Becket (1964)

O’Neill Media Center
PQ2601 .N67 B413 2007

Ca. 1300:
Medieval Order:
Centers/Margins/Mediation/Purgation

11 September 2007
Week 2-Lecture01
Point of this lecture:

Show representations of the 13th century (1200s) self-understanding as an interrelated organic hierarchy; a great chain of being with strong boundaries of purity and impurity; a mediation system that gives people a sense of place and meaning in a “cosmos” often filled with “chaos” [i.e., “order” out of “dis-order”].

I. Great Chain of Being: A Mediated world
### Great Chain of Being

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Macrocosm (Supernatural)</th>
<th>Mesocosm (Earthly) (3 estates in red)</th>
<th>Microcosm (Individual)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td>&quot;Clerks&quot; (Clerics)</td>
<td>Family</td>
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<tr>
<td>Angels</td>
<td>Pope</td>
<td>Husband</td>
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<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>Archbishops</td>
<td>Wife</td>
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<tr>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>Bishops</td>
<td>Son</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>Priests</td>
<td>Servants</td>
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<td>Plants</td>
<td>Laity (non-clergy)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inanimate Objects</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gold</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spirit (reason)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dirt</td>
<td></td>
<td>Passion</td>
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http://www.mlahanas.de/Greeks/images/HierarchicalScale.gif

http://evolution.berkeley.edu/evosite/history/images/chainofbeing.gif
The Great Chain of Being: An organic world --- an **organism**
Everything is interconnected and has **its proper place**

-- NOT an “atomistic” world [like ours]

-- NOT about individual “freedom” and “choice”

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• A hierarchical ladder of Being
• “Higher” beings “participate” more in Being [God]
• “Lower” beings “participate” less in Being [God]

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• Contrast with Darwin’s “evolution”:
  – MODERN: Evolution: things get better (evolve) over time
  – TRADITION: if things change, they must devolve
    • Started with perfection? Only one way to go is down.
    • Hence: “conservative” = conserve
  – TRADITION: “being” [stasis] better than “becoming” [change]
  – MODERN: “change” is a positive value
Christ the **Geometer**:

Measures out the world

Center = order [kosmos]
Outer / margins = chaos

---

Genesis: water = chaos
E.g., Leviathan: sea monsters

Land = stability; limit

Planets revolve around earth

Center = order [kosmos]
Outer / margins = chaos
Medieval map of the world

NB: Jerusalem at center
II. Philosophical “Essentialism”

ESSENTIALISM

• Aristotle / Thomas Aquinas:
  • The “essence” of a thing is \textit{what it is} or its “what-ness”
    - We do not invent, create, or choose essences
    - Key point: “essences” are \textit{unchanging}
    - “Essence” [ \textit{what a thing is} ] precedes “existence” [ \textit{the fact that it is} ]
KEY POINT for a course on the invention of the “subjective individual” and ending up with the French Revolution:

Your identity / meaning is fixed and unchangeable even before you are born: “Biology as destiny”

Tradition: Unchanging: BLOOD / GENEALOGY
Modern: Changing: meritocracy: individual effort

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZphh0HLhZ8

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lj3iNxZ8Dww
Pre-modern [essentialism]: our identity given to us by outside ourselves
Modern [existentialism]: we create our own unique individual identities

How did the Medievals order their world?

KEY: *NOT* BY “RACE” OR “CLASS”
Cf: “the Christian race”
“Class”: a capitalist invention
“Who owns the means of production?”
RATHER:

“ORDERS” OR “ESTATES”

[cf.: “What is the Third Estate?”

i.e., LAND [property]

passed on through blood / family / “marriage”

III. Societal order:

the Three “Orders” [“Estates”]
• First Order:
  – “ Those who pray”
    [ mediators ]
    • Bishops, Monks, Priests

• Second Order:
  – “ Those who fight”
    • Knights, i.e., Nobility

• Third Order:
  – “ Those who work”
    • Peasantry; Laborers; Merchants; the other 97%!!!

PROPERTY = LAND: a land-based economy
‘Privilege”: only the nobility could HUNT

LAND: “fixed” wealth…
unlike capital (which can move)
cf. “the Wandering Jew”

15 September 2004!
Mary Douglas: the boundaries of the social body are inscribed on the individual body.

How do we read a visual text?

“Anthropological boundary markers”: hair / clothing / gender
Are Your Jeans Sagging? Go Directly to Jail.

