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The Fathers of the Church and the Evil Eye

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The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how difficult even the most highly educated and sophisticated Christians of the late fourth and early fifth centuries found it to rid themselves of the idea that envy lends a malign power to men's eyes. The idea at issue is that the eyes of envious men are able, unaided, to inflict injury at a distance. This is the belief called the "evil eye" by speakers of English and other modern European languages, though that significantly is not the way in which most men in pagan and Christian antiquity would have referred to it. The difficulty that such fathers of the church as Basil, Jerome, and John Chrysostom had with freeing themselves from the idea is some indication of how deep-seated it must have been in the general population.

I shall also try to show that these church fathers, who do attack belief in the evil eye, address only one aspect of a much larger constellation of beliefs. They leave unquestioned the assumption that there are envious supernatural forces out there eager to destroy prosperity, virtue, and beauty. Their failure to deal with this larger issue is a further indication of just how much a part of men's mental make-up must have been the conviction that life was beset by unseen envious forces. We see evidence of that fear in the many amulets that survive from this period. It is important to bear in mind that the fear reflected in these objects is not directed specifically at the evil eye as the fathers of the church construe it but at a much wider spectrum of dangers. In the case of Basil and John Chrysostom, and perhaps to a lesser extent Jerome, there is a further factor that has affected their thinking about the evil eye: the influence of pagan philosophy has made them concentrate their attention on a severely restricted conception of the evil eye to the exclusion of other related beliefs.

The fathers of the church have no reservations about condemning all forms of magic-working, in which category they certainly included the casting

of the evil eye.¹ Although they are unanimous and consistent in their condemnation of magic-working, they waver on the question of whether there is anything to it.² They condemn magicians as frauds and charlatans, but sometimes speak of them as though they posed a real threat. They have no doubt that magic is the devil's work, but they are not at all certain whether the demonic forces magicians enlist to aid them do in fact afford any real help or only create the illusion of change.³

The attitude of the fathers of the church to magic reflects in part the hostility of the Roman civil authorities to magic as a socially disruptive force, in part the skepticism found in educated pagan circles about the possibility of a man's being able to set aside the laws of nature, and in part the feeling that endowing men with more than human abilities is contrary to Christian doctrine.⁴ Scripture has a surprisingly small part to play in shaping Christian attitudes toward magic.⁵ How little support the church fathers can find in it for their condemnation of magic is apparent in Jerome's palpable delight in his commentary on Galatians at Paul's mentioning sorcery (φαρμακεία) immedi-

¹ For magic in the New Testament: David E. Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," *ANRW*, II.23.2 (Berlin-New York, 1980), 1507–57; for the views of the ante-Nicene fathers on magic: Francis C. R. Thee, *Julius Africanus and the Early Christian View of Magic* (Tübingen, 1984), 316–448; for Origen, Chrysostom, and Augustine: N. Brox, "Magie und Aberglauben an den Anfängen des Christentums," *Trierer theologische Zeitschrift* 83 (1974), 157–80.

² Ramsay MacMullen's assertion (*Enemies of the Roman Order* [Cambridge, Mass., 1964], 323–24 note 25) that "if the Church thundered against magic beliefs, that was because they were wicked, not untrue," is too extreme and unnuanced and takes no account of the very different positions different fathers adopted.

³ On the tendency to deny that humans can perform sorcery and to blame everything on the demonic, see Peter Brown, "Sorcery, Demons and the Rise of Christianity," in *Witchcraft, Confessions and Accusations*, ed. Mary Douglas (London, 1970), 32.

⁴ On Roman legislation against magic appealed to by Augustine in support of his thesis that magic is pernicious and not only condemned by Christians, see *De civitate dei*, 8.19; in general on Roman legislation on magic, see MacMullen, *Enemies*, 124–27; on the judicial prosecution in the 4th century A.D. of those who had resort to magic, see A. Barb, "The Survival of Magic Arts," in *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, ed. A. Momigliano (Oxford, 1963), 100–14; John Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (London, 1989), 217–26.

⁵ Magic condemned: Deuteronomy 18:11–12; Galatians 5:20; *Didache*, 2.2; Aristeides, *Apologia*, 8.2, 13.8; Justin, *Apologia*, 1.14.2; Pseudo-Phocylides, 149; *Oracula Sibyllina*, 283–85.

ately after idolatry amongst the deeds of the flesh (Gal. 5:18): he remarks that we are not to imagine that magical spells and the maleficent arts are not forbidden in the New Testament; they are forbidden amongst the deeds of the flesh. The explanation he gives for their being put in this category is that because of the magical arts unfortunate people often fall in love and become the objects of love.⁶ The church fathers may have found condemnations of magic hard to come by. They are even less well-placed when it comes to adducing scriptural authority for their contention that magicians and sorcerers are impostors and charlatans. They are firmly convinced that men cannot alter the course of nature but cannot find chapter and verse to support that view.

