

The History of Evil in the Early Modern Age

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

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

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Introduction

A brief biography of a re-evaluator of values

Martin Luther was born in 1483 to parents who defined good and evil in medieval economic terms. Hans and Margarita Luther hoped that their savings would allow their son Martin to use his intellect to climb above his peasant background to a firm position in a higher socio-economic class. From this position he would be able to look after his aging parents. This value system of the market, a system which claims hard work and money equate to merit and goodness, is an axiology that is no more medieval than contemporary. It is a familiar axiology, but one that Martin Luther came to radically reject.

Groomed for law school, Martin Luther began studies at the University of Erfurt in 1501. By 1505 he had successfully obtained both a Bachelor and a Master of Arts degree. Famously, in July of that same year, the twenty-one-year-old Martin Luther found himself caught in a violent thunder storm. Knocked to the ground by a bolt of lightening, fearing for his life, the young Luther quickly re-evaluated the goals his parents had set for him. Crying out to Saint Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary, he promised that if he survived the storm he would newly orient his life towards God's values rather than those of society. Fifteen days after surviving the storm, Martin, to his father's great chagrin, entered the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt, hoping to obtain spiritual goodness and avoid evil.

As a cloistered monk, Luther believed he would live a life that resisted the evil that is found so copiously in society and in the world. As such, Luther was following a medieval value system that paralleled that of the market economy. This axiology placed the sacred above the secular and suggested that merit could be earned through fasting, self-deprivation, prayers, and masses. Long before Luther's rejection of this view, his father, who had worked in the mines in order that his son might be able to study law and support his parents in their old age, suggested that Luther might have gravely misunderstood the rules of good and evil. On the day of the celebration of his first mass as a priest, Hans Luther dared to ask Martin to consider if it was not God but the Devil who sent the lightening and the call to the cloister rather than to serve his parents and society through

the practice of law.¹ Medieval though this might sound, this epistemological uncertainty plagued Luther throughout his life: How might a person distinguish true goodness from evil? Worse, how might a person ever achieve goodness?

Such questions plunged Luther into *anfectung*, a profound spiritual despair concerning his own merit. Luther desperately wanted to be good. It was his desire to be 'holy from head to toe' that had driven him to the cloister in the first place.² While the Augustinians had a reputation for strictness, the vicar general of the order, Johann Staupitz, proclaimed to Luther an Augustinian message of grace. Luther was told he must let go of his striving to perfect himself and sink into God, for God alone can perfect the sinner with love. Moreover, Staupitz urged Luther, who had been lecturing on Aristotle and Peter Lombard, to pursue a doctorate in theology in Wittenberg which would require him to study and lecture on Scripture. Luther believed this to be a dangerous idea but finally relented. In reading, studying, and teaching *Psalms*, *Romans*, and *Galatians*, Luther discovered that, according to Scripture, God is not a judge of merits and debts but a merciful lover who has suffered abandonment, death, and even a descent into Hell in order to engage humans in loving relationship.

Thus, according to his *Lectures on Romans* (Luther 2016), Luther declared to his students in 1515 a total rejection of the economic model of good and evil. Goodness is not a measure of assets and evil is not debt. One does not acquire goodness by storing up merit earned through good or successful actions nor does one become evil by failing to acquire assets at the same or greater rate as one accrues debt from evil or unsuccessful actions. Rather goodness is a value given by God through love, a value taken on by the beloved simply from being loved. God determines all value as God is the supreme value-maker. Furthermore, God does not use a balance sheet to make the determination but only a heart infused with love.

Luther's academic theological insight became a matter of market significance in 1517. Goodness is a gift from God which cannot be bought in any market, thus goodness cannot be bought through indulgences, according to Luther. This was a dangerous position in a time when the indulgences of John Tetzel were helping to fund the building of Saint Peter's in Rome and to pay the investment bankers, the Fuggers, who had loaned Albert of Mainz the 10,000 ducats necessary for his position. Understanding little of the politics at the time, Luther proclaimed only what he saw as correct theology. Luther proclaimed that a coin in the coffer ringing would not result in a soul from Purgatory springing. Indeed, the whole idea of a Purgatory, an other-worldly penitentiary where sinners paid off their debts via the coins, prayers, sacrificial masses, and sufferings of the living was rejected by Luther as well. Quickly, some German nobles rallied behind Luther for their own economic reasons. But Luther's claim shattered more than the pipeline of resources from Germany to Rome. Luther was ultimately arguing that money could not buy merit, not when it was spent on indulgences but also not when it was spent on relics, pilgrimages, or private masses. Merit comes from God's love expressed on the cross. To preach anything else was to decrease faith and,

