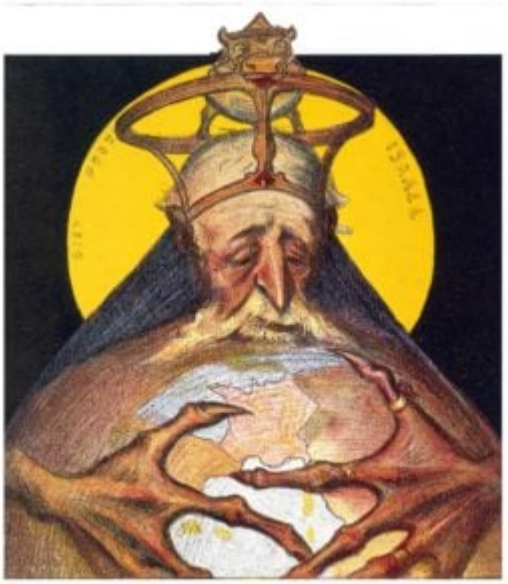
Nevertheless, the Christian Church decided early in its history that usury was a sin (Moehlman, 1934). In the council of Nicaea of 327 CE it forbade clergy to collect interest on any debts. In the Third Lateran Council of 1179, it decreed

> Since in almost every place the crime of usury has become so prevalent that many persons give up all other business and become usurers, as if it were permitted, regarding not its prohibition in both testaments, we ordain that manifest usurers shall not be admitted to communion, nor, if they die in their sin, receive Christian burial, and that no priest shall accept their alms. (Moehlman, 1934, pp 6-7)

Thus for most of the middle ages it was difficult for people in business to obtain financial support for their enterprises. Jewish merchants, untrammeled by Christian prohibitions, unable to own land, and often prevented from practicing trades because of exclusively Christian guilds, gradually assume the responsibility for lending money in return for interest (Foxman, 2010). Some kings and princes found the linguistic abilities and financial connections of the Jews appealing and appointed them to their courts. However, most Jews remained poor and unrecognized – traders, shopkeepers, pawnbrokers and minor moneylenders.

In later years the Catholic Church found itself in need of capital to build its churches, and revised its doctrine on usury, founding its own lending organizations called Mounts of Piety (*Monte de Pieta*). The oldest bank in the world, the *Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena,* derives from one of these

lenders. After the Reformation, Protestants re-interpreted the scriptures and established their own investment banks.



Jewish lenders prospered and some of our current banks have Jewish roots, the Rothschild banks and Goldman-Sachs being two of the biggest. However, almost all of the world's largest banks were actually founded by Gentiles. The idea that the Jews control international banking is ludicrous. Why one should only consider the religion of a banker when he is Jewish is invidious (Foxman, 2010). One never mentions the Roman Catholic origins of the Bank of America or the Presbyterian origins of Wells Fargo. Yet Jewish bankers have long been game for hateful cartoons. The depiction of "King Rothschild" by Charles Lucien Léandre shown on the right is from the cover of *Le Rire*, April 16, 1898. Above Rothschild is the Golden Calf that was worshipped by the the idea of Mammon, the idol of wealth condemned in the New Testament:

> No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. (Matthew 6:24).

The myth of Jewish greed has become a mainstay of antisemitic thought. Richard Wagner (1850) cannot get away from it even though he is supposed to be writing about music.

> According to the present constitution of this world, the Jew in truth is already more than emancipate: he rules, and will rule, so long as Money remains the power before which all our doings and our dealings lose their force.

Even Jewish writers have been convinced of the myth

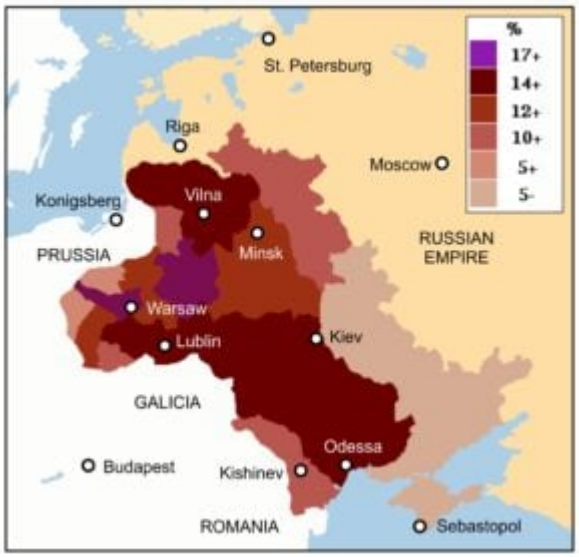
> Thus, by himself and by those around him; by his own laws and by those imposed upon him; by his artificial nature and circumstances, the Jew was directed to gold. He was prepared to be changer, lender, usurer, one who strives after the metal, first for the pleasures it could afford and then afterwards for the sole happiness of possessing it; one who greedily seizes gold and avariciously immobilizes it. (Lazare, 1903, p 110).

