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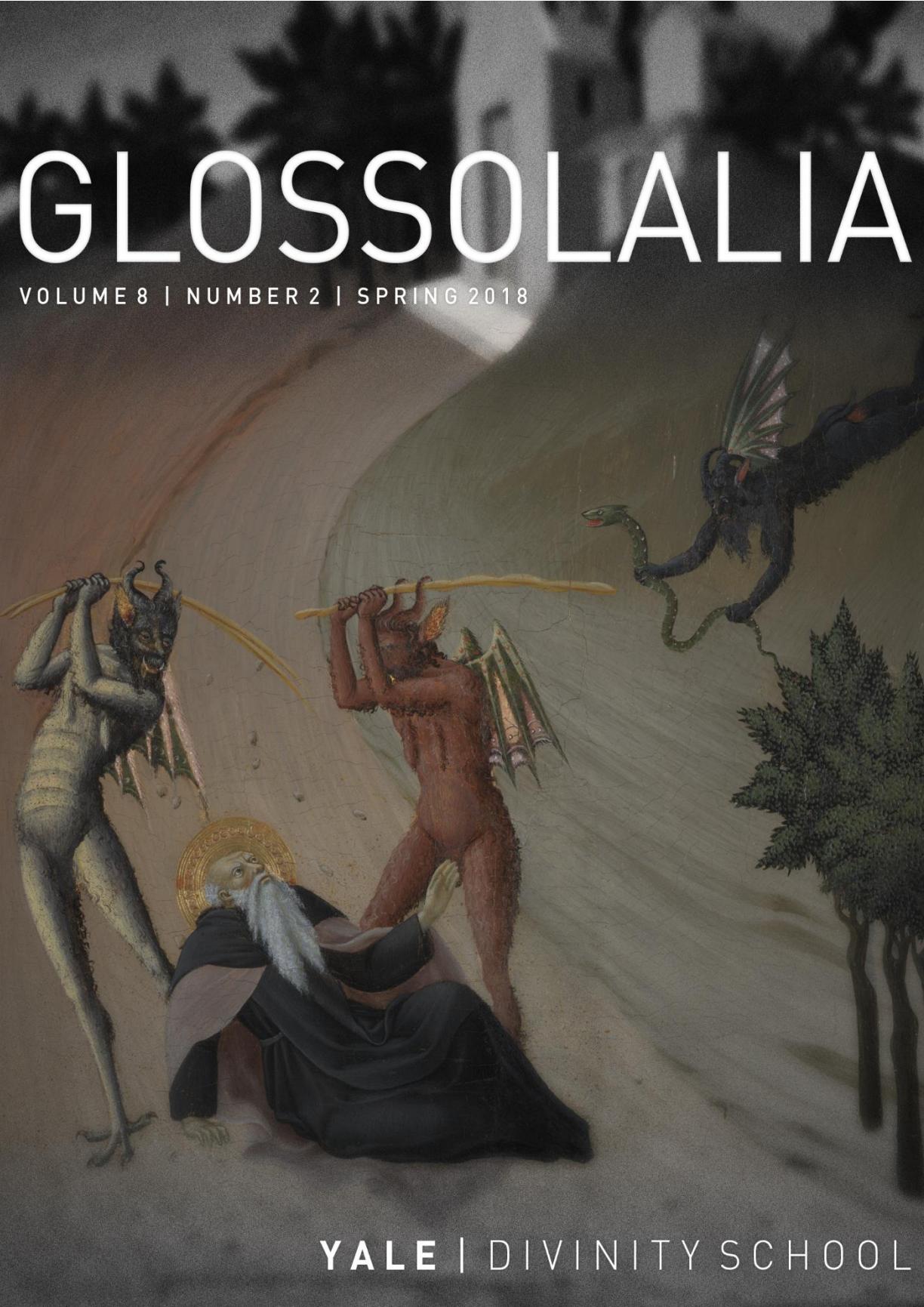

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Glossolalia is an open-access, peer-reviewed graduate journal of religion that publishes biannually out of Yale Divinity School. Grounded in a strong belief in the need for further collective academic utterance at the graduate level, *Glossolalia* exists as a multidisciplinary space for academic papers and analysis. Though initially founded (and subsequently re-founded) by Yale graduate students, *Glossolalia* welcomes submissions from the worldwide community of scholars and academics.

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FROM THE DESK OF THE EDITOR IN CHIEF

Most praiseworthy readers of *Glossolalia*,

As the spring of 2018 completes its denouement, and most glorious summer rises upon the temporal horizon, I am happy to report that our small journal grows and thrives. We continue to draw scholarship from the top universities and colleges of the world, as well as from a variety of independent scholars, whose pensive writings represent the most venerable level of academic discourse. Furthermore, we maintain our belief in the impact of open-access scholarship, and the value of independent publishing. In the increasingly corporate academic-publishing complex, all scholars must discover new ways to find their voice. Though *Glossolalia* is but a small journal, we remain honored to provide a platform for these voices, and we look forward to many more years of diligent editing and publishing to come.

Our shared earth, in the two-thousand and eighteenth year of the Common Era, often feels like a place without room for humor. Authoritarianism violently encroaches upon the languishing citizens of the world; the economic 1% attains unfathomable levels of wealth and power; and the globe's climate shifts irrevocably towards the uninhabitable. Yet, as history has taught us, humor often arises from the darkest depths, as a deeply human response to times of trouble, strife, and agony.

We thus called upon the global academy to send us their work considering the theme of humor. Our contributors broadly interpreted the phrase, not only as 'that which provokes laughter and happiness,' but also in the more ancient sense of 'a manner of being' or 'a state of mind.' Within the forthcoming pages are four essays that exemplify the work of intellectually perspicuous scholars. Two of the papers allude to that traditional definition of humor. Jais

Brohinsky and Gerhard Sonnert observe, from a uniquely data-driven and social scientific perspective, the potential relationship between religiosity and belief in extra-terrestrial intelligence within contemporary society. Sam Osborn takes us back to the classical era, analyzing the unification of Celtic pagan cults in the period of the Roman invasions. The other two articles engage with the more common definition of humor. Carmen Denia explores the comic relief manifest in the 21st and 22nd cantos of Dante's *Inferno*, while Victor Gan examines a sublime dialectic found in liturgically-grounded medieval religious comedy.

We now invite you, our most loyal readers, to join us once again on this intellectual journey – on a road paved with collective academic voice and the finest scholarship. With never-ending veneration for our authors, we turn, at last, to the products of their labor.

Wishing you all the very best,

Alexander D'Alisera
Editor in Chief

RELIGION AND EXTRATERRESTRIALS

An Astrosociological Perspective

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In the twentieth century, questions about the existence of extraterrestrial life became firmly rooted in scientific endeavors. The formal search for extraterrestrial intelligence (SETI, 1959), early messaging projects like Evpatoria (1962) and Arecibo (1974), the discovery of exoplanets in the 1990s, and the nascent fields of astrobiology and astrochemistry all put the question of extraterrestrial life, whether tangentially or directly, into the purview of science. This was not always the case. For most of recorded history, questions about extraterrestrial life, and in particular about

extraterrestrial intelligence (ETI), were the subject of theological debate and imagination.

This article investigates if and how views of ETI are associated with religious beliefs, as well as how people think the discovery of ETI would affect religious beliefs. To this end, we analyze the results of a survey we created to explore these questions. By grounding our study in an historical context and combining cultural interpretation with social scientific research, we gain a compelling perspective that is able to both place these questions within a landscape of shifting paradigms, as well as to ascertain current trends today. This approach, we propose, can appropriately be called an astrosociological perspective.[1]

A Brief and General History of the Plurality of Worlds[2]

Scholars date the first historical records of lunar observations to cave paintings made in the seventh millennium BCE and surmise that such pictographs are evidence of cosmic contemplation.[3] While it is a comparatively recent development to use scientific means to actively search for an answer to the question 'Are we alone?', the concept of other life is baked into the foundations of Western thought. In the Western tradition, the genesis of the religious debate about ETI appears to date back to at least the fourth century BCE. At the time, what has become known as the Aristotelian worldview of a static and unique Earth at the center of a finite and bounded

[1] Jim Pass, in *Redefining the Definition of Astrosociology Utilizing Three Perspectives* (2010), defines astrosociology as the study of "the social, cultural, and behavioral patterns related to outer space" (p 4). We hold with this definition.

[2] For a much fuller discussion on the plurality of worlds see Michael Crowe's *The Extraterrestrial Life Debate, Antiquity to 1915* (2008), Steven Dick's *Plurality of Worlds: The Origins of the Extraterrestrial Life Debate from Democritus to Kant* (1982), and David Weintraub's *Religions and Extraterrestrial Life: How Will We Deal With It?* (2014).

[3] Norriss S. Hetherington, *Encyclopedia of Cosmology: Historical, Philosophical, and Scientific Foundations of Modern Cosmology* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

universe contended against Atomist conceptions like those of Leucippus, Democritus, and Epicurus, which adopted Anaximander's infinite universe and posited a plurality of worlds.[4] Given the nature of infinity, at least some of these worlds were thought to be inhabited.[5] The physics and cosmology of Aristotle largely prevailed and laid the groundwork for Ptolemy's geocentric universe, and, though these writings were lost to Europe for nearly 1,000 years, their ideas held sway and were folded into emerging Christian doctrines and subsequent theological debate. While the Aristotelian universe was generally accepted, some medieval scholars like John Buridan (c. 1295–1358), Nicole Oresme (1325–1382), and Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1461) posited that it was within God's power to create other worlds and (at least in the understanding of Nicholas) populate them, whether or not one could reasonably believe Him to have done so.[6]

Similar debates on the plurality of worlds arose among Jewish[7] and Muslim[8] scholars. While Aristotle's and Ptolemy's texts were lost

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[4] Michael J. Crowe and Matthew F. Dowd, "The Extraterrestrial Life Debate from Antiquity to 1900," in *Astrobiology, History, and Society*, ed. Douglas Vakoch (Berlin: Springer, 2013), 3-56.

[5] David Weintraub, *Religions and Extraterrestrial Life: How Will We Deal With It?* (Cham: Springer International, 2014).

[6] Michael J. Crowe, *The Extraterrestrial Life Debate, Antiquity to 1915: A Source Book* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008); Steven J. Dick, *Plurality of Worlds: The Origins of the Extraterrestrial Life Debate from Democritus to Kant* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

[7] For example, Moses Maimonides (1135-1204 CE) wrote in his *Guide for the Perplexed*: "Consider how vast are the dimensions and how great the number of these corporeal beings ... The species of man is the least in comparison to the superior existents—I refer to the spheres and the stars. As far as comparison with the angels is concerned, there is in true reality no relation between man and them. Man is merely the most noble among the things that are subject to generation, namely, in this our nether world" (Weintraub 2014, 13).

[8] For example, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (1149–1209 CE) wrote in his commentary on the Qur'an known as *The Keys to the Unknown*: "It has been proven by evidence that God, the Exalted, is capable of actualizing all possibilities ... of creating thousands and thousands of worlds beyond this world, each of which would be

to Europe, they were translated and read throughout the Arab world. During the latter half of the first millennium CE, Islamic scholars were commenting on the Aristotelian and Ptolemaic systems and attempted to reconcile the possibility and implications of multiple worlds. However, neither Islam nor Judaism had a fundamental conflict with the possibility of plurality because adherents of both understood God to be omnipotent, omnipresent, and ultimately unfathomable. Other worlds, inhabited or otherwise, would also be considered God's creations and would not affect the Earthly relationship to the divine.[9]

Largely due to the work of astronomers and scientists, such as Nicolaus Copernicus, Giordano Bruno, Galileo Galilei, Johannes Kepler, and Isaac Newton (many of whom were devout), heliocentrism was gradually accepted by the majority of the Western world – including, eventually, the Catholic Church. As the center of the universe moved from the Earth toward the sun, the plurality of worlds turned from debate into assumption. The question that remained was habitation. Scientific writings on the subject in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were often tied to theological assumptions and tended to fall into two camps: the Principle of Mediocrity and the Principle of Plenitude,[10] which both arrived at similar conclusions. The Principle of Mediocrity put forth the idea that Earth was not so special after all, and that other parts of the universe would be similar to what we find here. Therefore, if life existed here, it likely did elsewhere. The Principle of Plenitude posited a universe teeming with life. This position was often based

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greater and more massive than this world ... and the argument of the philosophers for the uniqueness of this world is weak and poor, being based on invalid premises" (Weintraub 2014, 165).

[9] Michael Ashkenazi, "Not the Sons of Adam," *Space Policy* 8, no. 4 (1992): 341-349.

[10] Crowe and Dowd, "The Extraterrestrial Life Debate from Antiquity to 1900," 2013.

on the claim that God values life, is all powerful, and would therefore fill the universe with living creatures. The argument did not always center on the divine; nature or other physical organizing principles were also cited as the genesis of plenitude. Among scholars and theologians, the general consensus by the end of the eighteenth century appeared to be that the other celestial bodies in our solar system, including the moon and sun, were inhabited.[11]

It is important, for the purpose of contextualizing our research, to draw attention to the shift that occurred in this evolving debate, from understanding the outside world through reason and scriptural argument to understanding based on observation and repeatable experiments. In this regard, it is imperative to mention Charles Darwin, whose 1859 publication of *On the Origin of Species* introduced the so-called 'dangerous' idea that life, the world, the mind (and, as some would later argue, the cosmos) do not need a designer to achieve plurality and plenitude.[12]

In the second half of the nineteenth century, shortly after Darwin's groundbreaking biological theory saw print, improved observational technologies, spectroscopy, and the subsequent advent of astrophysics allowed astronomers to do more than track the motion of celestial bodies. By measuring the light emitted from or reflected off of these objects, scientists could for the first time gather empirical data about their composition.[13] These observations validated the idea that the distant universe is made up of the same stuff as matter on Earth. Regarding extraterrestrial life, observations of the moon revealed a stark contrast between the lit and unlit portions, suggesting it had no atmosphere and therefore no air, no

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[11] Crowe and Dowd, "The Extraterrestrial Life Debate from Antiquity to 1900," 2013.

[12] Daniel C Dennett, "Darwin's Dangerous Idea," *The Sciences* 35, no. 3 (1995): 34.

[13] John Lankford and Rickey L. Slavings, *American astronomy: Community, careers, and power, 1859-1940*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

water, and no life. Similar considerations began crossing other potential hosts off the list of possibilities. By the 1870s, scientific study and debate had rejected potential life on the sun, moon, and every planet except Mars.[14] Previous observations of Mars had revealed polar ice caps, what appeared to be a system of canals, and speculation of an atmosphere and even vegetation.[15] These observations, along with the recurrent appearance of Martians in literature, breathed a few more decades of life into the potential for ETI in our solar system. However, as the ice caps were shown to be composed of carbon dioxide instead of water, the vegetation nonexistent, and the canals a wishful interpretation, it seemed we were truly alone, at least in this neck of the woods.

Almost two decades into the twenty-first century, humans have sent spacecraft to every planet in our solar system, the largest of Jupiter's and Saturn's moons, and have even caught a close-up glimpse of Halley's Comet. While the places for extraterrestrial life to hide in our solar neighborhood are shrinking, its potential homes within our galaxy are expanding. The discoveries of a few thousand exoplanets since 1992 constitute a new phase in the search for ETI. The sheer quantity of potentially habitable planets, the documented ones being only a fraction, reignite the possibilities of life despite the unique position Earth occupies in this solar system.