therefore, to increase sin. Therefore, the last four of Luther's 95 theses emphasized the danger of the preaching of indulgences for such preaching destroys faith in God's love and the salvific benefit of the cross.

Although Luther believed his axiology to be wholly in line with Scripture and Augustinian tradition, others saw his system as revolutionary. While indulgences quickly fell out of favor after the publication of the 95 theses, Luther's broader view was denounced. His claim was that goodness cannot be achieved through obedience to law, not civic law, not Biblical law, nor Papal law. Goodness is a cloak laid upon a beloved by the divine lover who suffered and died for love of humanity. In contrast, evil is not a result of lack of merit but of lack of faith. Under this model, the difference between Judas and Peter was not the size of their betrayals of Christ but the lack of Judas' faith that Christ would forgive him. Evil is not a debt owed because of poverty, lack of institutional support, or even criminal behavior. The root of all sin is the lack of trust that one's value came from God alone. This anxiety, fed by the Devil, is the root of vice.

Luther's evangelism thoroughly rocked the medieval church and society. His rejection of indulgences and the Pope's authority to grant and sell them sparked his excommunication. Flung from the monastery and the Roman church, Luther claimed that neither were the place of goodness and holiness he had previously thought. Rather, he believed that he and all Christians were called to serve outside the cloister and the cathedral and in society and in the world.

Luther's preaching that God's grace shed goodness on the believer had civic and ecclesiastic consequences throughout all of Europe. Luther's view that the root of evil was faithlessness rather than impurity changed church practices, civic laws, and social attitudes. Because goodness was not considered an inherent quality of action but rather a gift given by a loving God, Luther taught that Christians are free to do any action while called to love and serve their neighbor. No action was inherently good or evil on its own.

One effect of Luther's new axiology was the promotion of marriage for all Christians, including pastors. The promotion of marriage is an important example because Luther spent a great deal of effort advocating specifically for marriage as a test case for his view on good and evil. In the cloister, Luther claimed, he was told that celibacy was inherently more pure, more meritorious, more good than sexual activity in marriage. Such a view, said Luther, made him proud of his self-control and assured of his salvation by his own merit. But having proclaimed that no action in itself is good and that such pride in one's own merit is the root of all sin, Luther began to highlight Biblical passages in which God blesses marriage such as that of Adam and Eve, Sarah and Abraham, and the couple at the wedding of Cana. Because God's blessing is what makes an action good, not the action itself, this meant that marriage was good if God declared marriage to be good. Luther's writings on marriage inspired many priests and former monks to take wives, although Luther himself resisted marriage for some years. Having believed for so long in the supremacy of celibacy, Luther finally decided to marry Katarina von Bora 'to spite the devil' who had tried to convince him to earn merit through

abstinence.³ Once married, Luther began to preach that while celibacy required remarkable self-control so did marital harmony. Indeed, a household with a wife and noisy children gave many more opportunities to practice self-control and patience than a quiet monastery, in Luther's opinion. Moreover, marriage taught a spouse that one is never really a sovereign self but a person mutually dependent on others for well-being. In addition, Luther came to believe that sexual passion and marital affection are excellent living metaphors for the overriding love Christ has for humanity. The lover is overcome with such great love that he or she would willingly lay down any merit, and even life itself, for the beloved covering the beloved's sins with the lover's own merit, just as Christ has done for humanity. Thus marriage is a school house of faith that teaches its students humility, love, and gratitude for the divine lover and for each other. Marriage does not make one good any more than celibacy does. But marriage is a state that encourages humility and faith that love and grace are the roots of all value. As a result of Luther's views on good and evil as they applied to marriage, pastors were allowed to marry in the Lutheran church. Throughout Germany, monasteries and convents closed, their former inhabitants marrying and creating families. Moreover, European society as a whole began to revere the state of marriage and the family.