The attitude of the fathers of the church to the evil eye is a profoundly ambiguous one: they are not prepared to accept that the eyes of envious men can on their own inflict harm, but they are willing to concede either that the virtuous and the fortunate do have something to fear from envious forces or that a supernatural force may use the eyes of the envious to cause harm. This is their considered position when their mind is fully focused on the issue and its implications. When their mind is on something else, they speak of the eyes of the envious doing harm. In essence they continue to believe in the evil eye, but qualify the expression of their belief to make it philosophically and theologically respectable.

The position that they take on the evil eye owes a good deal more to presuppositions about the nature of man and his capabilities that the church fathers share with educated pagans than it does to the authority of the scriptures. What a church father found incredible about the evil eye was exactly what an educated pagan would have found incredible. What the fathers leave unquestioned is exactly what a pagan would have left unquestioned. They share very much the same blind spots. Not only do pagan presuppositions shape the attitude of the fathers of the church to the evil eye, but pagan philosophical discussion has deeply affected the way in which such fathers as Basil and John Chrysostom conceive of it. The limited view that they take of the issue is a holdover from learned pagan discussion. The terms of debate that Basil and John Chrysostom felt bound by here had been laid

⁶ *Commentarius in epistolam ad Galatas*, PL 26, col. 443: "et ne forsitan veneficia, et maleficae artes non viderentur in Novo prohibita Testamento, ipsae quoque inter carnis opera nominantur. quia saepe magicis artibus, et amare miseris evenit et amari."

down long before by pagan philosophers. This has meant that one belief has been singled out from a larger complex of beliefs of which it was part and discussed in isolation from them. The evil eye, as I shall try to show, is a somewhat artificial construct. Ancient criticism of it is interesting as much for what is said about it as for what is not said about the larger body of beliefs to which it belongs.

We must step back for a moment to look more closely at what it is that we are talking about when we speak of the evil eye in classical antiquity and the late Roman world. Michael Herzfeld has with some reason proposed that the term "evil eye" should not be used in cross-cultural comparisons, on the ground that the term is frequently employed to refer to beliefs that have little in common with each other, although he does think that it has a proper application.⁷ There are problems with the notion of the evil eye, even within a culture. In the case of classical antiquity and of the late Roman world, the term *evil eye* as such is hardly used at all and then only under the influence of certain scriptural passages of uncertain import.⁸ The terms most often used are, by Greek speakers, *φθόνος* and *βασκανία*, and, by speakers of Latin, *invidia* and *fasciatio* or *fascinus*. What men feared under these headings was not a single object with a secure and fixed identity but a complex of objects with shifting identities, and identities that coalesce. Very often what they feared will have been inchoate and will have lacked any real identity.⁹ The more or less constant factor in this constellation of fears was fear of envy: men were afraid lest their good fortune would draw envy on their heads. They might fear it would come from their fellow men, demons, the gods, fortune, the fates, and a malign supernatural power they called simply *φθόνος* or *invidia*. Their fear will very often have had no clear focus to it and will have been no more than an undifferentiated sense of apprehension. The explanations they gave for the misfortunes that befell them will have been equally fluid, and they will sometimes have put down the catastrophe to a combination of forces, for example, envious demons

⁷ "The Horns of the Mediterraneanist Dilemma," *American Ethnologist* 11 (1984), 448–50; "Closure as Cure: Tropes in the Exploration of Bodily and Social Disorder," *Current Anthropology* 27 (1986), 108 note 3.

⁸ It is found in Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio funebris in Meletium*, PG 46, col. 856 and in John Chrysostom, *Commentarius in epistolam 1 ad Corinthios*, PG 61, col. 106.

⁹ I do not, for instance, share Peter Brown's confidence (*Witchcraft*, 32) that the identity of the force apostrophized as *Invide* on Christian amulets was always and un-faillingly thought to be the devil.

working through envious human beings; or again they will have assigned no more secure an identity to the cause of their misfortune than that φθόνος or *invidia* had struck them down.