ETI in Popular Culture

The topic of ETI is not restricted solely to rarefied debates among theological elites or scientific experts. It is also firmly established within popular culture. The briefest of online searches reveals over 500 movies featuring extraterrestrials.[16] The amount of literature

[14] Crowe and Dowd, "The Extraterrestrial Life Debate from Antiquity to 1900," 2013.
[15] Percival Lowell, *Mars* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1895).
[16] "List of films featuring extraterrestrials," Wikipedia, accessed March 14, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_films_featuring_extraterrestrials.

associated with or based upon alien life—articles, books, novels, comics—far outstrips this number. These contributions fall within the purview of the genre broadly known as science fiction (SF).

There is an important distinction to draw between the possibility of life and that of *intelligent* life. Likewise, there is a relevant distinction between scientific considerations and the aliens that exist among us in the form of popular stories. Anthropologists such as Klara Anna Capova point out that, although extraterrestrial life could very well be microbiological in an early stage of development, popular portrayals typically focus on ETI as technologically advanced and scientifically robust spacefaring civilizations.[17] We can look to popular culture's preoccupation with extraterrestrials as the projection of a society grappling with its own nature and history. Noteworthy here is that much of SF assumes biological, cultural, as well as technological evolution, and that portrayals often divide along a binary of hostile (think *War of the Worlds* or *Independence Day*) or beneficent (think *Contact* or *Arrival*). Whatever the details of SF narratives—from the extremes of nihilistic catastrophe to paradisiacal deliverance—they all transcend the *conditio humana* and thus venture into an historically religious territory, which has increasingly become the subject of the sciences and social sciences.

Though SF themes can be traced as far back as the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh* or the Sanskrit *Rigveda*, as an accepted literary term it is less than 100 years old.[18] Despite its common usage, the genre evades a definition as surely as ETI evades a definitive form in our collective imagination. From Hugo Gernsback's 1926 notion of 'Scientifiction' as "a charming romance intermingled with scientific

[17] Klara Anna Capova, "The detection of extraterrestrial life: Are we ready?" in *Astrobiology, History, and Society*, ed. Douglas Vakoch (Berlin: Springer, 2013), 271-281.

[18] Adam Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

fact and prophetic vision"[19] to J. O. Bailey's 1947 assertion that it must be "something that the author at least rationalizes as possible to science"[20] to Darko Suvin's description of the "literature of cognitive estrangement"[21] and Norman Spinrad's more pragmatic take, "science fiction is anything published as science fiction"[22] – the existence of SF is clear, though what exactly it is remains debatable. In *The History of Science Fiction*, Adam Roberts examines "the cultural and historical circumstances of the genre's birth: the Protestant Reformation, and a cultural dialectic between 'Protestant' rationalist post-Copernican science on the one hand, and 'Catholic' theology, magic and mysticism, on the other."[23] Through such a lens, we can view the genre, and therefore its treatment of ETI, as arising from the same source as the theological debate about the plurality of worlds and questions of mediocrity and plenitude.

Taking Roberts's theory of the origin of the SF genre and holding it alongside the epistemic shifts of the 1800s, we can perceive the debate about ETI as driven by, and as an embodiment of, science, technology, and rationalism. Through such a lens, we can re-imagine the conversation between religion and scientific research on ETI as a conversation between paradigmatic ways of knowing as embodied by scientific and religious thinking. This perspective greatly benefits from Constance Bertka's classification of dispositions ('integration,' 'conflict,' and 'independence') toward the relationship between science and religion.[24] 'Integration' assumes people's willingness and

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[19] Hugo Gernsback, "A New Sort of Magazine," *Amazing Stories* 1 (1926): 3.
[20] J. O. Bailey, *Pilgrims Through Space and Time: A History and Analysis of Scientific Fiction* (New York: Argus Books, 1947), 10.
[21] Darko Suvin, "The SF Novel in 1969," in *Nebula Award Stories "Five"* ed. James Blish, (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 158.
[22] Quoted in John Clute and Peter Nicholls, *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (London: Orbit, 1993), 311-314.
[23] Roberts 2016, 3.
[24] Constance M. Bertka, "Christianity's Response to the Discovery of Extraterrestrial Intelligent Life," in *Astrobiology, History, and Society*, ed. Douglas

ability to accommodate their religious commitments and traditions with the implications of ETI. Conversely, 'conflict' assumes that religion and science make claims about the same subject from mutually exclusive axioms and are therefore irreconcilable. 'Independence' sees religion and science as focusing on different subjects: "science tells us how, religion tells us why, and therefore they cannot be in conflict."[25] By applying Bertka's tripartite theorization, we will thus be able to view our participants' opinions about the effects of ETI on religion as projected social dispositions toward the wider relationship between scientific and religious thinking. In light of the data material generated in our survey, we propose a dichotomous division of Bertka's tripartite scheme. The main difference we can empirically ascertain is seen between 'independence' and 'engagement' (which encompasses 'conflict' and 'integration'); or, in other words, ETI will not affect religious belief or it will. In the discussion, we will speculate about the possible disentanglement of 'engagement' and the application of its two subtypes, 'conflict' and 'integration.'

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, speculations about the existence of ETI became firmly rooted in popular culture and can thus be understood as expressions of collective storytelling, cultural biases, and different epistemological dispositions. These speculations have grown alongside the scientific establishment's inquiry and debate. Government agencies have joined the investigation, though with an air of secrecy, as was recently reported by the *New York Times*.[26] Theologians still debate the question of religion and ETI, as they have done throughout the centuries. Yet,

Vakoch (Berlin: Springer, 2013), 329-340.

[25] Bertka 2013, 34.

[26] Helene Cooper, Ralph Blumenthal, and Leslie Kean, "Glowing Auras and 'Black Money': The Pentagon's Mysterious U.F.O. Program," *The New York Times* (December 16, 2017), https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/16/us/politics/pentagon-program-ufo-harry-reid.html.

their debate has now become reactive to current research in astronomy. What drives the contemporary discourse is the possibility of the scientific detection of ETI, and theologians who participate see themselves called upon to prepare for this possibility becoming a scientific reality. A central question in the theological discussion has revolved around the effects that a potential discovery of ETI would have on religion, mirroring the debates that arose about four centuries ago in the wake of the heliocentric theory.

Whereas doctrine, tradition, and holy texts are central to theological reasoning about the challenge posed by potential scientific discoveries of ETI, an important contribution to the overall debate can also be made by the social sciences. Using survey methods, researchers can find out what kinds of people (believers in different faiths or none) actually think about the relationship between religion and ETI. These beliefs might be quite different from theologians' normative reasoning about what one ought to think about the issue. Nonetheless, they would crucially shape societal reaction in case of ETI discovery or contact and, for that reason, are important to account for in theological debates.

Previous Surveys

Past polls have indicated that nearly half of Americans believe that ETI exists.[27] The Brookings Report, a 1960 report commissioned by NASA on policy issues related to space exploration, concluded, in a subsection titled "The implications of a discovery of extraterrestrial life," that contact with ETI could disrupt human societies and that individuals' reactions to ETI would depend

[27] Douglas Main, "Two Numbers: Americans are nearly as likely to believe in Intelligent Aliens as they are in Evolution," *Newsweek* (October, 7, 2015) http://www.newsweek.com/2015/10/16/two-numbers-americans-are-nearly-likely-believe-aliens-they-are-evolution-380639.html; Jeff Levin, "Revisiting the Alexander UFO Religious Crisis Survey: Is There Really a Crisis?" *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 26, no. 2 (2011): 273-284; 275.

in part on their religious background and environment.[28] Scientists have since weighed in, predicting that such contact would be devastating to Earthly religions.[29] Several studies have examined this assumption by surveying opinions regarding the impact of the discovery of ETI on religious belief.

In 1992, Michael Ashkenazi conducted 21 interviews with theologians and practicing officiants of the three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). While noting that his sample size was small, Ashkenazi reported that none of the interviewees felt that contact with ETI would affect their own or their congregation's belief or practice. Ashkenazi went on to flip the argument from the Brookings Report by hypothesizing that religious impact on Earth would depend largely on whether ETI had religion and, if so, what its nature would be.[30]

The Alexander UFO Religious Crisis Survey (AUFORCS) was a mail survey of clergy conducted in 1994 that gathered 230 responses from Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish congregations in the U.S. Alexander reported that minister and rabbi respondents did not feel that their faith or that of their congregation would be threatened by the existence of ETI. This was in contrast to the 'conventional wisdom' that religion would face an insurmountable crisis.[31] In revisiting AUFORCS, Jeff Levin concluded that "such a crisis may

[28] Donald N Michael, *Proposed studies on the implications of peaceful space activities for human affairs* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1960).
[29] Jill Cornell Tarter, "SETI and the religions of the universe," *Many Worlds: The New Universe, Extraterrestrial Life and the Theological Implications*, ed. Steven K. Dick (Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2000): 143-149; Paul Davies, *Are we alone?: philosophical implications of the discovery of extraterrestrial life* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995).
[30] Ashkenazi, "Not the Sons of Adam," 1992.
[31] Victoria Alexander, *The Alexander UFO Religious Crisis Survey* (Las Vegas, NV: The Bigelow Foundation, 1994).

be primarily in the minds of those less familiar with or engaged in religion."[32]

Another important, though less directly relevant, survey was conducted by Douglas Vakoch and Yuh-shiow Lee in 2000. Vakoch and Lee constructed a psychometric instrument to assess six different beliefs in American and Chinese undergraduates: 1) the existence of ETI, 2) ETI would be benevolent, 3) ETI would be malevolent, 4) contact with ETI would have religious significance, 5) discovery of ETI would be unsettling, and 6) experts should design replies to ETI messages. Vakoch and Lee found that Chinese and American students who were more religious were less likely to believe in the existence of ETI, whereas more religious Americans were also more likely to believe ETI would have hostile intentions.[33] Because strength of religious conviction appears relevant, we included this factor in our examination of the anticipated impact of ETI on personal belief, personal tradition, and religion as a whole.

In 2002, the Sci Fi Channel commissioned a Roper Poll to conduct phone interviews with 1,021 random Americans regarding their beliefs about extraterrestrials. Though the poll asked questions ranging from UFO sightings to the amount of information the government shares with the public, it also found that 88% of respondents said that the discovery of ETI would have no impact on their religious beliefs. This response was shown to correlate directly with age; the older the respondents, the less likely ETI was reported to impact their beliefs.[34]

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[32] Jeff Levin, "Revisiting the Alexander UFO Religious Crisis Survey: Is There Really a Crisis?," 282.

[33] Douglas Vakoch and Yuh-shiow Lee, "Reactions to Receipt of a Message from Extraterrestrial Intelligence: A Cross-Cultural Empirical Study," *Acta Aeronotica* 46, no. 10-12 (2000): 737-744.

[34] Roper, *UFOs & Extraterrestrial Life: Americans' Beliefs and Personal Experiences* (2002) Retrieved from http://web.archive.org/web/20090524145857/http://www.scifi.com/ufo/roper/.

The Peters ETI Religious Crisis Survey is, to our knowledge, the most extensive and focused survey to date. Peters and Froehlig received 1,325 total responses from persons belonging to ten different religious groups as well as from those identifying as non-religious. The survey specifically addressed the impact ETI would have on religious belief as well as the participants' tacit and overt beliefs about the nature of ETI. While the Peters Survey corroborated the previous assessments that people did not imagine that their own beliefs, nor those of their congregation or tradition, would face a crisis, Peters and Froehlig reported that nearly 70% of respondents who identified as 'non-religious' agreed that "... contact with extraterrestrials would so undercut traditional beliefs, that the world's religions would face a crisis."[35]

Whereas the Peters Survey covered a wider range of religious affiliation than Ashkenazi or the AUFORCS, the Roper Poll did not include religion as a factor. We attempted to cover as wide of a religious range as Peters and also added a factor of self-identified strength of belief that was missing from most previous surveys. While these instruments used the language of 'problem' or 'crisis' to describe potential impact on belief, we kept the language neutral to see if, and how, this would affect responses. Our instrument also looked for connections between denominational belief, strength of belief, and a judgment of ETI as helpful and/or hostile. Lastly, while demographic factors of age, sex, education, race, and geographic location were incorporated into the Roper Poll, these factors were either not included or remained unanalyzed in the other surveys. We included these factors, excepting geographic location. We also used a statistical approach that simultaneously controlled for the variety

[35] Ted Peters and Julie Froehlig, *Peters ETI religious crisis survey* (2008): 12. Retrieved from http://www.counterbalance.org/etsurv/PetersETISurvey Rep.pdf.

of background factors, so as to obtain a clearer view on the effects of religion.

Data and Methods

Our survey was created on, and distributed through, Google Forms. Due to limited time and funding, we collected a convenience sample using the snowball technique, with the goal of maximizing the number of participants and statistical power. Over a three-week period in early 2018, we emailed friends and colleagues around the U.S., asking them to participate and to forward the survey to others. Through the use of social media, the survey was distributed beyond our social and professional networks. While about 60 personal emails were sent out, we received 762 total responses, which we culled to 747 by eliminating duplicates and blanks. Because of our method of collection, it is important to note that our sample is not representative of any particular social population or geographic location. Nonetheless, convenience samples are typically used at the inception of a new research field (such as the study of the relationship between religion and ETI) because they are able to generate hypotheses that can be followed up in larger, and more expensive, representative studies. In addition, whereas the sample distribution of characteristics may be indeed be atypical, our multivariate statistical analysis focuses not on distributions, but on higher-order correlations for which bias is at least less likely.

We asked 14 questions, eight of which inquired about the respondents' opinions on ETI; two, about the independent variables of interest, religion and strength of belief; and four, about the control variables of age, gender, race, and education. The opinion questions as well as the 'strength of belief' question were answered on anchored 6-point scales. We chose neutral wordings for the questions about how one's personal religious beliefs, one's religious tradition, and religion in general might be affected by the discovery

of ETI (taking into account the potential perception of positive effects).

We initially divided religious affiliation into 11 groups: Agnostic, Atheist, Buddhist, Catholic, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Orthodox Christian, Protestant: Evangelical, Protestant: Mainline, and Other. Owing to low response numbers, we excluded the few responses we received from self-identified Hindus and Muslims, as well as 37 respondents who left the religion question blank. To increase statistical power, we combined the four Christian denominations under a larger category of 'Christian' and added 26 respondents who had identified as Christians using the category of Other. The Other category included 24 respondents who self-identified as 'Spiritual,' as well as deists, Unitarians, Taoists, wiccans, 14 self-identified pagans, and more. Table 1 shows the number of respondents for each category after this initial sorting process.

Table 1: Sample composition by belief group

Belief Group	Respondents
Agnostic	154
Atheist	119
Buddhist	26
Christian	241
Jewish	37
Other	128

The participants' ages spanned seven decades, from 13 to 86, with a mean age of 43. Age was treated as a linear continuous variable. Females accounted for 58.8% of respondents; males, 40.1%; and 1.1% self-identified as other (who were dropped from the analysis, owing to low numbers). 88.7% of participants identified as White or Caucasian; hence, in our statistical analysis, we collapsed the

categories into a dummy variable of White versus non-White. The mean response for strength of religious belief was 4.1 (within the 1 to 6 scoring range). In terms of education, 7.0% of respondents had not received a high school diploma; 10.4% had a high school diploma or GED; 31.0% attended some college or received an Associate degree; 26.1% had a bachelor's; and 25.5%, a graduate degree. The educational levels were coded from zero to four and treated as a linear continuous variable.