Other social changes occurred as well. Luther's insistence on the equality of all before God regardless of social status sparked what is called the radical reformation. To Luther's horror, peasants led by radical reformers revolted against the political and ecclesiastic authorities. Luther quickly worked to explain that while God justified sinners to be saints through love, obedience to civic authority still has civic value for it inspires peace, harmony, and order. Indeed, to use violence in order to try to create goodness on earth is to claim falsely that there is a human ability to create perfection; this is to make a radical mistake. Consequently, Luther condemned violent revolution and insurrection and upheld the right of authorities to keep the peace by any means necessary.

Importantly, although Luther upheld the right of the nobility to rule, he did write advice to the nobility of Germany. Luther proclaimed that the faith of Christian rulers freed them from the anxiety about wealth, power, privilege, and even private charity. With this freedom they could work towards simply structuring society to serve others. Luther urged social welfare chests to be put in place to eradicate poverty since the need for private charity to establish merit was no longer needed. He urged the building of schools for boys and for girls to increase literacy because all men and women shared equally in God's glory and because all people ought to be able to read Scripture in order to learn of their value before God. The German nobility responded, and Luther lived to see these ideas put into action.

Yet, in many ways the old systems of value as wealth, power, and merit remained intact. Without the spiritual hierarchy of clergy and laity, economic hierarchy became even more significant. In some ways, celibacy was simply replaced with marriage as the new prize for men and especially women. Thus, understanding Luther's re-evaluation of all values requires more than looking at history and

sociology. The reader who wants to understand deeply Luther's views of good and evil must dive into the theological foundation for his re-evaluation of all values, the move that destroyed the metaphysical foundations of the major philosophical systems of his time: Neo-Platonism, Scholastic Aristotelianism, nominalism, and humanism.

Beyond good and evil: Luther's refutation of the metaphysics of good and evil

Luther commented to his students in his 1515 *Lectures on Romans* that he had been worn out by the study of philosophy and urged those in his class to quickly pass through this area of study.⁴ Importantly, Luther's refutation of philosophy is a philosophical move based on his theology of justification. Luther insisted that the Gospel and Saint Paul's epistles make clear that value is something that happens only in the presence of God's valuing gaze. God's love cannot be measured nor known by reason. Because value arises in relationship with God, value is not something that is an essential property of a thing or even an action. There are no inherently good or evil creatures nor are there inherently good or evil actions, according to Scripture, according to Luther. Thus, a philosopher who examines a substance using his senses and his reason cannot uncover the value for the value lies in the future love and redemption of God. Luther explained,

The apostle philosophizes and thinks about things in a different way than the philosophers and metaphysicians do. For the philosophers so direct their gaze at the present state of things that they speculate only about what things are and what quality they have, but the apostle calls our attention away from a consideration of the present and from the essence and accident of things and directs us to their future state.

(LW 25: 360)

The metaphysician in trying to know the intrinsic value of the thing-in-itself misunderstands that the final cause of any creature and the value of that creature comes only from God not the creature itself. Luther quoted Seneca to his students saying, 'We are always acting this way, so that what Seneca has said is very true of us: "We do not know what we should do because we have learned unimportant things. Indeed we do not know what is salutary because we have learned only the things that destroy us"' (LW 25: 360). Luther believed that attempting to know value as if it is an intrinsic property of things or actions is not just misguided, but destructive to the soul who needs the reassurance of God's love. Thus, Luther finished this section of his lecture on vain philosophy with a series of insults claiming the metaphysician is 'a madman' and 'a maniac' who attempts 'to make a gay science out of a sad creation!' (LW 25: 361-2).

Luther's argument against philosophy has often been wrongly interpreted as the rant of a fideist against the use of reason in religion. But even a cursory read

of the text of his lecture notes reveals that Luther's critique is more interestingly philosophical. Luther was insisting that the philosophers of his age were making an ultimate mistake, playing the wrong game, in seeking to know substances at all. His attack on philosophy in his *Lectures on Romans* was aimed at the scholastic realists of his time who sought to know all the causes of a substance in a way that Luther had previously been convinced was simply wrong-headed by the nominalists and humanists who had dominated the debate at both University of Erfurt and Wittenberg where Luther had done his studies.