To substantiate these contentions adequately would take too much space. Two passages, one from Plato's *Phaedo* (95b5–6) and the other from Libanius' correspondence (*Ep.* 1403.1–2), will have to suffice to illustrate respectively the undifferentiated nature of fear of βασκανία and the identification of βασκανία with fortune. When Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo* tells Cebes not to speak too boldly, after Cebes has expressed his confidence that Socrates will have no difficulty in dealing with the next topic to be discussed, lest some βασκανία upset the discussion they are about to have,¹⁰ there does not seem to be any good reason to assign a precise source to the threat. It seems unlikely that it is supposed to emanate from any of those present in Socrates' death cell. Nor again is there any warrant for supposing that it is meant to come from the gods, despite the fact that Socrates immediately proceeds to say that the matter will be the gods' concern (95b7). Furthermore, we have absolutely no reason to suppose that there is in what Socrates says any implied reference to the harmful gaze of some being. Libanius, on the other hand, declares he knew that when three young men were praised a βασκανία would cast its gaze on them, but goes on to say that φθονερός δαίμων could not abide what was said about them.¹¹ βασκανία in this case does have a baneful gaze, but it is not the βασκανία of any human being that is at issue; if anything, it is that of envious fortune.

In pagan antiquity what is singled out for rejection is only one small facet of the constellation of beliefs that arise out of the deep-seated conviction that good fortune will attract the hostility of envious supernatural forces. Men found it impossible to accept only that other human beings could, without physical contact, do harm from afar, not that other non-human beings and forces might out of envy do damage, either by casting hate-filled eyes or by some other means. This is not to say there would not have been those who would not have rejected the whole complex of ideas out of hand—in theory, this is what a Stoic or Epicurean would have done—only that while a man

¹⁰ μὴ μέγα λέγε, μή τις ἡμῖν βασκανία περιτρέψη τὸν λόγον τὸν μέλλοντα ἔσεσθαι.

¹¹ ἦδειν ὅτι Βασκανία τις ὄψεται τοὺς σοὺς υἱεῖς, ἧ πέφυκεν ὄραν ἐκείνη τοὺς ἐπαινομένους. . . . οὐκ ἦνεγκεν οὖν φθονερός δαίμων τὸν περὶ αὐτῶν λόγον.

might have difficulty accepting that the intervention of another human being could alter nature's course, he would have had a good deal less difficulty with the idea that the intervention of an envious force or being, if it were other than human, was capable of interrupting the normal pattern of events.

Some educated men in pagan antiquity, at least from the first century of our era, and probably from a much earlier date, evidently found the idea that the eyes of envious men could cast a harmful spell something of an embarrassment. Grattius, a poet writing under Augustus, speaks in his *Cynegetica* of fear of the malign eye as a false fear belonging to an earlier age.¹² Persius, the Roman satirist of the time of Nero, characterizes the grandmother and aunt who take an infant boy from his cradle to daub saliva on his forehead and lips, so as to negate the effect of eyes that burn, as fearful of the divine.¹³ In speaking of eyes that burn, Persius is referring to the scorching and withering effect that the evil eye was imagined to possess. We should not assume too readily that Grattius and Persius have only the eyes of human beings in mind, but we may fairly infer that, in speaking respectively of false fear (*falsus metus*) and fear of the divine (*metuens divum*), they are referring to the state of mind that in Greek would be labeled δεισιδαιμονία,¹⁴ that is, the preternatural fear of the divine and demonic. In categorizing the fear in these terms and attributing it to an earlier era and to women, they distance themselves from it. Plutarch, in his account of a conversation after a banquet at which the subject of the envious eye (βάσκανος ὀφθαλμός) and those men able to harm with it is brought up, says most of those present completely belittled and ridiculed the idea (*Quaestiones convivales*, 680c).¹⁵ Finally, in Heliodorus' novel the *Aethiopica*, when an Egyptian priest suggests that his host's daughter has drawn an envious eye on herself, the host, a priest of Delphian Apollo, smiles at the irony

¹² "quid, priscas artes inventaque simplicis aevi, / si referam? non illa metus solacia falsi / tam longam traxere fidem (400–402); ac sic effectus oculique venena maligni / vicit tutela pax impetrata deorum" (406–7).

¹³ "ecce avia aut metuens divum matertera cunis / exemit puerum frontemque atque uda labella / infami digito et lustralibus salivis / expiat, urentis oculos inhibere perita" (2.31–34).

¹⁴ Phrases of the form *metuens divum*, as the commentators on Persius point out, normally refer to a proper respect for the gods (Ovid, *Fasti*, 6.259–60, *Metamorphoses*, 1.323; Livy, 22.3.4) and not to superstitious fear. It is unlikely, however, that Persius has simple piety in mind and not the superstitious fear characteristic of women.