We carried out a multivariate analysis of variance for each ETI opinion item, predicting it from religion, strength of belief, and the controls. In addition to estimating main effects models, we checked for potential interaction effects between religion and the other independent variables. In all cases, we followed the stricter $p<0.01$ standard for significance (instead of the conventional $p<0.05$ standard) to guard against false positives. Occasionally, a control variable was statistically significant. We report all significant findings; however, to streamline the results section, we forgo results tables and show the main effects of religion in the form of bar graphs. Tukey post-hoc tests were used to determine statistically significant differences between religions. To graph significant interaction effects, we used a prototypical respondent (a 43-year-old white woman who was about halfway between 'some college' and a Bachelor's degree) in order to calculate regression lines for two religions displaying great difference for a given item. In all cases, error bars in main effects models indicate one standard error, while bands surrounding regression lines of interaction models indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Results

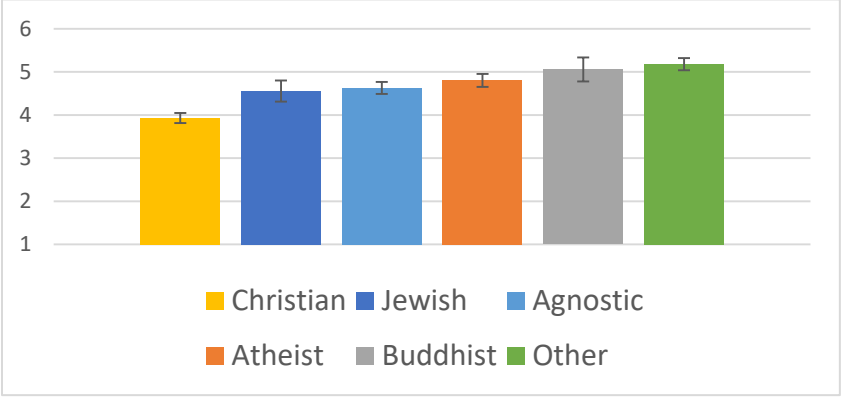
In four of the eight ETI opinion questions, a main effect of religion was detected. Moreover, four interactions of religion with other independent variables (mostly strength of belief) were found

in three of the remaining four questions. In the following, the results of our main effects and interaction models are presented for each of the questions.

Question 1: In your opinion, what is the likelihood that extraterrestrial intelligent life exists?

On the rating scale used, 1 represented 'There is no chance that extraterrestrial intelligent life exists,' and 6 represented 'Extraterrestrial intelligent life definitely exists.' We found religion ($p < 0.0001$) and race ($p = 0.0034$) to be significant main effects, with the estimated effect of Whiteness being 0.52. There were no significant interaction effects. In Figure 2, three distinct tiers of religious beliefs are differentiated, with Christians being least likely to believe in the existence of ETI and Others being the most likely. Jews, Agnostics, and Atheists constituted a third, statistically inseparable, bloc in between.

Figure 2: Question 1 Estimated Mean Responses by Religion

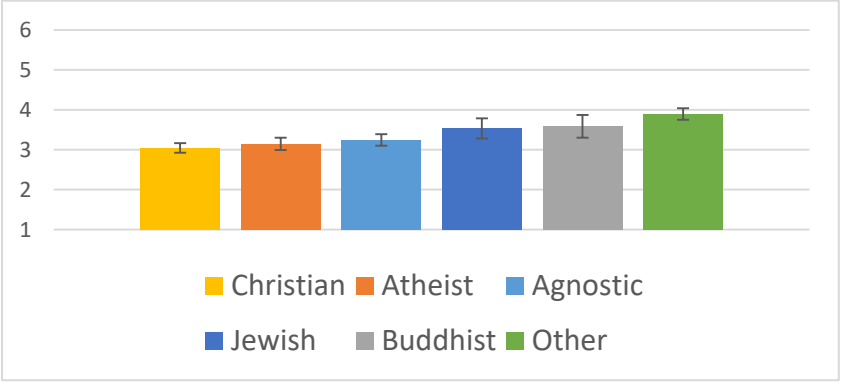


(N = 653)

Question 2: How likely is it that, within the next 50 years, human beings will learn of one or more extraterrestrial civilizations?

The rating scale went from 1 'There is no chance that we will learn of extraterrestrial civilizations within the next 50 years' to 6 'We will definitely learn of extraterrestrial civilizations within the next 50 years.' We found statistically significant main effects to be religion ($p < 0.0001$), age ($p = 0.0001$), and education ($p = 0.0032$), with no significant interaction effects. The effect of age (0.013) indicates that the older one gets, the more likely one is to think that humans will learn of extraterrestrial civilizations in the next 50 years. This result differs from that of the earlier Roper Poll. Education had a negative effect (-0.144); the more educated the respondents, the less likely they were to believe in ETI discovery within the next 50 years. Figure 3 shows that Christians have the lowest mean on this item; Others, the highest. Christians are statistically distinct from Jews, Buddhists, and Others; Christians and Atheists are distinct from Buddhists and Others; and Christians, Atheists, and Agnostics are distinct from Others.

Figure 3: Question 2 Estimated Mean Responses by Religion



(N = 652)

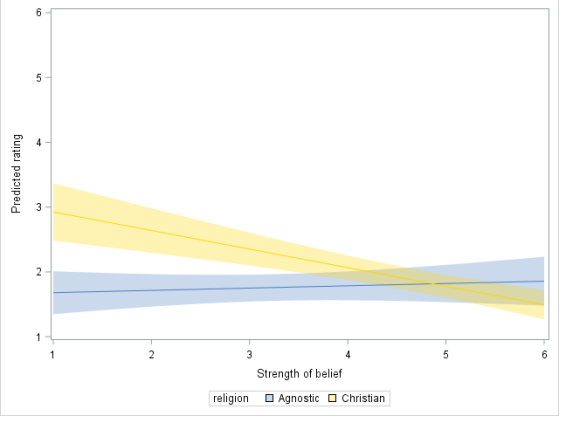
Question 3: To what extent would the discovery of a civilization of intelligent beings living on another planet affect your personal beliefs about religion?

The responses ranged from 1 'My beliefs would not be affected at all' to 6 'My beliefs would be dramatically affected.' While strength of belief had a significant negative coefficient (-0.10) in the main effects model ($p = 0.0009$), there were significant interaction effects between religion and strength of belief ($p = 0.0016$) and between religion and education ($p = 0.0031$).

Figure 4 shows that, as strength of belief increases, Agnostic respondents are slightly more likely to think that their personal beliefs would be affected. By contrast, Christian respondents are less likely to think that their personal beliefs about religion would be affected as strength of belief increases.

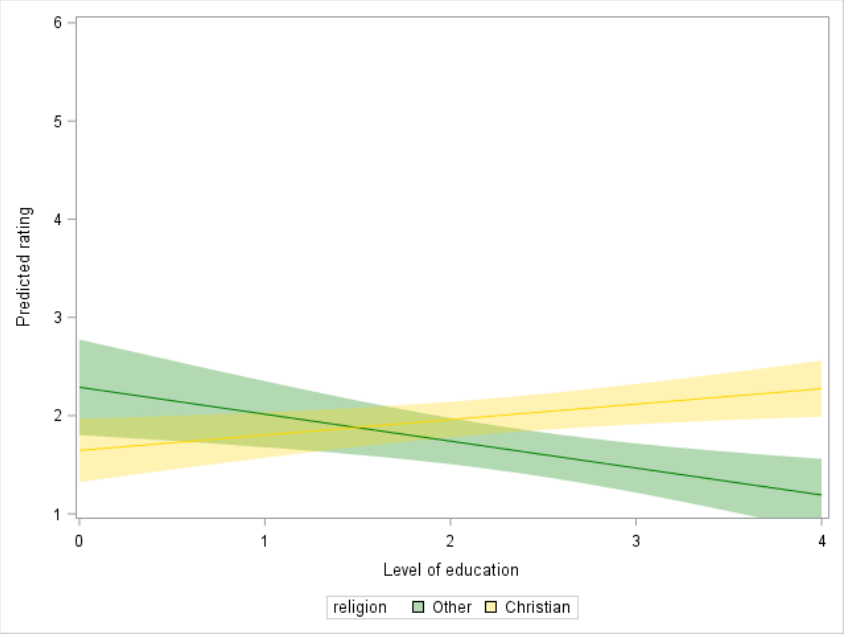
Looking at Figure 5, we see that the more educated the Christian respondents, the more likely they think that their personal beliefs about religion would be affected. The category of Other showed an opposite trend; the more educated the respondents, the weaker their opinion, on average, that their personal beliefs would be affected.

Figure 4: Question 3 Interaction between Religion and Strength of Belief



(Graph constructed using a prototypical respondent. Y-axis shows predicted answers to Question 3 based on the interaction effect between religion and strength of belief.)

Figure 5: Question 3 Interaction between Religion and Level of Education



(Graph constructed using a prototypical respondent. Y-axis shows predicted answers to Question 3 based on the interaction effect between religion and level of education.)

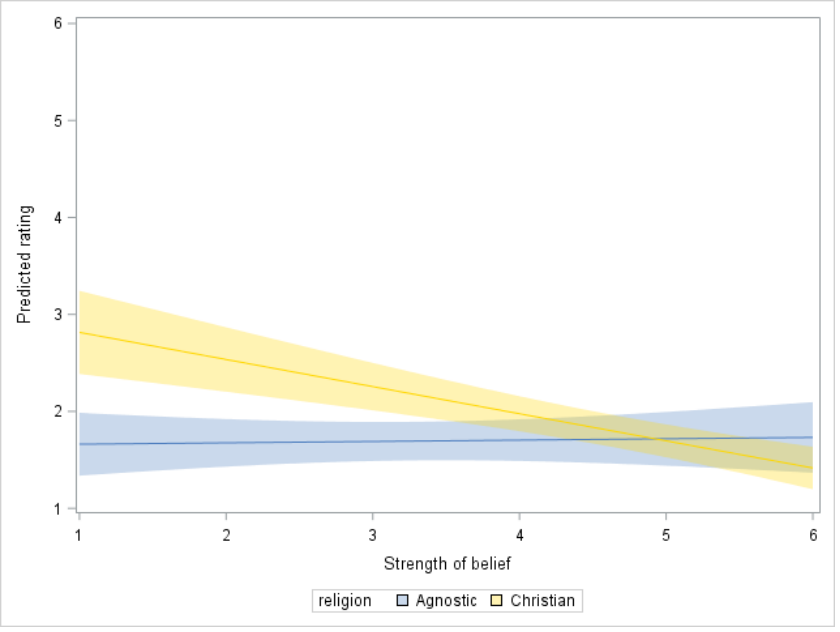
Question 4: To what extent would the discovery of a civilization of intelligent beings living on another planet affect your particular religious (or non-religious) tradition as a whole?

Respondents were asked to choose an answer from 1 to 6, with 1 representing 'My tradition would not be affected at all' and 6 representing 'My tradition would be dramatically affected.' Significant main effects were age ($p = 0.0002$), strength of belief ($p = 0.0049$), and education ($p = 0.006$). Age and strength of belief had small negative coefficients (-0.01 and -0.08 respectively), while education had a positive one (0.11). As with Question 3, the

interaction effect between religion and strength of belief was significant ($p = 0.0017$).

In Figure 6, we see the different estimated effect that strength of belief has on Agnostic and Christian respondents. As strength of belief increases, Agnostics are slightly more likely to think their tradition would be affected, whereas Christians are less likely to think their tradition would be affected. This interaction is similar to that of Question 3 (Figure 4).

Figure 6: Question 4 Interaction between Religion and Strength of Belief



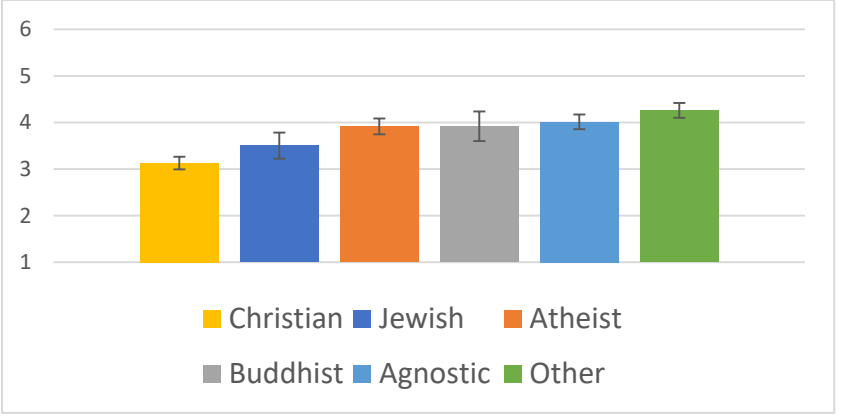
(Graph constructed using a prototypical respondent. Y-axis shows predicted answers to Question 4 based on the interaction effect between religion and strength of belief.)

Question 5: To what extent would the discovery of a civilization of intelligent beings living on another planet affect religion in general?

Here, the participants used a rating scale where 1 represented 'Religion in general would not be affected at all' and 6 stood for 'Religion in general would be dramatically affected.' Significant main effects were religion ($p < 0.0001$), age ($p = 0.0002$), and education ($p = 0.0031$). Age had a small negative coefficient (-0.015), and education, a positive coefficient (0.16).

Figure 7 shows that Christian respondents as a group were statistically distinct from all other groups, excepting Jews, in thinking that religion in general would be affected less dramatically. On the opposite end, the category of Other was distinct from Christians, Jews, and Atheists in their belief that religion in general would be more dramatically affected by the discovery of an ETI civilization.

Figure 7: Question 5 Estimated Mean Responses by Religion

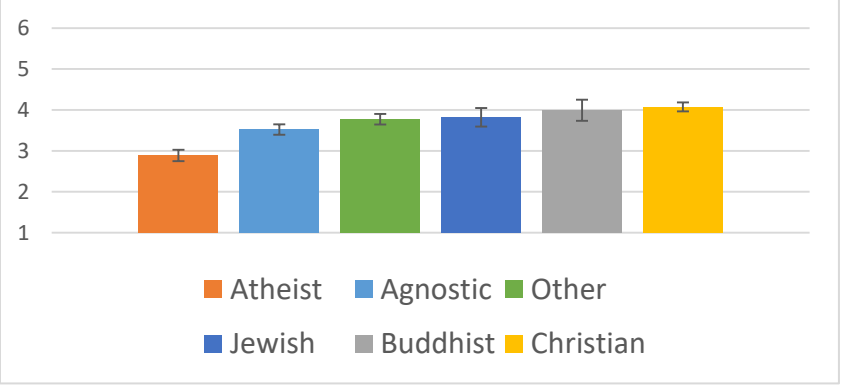


(N=651)

Question 6: If an extraterrestrial intelligent civilization were discovered, what is the likelihood that its members would have religious beliefs?

On this question, the ratings ranged from 1 meaning 'There is no chance they would have religious beliefs' to 6 representing 'They would definitely have religious beliefs.' Significant main effects were religion ($p < 0.0001$) and strength of belief ($p = 0.007$), though the coefficient for strength of belief was small (0.085). Figure 8 depicts a significant difference between Atheist respondents, who had the lowest average ratings on this question, and all other religious categories, as well as a distinction between Christian respondents and the categories of Other, Agnostic, and Atheist.