But importantly Luther's rejection was not simply academic. He believed that the pursuit of these vain philosophers actually undermines faith and threatens salvation. This occurs in the following way: a scholastic realist believes that one can philosophically examine a substance such as the human person and know her causes – not simply her efficient, material, and formal causes but also her teleological cause, her end and her purpose. By knowing this, the philosopher suggests he also knows the value of the substance in relation to how well she accomplishes her teleological function. She is considered just or unjust based on the number of just action she performs. Yet, Luther claimed, Scripture rejects this view and says the reverse; it is because one is justified that the actions one does are just. The Scriptural view defies the ability of the philosopher to understand justice. The philosopher cannot know the value of any substance in itself for such value only exists in the gaze of God. Just as the value of a tool is contextual to the circumstance and aesthetic of the worker, just as the value of a work of art is contextual to the circumstance and aesthetic of the viewer, just as the value of an animal is contextual to the circumstance and aesthetic of the farmer, just as the value of a beloved is contextual to circumstance and aesthetic of the lover, so to the value of a human person and her action are both determined by the gaze of God. To say otherwise, is to seek value in one's own person and action, a view that is heretical and dangerous. Indeed, Luther insisted, such a view is the foundation of evil. Seeking to earn one's own value is an attempt that will lead either to hubris or despair. Such a deception, such lack of faith in the loving gaze of God, is the root of all evil. This theological explanation is the basis of Luther's rejection of the philosophical metaphysics of the Scholastics.

Luther is not the first medieval philosopher to reject Scholastic metaphysics. Trained at Erfurt and Wittenberg Luther was well read in nominalism and humanism. The nominalists rejected the scholastic goal to know the essence of the thing in itself using reason, and sought only to understand a thing in so far as it could be experienced. Luther also was impressed by the humanists' love of classical literature, their agility with original languages, and their distrust of authority. Certainly Luther would not have been the scholar he was without the influence of the nominalists and humanists. However, Luther claimed that there was a dangerous heresy lurking in the work of such scholars. Unable to trust fully in Scriptural authority about the absolute power of grace, the nominalist Gabriel Biel seemed to Luther to be suggesting that the individual could become good on her own through service to others with God simply strengthening her resolve and

power. Luther believed that goodness was not an attribute or power strengthened by God, but a value given by God. Similarly, Luther argued bitterly with Erasmus in his *On the Bondage of the Will*. His main problem with both the humanists and nominalists was that they did not trust in Scripture's promise of God's salvific love. While Luther shared with the nominalists and humanists an appreciation of Stoic virtue, the need to work for the benefit of society and to care for the neighbor, he was always clear that developing civic virtues was only an attempt to best serve one's neighbor. There was no guarantee that one would be successful and even if one was successful only the neighbor profited not the actor who still had no more real merit than before. Believing otherwise created the problems of hubris or despair, both of which undermined faith in God's love and thus increased sin.

All in all, Luther's main assault on nominalism and humanism was his insistence that goodness arose from relationship with God. Thus, Luther's axiology of good and evil rejected both Scholastic realism and nominalism. Simply put, human reason cannot discover what has true merit for value is not an essence or property of things or actions but a quality that arises in relationship with a value maker. Luther knew this can feel offensive. "When reason hears this, it is immediately offended and says: "Then are good works nothing? Have I toiled and borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat for nothing?"' (LW 26: 231). Yet Scripture tells the Christian believer that God's love for human beings is assured. Thus the human being is called to believe in faith that he is not good because of who he is or what he has done but because God chooses to call him good, chooses to die for him, and chooses to shed the goodness of Christ upon him. Once that is recognized the faithful believer can stop worrying about his own salvation and instead turn to real care and concern for his neighbor. No longer self-absorbedly attempting to earn merit, the Christian can freely and lovingly use reason to help his neighbor thrive and flourish.