The Pale of Settlement

As the Middle Ages progressed, the Jews were expelled from many European countries: England, 1290; France, 1306; Hungary, 1349; Austria, 1421; Spain, 1492; Portugal, 1497 (Baum 2012, p. 18). Other countries required that the Jews live apart from Christians in regions that came to be known as *ghettos*, from the Venetian dialect word for “foundry” located near where the first ghetto was established in Venice in 1516. Other ghettos were later set up throughout Italy, and then in Germany and in Poland (Goldstein, 2012, p 130)

Many of the expelled Jews moved to Eastern Europe. They settled in the
regions that now form the countries of Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine. Much of this area was then part of the Kingdom of Poland. Polish nobles welcomed the new immigrants. Many Jews were used as tax-collectors. This did sit well with some of the Eastern Orthodox Slavic people who chafed under the control of Catholic Poland. In 1648, the Cossacks in Ukraine rebelled under the leadership of Bohdan Khmelnytsky. During this war, tens of thousands of Poles and Jews were

massacred (Bacon 2003). The Eastern Orthodox Church was every bit as antisemitic as the Roman Catholic Church. Ukraine became independent of Poland and soon became part of the Russian Empire. Later Poland itself would be partitioned between Prussia, Austria and Russia and cease to exist as an independent kingdom.



The "Pale of Settlement" was set up in 1791 by Catherine the Great. This was an area in the Western regions of the Russian Empire wherein Jews were allowed to live. The term "pale" refers to the stakes that delineated the area
– the word was originally used to describe an area in Ireland under the control of the English crown. Over the years many of the Jews in central Russia were exiled to the Pale of Settlement. As shown in the map (adapted from Wikipedia, originally created by Thomas Gun) the Jewish percentage of the population in these regions was significant. Around 1900, the Jews in the Pale of Settlement numbered almost 5 million (about half the total number of Jews in the world), and formed about 10% of the general population of the area.

The ghettos and the Pale of Settlement separated the Jews from their neighbors. Their resultant isolation of the Jews increased their "unlikeness" or "otherness." By closing them off in localized areas beyond the reach of normal civil authorities, it also made them more susceptible to random violence.

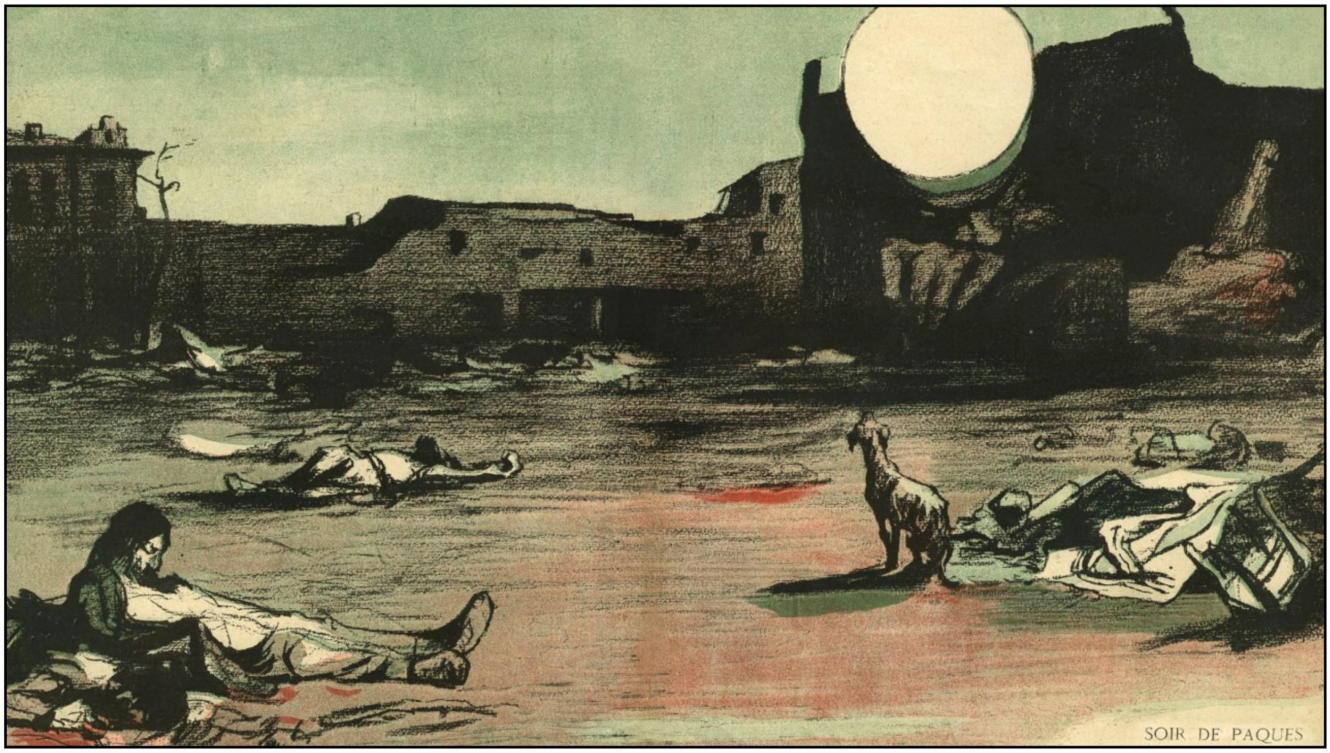
In 1881, Tsar Alexander II was assassinated in St. Petersburg by a group
of revolutionaries. The group *Narodnaya Volya* ("People's Will") was