¹⁵ οἱ μὲν ἄλλοι παντάπασιν ἐξεφλαύριζον τὸ πρᾶγμα καὶ κατεγέλων.

of his guest's subscribing to a belief to which the masses gave their allegiance (3.7.2).¹⁶

It would be foolish to make too much of these expressions of disdain and draw the conclusion that the educated classes in the Roman Empire were either contemptuous of belief in the evil eye and viewed fear of it as a pathological condition or were embarrassed about admitting to their own belief. They do nonetheless constitute evidence that the belief encountered some resistance.¹⁷ We should also be cautious about placing too much weight on the lonely position that Plutarch implies he occupied in believing in the evil eye: he gives us to believe that, at least at the beginning of the dinner party's conversation on the evil eye, only he and his host, Mestrius Florus, were prepared to defend the belief. We may suspect that the isolation of Mestrius and Plutarch does not necessarily reflect any reality, but is a device intended to highlight the intellectual *tour de force* that Plutarch performs in explaining how it is possible for the envious to cause damage at a distance.

No doubt there were many reasons for an educated man to want to distance himself from giving open adherence to the belief, but one prominent factor influencing his conduct may well have been concern lest he seemed to belong to the number of those who were filled with credulous and awe-struck amazement in the face of the miraculous and wonderful. There is, not surprisingly, a tendency to assign the evil eye to the realm of the miraculous and the wonderful because it represents a departure from the normal course of nature and precisely because there seemed to be no way to explain how one man, without being in direct physical contact with another, could harm him. Thus Apollonius Rhodius in his *Argonautica*, after describing Medea's bewitching the bronze giant Talos with the evil eye, apostrophizes Zeus in shaken wonder that it should be possible for death to come on someone without his being struck or falling sick and that a man should be able to harm someone from afar (4.1673–75).¹⁸ Stories about the evil eye seem to have been one of the staples

¹⁶ γελάσας οὖν εἰρωνικὸν, καὶ σὺ γὰρ, εἶπεν, ὡς ὁ πολλὺς ὄχλος εἶναι τινα βασκανίαν ἐπίστευσας.

¹⁷ MacMullen, *Enemies*, 121, again goes too far in maintaining of the 2nd and 3rd centuries that "As time went on, all doubters disappeared. A universal darkness prevailed." He restates the same view, dismissing Brown's reservations (*Witchcraft*, 22) in *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven-London, 1981), 71–74.

¹⁸ Ζεῦ πάτερ, ἦ μέγα δὴ μοι ἐνὶ φρεσὶ θάμβος ἄηται / εἰ δὴ μὴ νοῦσοισι τυπῆσί τε μοῦνον ὄλεθρος / ἀντιάει, καὶ δὴ τις ἀπόπροθεν ἄμμε χαλέπτει.

of the branch of literature that from the Hellenistic Age on catered to the public's taste for wonders, paradoxography.¹⁹ This taste for the miraculous was to some extent made disreputable by the assaults of two philosophical schools, the Epicureans and the Stoics. The Stoics, about whom we are better informed here, had no time for wonders and simply denied the possibility of their existence.²⁰ Much of the impetus for their attack is attributable to their eagerness to counter the disconcerting effect that awe-struck fear might have on a man's mental equilibrium. It will be no coincidence then that the philosophical standpoint of Persius and of those at Plutarch's dinner party who attack belief in the evil eye is a Stoic one.²¹

From an intellectual point of view, the difficulty educated pagans had with the evil eye, when they put their minds to the issue, was that it was hard to see how the eyes could harm without apparent physical contact. There were three responses to this difficulty: (1) probably the most common, to ignore it; (2) to see in it an insuperable obstacle to the belief's being true; and (3) to argue that there was in fact physical contact between the eyes and what they rested on. Thus Plutarch's explanation of the evil eye is that there is a physical emanation from the eyes of the envious person which enters the eyes of the envied party to cause bodily and psychic upset (*Quaest. conviv.*, 680f–681a, 681e–f). Plutarch here is deeply indebted to the presocratic philosopher Democritus, who had used his theory of atomic particles to account for the capacity the eyes of the envious had to harm (DK 68 A 77 = Plutarch, *Quaest. conviv.*, 682f–683a). What is notable about all of the theories devised in

¹⁹ Pliny the Elder attributes to two Hellenistic paradoxographers, Isigonus and Nymphodorus, stories about people who had the power to fascinate (*Historia naturalis*, 7.16). On the literary form, see A. Giannini, "Studi sulla paradossografia greca I," *RendIstLomb* 97 (1963), 246–66; idem, "Studi sulla paradossografia greca II," *Acme* 17 (1964), 99–140.