Figure 8: Question 6 Estimated Mean Responses by Religion



(N = 653)

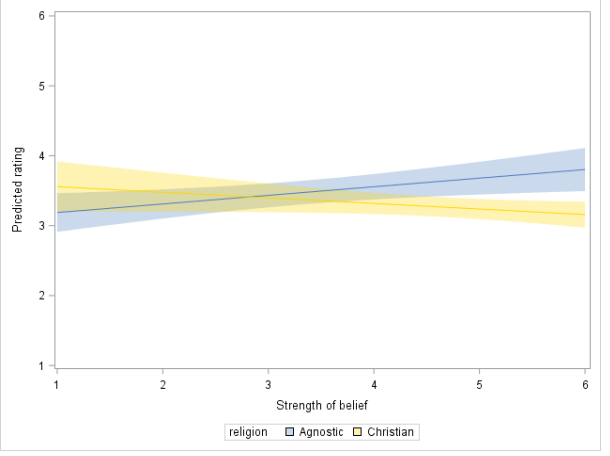
Question 7: If an extraterrestrial intelligent civilization were discovered, what is the likelihood that its members would help human beings?

The scale ranged from 1 standing for 'There is no chance that they would help humans' and 6 representing 'They would definitely help humans.' Age was the only significant effect found ($p = 0.0014$), with a very small effect size (the coefficient was 0.009).

Question 8: If an extraterrestrial intelligent civilization were discovered, what is the likelihood that its members would be hostile toward human beings?

On the final ETI opinion item, the participants gave ratings on a scale from 1 representing 'There is no chance they would be hostile to humans' to 6 meaning 'They would definitely be hostile to humans.' Similar to Question 7, age was a significant main effect ($p = 0.0026$), though, as one might expect, a slight negative one (-0.0072). We also found an interaction effect between religion and strength of belief. Figure 9 displays this interaction by contrasting Christian and Agnostic respondents. The stronger the personal belief, the less likely Christian respondents were to think that ETI would be hostile toward humans, but the more likely Agnostic respondents were to believe this would be the case.

Figure 9: Question 8 Interaction between Religion and Strength of Belief



(Graph constructed using a prototypical respondent. Y-axis shows predicted answers to Question 8 based on the interaction effect between religion and strength of belief.)

Discussion

When considering the responses to the eight ETI opinion questions together, we find that religion is an important variable

affecting participants' views on ETI. In half of the questions, religion was a significant main effect explaining the greatest variation in response. In three of the remaining four questions, religion interacted with strength of belief three times and, additionally, once with education. None of the control variables came close to that showing. Age, which, among the control variables, was most frequently found significant, had small effect sizes. The largest age coefficient, |-0.015|, amounts to only 0.9% of the standard deviation of the dependent variable; and a standard deviation change in age corresponds to 15.2% of the standard deviation of the dependent variable. Other predictors showed up only infrequently as significant main effects. Religion thus proved to be a much more relevant predictor of ETI beliefs than did the control variables.

The question of how religion affects views on ETI has a less clear answer and allows for a number of interpretations. Looking at the results for religion in the four main effects models where religion was significant (Questions 1, 2, 5, 6), we see that Christian respondents always occupy an extreme position; they are either the least likely or most likely to believe. In three cases, Other respondents are at the high extreme of the line-up of our religious groupings, with Christians at the low end. On Question 6, where Christians are at the high end, the bottom end is occupied by Atheists.

From an astrosociological perspective, we are particularly interested in what beliefs and/or dispositions are represented by the categories of Atheist and Other. It may be useful to view the distinction between Christians, Atheists, and Others, as it appeared in this sample, through the lens of 'conflict,' 'independence,' and 'integration' derived from Bertka's theory.

Bertka notes that 'independence' is the common approach in mainstream Christian communities.[36] Such a mentality could explain the statistically distinct Christian mean response to the effect of ETI discovery on religion in general (Question 5), because, from an 'independence' perspective, religion and science ask different questions, and, therefore, scientific discovery does not threaten religion in general. From such a perspective, even if ETI stands in for scientific or technological advancement, contact with ETI would have little or no bearing on religion.

The group of Other appears to be on the engagement side of Bertka's scheme, and, more specifically, in the 'integration' sub-category. While a few of the self-identified Other respondents cited organized religions, such as Unitarian Universalism and Taoism, the majority avoided denominational categorization and chose descriptors like 'Complicated,' 'Humanist,' 'Mystical,' 'Open,' and 'Spiritual.' It may be possible to view this rejection of the offered categories, in the context of a survey about ETI and religion, as a rejection of a perceived binary between religion and science (as represented by ETI). This could be interpreted as an 'integration' stance, in which science and ETI are both accepted as integral to one's belief structures. Eight self-categorized Other respondents cited knowledge of, or interactions with, ETI, more than all other categories combined. An interpretation of 'integration' could explain Other respondents' statistically distinct and highest mean regarding the existence of ETI, their discovery within the next 50 years, and even the effect of ETI on religion in general.

Atheist results can also be viewed through the lens of 'engagement,' though more on the 'conflict' than on the 'integration' side. If we understand atheism to mean a disbelief or lack of belief in a higher power or deity, and we understand religion to involve this

[36] Bertka 2013, 334.

type of belief, then the Atheists' mean score in Question 6 (which asks about the possibility for ETI to have religion) takes on potential significance. If we view the response as a projection of personal beliefs, then the Atheist respondents' statistically distinct position makes sense: They do not have a belief in a higher power, do not have a religion as defined by such, and, therefore, they may be prone to conclude, neither would ETI. In the Atheists' minds, religion may be characteristic of humanity's immature developmental stage, and a more advanced ETI might have left that stage long behind, if they had ever gone through it. This idea can be glimpsed in some Atheists' open-ended responses at the end of our survey: "Most likely an alien intelligence would be many thousands of years beyond us," and "... everything would depend on ... what their beliefs are and if they have scientific proofs as backbones to their belief systems." In this view, Atheists' low belief in ETI having religion may reflect an assumption of 'conflict' between science and religion.

In comparison with Peters's survey, our sample size was smaller, and we were therefore unable to represent the nuance of a larger group of different denominations. Replicating a finding in Peters's study, our sample showed a distinction, across all belief groups, between the predicted effects the discovery of ETI would have on the participants' personal beliefs and traditions and the predicted effects on religion in general. However, by looking at mean responses about the effects on religion in general in multivariate models that control for various background characteristics (instead of percentages of agree/disagree/neither-agree-nor-disagree responses in Peters's survey), we found Atheist and Agnostic mean responses on this question to be statistically indistinguishable from Buddhist, Jewish, and Other respondents. While the Christian estimated mean response was indeed statistically separate and lower, all group means, with the exception of Other, fell between 3 and 4 and surrounded the center of our response range. This seems to

complicate Peters's finding that "non-religious persons are much more likely to deem religion fragile and crisis prone that [sic] those who hold religious beliefs."[37]

Taken together, the results for Questions 3, 4, and 5 show that across religions, the effect of discovering ETI was estimated to be larger for religions in general than for one's own religious beliefs and religious tradition. This may be caused by a different mode of thinking when one's own religion is involved, as opposed to reasoning about religion in general. If religious belief is an integral part of a person's identity, it may be very robust vis-à-vis disturbances or new facts, such as the discovery of ETI. People may tend to keep their religious beliefs intact even in the face of possible contradictions and problems of doctrine, thereby avoiding potential cognitive dissonance[38] that could be generated by reasoning through the consequences of ETI discovery for their religion. By contrast, when personal identity is not at stake, as in considering the impact of discovering ETI on "religion in general," a more detached and rational stance toward doctrinal or societal repercussions appears easier to adopt. The second case revolves around reason, whereas the first case is more likely to be driven by self-preservation. The mentioned interactions on Questions 3 and 4 show that Christian respondents with great strength of belief are particularly apt to insulate their religious belief from potential effects of ETI discovery.

Vakoch and Lee found that the more religious Americans were less likely to believe in ETI and more likely to believe that ETI would be hostile.[39] In their survey, they used psychometrics to create a category of religiosity based on Genia's nine-item scale of Intrinsic

[37] Peters 2008, 13.
[38] Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957).
[39] Vakoch & Lee, *Reactions to Receipt of a Message from Extraterrestrial Intelligence: A Cross-Cultural Empirical Study*, 2000.

Religiosity.[40] In contrast, our survey used self-reporting to measure what we call 'strength of belief.' It may be that these constructs measure different relations; however, it is worth noting that our survey did not find strength of belief to be a significant effect on respondents' belief in ETI. Strength of belief did impact the belief that ETI would be hostile, but only in interaction with religion, as reported above.

Regarding the two questions about the helpful or hostile nature of ETI, the consistent result across all respondents was that of simply not knowing. In the main effects models, every religious group's mean was right in the middle of the scale, between 3 and 4, and most individual responses were also bunched there (which also manifests itself in these two questions having the two smallest standard deviations of the eight ETI opinion questions). Considering this finding through the lens of popular narratives about ETI, we can interpret the results as indicating that, while stories run the gamut from destruction to salvation, there is no one accepted collective narrative. We can also view this finding as a rejection of the helpful/hostile dichotomy, as uncertainty due to a lack of information, and/or as requiring greater nuance and complexity in categorizing an entire civilization. If we understand these interpretations as projections of humanity onto ETI, we can consider that the jury is still out regarding our own intra-species intentions toward one another. If such an interpretation holds, a question arises about when and how a different and more homogeneous collective narrative might emerge. While this question is not in the scope of our survey, it again opens a possible application for research about ETI and its use for Earthly relations.

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[40] Vicky Genia, "A psychometric evaluation of the Allport-Ross I/E Scales in a religiously heterogeneous sample," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 32 (1993): 284-290.

Conclusion

Our study suggests that religion, and interaction between religion and strength of belief, are significant factors contributing to people's opinions about the existence and nature of ETI and about the effects of discovery upon belief systems. Other background factors—age, educational level, gender, and race—make much less of a difference. There were a number of limitations to this study, ranging from the reliance on social networks for sampling to the underrepresentation of certain religious denominations and non-White respondents. It is hoped that these findings and the interpretive lenses through which we viewed them stimulate further in-depth studies, analysis, and discussion with larger, more representative samples, more detailed questionnaires, or qualitative interviews.

The center of the current conversation around potential contact or discovery scenarios has shifted from a theological discussion to a primarily scientific one. When considering the effects of ETI on religion, theologians today are reacting to scientific discoveries from fields like astronomy and astrophysics. In this article, we hoped to show that it may be useful for theologians to integrate an additional scientific input into their discourse about ETI—an input from *social* science. This is because the scientific discoveries are also absorbed and metabolized into popular culture through narratives that open avenues for interpreting and understanding the beliefs held by people of various religious convictions. Here, social sciences can make a significant contribution by offering insight into social understandings and beliefs as they exist in the population. Thus, by combining the methodological arsenal of empirical social science research with historical and cultural interpretive lenses, astrosociology is poised to make a fruitful contribution to the debate about the relationship between ETI and religion.

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DESIGNING A CELTIC NATIONAL RELIGION

Two Case Studies of Indigenous Pagan Cult Unification in Britain and Gaul

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Introduction

The classical Celts were in the unique position of having a well-established, well-trained priestly class, but a highly decentralized and factionalized tribal government. Religion and philosophy, and the artistic expression that they provoked, were important motivators for the elite members of Celtic society. Their intricate, motif-laden grave goods and symbolic fugues of early medieval poetry speak to a people that took deep meaning from the representative. The paradox of a strongly unifying theology alongside factional, belligerent tribes drove an ecosystem that highlights the power of religion as a social bonding agent. Here, I will review how the educated priestly class of the pre-Roman Celts attempted to unify regional cults into a more structured, symbolically canonized national religion. The historic motivation of unification was largely promoted by the direct military threat of Rome in the last centuries BCE. Rome's escalating ambitions in Gaul pair in particular with two episodes of indigenous cult mobility and cohesion. These two cults, the chthonic-fecundity god and the tribal-war god, are the best materially evidenced examples of indigenous theological clarifications in Celtic paganism.

Such unifying efforts by the Celtic priestly class show us how cultural commonality alone is not enough to bond a factionalized tribal network; instead, ritualized theological actions are needed to define the widespread understanding of shared identity.

Religions are not static. Their histories are defined by periods of dramatic reorganization and reformation as they adjust and adapt, both theologically and bureaucratically, to the dynamic worlds around them. These bursts of evolution are exciting not just for their superficial drama, but because they indicate periods of deep theological introspection. There is likely no better indicator of well-trained and powerful theologians than via the internal restructuring of their own religions. With deep study comes the urge to be sensitive to the politics and philosophies external to the religion, and with that, a reassessment of the state of the religion. Indeed, no well-studied European religion is not without its reformations, schisms, or reorganizations. Yet the oldest and most indigenous religions are viewed with a sort of constancy that is reserved only for the misunderstood 'other' and the institutions of the forgotten past. Instead of a religion with a dynamic theology, pre-Roman Celtic paganism is often seen as a collection of static and primitive regional cults, lacking both the organized priestly class needed to drive canonization, and the secular municipalities needed to maintain organized religion.

Before Rome reared out of the Mediterranean basin, the La Tene phase Celts were the dominant culture in Europe from Iberia and Northern Italy to the Black Sea and Scotland.[1] The Celtic world is traditionally viewed as tribal and diffuse; rather, the Celts were bound by strong fibers of cultural cohesion. Linguistic, artistic, and religious institutions held the Celtic peoples in close orbit. Indeed, they shared a language, a canon of motifism in physical art, a massive corpus of

[1] Simon James, *The World of the Celts* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 17.

oral stories, a common civil and martial law, a well-developed theology, and complex moral philosophy.[2] The Celts inhabited a paradoxical world, at once fiercely factional and culturally coherent. Celtic religion occupies a unique historic station, concreting together what would be the otherwise diffuse clasts of North Central Europe.

The Celts are well-known as Caesar's adversaries in the Gallic Wars, and equally so for numerous earlier invasions into the Greco-Roman world; they are most frequently understood as Caesar describes them: military antagonists to the classical world. We rarely consider the idea that Celtic theologians were key actors in antiquity. Anne Ross, however, in her monolithic review of Celtic religion in Britain, discusses this theory with cautious sincerity:

> [The Druids'] political power may have been on the increase during the years preceding the Roman occupation of Gaul, and it may be that, had this military defeat not occurred, they would have formed the nucleus of an organisation that Celtic society has never evolved sufficiently to achieve, namely a central government. It is not impossible that certain gods were especially venerated [...] due to a deliberate policy of the Druids to establish *national* gods rather than purely local and tribal gods.[3]

The Druids, Ross claims, explicitly attempted to unify a network of distributed local cults into a state religion. The utility of this action was twofold: a) it would have served to better unite and define an otherwise tribal culture against an increasingly belligerent Rome; and b) it would have redirected additional influence to the Druid caste that officiated religious activities.

Seeing as how the Druids are so often co-opted into the realm of new age mysticism and Celtic romanticism, we must exercise caution

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[2] Bettina Arnold and D. Blair. Gibson, *Celtic Chiefdom, Celtic State: the Evolution of Complex Social Systems in Prehistoric Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 13-25. Jean Markale, *The Celts: Uncovering the Mythic and Historic Origins of Western Culture* (Vermont: Inner Traditions International, 1993), 49-55.
[3] Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain: Studies in Iconography and Tradition* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1996), 80.

when attempting truth statements about the Druids. However, it is clear that this caste of poet-legislators certainly existed, and played a subtle, yet decisive role in the history of classical Europe. The Druids as an institution would have directly benefited from a centralized Celtic religion. Caesar himself writes: "The Druids officiate the worship of gods, regulate public and private sacrifices, and give rulings on all religious questions."[4] It is made clear by classical commentators that the Druids (in addition to their larger role as diplomats, philosophers, and scholars) were, if not the leaders of the Celtic religion, certainly central in leading key rituals.[5] In particular, the Druids oversaw human sacrifice, and were able to exile a member of the community from observing these rites – a severe form of social exclusion that led to reverberating ostracism.[6] Thus, any move to unify regional cults into a national religion would have involved a clarification of liturgies that empowered the learned Druid order with greater political and theological control.