composed of Russian-born anarchists, but one young woman was Jewish. The new Tsar Alexander III believed that the Jews were behind the assassination and unleashed a series of pogroms in the Pale of Settlement to avenge his father's death.

The word "pogrom" derives from a Russian word for storm or devastation. Christians in a community were encouraged to murder their Jewish neighbors – killers of Christ and assassins of the Emperor. The police were ordered not to intervene. These pogroms continued into for several years. Thousands of Jews were killed.

The pogroms returned in 1903-1906 during the reign of Tsar Nicholas II. These appear to have been instigated by members of the Tsar's secret police. One political rationale for these actions against the Jews was to rally the Russian people around the Tsar and against all those that were promoting the modernization of Russia.

The first pogrom of the 20th Century began in Kishinev, Moldava (then known as Bessarabia), on Easter Sunday in 1903. A child had been found murdered, and city leaders accused the Jews of his murder. Patriotism, blood libel and deicide worked together to create a rampaging and murderous mob (Penkower, 2004). The following is an illustration from the French Journal *L'Assiette de Beurre* of April, 1903, depicting the aftermath of the Easter pogrom.



The novel *The Lazarus Project* by Aleksander Hemon (2008), which tells the story of a survivor of the Kishinev pogrom who immigrated to the United States, provides a vivid description of the violence and its far-reaching consequents. The epic poem *City of the Killings* written in 1903 by the Jewish poet Chaim Bialik to commemorate the massacre begins:

> Rise and go to the town of the killings and you'll come to the yards
> and with your eyes and your own hand feel the fence
> and on the trees and on the stones and plaster of the walls
> the congealed blood and hardened brains of the dead.

The Protocols

At about this time there appeared the first traces of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (Nilus, 1906/1922). This document purported to be the secret plans of Jewish Leaders to take over the world. The protocols describe how these elders will sow dissension and confusion amidst the *goyim* and ultimately step in to rule:

> In order to put public opinion into our hands we must bring it into a state of bewilderment by giving expression from all sides to so many contradictory opinions and for such length of time as will suffice to make the *goyim* lose their heads in the labyrinth and come to see that the best thing is to have no opinion of any kind in matters political, which it is not given to the public to understand because they are understood only by him who guides the public. This is the first secret.
>
> The second secret requisite for the success of our government is comprised in the following; To multiply to such an extent national railings, habits, passions, conditions of civil life, that it will be impossible for anyone to know where he is in the resulting chaos, so that the people in consequence will fail to understand one another. This measure will also serve us in another way, namely, to sow discord in all parties, to dislocate all collective forces which are still unwilling to submit to us, and to discourage any kind of personal initiative which might in any degree hinder our affair. There is nothing more dangerous than personal initiative; if it has genius behind it, such initiative can do more than can be done by millions of people among whom we have sown discord. We most so direct the education of the goyim communities that whenever they come upon a matter requiring initiative they may drop their hands in despairing impotence. The strain which results from freedom of action saps the forces when it meets with the freedom of another. From this collision arise grave moral shocks, disenchantment, failures. By all these means we shall so wear down the *goyim* that they will be compelled to offer us international power of a nature that by its position will enable us without any violence gradually to absorb all the State forces of the world and to form a Super-Government. (Protocol 5)