²⁰ *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, ed. J. von Arnim, 4 vols. (Leipzig, 1905–24), III, 642; cf. *ibid.*, I, 239 (Zeno); Epictetus, 1.29.3. Strabo (1.3.21) treats Democritus as the precursor of those philosophers (i.e., the Stoics) who try to inculcate a resistance to astonishment (ἀθαυμαστία). On Democritus and the Stoics, see R. Gauthier and J. Jolif, *L'Éthique à Nicomaque*, 2nd ed. (Louvain-Paris, 1970), on Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1125a2. Lucian couples Democritus with Epicurus and Metrodorus as men resolute in their determination not to be awed by miracles (*Alexander*, 17).

²¹ H. Dörrie, *Der Königskult des Antiochos von Kommagene im Lichte neuer Inschriften-Funde*, *AbhGött, phil.-hist.Kl.*, 3rd ser. 60 (Göttingen, 1964), 110, identifies the scoffers' position as Stoic.

pagan antiquity—and they are all really variations on Plutarch's adaptation of Democritus—to make sense of the ability of the envious to inflict harm through their eyes is that they assume the harm must be done through some form of physical contact.²²

That Plutarch's theory should have found its way into two collections of physical and medical conundrums, one ascribed to Aristotle ([Arist.], *Probl. ined.* 3.52 [Bussemaker IV.333] and the other to Alexander of Aphrodisias ([Alex. Aphrod.] *Probl.* 2.53 [J. L. Ideler, *Physici et medici Graeci minores* I.67–68]), is a fair indication that there was an audience for it and that Plutarch somewhat misrepresents his position in suggesting it was a lonely and embattled one. Many educated men will have been only too happy to embrace an explanation that conferred respectability on a belief to which they might otherwise have been embarrassed to admit. Many others apparently felt no embarrassment at all about the belief. Pliny the Elder, despite the robust skepticism he displays about certain aspects of magic, is one such:²³ there is no hint that he withholds his intellectual assent from what he has to say about *fascinatio*.²⁴ Aelian, a product of the Second Sophistic who was born in Praeneste but writes in Greek, is another: he happily recounts the measures that animals and birds take to protect themselves against the eyes of the envious.²⁵

In sum, in pagan antiquity one small facet of a much larger complex of beliefs, whose core was the feeling that good fortune was vulnerable to the assaults of envious supernatural forces, was singled out for rejection or explanation. It is important to bear this in mind when we turn to what those fathers of the church who do address the issue of *βασκανία* or *fascinatio* have to say about it. Those church fathers who show no sign of having read any of the philosophical discussions of the topic, although they take a somewhat larger view of *βασκανία*, cannot accept that one human being can harm another through *βασκανία*, but do not question the existence of an envious supernatural force. The church fathers whose thinking does betray the influence of pagan

²² Heliodorus, *Aethiopica*, 3.7.2–8.2; [Aristotle], *Problemata inedita*, 3.52 (Bussemaker IV.333); [Alexander of Aphrodisias], *Problemata*, 2.53 (J. L. Ideler, *Physici et medici graeci minores*, I.67–68).

²³ On Pliny's disbelief in magic, see Mary Beagon, *Roman Nature: The Thought of Pliny the Elder* (Oxford, 1992), 92–123, an assessment that does not quite bring out Pliny's blind spots.

²⁴ *Historia naturalis*, 7.16–18; 13.40; 19.50; 28.22, 35, 101; 37.145, 164.

²⁵ *De natura animalium*, 1.35; 11.18.

philosophical discussion show in the very limited view they take of βασκανία and in their criticism of belief in it their indebtedness, naturally unacknowledged, to pagan thinking on the subject. What they attack is the belief that men in their envy are able through their eyes alone to hurt other human beings; the basis of their criticism is that a mere part of the body could not do this on its own.

The Fathers of the Church

Nowhere is the limiting influence of pagan discussion more evident than in Basil's discussion of the evil eye in his homily on envy. After arguing that the envious do themselves much more harm than they do those at whom they direct their envy, he turns to an apparent counter-example to his thesis, namely, the belief held by some that envious men through the sole agency of their eyes can inflict harm on others.²⁶ He goes on to give a fuller version of this belief: "Bodies in good condition, even those that are at the very apogee of physical form and youth, waste away when exposed to fascination and lose all of their substance, inasmuch as a deadly efflux emanates from envious eyes to ruin and kill."²⁷ Having spelled out what the belief is, Basil dismisses it as a vulgar story introduced by old women into the women's quarters.²⁸ Then, changing his tack somewhat, he makes what is in effect a concession: when demons who have a hatred of what is fair come across men with propensities akin to their own, they employ these propensities to further their own purposes, which means that they press the eyes of the envious into service to secure their own ends.²⁹ Basil concludes this part of the homily by asking us whether we are not afraid of making ourselves a servant of a deadly demon and the enemy of God who is good and free of all envy.