As the Roman Republic turned more aggressively toward the Gallic frontiers, it became clear that Celtic society lacked the centralized government of the Republic. This is demonstrated through Vercingetorix's secular attempts to unify the Celtic Gauls, which famously came too late, as the region succumbed completely to Caesar's conquest.[7] Adding pan-Celtic coherency and elements of national identity to the existing religion would have bolstered cultural unity among a people that otherwise struggled to achieve national status. In an environment of regional chiefdoms and landscape cults, the Druids had an important inter-tribal status,[8] and the power of the

[4] Julius Caesar, *Commentaries of Caesar on the Gallic War*, VI.13.1.
[5] See Philip Freeman, *The Philosopher and the Druids: a Journey among the Ancient Celts* (London: Souvenir, 2006).
[6] Julius Caesar, *Commentaries of Caesar on the Gallic War*, V.6.13. Anne Ross, *Druids: Preachers of Immortality* (Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2004), 55.
[7] Markale 1993, 94-104.
[8] Peter Berresford Ellis, *The Druids* (London: Constable, 1994), 189-198.

Druids was noted by classical observers. Posidonius of Apameia, who travelled extensively and wrote ethnographically of the Celts commented: "The Gauls consider the Druids the most just of all their people, and so they are given the role of judge in all public and private disputes. In the past they were even able to halt battles and bring an end to wars."[9] Druids were both civic and religious leaders, who could arbitrate inter-Celtic disputes with both legal and priestly authority.[10] This caste of advisors, priests, and bards was uniquely positioned to understand Celtic identity in the last millennium BCE, and attempted to define and reorganize it. Such an institution would certainly be well equipped to strengthen inter-tribal cults, and subsequently benefit from the afforded liturgical power.

The best evidence for the concretion of regional cults into a Pan-Celtic state religion comes from the archaeological and art historical patterns of cult symbol diffusion. In particular, two patterns of unification are discernible in a timeframe that might be reactionary to diminishing Druidic power, or the threat of Roman occupation. Two cults, dedicated to the chthonic-fecundity god and the tribal-war god, reveal the intentionality of theological mobility in the pre-Roman period. If cult unification was happening in the Celtic world, it certainly would have been holistic in its scope. However, the incredibly limited material culture and entirely absent theological history limit our insight to only a few archaeologically visible case studies.

I have chosen to highlight these two cults specifically because they speak to patterns of cult movement in Northern Europe that are perceivably distinct from Roman influences. During the time of the initial Romanization of the Gauls, the major signal in Celtic cult dynamics was that of Roman syncretism. Roman theology, especially artistically, was mapped onto the Celtic gods to create Romano-

[9] Freeman 2006, 103-114; 158-174.
[10] Ellis 1994, 51-53.

Celtic hybrids that dominate the art and theology of the early Christian period. This is of particular importance because one of the major Roman imports into the Gaulish religion was a heavily taxonomic influence. It is more than likely that as classical divinities – most often Mercury, Apollo, Jupiter, and Mars – were mapped onto regional cults, small local gods were subsumed into monolithic Romano-Celtic cults with established and vibrant motifs.[11] The material record certainly points to an ecosystem of sorting, grouping, classification, and integration of Celtic divinities during the period of Gallic Romanization. This syncretism resulted, within a hundred years, in the near total absorption of local gods and goddess into the Roman pantheon. In this paper, however, we are not interested in the process of Roman-Celtic hybrid cult generation, but rather the purely indigenous attempts of the Druids and Celtic priests to amplify and define their own religion, independent of Mediterranean influences.

Druids were in a unique position, being both noble judges and advisors, as well as religious officials and ritual leaders. The duality of their station let them straddle the civic and theological, and rendered them at once highly sensitive to global politics and daily religious life. Recognizing the unique power of the Celtic educated class is critical in understanding the mechanism of cult unification during this time, but does not evidence it directly. For that we must look at the two case studies accessible through accumulation of modern archaeological and art historical research. In the next sections, I will lay out two possible narratives of cult unification around the time of the Roman invasions which would indicate a period of local theological exertion in opposition to foreign hostility.

[11] Ross 1996, 196; 227; 254-256; 269-275.

Chthonic-Fecundity Cult

The chthonic-fecundity cults of Northern Celtica offer a control environment independent of Roman influence. The antlered Celtic god, Cernunnos, is attributed to a diverse program of ideological and symbolic motifs, mostly involving death and prosperity. The integrity of his cult was in part preserved by the absence of a perfect classical analogue. His chthonic and pecuniary elements do link him to other Greco-Roman death-realm gods with coin/wealth symbolism, most obviously Pluto and Dis Pater.[12] The Celts, however, exalted in duality and habitually conjoined death and rebirth. The antlered god is no exception: mixing the moribund with the explicitly fecund - pastoral, but especially sylvan, cynegetic, and numismatic.[13]

The cult of the antler god can be tracked across Europe by way of a well-developed symbolic package. The god-figure himself, Cernunnos, is one of the most iconic Celtic divinities; in addition to the unmistakable antlers, the god is often squat positioned, be-torqued, coin bearing, and animal heralded. The chthonic-fecundity cult is also linked closely to the motif of the ram-horned serpent. Since his first known depiction, carved in Val Camonica by trans-alpine Celtic incursions into Northern Italy in the mid-fourth century BCE, Cernunnos has been iconographically linked to the serpent. The ram-horned/ram-headed serpent is a striking symbol that shadows Cernunnos, and its presence is a key indicator of the chthonic-fecundity cult, even when it is disassociated from the antlered-god (as we occasionally see in Northern Britain).

The Cernunnos cult's migration into Britain is strong evidence of indigenous evangelism of the cis-alpine stag lord cult into the Northern reaches of the Celtic world, and Bober and Ross both

[12] Phyllis Fray Bober, "Cernunnos: Origin and Transformation of a Celtic Divinity," in *American Journal of Archaeology*, vol. 55, no. 1, 1951: 31-34.
[13] See Bober 1951.

highlight an integration of Cernunnos into the pre-Roman British head cults. Ross observes that occurrences of the antlered god in North Britain are connected mostly to the settlement of Belgic Gauls, to whom Cernunnos was endemic.[14] There is archaeological evidence that Britain had its own indigenous horned god cult, especially in Brigantian areas,[15] however only with continental Belgic settlements in Dobunnic and Brigantian Britain does this native British god begin to show Cernunnos-like qualities. The bonding of the indigenous British horned god with the continental Cernunnos was also paired with emergence of horned serpent iconography.[16] The immortality serpent became fully integrated into the horned god cult in Pre-Roman Britain[17] and became such a fixture in the Brittonic chthonic-fecundity cults, that we see references in the early Christian folklore of early medieval Ireland and Wales.[18]

Cernunnos is often linked with eastern influences. Scholars have highlighted his striking similarity to a tricephalic horned god depicted on the very early Pashupati seal from the Indus Valley in the third millennium BCE.[19] [20] This suggests that the cult of a Horned Animal Lord might have been carried over from the east with the first waves of Neolithic migrants. If the Pushpati Seal shows a depiction of a proto-Cernunnos, then the god was as common to the Celtic people as the language family they shared. This early substratum origin of Cernunnos would make him a primal and unifying icon to the Celtic people. As the inevitable evolution of local cults diversified, early cults, like that of Cernunnos, would be a foundational anchor for theological unity.

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[14] Ross 1996, 179; 212.
[15] Ross 1996, 191.
[16] Bober 1951, 26-27.
[17] Ross 1996, 198-201.
[18] Ross 1996, 183; 197.
[19] Bober 1951, 21.
[20] Ellis 1994, 123.

The old age of Cernunnos means that the British horned god and the continental antlered god shared a common origin, but their cults likely diverged after the upper Neolithic or Bronze Age.[21] Thus, the mapping of the continental onto the British as Belgic Celts moved into Brigantia would have been a recombining of ancestral cults. Shared heritage would have been a powerful tool for combining similar, yet iconically and regionally distinct cults. It should be noted that by using only the material record, it is impossible to say if this was the product of explicit theological interventions, or the act of secular settlements bringing foreign, but familiar cults to Britain.

The union of the British-Belgic chthonic-fecundity cults is perhaps best evidenced in the emergence of the Gaulish-British tricephalic cult. Bober, writing on the three-faced Auten statue from the first century CE, notes: "It is obvious that this being is here assimilated to Cernunnos."[22] Ross also explores the link between tricephalic cults and chthonic-fecundity divinities. The head, she argues, is a symbolic vessel of the immortal mind, as well as a moribund trophy symbol.[23] Bober's detailed exploration of the relationship between Cernunnos and the compatible head-cults of the North Atlantic, reveals that the fullest extent of unification may have been a synthesis of the British Horned God, the Belgic Antlered God, and the pan-Celtic head cult. These cults are bound in likeness only by way of shared interpretations of core symbolism, and were not usually co-assimilated until the Roman period. Still, this does speak to a mechanism of cult-unification. Despite the staggering diversity of the Celtic Pantheon, many patterns of divinity appear again and again. Iconographically these three cults—the Horned God, the Antlered God, and the Tricephalic God—are all quite

[21] J.P. Mallory, *The Origins of the Irish* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1993), 105-128.

[22] Bober 1951, 34.

[23] Ross 1996, 94-163.

distinct, but the details of theological interpretation offered by Ross and Bober suggest a shared theological meaning. Thus, a great many of the small and local cults of the Celtic world might have been merely iconographically diverse renderings of a unified theology. Where there is unified theology, there is, of course, unified ritual and liturgy, and it is these shared, officiated experiences that would have let the heads of the Celtic religion curate Celtic statehood.

The insular import of continental theology is an important signal in indigenous Celtic religious reformation. Ross closely explores the transmission of Beglic Cernunnos into Britain and notes:

> [Cernunnos] is one Celtic god who appears to have attained to a more than local significance, and the widespread nature of his distribution may, perhaps, be due to the influence of the Druidic priesthood who, it may be very tentatively suggested, were moving toward the establishment of both central political organisation and of the truly 'national' religion at the time of the Roman conquest of Gaul.[24]

The Druids were known to have gathered annually in Carnute territory.[25] Though Caesar suggested the Druidic institution had its origins in Britain, it is clear from the archaeological record (as well as Posidonius and Caesar's own writings) that by the height of the Roman Republic, the geographic core and political center of La Tene culture was Northern Gaulia. Classical ethnography speaks to an organized religious elite, meeting annually, and headed by an arch-druid.[26] As Gaul fell under Roman influences, it is clear that only in the fringes of the Celtic world could the religion, and its potential for political organizing, survive. The continental origins, but insular preservation of Celtic polytheism highlights the urgency of the enterprise. There is compelling evidence in the Lindow Marshes of Northern England that groups of religious Celts were practicing rites

[24] Ross 1996, 81.
[25] Freeman 2006, 165.
[26] Ross 1996, 81.

of human sacrifice even as Paulinus, under Nero, was invading Wales and sacking the Druidic holy site of Anglesey.[27]

Tribal-War God Cult

Gaul was the cultural and military core of the late La Tene culture that interfaced with Rome, and its Belgic metropolis, Camulodunum (fortress of Camulos), points to religion's political organizing potential for the Celts. Camulos first appears as a tribal and warrior god of the Remi people in Northern Gaul, but his cult became one of two fast-spreading tribal-war god cults that swept through the North Atlantic. Ultimately, like the cult of Cernunnos, it established itself in pre-Roman Britain. Camolus's spread is most easily traced through networks of place names and local city names which solidify him as a god of the polity. His role is one of oppidum embodiment – the god of the town, the people in it, and their wars – and this is reflected in the number of historic towns and cities bearing his name. Lindsay writes:

> Place names suggest that the Belgic nobles worshipped him as a powerful war leader. We seem then to witness a tribal god, no longer rooted in his own territory, being adopted by individuals or groups for his talismanic force. [...] He is essentially the protector of a tribal or subtribal group and his warrior-role is only a special aspect of this function.[28]

As the cult of Camulos spread through the northern reaches of Britain, his tribal domain became a tool for powerful kings to assert authority over increasingly large regions. Lindsay sees the movement of Camulos as a unifying force in the Celtic world:

> No doubt, in pre-Conquest days, in both Gaul and Britain there had been certain unifying trends, linked with the breakdown of old tribal forms

[27] Anne Ross and Don Robins, *The Life and Death of a Druid Prince: The Story of Lindow Man, an Archaeological Sensation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 79-100.

[28] Jack Lindsay, "Canudos and Beleños," in *Latomus* 20, no 4., 1961: 736.

> and the struggle to develop enlarged units of political control. The warriors carrying Camulos far afield give an example of the expansion of cults outside the tribal limits - an expansion bound up with intertribal conflicts of nobles and the growth of dynastic powers at the expense of tribal equality.[29]

The reorientation of tribal war gods toward dynastic expressions of cohesion and expansionism mirrored another Gallic tribal cult: that of Belenos. While Camulos occupies the role of a North Atlantic defender of the people, Belenos has an initial loci in trans-alpine Gaul and Noricum. Like Camulos, he is a war god of the tribe, probably initially of the Noricans. But his authority extends to the pastoral, solar, and healing: supplanting him as a powerful, multi-disciplined god of the people, the state, and their prosperity and defense. This capacity is fully realized in the pan-Celtic fire festival, Beltane, which continued to be practiced in Celtic Britain into the medieval period and is clearly linked to Belenos. Classical ethnographic writing tells us that Beltane involved the purification of cattle herds by driving them between two great bonfires – extending and defining the role of Belenos as god of both pastoral animal husbandry and apotropaic healer.[30]

Though the cult of Belenos was initially concentrated in Noricum and alpine Gaul, the Roman writer Ausonius mentions a temple to Belenos in Gaul near the English Channel, and there are pre-Roman inscriptions to a *Belenus* in County Durham and Maryport in Britain.[31] The best evidence of the widespread transmission of the Belenos cult is the festival to him. Indeed, the ancient and vast cult of Belenos seems have been so solidly established in the Celtic experience that it echoed through rural folklore into the historic period. Most European folklorists agree that Beltane was Christianized into the May Day festival which is still celebrated around Europe. The

[29] Lindsay 1961, 739.
[30] Anne Ross, *Folklore of Wales* (Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2001), 39-42.
[31] Freeman 2006, 151; Ross 1996, 472.

mythological Welsh king *Beli Mawr* is also a folk memory of the Romano-Celtic Belenos-Apollo cult that established itself during the Roman period.[32]

In this light, Belenos becomes the model example of an ancient regional-tribal cult proliferating out into greater Celtica. This transmission was likely driven by both martial and civic leaders interested in establishing legitimate dynasties, and by the learned classes who were interested in solidifying a liturgy around a healing god of the people. These rituals seem to have been so successful that they are still practiced in part today as May Day festivals. The holiday has likely lost most of its original rites and meaning, but the modern reverence for the holiday (despite two major continental religious conversions, first Roman paganism and then Christianity), speaks to its powerful organizing role in Celtic culture. If this is the case, it demonstrates the aptitude of the Druids as curators of cultural immortality. Despite the complete martial decline of the continental Celts before the first century CE, the efforts of their lore keepers, ritualists, poets, and orators kept alive significant fragments of their religion. This is a stunning feat, considering that the core vehicle of Celtic theology was oral storytelling. It seems that the priestly class was unwilling to commit core ideas to either the written word or anything else but the most opaquely esoteric votive artwork. Such preservation is in large part due to the independence enjoyed by the British fringe, which continues to be a refuge for Celtic folklore.

