

Political Demonology: The Logic of Evil in Contemporary Literature and Theology

Day Conference - Friday, 20 May 2016
Worcester College, Oxford

This conference is intended to bring theologians, philosophers of religion, and literary scholars together to frame approaches to the problem of political evil—a project one might call ‘political demonology’—for our contemporary political and cultural crisis.

What or who is the political enemy? What is political evil or sin? If we are living in the age of ‘the complete triumph of the individual’ (Giles Châtelet), then the status of ‘individuality’ ‘subjectivity,’ and ‘soul,’ must be attended to in this context. But if individuality is coming to some kind of end (post-modern, post-capitalist, post-material, or otherwise), what moral-political regime is, or should be, appearing on the horizon? And what, then, is the meaning, place, and aesthetic of evil as a political phenomenon? Would the transformation of the individual mean liberation, oblivion, or even imply new forms of violence? And what is the role of statehood or the social? Through this interdisciplinary dialogue we seek to reformulate our own definitions, even as various contemporary crises violently reformulate them for us.

We seek 20-minute papers on any topic relating to ‘political demonology’—broadly defined as the genesis, location, logic, categorization, or implementation of political evil. Participants are encouraged to approach the topic from any angle. While we address ourselves to the present, historical approaches that illuminate the contemporary moment and our current conceptions are very welcome.

Questions to be considered might also include:

- How might we define ‘political demonology’? What inheres in the act of pursuing, however speculatively, a political ‘demonology’? Is the concept of evil valuable to a political project?
- From what point does evil arise in states and communities? What is its metaphysical horizon? How does it afflict political systems? Is it a personal, a systemic, or a substantial category? According to which logic does evil unfold? And what are the remedies—if they exist?
- How might a contemporary understanding of political evil allow us to take a stance against the disposability of human beings, against self-reductionism and the privileging of self-management over creativity?
- What are emerging metaphors and genres in the field of theological and literary hamartiology?
- What might be the implications of the state of exception (Carl Schmitt) – reactionary, radical, or otherwise? Is transcendence an option or fiction? Can we talk about ‘radical evil’ or ‘radical good’?

***Please send your abstract (200 words) to: demonologyoxford2016@gmail.com
by 20 March 2016***

The conference is organized by the Political Demonology Working Group, initiated by Therese Feiler (Postdoctoral Researcher, Faculty of Theology and Religion) and Michael Mayo (Junior Research Fellow, Faculty of English).