²⁶ *De invidia*, PG 31, col. 380: τοὺς δὲ φθονερούς τινες οἴονται καὶ δι' ὀφθαλμῶν μόνων τὴν βλάβην ἐπιβάλλειν.

²⁷ ὥστε τὰ εὐεκτικὰ σώματα, καὶ ἐκ τῆς κατὰ τὴν ἡλικίαν ἀκμῆς εἰς τὴν ἄκρην ὥραν ὑπερανθήσαντα, τήκεσθαι παρ' αὐτῶν καταβασκαινόμενα, καὶ ὄλον ἀθρόως συναναιρεῖσθαι τὸν ὄγκον, οἷον ρεύματός τινος ὀλεθρίου ἐκ τῶν φθονερῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ἀπορρέοντος, καὶ λυμαιομένου καὶ διαφθείροντος.

²⁸ ἐγὼ δὲ τοῦτον μὲν τὸν λόγον ἀποπέμπομαι, ὡς δημῶδη καὶ τῇ γυναικωνίτιδι παρεισαχθέντα ὑπὸ γραιδίῶν.

²⁹ ἐκεῖνο δὲ φημι, ὅτι οἱ μισόκαλοι δαίμονες, ἐπειδὴν οἰκείας ἑαυτοῖς εὐρωσι προαιρέσεις, παντοίως αὐταῖς πρὸς τὸ ἴδιον ἀποκέχρηνται βούλημα· ὥστε καὶ τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς τῶν βασκάνων εἰς ὑπηρεσίαν χρῆσθαι τοῦ ἰδίου θελήματος.

The belief that Basil rejects as vulgar and an old wives' tale, at least in the form that he presents it, is no such thing, but a learned interpretation of *βασκανία* that he gets from Plutarch, probably directly. Basil read Plutarch; the homily *De invidia* owes a debt to Plutarch's *De invidia et odio*.³⁰ Since the theory of *βασκανία* that he rejects is basically the same as Plutarch's, and the description of the effect of *βασκανία* on bodies in their prime comes from Plutarch's explanation of why good-looking young men in their prime may fascinate themselves if they see their image reflected in water, the chances are that he has taken it directly from that author.³¹

Why Basil should dismiss Plutarch's explanation of *βασκανία* as an old wives' tale is something of a puzzle. In calling it an old wives' tale, he of course wishes to suggest that it is a superstitious belief of the sort that only credulous old women would believe.³² It seems unlikely, however, that it had

³⁰ Basil's debt particularly to Plutarch's *De tranquillitate vitae* has been demonstrated by M. Pohlenz, "Philosophische Nachklänge in altchristlichen Predigten," *ZWTh* 48 (1905), 72–95. See also R. Hirzel, *Plutarch* (Leipzig, 1912), 84–85; K. Ziegler, *RE* 21 (1951), col. 311; D. Russell, *Plutarch* (London, 1973), 144–45. Case for debt to Plutarch's *De invid. et od.* in Basil's *De invidia*: envious will never admit to envy: *De invid.*, PG 31, col. 373 = *Mor.*, 537e; misfortune of the envied puts a stop to envy: *De invid.*, PG 31, col. 373 = *Mor.*, 538b–c; doing good to the envious does not stop their envy but exacerbates it: *De invid.*, PG 31, cols. 376–77 = *Mor.*, 538c–d.

³¹ Cf. *Quaest. conviv.* 682e: σφαλερὸν γὰρ ἢ ἐπ' ἄκρον εὐεξία κατὰ τὸν Ἱπποκράτην, καὶ τὰ σώματα προελθόντα μέχρι τῆς ἄκρας ἀκμῆς οὐχ ἔστηκεν.