Human's fallen nature: sin

While Luther believed that all people were fully justified, made righteous, through faith in the graceful love of God, he also believed that every human being was simultaneously in bondage to sin. While God's grace makes the person good, such grace did not empower the person to be or act without sin. This paradox of being both saint and sinner, both righteous and evil, was the human condition of the Christian.

Luther, as an Augustinian monk, found that much of his theology was in common with the African doctor, including his insistence in the absolute necessity of grace. However, Augustine (2016) suggested that one root of sin in human beings is a wrongly oriented desire.⁵ Luther, having rejected the view that goodness is a property of persons or actions, also rejected the view that goodness is a matter of correct orientation of desire or of correct seeing and loving. Rather than focusing on the Greek concepts of *agape* and *eros* or the Latin *caritas* and *cupidas*, Luther spoke in German of the difference between *brautliebe* (the bride's love)

and *horenliebe* (the whore's love). Both the bride and the whore are sexual in their orientation. But while the whore seeks to use her partner for money and security, the bride simply loves her spouse for all that the spouse is.

[A] bride's love . . . glows like a fire and desires nothing but the husband. She says, 'It is you I want, not what is yours: I want neither your silver nor your gold; I want neither. I want only you. I want you in your entirety, or not at all'.
(LW 44: 9)

The whore cannot wholly love because she is insecure. She is trying to earn money and security through the sexual encounter. Through this metaphor, Luther explains that the root of sin, the selfish use of the neighbor, is insecurity.

The root of sin, according to Luther, is lack of faith and the accompanying feeling of despair that one has no security or the false pride that one has secured oneself. Either attitude results in a lack of care and concern for others. To combat the latter Luther used the Law to show his parishioners that no matter how they thought they excelled they had each fallen short of the law. But, at the end of his sermons Luther was not a moralistic preacher. Rather he was an evangelist for faith in a loving God. Only by being aware of her need for God and her security in God's love can the Christian turn her gaze from herself to truly serve her neighbor.

That said, no matter how strong one's faith at any given moment, the Christian is daily at war with his own hubris, despair, and selfishness. And this inner war has tragic civic consequences. Luther biographer Scott Hendrix writes,

Luther, was, however, a realist about the human condition. His evil triumvirate, 'sin, death, and the devil,' caused believers and non-believers alike to mistreat, exploit and kill one another. Evil could not be eliminated by human reason and optimism or, for that matter, by religion that deluded people with the promises of miracles, which Luther often dismissed as superstitions. He did not expect the world to become perfect through religion, but he did believe that the religion he advocated provided comfort, strength, and compassion until the fight against evil was won.

(Hendrix 2015: xii-xiii)

Importantly, Luther certainly preached a civic use of the law. Once a Christian is free of her anxiety about her own goodness, she is free to follow Christ's command to serve her neighbor. Luther explained that Scripture and reason help such a Christian determine which practices are more likely to help others thrive. In doing so Luther preached against certain practices more than others.

In an era when moneymaking was becoming a source of upward social mobility, Luther found it necessary to denounce the practice of usury, or lending money to the poor and charging interest. Making an unusual ally of Aristotle, Luther denounced usury like a Scholastic saying that it is an unnatural practice for money does not beget money on its own.⁶⁷ However, Luther's point in his treatise on usury is not that usury is inherently evil but that it is a practice that harms

more than it helps the neighbor.⁷ In denouncing usury, Luther turned more often to Scripture than Aristotle reminding his listeners that Christians are called to serve the poor for the sake of the poor, not in order to make money off the practice.⁸ Generally, Luther used both philosophical reason and Scripture to point the listener away from a practice that does not help others in the community thrive and flourish but serves only to advance the security of the lender, a security that she does not need as a Christian confident in the love of Christ.

Similarly, Luther preached against slander which he claimed was as unnatural as placing the feces of another in one's mouth. Slander and gossip about the flaws of another is a practice beloved by the Devil who grins at the false confidence of a sinner who focuses on the sin of another. Moralism that seeks to condemn another as evil is dangerous according to Luther, for it leads to a false security in one's own ability to avoid a crime or to an unbearable despair that one has fallen beyond redemption. Confidence in one's own righteousness as a gift of God cures one of the need to slander others and sets one free to help those who are suffering instead.