By NIKO KOPPEL

A hip-hop style helps bring a generation gap into full view.

Published: August 30, 2007

JAMARCUS MARSHALL, a 17-year-old high school sophomore in Mansfield, La., believes that no one should be able to tell him how low to wear his jeans. "It's up to the person who's wearing the pants," he said. Mr. Marshall's sagging pants, a style popularized in the early 1990s by hip-hop artists, are becoming a criminal offense in a growing number of communities, including his own. Starting in Louisiana, an intensifying push by lawmakers has determined pants worn low enough to expose underwear poses a threat to the public, and they have enacted indecency ordinances to stop it.
Head-dress / Head-covering / Hair
“nimbus” [“halo”] = eternal: UNCHANGING
[cf. wedding ring: circle without end = “perfect motion”]
ENDLESS REVOLUTIONS [i.e., revolving …]

“Christ in Majesty”
Spain, 1150-1200 [fresco], Boston MFA
“Revolution”:
Endless revolving???
Or sudden revolt???

Cultural significance / meaning of nimbus?
*The social order is given and eternal –
it is not a social compact – we do not create it or choose it
to alter it is an act of rebellion [cf. Shakespeare!]

IV. Musical Representation:
Hildegard of Bingen –
“Humility”
Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179: 
The Order of Virtues

- Note Hildegard’s drawing: perfect human being
  - Perfection: note optimism!
  - within circle [nimbus / mandala] -- eternal order
  - “virtue” – from Aristotle --- “virtue ethics"

- Individual within a cosmos: “humility”

What does the music signify?

- Music for ancients/medieval: represents *cosmic order*, *cosmic harmony*
  - Pythagoras – discovered the resonances of plucked strings (system of overtones) – “music of the spheres”
  - cf. Aristotle: the perfect motion of the planets (“harmony of the spheres”)
Allegory: Order of the Virtues
What do the words signify?

- An ode to the Virtue of “humility”:
  - humus = “ground” [cf. Human / humble]
  - human is made from humus
  - humble person: one whose feet on the ground --- knows their place in the order of the cosmos

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The Virtues sing to their sister, the virtue of Innocence

Mourn for this, mourn, oh Innocence, you who in your fair modesty lost no perfection, who did not devour greedily <the apple!> with the gullet of the serpent of old.

<allusion to Garden of Eden>

NB: IT’S ABOUT KNOWLEDGE:

KNOWLEDGE OF WHO YOU ARE

“You shall be as gods … knowing good and evil.”

Then, enter the Devil!

• NB: the Devil speaks/shouts but does not sing:
  – song=cosmic harmony
  – he is cosmic disorder
• He tries to tempt them to abandon their humility and follow his own “rebellion”
• cf. Satan: led rebellion of angels… cf. Chain of being
The Devil speaks:
What power can claim that there is no power but God?
I say: whoever wants to follow me and do my will---
I’ll give them everything!

NB: allusion to temptations of Christ in the desert

Devil continues:
As for you, Humility, you have nothing that you can give your followers:

none of you [Virtues] even know what you are!

Cf. Garden of Eden -- serpent’s temptation: eat of the Tree of Knowledge !!! You will not be humble; “You will be as gods.”
Humility gives her retort:

My comrades and I know very well
that you are the dragon of old
who craved to fly higher
than the highest one:
but God, himself hurled you in the abyss.

Gustave Doré, *Fall of Lucifer*

Cf. Myth of Daedalus/Icarus and Tower of Babel:
those who want to “fly too high” have lost sense of their place
[i.e., the virtue of *humility*] in the cosmic order
Virtues conclude:

• “As for us, we Virtues dwell in the heights.”
  – *Nos qutem omnes in excelsis habitamus.*

• NB: *irony* --- he promises them they can fly high; but they already are in the heights precisely because they know their place [humility]
V. Architecture

Gothic Cathedral
[Chartres, France]
Perfect numbers: 2-part & 3-part divisions
[cathedrals, three orders, heaven/hell/purgatory]

12th-13th centuries: an “Age of Reason” [geometry]

and an “Age of Faith”

Or perhaps: age of “reasonable faith”
Medieval Eucharist [Mass]:
Mediation between states of being [God/humanity; Creator/created; Body/bread]

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A World of Mediation in Great Chain of Being
Durham, England

Gasson Hall, Boston College
Cultural meaning of the architecture?
A cosmic harmony: mediated chain of being uniting
the divine and the human / faith and reason.