³² For old wives' tales as an expression of contempt: Plato, *Gorgias*, 527a, *Res-publica*, 350e, *Theaetetus*, 176b; Herodas, 1.74; 1 Timothy 4:6; Lucian, *Philopseudes*, 9; Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii*, 5.14; Porphyry, *De Abstinencia*, 4.16; Julian, *Oratio* 5, 161b; Cicero, *De natura deorum*, 3.12; Tibullus, 1.3.85; Horace, *Sermones*, 2.6.76–77; Apuleius, *Apologia*, 25, *Metamorphoses*, 4.27; see also Headlam on Herod. 1.74; nonsensical talk characteristic of old women: John Chrysostom, *In Matthaeum*, PG 57, col. 30, *In epistulam ad Romanos*, PG 60, col. 414, *In epistulam 2 ad Thessalonicenses*, PG 62, col. 470; on the superstitiousness of women in general: Bion fr. 30 Kindstrand = Plutarch, *De superstitione*, 168d; Polybius, 12.24.5; Strabo, 7.3.4; on the superstitiousness of old women: Plutarch, *Non posse suaviter vivere secundum Epicurum*, 1105b; Cleomedes, *De motu circulari corporum caelestium*, 208 Ziegler; Basil, *Homilia in hexameron*, 6.11, PG 29, col. 145; Gregory of Nyssa, *In Eunomium*, PG 45, col. 296; John Chrysostom, *In Matthaeum*, PG 57, col. 353; Cicero, *De domo sua*, 105, *ND*, 1.55, 2.5, 70, 3.92, 96, *De divinatione*, 1.7, 2.19, 125, 141, *Orationes tusculanae*, 1.48, 92; Servius, *In Aeneidem*, 8.187; Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 13.5; Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones*, 1.17.3, 5.2.7; Firmicus Maternus, *De errore profanorum*, 17.4; on women and old women in particular being expert in warding off or taking off the evil eye: Theocri-

become part of the fabric of popular culture. A possible but only partial solution to the problem may lie in the conventions governing the way in which Christians refer to the views of pagan philosophers. The Cappadocian fathers and John Chrysostom are in the habit of speaking in an extremely dismissive fashion of pagan philosophers when the views of these philosophers are in conflict with what they take to be Christian doctrine.³³ We find Gregory of Nazianzus speaking of a certain theory as even more outlandish and old womanlike than the atoms of the Epicureans.³⁴ It is hard at the same time not to believe that the contempt expressed by the Cappadocian fathers is something of a pose designed to reassure their hearers and readers that, despite their education in the pagan classics, they had no truck with the ideas of pagans.³⁵

Despite his dismissal of Plutarch's theory, Basil has more in common with Plutarch than perhaps he would want to admit: he too believes that the eyes of the envious may cause hurt, but instead of having recourse to atomic theory to

tus, 6.39–40, 7.126–27; Heliod., *Aethiop.*, 4.5.3; Persius, 2.31–34; Ps. Acro, in *Horatii Epodem*, 8.18; Augustine, *Confessiones*, 1.7.11; old women as magic-workers: Plutarch, *De superst.*, 166a; Lucian, *Philopseudes*, 9, *Dialogi meretricum*, 4.1, 3, 5; John Chrysostom, *Ad illuminandos catecheses*, PG 49, col. 240, *In epistulam 2 ad Corinthios*, PG 61, col. 106, *In epistulam ad Colossenses*, PG 62, cols. 358–59; Athanasius, *Fragmentum de amuletis*, PG 2, col. 1320; Tibullus, 1.8.17–18; Horace, *Sermones*, 1.8; Propertius, 2.4.15; Ovid, *Amores*, 1.8; Petronius, *Satyricon*, 131.

³³ Cf. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Contra Iulianum imperatorem*, 2, PG 35, col. 717, *Adversus Eunomianos*, 10, PG 36, col. 24, *Carmina moralia*, 10 (*de virtute*), PG 37, col. 695; John Chrysostom, *Ad populum Antiochenum*, PG 49, col. 175, *In Acta Apostolorum*, PG 60, col. 47.

³⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus, *De theologia*, 10, PG 36, col. 36: ὁ καὶ τῶν Ἐπικουρείων ἀτόμων ἀτοπώτερόν τε καὶ γραωδέστερον.

³⁵ For an echo in Basil (*Ep.* 11) of a letter of Epicurus (fr. 138 Usener) suggestive of a certain sympathy and understanding for that philosopher: P. Von der Mühl, "Basilus und der letzte Brief Epikurs," *MusHelv* 12 (1955), 47–49; W. Schmid, *RAC* 5 (1962), s.v. Epikur, col. 783; on Basil's attitude toward Greek literature and his use of Greek philosophy to bolster his arguments: N. G. Wilson, *Saint Basil on the Value of Greek Literature* (London, 1975), 9–13; on the view that Basil's attacks on Greek philosophy and science in the *Hexameron* do not reflect Basil's own position but the official voice of the church: E. Amand de Mendieta, "The Official Attitude of Basil of Caesarea as a Christian Bishop towards Greek Philosophy and Science," in *The Orthodox Churches and the West*, D. Baker, ed., *Studies in Church History* 13 (1976), 25–49; the cleanness of this division questioned: M. Naldini, *Basilio di Cesarea, Sulla Genesi* (Milan, 1990), xxiv–xxv.

explain how that could be, he appeals to the notion of envious demons using envious human beings as the instruments of their will. Basil does not spell out his reasons for rejecting the idea that the envious can harm through their eyes alone, but from the emphasis that he places on its being done through the eyes alone we may surmise that neither he nor his audience could imagine harm being done without direct physical contact. The same pattern of reasoning, as we have seen, lies behind pagan rejection of βασκανία.