The cults of Belenos and Camulos show a theological shift from tribal-god as regional protector to tribal-god as statewide protector and dynastic unifier. This shift implies that the Celtic people were looking outwards from their tribal sub-factions, and were attempting to create a unified state – a state that, while largely defined by secular

[32] Anne Ross, *Druids: Preachers of Immortality* (Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2004), 160.

civic ambitions and martially secured, was also predicated in part on religion and arbitrated by a theological elite. The fossilization of the cult of Belenos into a fixture of pan-European folklore is a further testament to the intentions of its priests and religious leaders. The amplification and maintenance of such an antique cult clearly required a period of widespread organization, and it is the best indicator that the Celts were trying to, if not briefly able to, establish some sort of national religion.

Conclusion

The idea of cultic unification in this period has exciting implications. It suggests a pre-Roman Europe that is more integrated than it was previously understood to be, not just along the traditional arteries of cultural diffusion, but also by way of the uniquely Celtic clade of philosophers and theologians. When a religion undergoes mobilization, liturgical synthesis, and symbolic organization, this reflects a period of acute theological activity. The details of this drama, which would have unfolded exclusively orally, in the hushed privacy of nemeton or the boastful war chief's hall, are lost. However, the timing of this movement, while the legions of Caesar were stirring in the south, speak to a theological class that was not only highly sensitive to global politics, but was extremely cognizant of the cost of factional tribalism. Above all else, the theology of the Druids was one that marveled in rebirth and liminal passage. Theirs was a philosophy of sustenance beyond death, and this theology was what informed the success of their efforts in synthesizing the ephemeral into the persistent. The accumulation of regional cults into a more national religion might have been a critical step toward late classical statehood, a conclusion to which the Celts never arrived. Furthermore, the mobility and synthesis of the cults reviewed here suggest that the Celtic intelligentsia had an introspective view of their own statecraft as compared to their southern neighbors. The

archaeological records of these unified cults show us that the Celtic priestly class consisted of vibrant and important actors in the classical world, and give voice to a theological drama that was otherwise undocumented by classical commentators.

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HELL'S KITCHEN

Cooking and Consumption in Inferno *21-22*[1]

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In Sirach, it is written: "Before thy death work justice: *for in hell there is no finding food*."[2] And yet, Dante fills his vision of hell with images of cooking and consumption—a visual feast for the reader to enjoy and the literary scholar to consider. This paper examines *Inferno* 21-22 (cantos filled with figures eating, digesting, and cooking) in order to understand the function of such imagery in a place where no one *needs* to eat anymore. I argue that the images of cooking and consumption, while derived from preceding biblical and visionary literature, are used innovatively in *Inf.* 21-22 to highlight the nature of barratry in a comedic fashion, to juxtapose horror and humor for greater affect, and to connect the episode to the broader concerns of the text regarding the body of hell and the body politic. As such, in this paper, images of cooking and consumption take their place alongside other images that Dante draws from preceding literary

[1] With gratitude to Prof. Peter Hawkins, who refined my ideas and writing with his generous feedback. My thanks, as well, to Theodore Lai for his unwavering editorial support in every paper.
[2] Sirach 14:17 (DV). All biblical quotations in this paper are taken from the Douay-Rheims Bible, 1899 Edition. Emphasis mine.

sources, thereby discovering new connections that enlighten the mind and nourish the soul.

This paper also responds to a section on "The Cauldron" in Alison Morgan's *Dante and the Medieval Other World*.[3] While Morgan and I tackle the same cantos and vision literature, we arrive at different conclusions regarding the place of cooking and consumption in hell's kitchen. In the first section, I look into the opening scene of the fifth bolgia and build upon Morgan's assertion that culinary images within these cantos can be traced to preceding medieval vision literature to suggest that the devil returning from earth, while carrying a soul, alludes to a shopper. The act of shopping, I argue, is Dante's humorous contribution to the long tradition of infernal culinary imagery, crafted specially to comment on the nature of barratry. In the next section, I explore the relationship within *Inf.* 21-22 between kitchens, humor, and horror. As Leo Spitzer and Alison Morgan have both noted, the humor here is likely inspired by medieval mystery plays and twelfth-century developments in vision literature. I build on these ideas to suggest that, within the context of changing symbolic meanings of the kitchen in the late medieval period, humor is incorporated into *Inf.* 21-22 to provide (paradoxically) a welcome respite and intensification of the readers' horror at the punishments in hell. Lastly, in my third section, I respond to Morgan and other scholars who claim that the fifth bolgia is disconnected from the rest of the Inferno. I connect references to the digestive system within these cantos to the larger image of the body of hell, which concerns the entire canticle. I interpret this infernal body as a poetic perversion of a greater concern within the text: the body politic. Through this reading, I explain the placement of barraters within the belly of hell, and how their punishment fits their crime.

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[3] Alison Morgan, *Dante and the Medieval Other World* (Cambrige: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Shopping for Souls

After introducing the boiling pitch that fills much of the fifth bolgia, the poet initiates the action of the scene with a dark demon running by Dante and Virgil:

> and I saw behind us a black devil running along the ridge. …
> His shoulder, which was sharp and high, was
> loaded down with a sinner's two hips, and he held
> hooked with his claw the sinews of both feet.
> From our bridge he said: "O Evil Claws, here is
> one of the elders of Santa Zita! Put him under I am
> going back for more
> to that city, which is well supplied with them:
> everyone is a grafter there, except Bonturo: for
> money there they turn 'no' into 'yes.'"[4]

The poet captures the scene like a photographer: the sinner is slung across the racing devil's back, gripped by the "*nerbo,*"[5] or the "strong sinew just above the hoof, by which butchers customarily hang or carry carcasses."[6] Leaning on Benvenuto, Singleton compares the devil with his claws to a butcher who "carries to the abattoir an animal with its throat cut, to have it skinned and to sell it."[7] The scene must have been familiar for any contemporary of Dante who witnessed ordinary commercial practices in the street.

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[4] *Inf.* 21.29-30, 34-42. All citations of the *Inferno* in Italian and the English translation are taken from Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. and ed. Robert M. Durling, introduction and notes by Ronald L. Martinez and Robert M. Durling. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), and are cited by canto and line number.
[5] *Inf.* 21.36
[6] See commentary for *Inf.* 21.35-36, within the Charles S. Singleton, trans., *The Divine Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970-75).
[7] *Cf.* Singleton 1970.

Morgan claims that this moment and the rest of the episode draws upon preceding medieval vision literature.[8] Indeed, even as early as the mid-second century, in of the first pieces of vision literature, *St. Peter's Apocalypse* describes hell as "a furnace and a brazier" in which fires blaze on. Such equipment could have been found easily in medieval kitchens as a source of heat.[9] Similar cooking or kitchen imagery developed across the centuries so that by the time one arrives at *Thurkill's Vision* at the dawn of the thirteenth century, all manner of implements appear, including "a glowing pan" in which devils "fried each limb in that boiling grease as it was torn away."[10] The kitchen, by Dante's time, had shifted from simply being a source of heat-related imagery to one of varied, creative tortures.

While Dante certainly participates in this visionary tradition, he innovates in the *Commedia* by adding to the culinary process the act of shopping. In the passage, the devil has just returned from Santa Zita (the Tuscan city of Lucca) "which is well supplied" with more corrupt officials ("*ben fornita"*).[11] The Mandelbaum translation turns "*ben fornita*" into "well-stocked", thereby emphasising how the poet treats the devil's time on earth as something akin to shopping for hell-bound souls.[12] The devil is eager to return to Lucca, like one excited about a sale. As any cook would understand, procuring ingredients is an important step in the cooking process. The nearest example in preceding vision literature is the row of sinners in *St. Patrick's Purgatory*, hung "by hot iron hooks through their eyes and noses," and other body parts, much like animals in a butcher shop.[13]

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[8] Morgan 2007, 14.
[9] James B. Tschen-Emmons, *Artifacts from Medieval Europe* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2015), 77.
[10] Eileen Gardiner, ed., *Visions of Heaven and Hell before Dante* (New York: Italica Press, 1989), 227.
[11] *Inf.* 21.40
[12] Allen Mandelbaum, trans. *Inferno* (New York: Bantam Classics, 1982).
[13] Gardiner 1989, 140.

However, these sinners are suspended over a fire, reminding one more of smoked meats at home than meat products on display in shops.[14]

Even more striking is the devil's claim that "for money there they turn 'no' into 'yes'".[15] The allusion to barratry is clear: a political office can be purchased for the right price at Santa Zita. However, the line may also refer to the punishment of souls in the fifth bolgia. For the right price, a soul will say "yes" to barratry. Thus, it is sold—it sells itself, in fact—to the demons collecting ingredients for their infernal kitchen. The addition of shopping is notable not only for its novelty, but the *contrapasso* connection it draws between the sin of barratry and the punishment of barrators in the *Malebolge*. Just as barratry monetises government positions, which are meant to be filled by worthy leaders, into commodities enjoyed by the highest bidder, so too the souls of the damned barraters are purchased like pieces of meat by devils who like to play with their food. As the poet is wont to do, he moves beyond earlier vision literature, where gastronomy was part of a series of horrific scenes, to a more specific use: to illustrate the objectifying nature of barratry, and thus, its corresponding punishment in his schema of the hereafter.

Playing with Your Food

Another notable feature of the opening scene of the fifth bolgia is its humorous theatricality. As in a play, the stage is first set by Dante's description of heat and darkness, employing an extended metaphor regarding pitch and Venetian ships.[16] The first devil enters like an actor from an imaginary stage left. Bearing his human prop, he addresses his fellow fiends, whom the pilgrim and his master

[14] John Allan, Nat Alock, and David Dawson, eds., *West Country Households, 1500-1700*, (Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2015), 103.
[15] *Inf.* 21.41-42
[16] *Inf.* 21.7-18.

watch from afar, like spectators of a show. Shortly after, the sinners are told that "Down here you have to dance / covered up and, if you can, grab secretly."[17] Their flailing in the burning pitch is compared to dancing, which entertains the devils, just as performers might amuse an audience.

Theatrical moments in the opening scene, as well as the playful mood of the rest of the fifth bolgia, have been attributed to farcical scenes in medieval mystery plays, which similarly featured devils at play and slapstick humor.[18] Spitzer argues that farce is fitting in this bolgia because barratry is a petty crime, where everyone involved demeans himself. Like a low-brow comedy, barratry involves the:

> levelling of sinners and their guardians: the delinquents and the authorities are equally unheroic in their reciprocal attempts at cheating: those who punish in the name of the law, as well as those who are punished, form one contemptible crew—above whom there stands out no great figure.[19]

The demons and the damned are tarred with the same brush, trapped in this circle of hell; and, quite humorously, they are left at the mercy of each other's wits and selfishness. For instance, the devils wrestling at the end of the episode fall into the lake of pitch, thus looking just like their victims.[20] Even their guests Dante and Virgil, who pass through hell with divine assistance and are superior to the infernal rabble, do not leave the scene unscathed. They fall for the devils' tricks, and then literally fall (or slide) into the next bolgia to escape the tricksters.[21] As in cases of barratry, no one in this bolgia rises above the ruthless mediocrity of his companions or escapes the slapstick humor coloring every interaction.

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[17] *Inf.* 21.53-54.
[18] Leo Spitzer, "The Farcical Elements in *Inferno*, Cantos XXI-XXIII," *Modern Language Notes* 59, no. 2 (1944): 83.
[19] Spitzer 1944, 83.
[20] *Inf.* 22.139-140.
[21] *Inf.* 23.49-51.

Yet what purpose do these gastronomic references play in the fifth bolgia? As in the previous section on shopping, Morgan links this feature of playfulness in the text to culinary imagery in preceding literature. For instance, she claims that, in *Thurkill's Vision*, "the devil-play of the *Comedy* is foreshadowed"; the action "in both is swift, the intention malicious and sadistic, the episode in its entirety threatening to the protagonist."[22] The central episode of *Thurkill's Vision* is a grotesque culinary circle in which devils watch the damned perform caricatures of their earthly sins before they are tortured—often by eating unnatural things or by themselves being cooked—and then reconstituted and returned to their seats to await their next performance."[23] However, one underexplored source of this shift may be the changing symbolic meaning of the kitchen in the medieval period. Historically, the kitchen was linked to heat and drudgery. Indoor heating of medieval homes came from the kitchen hearth, for the "fire was always lit in the medieval kitchen, and a large pot was always hung over the fire for boiling meat."[24] Thus, kitchen imagery was understandably useful in depicting scenes of fire, such as those of hell as described by Christ in the Gospels.[25] Moreover, unlike in later periods where cooks had the benefit of gadgets that make cooking a task of fine motor skills and sophisticated tastes, cooking in the medieval period was "everyday drudgery with heavy equipment," hence "men and boys were preferred" for staff kitchens

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[22] Morgan 2007, 20.

[23] Gardiner 1989, 227-231.

[24] Silvia Malaguzzi, *Food and Feasting in Art*, trans. Brian Phillips. (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2008), 376.

[25] Amongst several other verses regarding hell, Matt. 13:41-42, 49-50 reports that Christ said: "The Son of man shall send his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all scandals, and them that work iniquity. And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth… So shall it be at the end of the world. The angels shall go out, and shall separate the wicked from among the just. And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

in aristocratic homes.[26] As such, we expect and do find references to furnaces, braziers, or ovens in several visions, for example, the aforementioned *St. Peter's Apocalypse*, *Charles the Fat's Vision*, and *St. Patrick's Purgatory*.[27] There are also references to beating, pounding, and chopping of the damned by the devils in texts such as the *Monk of Evesham's Vision* and *Tundale's Vision*, which mirror the laborious tasks of the medieval kitchen.[28]

By the late medieval period, however, the kitchen developed other colorful associations. Bridget Henisch describes an array of images set in kitchens: a "misericord in St. George's Chapel, Windsor" of "four enormous hounds piling into a cauldron, indifferent to the cook just poised to hurl his ladle"; "a polished flirt" in the *Smithfield Decretals*, who "has one arm round the cook, while deftly fishing a joint out of her cauldron with the other"; and the addition of "an overturned cooking pot" to the thirteenth-century carving at the Amiens Cathedral of the vice of Discord, modelled after the carvings of the same vice at Notre Dame *sans* pot.[29] Therefore, by Dante's time, wrath, lust, gossip, and a misguided sense of humor had come to be associated with kitchens. Although none of these images listed by Henisch appear explicitly in the *Inferno*, it is possible that the sullied image of the kitchen opened up possibilities in textual representations of hell for kitchens to become playgrounds for the devils. The earthly kitchen had become a playground of vice, so that in imagining hell, it was easy to use the kitchen as a place of eternal punishment.[30]

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[26] Bridget Ann Henisch, *Fast and Feast: Food in Medieval Society* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1976), 87.
[27] Gardiner 1989, 8; 131; 141.
[28] Gardiner 1989, 207; 166.
[29] Henisch 1976, 59-61.
[30] This sentence is taken almost verbatim from a comment by Prof. Peter Hawkins on the first version of this essay.