The reader easily recognizes the confusions of the modern world. Our

natural paranoia quickly attributes this to outside agents rather than to the
simple complexity of political forces. Human beings have long imagined that our lives are controlled by secret societies such as the Templars, the
Rosicrucians, the Jesuits, the Illuminati, the Masons, and the New World Order (Eco, 1994, pp 132-139). *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* identified these clandestine agents as the Jews.

The protocols are a complete fiction (Eisner, 2005; Hagemeister, 2008). They were largely plagiarized from a satire against the French Emperor Napoleon II written by Maurice Joly in 1864 entitled *The Dialogue in Hell between Machiavelli and Montesquieu* (Graves, 1921). The most widely accepted story is that a Russian exile living in France, Mathieu Golovinski, adapted Joly's satire into an antisemitic tract at the instigation of the Tsar's secret police, who wished to impugn the forces of modernization in Russia, and to whip up hatred of the Jews as a distraction from the government's problems.

Despite being proven a fiction, the Protocols have been republished over and over again. The illustration at the right shows the cover of a French Version published in 1934. The

design is loosely based on Léandre's 1898 cartoon depiction of Rothschild. The cover artist goes by the alias 'Christian Goy." In the 20th Century the Protocols are widely published in Muslim countries, where they serve to foster animus against Israel. Why do people still believe that this tract represents the truth? It is easier to believe in a simple fiction than in complex facts. The confusion of the modern world is caused by the interactions of many different political forces. It is simpler to believe it is caused by the Jews than to try to understand the real causes.

Rootless Cosmopolitans

During the 18th and 19th Century nationalism became one of the main forces in European politics. As the Age of Enlightenment and the Age of Revolution undermined the legitimacy of divinely ordained dynasties, the people developed the idea of a nation – a community conceived or "imagined" in three ways: shared culture, limited geographic extent, and governance by the people (Anderson, 2016). Inherent in the concept of a nation was the idea that all its citizens should have equal rights. Nationalism gained its greatest impetus from the revolutions in the United States and France in the 18th century, and from the later Revolutions of 1848 in Europe.

According to the ideals of nationalism, no one should be discriminated against on the basis of their religion. As part of this movement Jewish citizens began therefore to be accepted as equal participants in the new nations (Mendes-Flohr, 1996; Barnavi, 2003, pp 158-9). This emancipation occurred slowly: France in 1791; Prussia in 1812; Belgium in 1830; the Netherlands in 1834 the United Kingdom in 1858; Austria 1867; the United States in 1877 (reviewed in Wikipedia).

Although nationalism wants all its citizens, regardless of their beliefs or background to be equal, it would prefer them

to be homogeneous, all believing in the same national ideals. Yet no nation is homogeneous. The success of a nation depends on how it comes together despite its differences.

As nationalism progressed, suspicions about the Jewish people remained. This worry was presaged by the Conte de Clermont-Tonnere in a speech to France's new National Assembly in 1789. He initially proposed the principle "that the profession, or manner of worship of a man, can never be motives for depriving him of the Rights of Election." He then listed some of the arguments against giving citizenship to the Jews and declared them invalid:

> It is here I am at tacked by the adversaries of the Jews. That people, say they, are unsociable; usury is enjoined them; they cannot be united with us, either by marriage, or habitual intercourse; they are forbidden our meats, and interdicted our tables. Our armies will never be recruited by Jews; they will never take up arms for the defense of their country. The weightiest of these reproaches is unjust, the others are but specious.

However, he then recognized that Jews may have commitments outside of the nation in which they would be granted full citizenship. They have religious and financial ties to colleagues in other nations. They may wish to be governed by their own laws and judged according to their scriptures. They could thus be a nation within a nation. So he suggested that

> you should deny the Jews every thing as a distinct nation, and grant them every thing as individuals.

This idea that Jews were still different from other citizens persisted. The very fact of the diaspora worked against them. With their allegiances to other Jewish communities in other countries, they seemed "cosmopolitan" rather than patriotic. They interfered with a nation's sense of itself. In the Middle Ages the Jew was assailed because he was not Christian. In the

Modern Age he was assailed because he was not truly French or German or Russian. In both cases he was not “one of us.”