A third example of a specific vice criticized by Luther is insurrection, the violent disobedience of an authority figure. That Luther preached against insurrection is often puzzling to those who see Luther as an insurrectionist against Papal authority justifying his behavior by claiming that one must never go against one's conscience. Importantly, Luther does not suggest that insurgency, mutiny, and revolution are inherently evil actions, but rather that they are actions that, like slander and usury, do not serve the neighbor well. Using arguments that Enlightenment liberal thinkers later discarded, Luther used medieval arguments concerning the natural right of nobility to rule. Luther's emphasis, however, is on the importance of a social structure that allows people to thrive. Luther did not see civil war, violence, or anarchy as compatible with human thriving, and he was extremely skeptical of the civic benefit of giving political power to the peasant class. Importantly, the root of the debate between Luther and the radical reformers and the Anabaptists was not really about the danger and benefit of insurrection but about the theory of justification. Luther insisted that the radical reformers and the Anabaptists were seeking merit for themselves and teaching a dangerous works righteousness that caused hearers to doubt the efficacy of baptism and the Eucharist. In doing so they denied that Scripture was a sure source of knowledge and that faith in God's love was sufficient for justification.

The devil: reified evil

Luther's world of thought is wholly distorted and apologetically misconstrued if his conception of the Devil is dismissed as a medieval phenomenon and only his faith in Christ retained as relevant or as the only decisive factor. Christ and the Devil were equally real to him: one was the perpetual intercessor for Christianity, the other a menace to mankind till the end . . . The Devil is the omnipresent threat, and exactly for this reason the faithful need the proper weapons for survival.

(Oberman 1989: 104)

As historian Heiko Oberman stated in *Martin Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, Luther did believe in the Devil. The temptation to see this as a medieval superstition is a temptation to minimize Luther's view of the real presence of evil in the world. In Luther's age, and particularly in Germany, folk tales about the Devil abounded. Moreover, stories involving the Devil were a common form of slander. For example, Roman Catholics circulated pamphlets against Luther which told and illustrated the story that Luther's mother was a prostitute before her marriage to Hans. The pamphlets insisted that Margarita was visited by the Devil one night at the brothel and that Martin Luther was quite literally Devil's spawn. Other pamphlets showed prints of Luther and Lucifer as compatriots. On the Lutheran side, cartoons and woodcut prints were drawn with portrayals of the Pope as the Anti-Christ.

Importantly, these pamphlets and prints were not meant to be hyperbolic or metaphorical. To Luther and his contemporaries, the Devil, or Anti-Christ, was a real being who was actively working to undo the salvation of souls. Of course, according to Luther, the Devil was fighting a lost battle for Christ had already defeated the Devil through the cross.⁹ When Christ hung on the cross the Devil had a false victory. Descending into Hell, Christ showed that everywhere the sinner is, Christ is there also. The sinner who is in despair, thus, finds Christ. The sinner who suffers and is damned, thus, finds Christ. Christ has won the victory over the Anti-Christ. So now the Devil's only power is to try to convince the insecure individual that she must rely on herself alone. The Devil is effective at this, in no small part, according to Luther, because the Anti-Christ has come to power in the Papacy using the voice from Rome to tell Christians lies. For example, they are told that they are unworthy to read Scripture or take the Eucharist as both bread and wine. They are told that celibacy has more merit than marriage. And they are told that they can buy salvation through the purchase of indulgences or save themselves through meritorious obedience to the Pope. Luther also saw the Devil at work in the preaching of the Anabaptists who claimed that only individual faith made baptism effective not the work of the Holy Spirit. Generally, the Devil, according to Luther, knows that humans are weakest when they are alone and proud or anxious. Thus, a person can come to recognize the voice of the Devil in any call to individualism that suggest that she does not need nor benefit her community. Also the Devil is in any assurance that she has merited her own righteousness and in any condemnation that she has no real worth.

Yet, despite this fiery language that suggested the Devil is a constant presence with a tempting voice, Luther was not an alarmist. He found the Devil easy to defeat:

When I awoke last night, the Devil came and wanted to debate with me; he rebuked and reproached me, arguing that I was a sinner. To this I replied; Tell me something new, Devil! I already know that perfectly well; I have committed many a solid and real sin . . . the sins I have committed are no longer mine

but belong to Christ. This wonderful gift of God I am not prepared to deny but want to acknowledge and confess. WAT 6. No 6827; 215, 40–216, 9.