The incorporation of such playfulness into *Inf.* 21-22 was not for naught. As noted earlier, Spitzer attributes an "intellectual justification for this respite granted the reader" since the low humor reflects the ignoble nature of barratry.[31] However, the humor also adds to the affective power of the text, enhancing the very horror that it seems to mask. Dante builds up an uneasy, jokey tone across the bolgia, from the silly names of the devils[32] to the sinners perched along the banks of the pitch lakes like bullfrogs.[33] He even includes an extended metaphor comparing the farts of the devils to "so strange a pipe", which he claims is not unlike what "horsemen or foot-soldiers setting forth" might use.[34] The comparison, with its parodic pomposity, is a nod to how the devils form a perverse military troop led by one who "of his ass had made a trumpet."[35] Altogether, the mood is raucous and jocular in an otherwise bleak canticle, and the seemingly mock-epic tone may lull the reader into a false sense of respite from the terrors of the previous circles of hell.

False, perhaps, because the terror of the tortured intersperses these playful moments. For instance, when sinners leap out of the boiling liquid to temporarily "lessen the pain," the poet compares them to dolphins "when they signal to sailors, / arching their spines, to take measures to save their / ship."[36] The grim situation of the sinners lurks beneath the almost pleasant comparison to helpful dolphins, enticing the reader to enjoy the moment, while also preventing him from being truly at ease. In retrospect, one could see that if the sinners are dolphins, then Virgil and the pilgrim are sailors who should have been more alert to the dangers they would soon face at the hands of the treacherous devils. It is from this impossible

[31] Leo Spitzer 1944, 83.
[32] *Inf.* 21.118-123.
[33] *Inf.* 22.25-27.
[34] *Inf.* 22.10-11.
[35] *Inf.* 21.139.
[36] *Inf.* 22.19-22.

dance between humor and fear that a dark moment emerges, when a demon captures one of the shades:

> … he hooked one arm with his pruning knife
> and pulled, tearing out a muscle. …
> When they had quieted down a little, without
> delay my master asked the soul, who was still gazing
> at his wound:[37]

Out of mere impatience, the demon tears out a hunk of flesh from the sinner, as a chef or butcher might hack at raw meat ("*un lacerto*"). All around, the demons are rowdy, but at the silent center is the sinner "who was still gazing / at his wound" in disbelief.

It is in this moment that we see most vividly the work of humor in *Inf.* 21-22. The poet draws us in to consider not only the violence of the act, but the piteous, quiet shock of the injured shade. He has been stripped of his human dignity, torn into like a piece of meat. The soul's gaze invites the reader to look more closely at his gaping wound, at the savagery beneath the revelry. Presumably, horrifying images demand a response, whether it be shock, a shriek, or a "shudder", as it is for the poet.[38] However, comedies are built on quick shifts in movement and the desire for the next laugh pulling us forward. Thus here, readers find that the plot refuses to halt at the sinner's wound. Virgil asks the sinner more questions, and the latter answers briefly, before he conspires to successfully escape the devils' clutches. In their frustration, the devils turn on each other, and two of them wrestle, fall into the boiling pitch, and need to be fished out—a scene one might easily expect from devil-play in a stage comedy. The devils fail to acknowledge the great injury done to the sinner and the text pulls us along with its action and cheap laughs.

[37] *Inf.* 22.71-72; 77-78.
[38] *Inf.* 22.32.

It becomes clear that the comedy of the bolgia is a poor attempt to cover up the horrible torture, which proves to be no different from elsewhere in the *Inferno*. There may even be something additionally disturbing about finding humor in this space, for the contrast between humor and horror foregrounds the latter even more. These cantos are ultimately successful in intensifying the horror we feel at the situation because the humor that, at first, seems like a respite or a theatrical interlude from the violence of previous sections, only serves to frame more clearly the on-going cruelty in hell.

Just Desserts

Playing devil's advocate, one might note that this continuity between *Inf.* 21-22 and the rest of the *Inferno* has been contested by other scholars, especially due to its comedic content. Morgan describes the cantos "as something of a peculiarity, as differing both in tone and fictional approach from the rest of the *cantica*."[39] She attributes the humor to the poet's disdain for barratry, with which he was charged in real life, although he professed his innocence until the end. Spitzer identifies the leveling effect of humor as peculiar in an otherwise "somber" canticle, linking the poet's choice of it here to the nature of barratry itself, as discussed earlier.[40] Durling also notes that some commentators have observed that these are "the only cantos in the entire *Comedy* in which Dante refers to his military service in the summer of 1289… and his experience of war and of its cruel humor does seem to have contributed largely to the" cantos.[41] Altogether, it appears that humor is what scholars identify as the differentiating factor in these cantos.

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[39] Morgan 2007, 21.
[40] Morgan 2007, 21.
[41] Durling 1997, 567.

While this may be true, humor in this canto is also closely linked to the kitchen. It is this relationship with the kitchen that cements the place of humor within *Inf.* 21-22, and thus, I argue, within the entire canticle. A kitchen is a site of cooking, which cannot help but be linked with eating. References to eating and digesting permeate this canto and the rest of the *Inferno*, highlighting a continuous process of consumption passing through what scholars have identified as the "body of hell." To envision this body, we begin with the body part with which we have dealt primarily: the belly. In Dante's construction, this is the Malebolge which, like the human digestive system, is divided into pouches. One of these bolge contains our barraters in boiling pitch-soup, but other pouches house the flatterers immersed in "pungent sauces" (that is, feces),[42] the simoniacs swallowed by "mouths" hewn into rocks and therein baked like "oily things,"[43] and the shape-shifting thieves that are "burned and… all consumed," like overcooked dishes.[44]

This belly is also connected to a mouth, for the souls entering hell are "devoured by the teeth of death" before they enter the "wide / throat of Hell."[45] The comparison between the entrance of hell and a mouth has a long textual pedigree, beginning with the Old Testament,[46] through medieval texts such as *Drythelm's Vision* and *St.*

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[42] *Inf.* 18.50-151.
[43] *Inf.* 19.22; 28-29.
[44] *Inf.* 24.101.
[45] *Purg.* 7.32; *Purg.* 21.4. All citations of the *Purgatorio* in Italian and the English translation are taken from Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, trans. and ed. Robert M. Durling, introduction and notes by Ronald L. Martinez and Robert M. Durling. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[46] Morgan writes: "Sheol is several times in the Old Testament personified as an insatiable demon with wide-open jaws." See Morgan 2007, 14. Elsewhere in Scripture, it is written that the unjust "are laid in hell like sheep: death shall feed upon them. And the just shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their help shall decay in hell from their glory" (Psalms 48:15) and that "if the Lord do a new thing, and the earth opening her mouth swallow them down, and

Patrick's Purgatory,[47] to Dante. Dante goes a step beyond these bodily metaphors to construct his hell as an actual body. Thus, at the other end of *Inferno*, the belly is connected to a tiny hole near Satan's bottom, out of which the pilgrim and Virgil exit the system.[48] Dante's literary digestive system runs the length of the *Inferno* and, together with other parts, forms a unifying structure to hell. It is in light of this big picture that the seemingly isolated culinary references in *Inf.* 21-22 stand out: *not* as anomalies in the text, but as part of a larger frame of reference. Even with the cantos' noticeably different tone, their humor is connected to the kitchen, the kitchen to the belly, and the belly to the whole body of hell.

One model for the body of hell that scholars have offered is the classical image of the body politic.[49] In Livy's retelling of a famous speech, Menenius Agrippa compares the different levels in society to various body parts, each of which must fulfill their role and contribute to the whole body for the *polis* to function properly.[50] Similarly, in the *Inferno*, the body of hell is a mass of human beings, gathered within a larger body. Unlike the body politic, however, which symbolizes a rightful and harmonious ordering of society, the body of hell is filled with chaos, terror, and rebellion. Its divisions are not according to class or to how one helps the community; rather, these represent the hurt each member has caused others while on earth. At hell's very bottom lies its "head" Satan, "emperor of the

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all things that belong to them, and they go down alive into hell, you shall know that they have blasphemed the Lord" (Numbers 16:30). All emphases mine.

47 Gardiner 1989, 61 and 142, respectively.

48 As Durling and Martinez have noted "Brown (1989) pointed out that this point corresponds to Satan's anus." For a discussion on the other parallels to body parts in hell, see Durling 1997, 547.

49 For more on metaphors of eating and a failed body politic, see Nicholas R. Havely, "The Self-consuming City: Florence as Body Politic," 1986.

50 See Liv. 2.32. Loeb Classical Library, *History of Rome, Volume I*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1919).

dolorous kingdom," and the worst sinner of all.[51] In this way, everything in the body of hell inverts the ideal body politic. Hell is a complete perversion of the perfect communion of bodies as the sinners are brought together not by shared love for the divinely-ordered *polis*, but by unavoidable punishments for past transgressions.

Thus, we come to consider the placement of barraters in the belly. Durling describes the Malebolge as "perhaps the most gigantic case of constipation on record" in literature, with its overcooked shades forever trapped in feces, pitch, and noxious fumes.[52] One could read fraud in the belly, on the simplest level, as a magnification of the food metaphor that "is inherent in much of the traditional metaphors of fraud."[53] For instance, in the idiom "to cook the books," someone committing fraud "cooks up" an idea by manipulating facts and figures, which the victim then "swallows." False information is thus a kind of poison in the belly to the person normally nourished by the food of true knowledge. Appropriately, the fraudulent, who once laced their words with the poison of deceit and cooked-up tricks, are now themselves cooked in the poisonous belly of the *Inferno*.

Further, one could also add to this reading the layer of the body politic. Returning to Menenius Agrippa's speech, the belly in the ideal *polis* is comprised of nobles who "nourished the [plebs] as well as being nourished by them, giving back to each part of the body what it needed to live and prosper."[54] Good governance by the ruling class, through effective management of resources, ensures wellness through the system. Barratry, as such, is precisely the opposite. It is

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[51] *Inf.* 34.28.
[52] Robert Durling, "Deceit and Digestion in the Body of Hell" in *Allegory and Representation*, ed. Stephen J. Greenblatt. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981) 65.
[53] Durling 1997, 576.
[54] Durling 1997, 553.

a failure in leadership when nobility is exchanged for gold, and thus those in power have neither incentive nor skill to direct the resources they receive on behalf of the community. Unlike Menenius Agrippa's ideal nobles, who parallel a healthy digestive system, barraters hoard all that comes their way, leading to an accumulation of wealth in the hands of few to the detriment of many. This results in a blockage in the political system, and thus, corruption in earthly governments. Not to put too fine a point on it, the constipation caused by the barraters overwhelms the body politic.

At last, we understand Dante's masterful contrapasso in the fifth bolgia. Again and again within the Malebolge, the poet includes references to cooking and digesting to describe how the sinners are "broken down" like food in the kitchen or in the gut. However, the digestive system itself in the body of hell has broken down, with the fraudulent stuck in pockets of eternal torment. The barraters, in particular, form a blockage within hell's belly as punishment for having hoarded resources in their lifetimes and thus causing corruption within governments. They receive their just desserts by becoming the blockage in the body of hell that they had sought to be in the failed body politic.

Conclusion

Eating, at its simplest, might be associated with life. After all, one needs to eat to live. And yet, as we have seen in *Inf.* 21-22, images of eating and other related activities, such as digesting and cooking, permeate Dante's vision of the afterlife. Critics like Morgan and Spitzer have traced the humor and culinary content of these cantos to Scripture, farcical plays, and medieval vision literature. Building on their work, I have argued that while these images are certainly derived from preceding Biblical and medieval vision literature, Dante galvanizes them in new ways. I argued first that Dante adds the act of shopping to the long tradition of culinary imagery in hell to draw

a parallel between government positions sold on earth by barrators and their souls sold to the devils in hell as punishment. Second, I suggested that, by drawing upon the changing symbolic meaning of the kitchen in the medieval period, humor in *Inf.* 21-22 paradoxically offers both a needed respite from and an intensification of the reader's horror at the tortures in hell. Third, I connected references to the digestive system within these cantos to a larger image of the body of hell. In seeing the body of hell as the polar opposite of the ideal body politic, we understand the placement of the barrators in the belly of hell. The society they sought to destroy on earth with their fraudulent ways is embodied now by the infernal digestive system in which they are eternally trapped. Although humor and devil-play have filled our passage through hell's kitchen, neither the effects of barratry on earth nor its horrific contrapasso in the *Inferno* is ultimately a laughing matter.

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DIVINE LIMINALITY IN MEDIEVAL RELIGIOUS COMEDY

A Dialectic of the Sublime

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The carnivalesque has been formed into a defining concept by Bakhtin's Soviet-era analysis of Rabelais. Bakhtin polarizes the culture of the preceding Middle Ages into the official, that is the serious, regimented, scholastic, and the carnival, that is the "small islands of feasts and recreations"[1] imbued with folk humor. He also stresses that the function of laughter is not merely to externalize a defense against objective abstract truth in its official totalizing form, but also liberates from "fear of the sacred, of prohibitions, of the past, of power. It unveils the material bodily principle in its true meaning. Laughter opened men's eyes on that which is new, on the future."[2] Further:

> Let us say a few initial words about the complex nature of carnival laughter. It is, first of all, a festive laughter. Therefore it is not an individual reaction to some isolated "comic" event. Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people. Second, it is universal in scope: it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants. The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity. Third, this laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time

[1] M. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 96.
[2] Bakhtin 1984, 94.

> mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. Such is the laughter of carnival.[3]

Rainer Warning expands on Bakhtin to declare that laughter is the antithesis of fear, and as such has a powerful religious function and not, primarily as Bakhtin saw it, a secular folk function. As he notes:

> "[Laughter] unmasks the norm itself, it reveals it in the narrowness of an exclusive principle. The norm is involved, insofar as laughter once again invokes what it has set aside." Laughter breaks the toleration of evil that theodicy is constrained by. "What theology represses returns in laughter at the ritually conquered unconquerable."[4]

The Czech Ointment Seller, the Spanish Gardener, and the English Shepherds

Through three close readings, we can examine the theological role that comedy plays in medieval religious drama. Our choices reflect material that can be used with the explicit aegis of the church for the purpose of religious celebration in or around the church in the context of Easter. Caveats include the difficulties in linkage of text to dramatic use, authorship, and dating, for which we await future scholarship. However, as these examples occur in clusters, and arguments do not derive from idiosyncratic exceptions, so they are not meant to illustrate purely literary quirks or exceptional individualistic expressions.