The idea of the Jews as “rootless cosmopolitans” was (and is) one of the main tenets of Russian antisemitism. It was basic to the foundation of the Pale of Settlement in Tsarist times and it continued in the socialist regime that followed the Russian Revolution. The following is a description of cosmopolitans from Vissarion Belinsky, a 19th century literary critic who promoted the idea of a truly Russian literature:

> The cosmopolitan is a false, senseless, strange and incomprehensive phenomenon, a manifestation in which there is something insipid and vague. He is a corrupt, unfeeling creature, totally unworthy of being called by the holy name of man (quoted in Pinkus, 1988, pp 153-154).

Despite Soviet Russia’s professed goal of the brotherhood of man, the idea of the Jew as a “rootless cosmopolitan” persisted after the Revolution. It came to a frightening culmination in the accusations against the Jewish doctors in 1952-3 (Carfield, 2002). It is frightening to note the similarity between Communist thought and the Fascist idea of *Bodenlosigkeit* (lack of “ground” in the sense of a place to have roots).

The ideas of nationhood radically changed the lives of many Jews (Arendt, 1951). Intent on proving themselves good citizens of the new nations, they relinquished some of their religious beliefs and behaviors. They became secular. Some even converted to the state religion, hoping to become “assimilated” into general society. Despite all these efforts to become involved as a citizen, the Jews continued to be considered alien. Rather than being welcomed as a compatriots they reviled as pretentious upstarts.

And so many Jews began to think that the only solution was to return to Palestine to found their own new nation of Israel.

No longer cosmopolitan they would reclaim their homeland. Zionism would provide Jews with a nation wherein they were not alien (Miller& Ury, 2010).

These new developments made it even more difficult for the Jews who remained in the countries of their birth. Would a Jew support Israel against the interests of the country in which he lives? Zionism raised fears about the allegiance of the Jews, and provided an excuse to exile them from the nations they could not be part of.

So arose the idea that the Jews could never really be part of any non-Jewish nation. This concept was presented by T. S. Eliot (1934) in a series of talks about literary traditions. He describes “tradition:”

> What I mean by tradition involves all those habitual actions, habits and customs, from the most significant religious rite to our conventional way of greeting a stranger, which represent the blood kinship of ‘the same people living in the same place.’ (p 18)

He goes on to suggest how tradition should be established and maintained:

> What we can do is to use our minds, remembering that a tradition without intelligence is not worth having, to discover what is the best life for us not as a political abstraction, but as a particular people in a particular place; what in the past is worth preserving and what should be rejected; and what conditions, within our power to bring about, would foster the society that we desired. (p. 19)

And then he brings up something that is essential to any great tradition:

> The population should be homogeneous; where two or more cultures exist in the same place they are likely either to be fiercely self-conscious or both to become adulterate.

> What is still more important is unity of religious background; and reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable. There must be a proper balance between urban and rural, industrial and gricultural development. And a spirit of excessive tolerance is to be deprecated.

The remarks about the free-thinking Jews are strange and terrifying. They are completely out of context in a discussion of the literary traditions of the American South. They clearly reflect the antisemitism of the writer and of his time. In the years subsequent to Eliot's book, the great liberal democracies of the world refused to accept Jews fleeing from the Nazi regime in Germany for fear that they would pollute their national identities.

Although nationalism fostered the idea of governance by the people, it also promoted war in the pursuit of a nation's destiny. As Anderson (2016) has pointed out, one of the measures of nationalism's success is how easily a people will lay down their lives to defend their country. Surely cosmopolitanism is a better ideal.

Conclusion

Human beings unfortunately seem to need to hate. We make an enemy of any one who is different from us. And so we revile those who gave us the Ten Commandments. We need to stop this senseless behavior. The main way forward is to learn abou those who are not us. This will broaden our understanding. With understanding will come tolerance and cooperation. And we should follow ideals that refuse to be limited to one faith or to one nation.

References

Anderson, B. R. O'G. (1983/2016). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Revised Edition. London: Verso.

Arendt, H. (1951, reprinted 1973). *The origins of totalitarianism*. New York:
Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich.

Bacon, G. (2003). “The House of Hannover”: Gezeirot Tah in modern Jewish historical writing. *Jewish History, 17,* 179-206.