(Oberman 1989: 105–6)

With such a word of confidence, Luther claimed, the Devil was banished. Furthermore, with such confidence the believer has nothing to fear. No wild animal, no criminal, and no witch can do real harm to the believer, for Christ has already saved the believer. Her salvation, her righteousness before God, is more secure than the knowledge of death which surely no one can avoid.

Because Luther knew the anxiety of doubt, Luther assured the believer that the community can hold him when his own belief fails. Just as the community of the church believes for the infant who is baptized, so too the community can believe for the adult who eats the Eucharistic bread and drinks the wine despite fear of his unworthiness. When the Devil runs rampant in a community and preaches that God is a vengeful Judge who will never find favor with most believers for they are marred with selfishness, anger, and the abuse of creation, the believer need only turn to Scripture to read of the God of love who promises to be Bread to the hungry, Light to the world, and Balm to the anxious sinner.

Conclusion: influence on later thinkers

Luther was not a systematic thinker nor a philosopher. He wrote no formal treatise on the nature of evil. Rather Luther was an occasional theologian and evangelist who responded to his interlocutors as circumstance required. That scores of friends, colleagues, and students wrote down so many of these lectures, talks, dialogues, disputations, and dinner conversations is a testament to his genius and his relevance to his listeners. Still, those systematic philosophers, theologians, and political theorists who came after him had much to discuss and debate about Luther's views on good and evil. In philosophy, Luther's influence is obvious in the many Lutheran philosophers who learned to read in German schools using Luther's Bible. Many of these also studied Luther's theology formally in the course of their education. These philosophers include Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, Fichte, Schelling, Schopenhauer, and others. Moreover, the historian of ideas can find Luther's skeptical view of the pursuit of objective truth reflected in the work of many anti-Enlightenment Lutheran thinkers from Hamann and Herder to Feuerbach, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche. In theology, certainly Luther's work inspired other church reformers both outside and inside the Roman Catholic church over the next half millennium. Importantly in 1998, several branches of the Lutheran church signed a joint declaration on Justification with the Roman Catholic church stating a central agreement on the issues at stake in his theory of justification. Politically, in Germany and Scandinavia as well as in many other areas of the world, Luther's views on the nature of civic good and evil have continued to influence civic policies over the past 500 years.

Notes

- 1 According to Roland Bainton, Hans Luther replied to Luther's proclamation that God had called him in a clap of thunder, 'God grant it was not an apparition of the Devil'. Bainton suggested that this was no idle jest for the Devil 'could disguise himself as an angel of light' and would have suggested to Luther a real 'doubt whether that first thunderstorm had been a vision of God or an apparition of Satan' (Bainton 1955: 32-3).
- 2 'The greatest holiness one could imagine drew us into the cloister . . . We fasted and prayed repeatedly, wore hair shirts under woolen cowls, led a strict and austere life. In short, we took on a monkish holiness. We were so deeply involved in that pretentious business that we considered ourselves holy from head to toe'; Luther's Sermon on June 24, 1525, WA 17:1, 309 (Hendrix 2015: 27). Hendrix explains that the Augustinians reputation for strictness particularly appealed to Luther's desire to be wholly holy.
- 3 Heiko Oberman's tenth chapter of *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* is titled 'Wedded Bliss and World Peace: In Defiance of the Devil' and begins with this quote from Luther: 'But it is the God of the world, the Devil, who so slanders the marital state and has made it shameful . . . it would be fair to marry in order to spite him and his world and to accept his ignominy and bear it for God's sake'; WA 18.277, 26-36; 27 March 1525 (Oberman 1989: 273).
- 4 See LW 25: 361.
- 5 See for examples, Augustine, *De Libero Arbitrio* 2.13.35; *Soliloquia*, I xiii.22; and *Contra Academicos* II.7.
- 6 See LW 45: 299.
- 7 See LW45: 292.
- 8 See LW 22: 518.
- 9 See LW 22:255.

Further Reading

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