There is a group of German and Czech Easter plays that unusually include scenes of the ointment or spice merchant (*unguentarius*) from whom three women (Marys) obtain salve for the burial preparation of Jesus. Stehlikova cites Jaroslav Kolár that "the history of Czech literature and culture is mirrored in the history of

[3] Bakhtin 1984, 11–12.
[4] Rainer Warning, *The Ambivalences of Medieval Religious Drama* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 108.

perception and examination of this relic," the fourteenth century Old Czech-Latin *Mastičkář* from the Czech National Museum. This fragment provides the text and directions for the portion of the Easter play that narrates three women going to buy ointment for the anointing of Jesus at his burial. The Merchant's newly hired apprentice, Rubin, engagingly alludes to his master as "a visitor of greatest renown, wise, artful, venerable physician […] nowhere is there anyone to equal him, except that he farts immoderately."[5] Rubin entertains the audience, fills in backstory, and holds forth on morality in a demotic register, while the Merchant's more formal and gnomic utterances intermingle in the everyday normality of the interaction, while alluding to scripture obliquely through form and content:

> Ah, Rubin! I wonder a raven doesn't peck out your eye for letting my honorable trade perish. Rubin, how can you be such a reckless wicked, faithless son that when I call you, you will not come to me![6]

The three Marys arrive and sing explicitly in a liturgical register (in farced Czech and traditional Latin texts) of their need for ointment for their dead Lord Jesus Christ. An episode is then interjected, with the aim of being "a demonstration to these ladies and for the renown of my ointments."[7] This is Abraham bringing dead Isaac to be healed, in a clear prefiguration of the resurrection to come (with its contribution of ointment by the Christ figure, the merchant). The method of healing? The stage direction is *fundunt ei feces super culum* – "they pour feces over his backside." Next, Isaac rises and says: "Alas, alack, alas, ah! How very long, master I have slept, but I have risen

[5] Jarmila F Veltruský, *A Sacred Farce from Medieval Bohemia - Mastičkář* (Ann Arbor: Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies, The University of Michigan, 1985), 335.
[6] Veltruský 1985, 345.
[7] In the translation of Roman Jakobson, "Medieval Mock Mystery," in *Medieval Slavic Studies*, Selected Writings, VI:2 (Berlin: Mouton, 1985), 672.

as from the dead; also, I nearly beshat myself."[8] Roman Jakobson dissects poetically and philologically how this lament "repeats and exhausts the repertory of exclamations typical of Old Czech Marian laments,"[9] the *Planctus Mariae*, another locus of early liturgical dramatic development.[10] The fragment is cut of in the middle of scatological dueling between Rubin and another apprentice, as well as the Merchant and his wife.

Much academic debate has centered on if this expansion of the ointment seller narrative has roots in pagan drama, whether about the physician-quack or springtime resurrection rituals.[11] Warning rightly dismisses such evolutionary-archeological preoccupations, and places the scene in its Easter context. In particular, he presents the novel notion that the preceding harrowing of hell scene decisively establishes the triumphant resurrected status of Christ, which colors subsequent scenes such as this:

> …the ritualistic boisterousness of the merchant play is not the moved-forward, negative background of a self-announcing kerygmatic *surrexit* jubilee but rather an expression and brimming-over of Easter joy that from the outset began in another mythical-archetypal dimension and is now acted out in naturalistic terms.[12]

Theologically, the concentric repetitions of death and resurrection (Jesus, Isaac), the multiple instantiations of Christ-figures (Christ triumphant over hell, the merchant, Isaac, corpse needing ointment), and the interweaving of vernacular scatology with liturgical Latin work against a static, determined, linear conception of reality and transform our sense of temporality into one where the earthy now and the eschatological to come overlap and come together at the

[8] Veltruský 1985, 351 replacing "befouled" with "beshat" as suggested in n.24.
[9] Jakobson 1985, 673.
[10] Sandro Sticca, *The Planctus Mariae in the dramatic tradition of the Middle Ages* (Athens GA: University of Georgia Press, 1988).
[11] Warning 2000, 66ff; Jakobson 1985, 685–86.
[12] Warning 2000, 72.

Easter occasion, and at every Eucharist. Humor is the leaven which lifts the entire drama from a dense didacticism to an imaginative and engaging dialogue.

Another scene, which has caught the imagination of dramatists of the Easter play, is the meeting of Mary with post-resurrection Jesus. Humorously, she mistakes him for the gardener. Humor here plays on the sensory incongruity of not recognizing the risen Christ by sight, and responding "*Domini"* only on his call and naming of "*Maria.*" The comedic potential takes many expressions: in a fourteenth century Czech ordo, the gardener plays up his role by complaining that Mary is trampling on his plants: "And don't step on the onion, if you don't want to be whacked on your rump with the shovel."[13] In the Sterzing play from South Tyrol, he accuses Mary of gallivanting looking for boys: "It isn't right for pious women to run like young men into the garden in the morning as if they were expecting a boy."[14] Bringing the theme of deception to a height of comic irony, is a Spanish play from which the speech of the gardener to Mary is worth quoting in full:

> Why do you call yourself the wife
> of the other man? Being dead,
> what good can he do you?
> I am alive, and I have a father
> in the finest sheepfold;
> I have a farm unimaginable,
> I am the son of a mother
> who is the best and most honored,
> I have as many sheep as I want,
> under a dove without gall
> and I have a trough
> that has no peer,

[13] Translation from Jakobson 1985, 681; See also Peter V. Loewen and Robin Waugh, "Mary Magdalene Preaches through Song: Feminine Expression in the Shrewsbury Officium Resurrectionis and in Easter Dramas from the German Lands and Bohemia," *Speculum* 82, no. 3 (2007): 595–641.
[14] Warning 2000, 79–80; Also in the Trier Osterspiel (c.1400) in Loewen and Waugh 2007.

and it's the glory of my sheepcote.
I'll bet if you'd look at me
with the eyes of the heart,
in two words you'd say
that I'm a polished fellow
and you'd like me as much as the other,
I'll bet you real money,
although you'd deny it,
he's no more gallant than I,
nor has a handsomer face,
nor fucks any better than I do.[15]

This rich mine of biblical allusions (such as Christ as shepherd, the garden in the Song of Songs, Marian doxology, and the prodigal son) set in a gripping narrative of sexual contest brings to mind the blatant sensuality of some medieval mystical accounts of love of Christ, but without the blanketing monovalence of a single affect. Imagine a *telenovela* where the happy ending of true comedy is known, allowing the watcher to laugh at the intervening antics in confidence of the outcome. There is a delightful liminality in the hall of mirrors effect of the character on stage as Jesus, yet someone pretending to be Jesus; as Mary's longed-for true love, yet a striving suitor; as God himself with all the qualities alluded to, yet a man who makes these unbelievable claims. Such a "truly dialectical being" plays a sacred role.[16]

The Second Shepherds' play in the Towneley cycle by the Wakefield Master is perhaps one of the most analyzed works in the genre, as an acknowledged masterpiece of English drama (though its theological value is some less discussed). Briefly, the adoration of the shepherds is transformed into three parts: an initial anchoring into the mundane lives of the three shepherds through their complaining about nature, the state, and their families. In the second central section, Mak, arrives, and joins in the grumbling. He 'borrows' a

[15] Warning 2000, 88–89.
[16] Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 211 who situates this in an anthropological context.

sheep, and his wife pretends that it is their newborn to avoid inquisition. When the shepherds arrive looking for the lost sheep, a transitional moment of misrecognition climaxes; after inspecting the apparently long snouted and odiferous baby, Mak's wife proclaims in her defense: "If ever I you beguiled / May I eat this child, / That lies in this cradle." Mak is found out, and is tossed in a blanket as punishment. The third section then follows more traditionally the call by the angels and the actual adoration of the Christ child.

The first section layers concerns about different social spheres through puns,[17] and brings the audience into the action through humorous sympathy. This shared *communitas*, Turner's anti-structural notion of cultural anthropology,[18] flattens out relational hierarchies and brings the audience closer to participation in enacted divine reality. The second section is a mirrored reflection of the divine-human incarnation in the human-animal confusion. Mistaken identities, without being dogmatically defined, bring to life the utter mystery of the hypostatic union. As Empson puts it: "The Logos enters humanity from above as this sheep docs from below, or takes on the animal nature of man which is like a man becoming a sheep, or sustains all nature and its laws so that in one sense it is as truly present in the sheep as the man."[19] The joking allusion to eating the lamb further overlies Eucharistic resonances to the scene, bringing in sacrifice, feasting, and related echoes. Ultimately, reconciliation between the shepherds and Mak occurs, without terminal punishment. In fact, the tossing reflects medieval practice to induce

[17] Warren Edminster, "Punning and Political Parody in The Second Shepherds' Play," *English Language Notes* 40, no. 4 (2003): 1–10.
[18] Victor W Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co., 1969), 96ff.
[19] William Empson, *English Pastoral Poetry* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1938), 28.

labor,[20] acting as a transition to the concentric repetitions of the birth. Laughter reconciles, and community is regenerated, with all proceeding to be introduced to the Christ child. Campbell analyzes the third section thus:

> Mak's prophetic dreams of the birth of what finally is a "hornyd" child are replaced by the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies of the Christ Child. The integration of the world of farce into the total drama of this particular play makes us all the more conscious of the difference between the initiative of Mak and the initiative of God; one takes for the moment, One gives for all time.[21]

Towards the Incongruous, the Delightful, the Unknown Eschatological Sublime

One set of medieval theological debates about the hermeneutics of how God is to be understood through representation is that in the ninth century between Amalarius of Metz and Florus of Lyon. Kilmartin summarizes the positions as: "for Florus, the Mass is a cultic mystery that celebrates the one mystery of salvation; for Amalar, the Mass contains many mysteries."[22] Warning discusses the problem with Amalarius's pluriform attempt at exhaustive historical interpretation of every moment of the liturgy: "this ritual does not celebrate a magical return but rather, to use of term of Beda's that is very illuminating in this context: a merciful *pascha perpetuum*."[23]

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[20] Jean N. Goodrich, "'So I Thought as I Stood, to Mirth Us Among': The Function of Laughter in the Second Shepherds' Play," in *Laughter in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: Epistemology of a Fundamental Human Behavior, Its Meaning, and Consequences*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 543.

[21] Josie P. Campbell, "Farce as Function in the Wakefield Shepherds' Plays," in *The Chaucer Review*, 1980: 342.

[22] Edward J Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West: History and Theology* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1998), 97.

[23] Warning 2000, 36.

Despite Amalarius's censure at the time, his hermeneutic became ascendant, with William Durandus's commentary following in like fashion. Such a fixed doctrinal web of concepts became the norm in both systematic theology and in wider trends in philosophy, until modern times in the West. In a word, Florus espoused mystery in the line of Pseudo-Dionysius. It may be helpful to look at this in terms of temporality: by fixing liturgical signification individually to separate historical events, we pull away from the present into the past. To move towards the hopeful future – Bede's *pascha perpetuum* – no reliance on a fixed schema is possible. Instead, the forward momentum relies on a tension of expectation, propelled by uncertainty in reconciling the incongruity of divine and human, which has to be navigated each time in a phenomenological context within society and culture. Drama, and liturgy approached as drama, can manifest this.

Contemporary analyses thus far remain mired in prescriptive concepts about the function of drama, such as that of Sticca, in his valorization of careful architectonic planning as reflecting true continuity with the liturgy.[24] Auerbach, while he appreciates the Augustinian and later use of low style for high purpose (in, for example, the *sermo humilis*) as representing a Christian departure from Greek stylistics, remains unsympathetic to the comic.[25] He recognizes the role of realism in early Christian drama, but as for the comic: "The popular farce does not enter into our discussion because its realism remains within the limits of the purely comic and unproblematic."[26] There appears to be an assumption that the comic must invariably belong to a secular, pagan intrusion that does not

[24] Sandro Sticca, "Christian Drama and Christian Liturgy," *Latomus* 26, no. 4 (1967): 1025–1034.
[25] Erich Auerbach, "Sermo Humilis," in *Literary Language & Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965), 25–82.
[26] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 159.

contribute to religious signification. Warning heroically analyzes the ambivalences of medieval drama under the simultaneous rubrics of phenomenology and hermeneutics, and achieves a densely knotted tension between the mythical-archetypal reality being communicated and the dogmaticism of kerygmatic instruction: "The religious dramas […] project the Christian kerygma back onto exactly those ritualized archetypes from which this kerygma had originally emancipated itself."[27] He differentiates this tension from the operative in the liturgy, which communicates more symbolically; thus, religious drama stands in functional equivalence to the liturgy in communicating divine truth with a different hermeneutical toolbox.

One of the few medieval sources to explicitly approve of religious drama does so in terms of mirth prefiguring heavenly bliss:

> *Miracles pleyes & daunces that ben done principaly for deuocion honesty and myrthe to teche men to loue god the more and for no ribaudrye […] But nowe it so that the rest the mirth the ese and the welfare / that god hath ordeyned in the halidayes. Is token of endlesse reste ioye and myrthe and welfare in heuenes blisse that we hope to haue withouten ende.*[28]

Comedy arises from the interactions between the warp of earthly concerns and the weft of ideals of divine incursion, sacrifice, and redemption. As in shot silk, we glimpse the possibility of eschatological fulfilment not by sheer identical repetition of concepts, character types, or narratives, but in the evanescent shimmer of the dissonance of juxtaposed incongruences. Berger says, characterizing Ritter, "[Humor] is a kind of philosophy,

[27] Warning 2000, 250.

[28] V. A Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1966), 132–33 from *Dives and Pauper* a c.1410 catechetical commentary on the Commandments in which appropriate behavior with regard to miracle plays on the Sabbath is discussed.

showing up the limits of reason in the vastness of reality."[29] This phenomenological grounding is at the heart of the bawdy, grotesque, sensuous aspects of laughter. This also accounts for the cultural situated-ness and its corollary, the *communitas*-enhancing function of the comic. There is an existential aspect to comedy, best expressed as a realization of the human condition. In an antithesis to the anxiety that Heidegger posits as the authentic human experience of being in the world, Plessner suggests laughter can be a manifestation of loss of control of the balance between consciousness and embodiment.[30] Rather than gripping tightly to our inability to understand, laughter can be our abandonment to divine providence: "Laughter is more than a sign: it is the causative agent that transforms an ordinary fall into an extraordinary spiritual "adventure" and elevation."[31]

To bring our discussion into contemporary relevance, Dario Fo has used the spirit of the *giullari* in creating passion plays for today, protesting modern political oppression:

> Jumping back and forth in time, shifting perspectives from one character to another, superimposing elements of one situation into another, Fo constructs a landscape of zany surprises that emphasizes unexpected connections among faith, hypocrisy, exploitation, and compassion. Fo scrambles the relationships among history, religion, and everyday experience so that the truths to be learned from them can be

[29] Peter L Berger, *Redeeming Laughter: The Comic Dimension of Human Experience* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 31.
[30] Helmuth Plessner, *Laughing and Crying: A Study of the Limits of Human Behavior* (Evanston [Ill.]: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 66.
[31] See Jacques Merceron, "The Sacred and the Laughing Body in French Hagiographic and Didactic Literature of the Middle Ages," in Katja Gvozdeva und Werner Röcke, ed., *Risus sacer - Sacrum risibile. Interaktionsfelder von Sakralität und Gelächter im kulturellen und historischen Wandel*, (Publikationen zur Zeitschrift für Germanistik, Neue Folge, vol. 20), Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften Peter Lang, vorr. Bern, 2009.

> set free from the preconceptions in which they have been enshrined."[32]

Can he be said to be engaging in God-talk, in doing theology? Learning from medieval religious comedy can engage dialectically with several modern tendencies that pull us from the divine: individualized interiority, doctrinal certainty, conceptual abstraction, and historical accounting. Comedy can ensure that we share laughter, remain open to incongruity, stay anchored in material physicality, and are ready in hope for the future. The corresponding theological virtues would be those of being in communion, radical apophaticism, anti-Nestorianism, and eschatological orientation. Despite dialectical tensions where laughter can turn denigrating, lascivious, or self-aggrandizing, the sublime comic fundamentally reflects a delight in play, and remains a unique way to approach the divine.

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[32] Ronald Scott Jenkins, *Subversive Laughter: The Liberating Power of Comedy* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 117.

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