Bandura, A., Underwood, B., & Fromson, M. E. (1975). Disinhibition of aggression through diffusion of responsibility and dehumanization of victims. *Journal of Research in Personality, 9,* 253–269.

Barnavi, E. (2003). *A historical atlas of the Jewish people: From the time of the patriarchs to the present*. New York: Schocken.

Bauer, Y. (2001). *A history of the Holocaust*. *Revised edition*. New York:
Franklin Watts.

Baum, S. K. (2012). *Antisemitism Explained*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Beck, A. T. (2002). Prisoners of hate. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 40, 209-216.

Beller, S. (2007). *Antisemitism: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford
University Press

Bernstein, P. (1951). *Jew-hate as a sociological problem*. New York: Philosophical Library.

Brewer, M. B. (1999). The psychology of prejudice: Ingroup love or outgroup hate? *Journal of Social Issues, 55,* 429–435.

Carfield, A. M. (2002), The Soviet “Doctors’ Plot”–50 years on. *BMJ*,
325 (7378), 1487–9.

Chanes, J. A. (2004). Introduction and Overview. In Antisemitism: A Reference Handbook. Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO

Clermont Tonnerre, S. (1790) Translation of a speech, spoken by the Count Clermont Tonnere, Christmas-eve last: on the subject of admitting non-Catholics, comedians, and Jews, to all the privileges of citizens, according to the Declaration of rights. Available at Hathi Trust.

Crossan, J. D. (1995). Who killed Jesus? Exposing the roots of anti-semitism in the Gospel story of the death of Jesus. San Francisco: Harper

Eco, U. (1994). *Six walks in the fictional woods*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard
University Press.

Eisner, W. (2005). *The plot: The secret story of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Eliot, T. S. (1934). *After strange gods: A primer of modern heresy*. London: Faber and Faber.

Foxman, A. H. (2010). *Jews and money: The story of a stereotype*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gelbin, C. S., & Gilman, S. L. (2017). *Cosmopolitanisms and the Jews*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press

Goldstein, P (2012). *A convenient hatred: The history of antisemitism*. Brookline, MA: Facing History and Ourselves.

Graves, P. (1921) The truth about “The Protocols”: a literary forgery. *The Times* (London) August 16, 17, and 18. Reprinted in a pamphlet

Hagemeister, M. (2008). The Protocols of the Elders of Zion: Between history and fiction. *New German Critique, 103*, 83-95.

Hemon, A. (2008). *The Lazarus project*. New York: Riverhead Books

Lazare, B. (1903). *Antisemitism, its history and causes: Translated from the French*. New York: International Library Publishing Co.

Luther, M. (1543/1948) *The Jews and Their Lies*. Los Angeles: Christian Nationalist Crusade.

Marcus, J. R. (1938). The Jew in the medieval world: A source book: 315-1791. Cincinnati: Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

Marrus, M. R. (1987). *The Holocaust in history*Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys.

Mendes-Flohr, P. (1996). The emancipation of European Jewry. Why was it not self-evident? *Studia Rosenthaliana*, 30, 7-20.

Milgram, S. (1974) *Obedience to authority: An experimental view.* New York:
Harper.

Miller, M. L., & Ury, S. (2010) Cosmopolitanism: the end of Jewishness? *European Review of History,* 17, 337-359.

Morse, N. C., & Allport, F. H. (1952). The causation of anti-semitism: an investigation of seven hypotheses. *Journal of Psychology* 34, 197–233.

Nilus, S., (1906, translated by Marsden, V. E., 1922). *Protocols of the learned elders of Zion*. Reedy, West Virginia: Liberty Bell Publications

Penkower, M. N. (2004). The Kishinev Pogrom of 1903: A turning point in Jewish history. *Modern Judaism*, 24, 187–225,

Pinkus, B. (1988). *The Jews of the Soviet Union: The history of a national minority*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Prager, D., & Telushkin, J. (1981, reprinted 2003). *Why the Jews? The reason for antisemitism*. Touchstone Books.

Sartre, J.-P. (translated by Becker, G. J., 1948). *Anti-Semite and Jew*. New York:
Schocken.

Stavrakopoulou, F. (2004). *King Manasseh and child sacrifice: Biblical distortions of historical realities*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Sternberg, R. J. (2003). A duplex theory of hate: Development and application to terrorism, massacres, and genocide. *Review of General Psychology* 7, 299-328.

Wagner, R. (1850, translated by William Ashton Ellis, 1894). Jews in Music.