From our vantage point it seems obvious that the same objection should apply to the theory that demons may, through the eyes of the envious, effect harm. For Basil, on the other hand, bringing the demonic or the divine into the explanation puts the explanation on a plane that excuses the further exercise of the critical faculty. Basil's rationality, like that of most men, extends as far as it can be made to coincide with deeply held beliefs, fears, and interests, but no further. His reservations about the envious having the power to inflict harm through their eyes turn out to be very limited.³⁶ He is not prepared to deny that the eyes of the envious may be dangerous, if demons use them, let alone that there may be envious demonic and diabolical forces out there intent on destroying what is fair and good.

When John Chrysostom attacks the notion of the evil eye as incoherent, what he too attacks under that heading is Plutarch's conception of the evil eye. His attack comes in his commentary on a passage in Paul's Letter to the Galatians that is something of a touchstone of the sensitivity of those who comment on it to the implications of belief in the evil eye for Christian doctrine. The problem with the passage and another in the Gospel of Matthew is that they might be taken to show that Paul and Jesus respectively subscribed to belief in the evil eye. The passage in Matthew (20:15)—the parable in which the lord of the vineyard asks those who complain to him that those who have only worked from the eleventh hour have received as much as they who have worked all day, whether their eye is not evil because he is good³⁷—is less of an embarrassment than that in Galatians. It is not particularly plausible to suppose that in it Jesus has the evil eye in mind. Nonetheless, the possibility that Jesus might be thought to lend his authority to the notion makes Chrysostom take pains to

³⁶ Similarly Charles Stewart, *Demons and the Devil: Moral Imagination in Modern Greek Culture* (Princeton, 1991), 290 note 16. See also Richard P. H. Greenfield, *Traditions of Belief in Late Byzantine Demonology* (Amsterdam, 1988), 112.

³⁷ ἢ ὁ ὀφθαλμὸς σου πονηρὸς ἐστίν, ὅτι ἐγὼ ἀγαθὸς εἶμι;

ensure that his readers understand the passage correctly. Paul's words in Galatians (3:1) in calling the Galatians foolish and asking who has put an envious spell on them are less easily discounted.³⁸

In Chrysostom's view, Galatians 3:1 is a rebuke aimed at the Galatians, couched not in the harshest way possible, but made less severe by the suggestion, in ἐβάσκανεν, that the Galatians' conduct has been sufficiently meritorious to have drawn envy on their heads; what has happened is that the Galatians have suffered the assault of a demon fiercely hostile to their success.³⁹ Chrysostom now proceeds to give a justification for his interpretation of ἐβάσκανεν as a reference to a demonic assault and not to fascination by the human eye:⁴⁰ he argues that when we hear of φθόνος in this passage and in the Gospels of ὀφθαλμὸς πονηρός meaning "envy," then we are not to suppose that the cast of the eye harms those seeing it, for the eye could not be bad, being only a bodily part.⁴¹ There then follows an extremely tortured explanation of how Christ came to use ὀφθαλμὸς πονηρός of envy, the gist of which is that, as the eye is a passive receptor through which the vision of what is seen flows into the soul, there can be nothing bad about the way in which it sees, the badness being confined to the reception of what is seen by souls endowed with a badness that gives rise to envy.⁴² By this Chrysostom may mean that while the eyes of the envious are not bad in the sense that they can do harm, they are bad in

³⁸ ὃ ἀνόητοι Γαλάται, τίς ὑμᾶς ἐβάσκανεν;

³⁹ John Chrysostom, *In epistulam ad Galatas commentarius*, PG 61, col. 648: οὐκ ἄμοιρον ἐγκωμίων τὴν ἐπίπληξιν θεῖς. τοῦτο γὰρ δεικνύοντος ἐστίν, ὅτι φθόνου ἄξια ἔπραττον πρότερον, καὶ δαίμονος ἐπίρεια τὸ γιγνόμενον ἦν, σφοδρὸν κατὰ τῆς εὐημερίας αὐτῶν πνεύσαντος.

⁴⁰ B. Kötting, *RAC*, s.v. Böser Blick, col. 479, is misleading here in paraphrasing the intent of Chrysostom's position to be that the danger of the evil eye comes not from the eye itself but from moral distortion in the heart of the envious man and in attributing the same view to Jerome on Gal. 3:1.

⁴¹ John Chrysostom, *In ep. ad Gal. comm.*, col. 648: ὅταν δὲ φθόνον ἀκούσης ἐνταῦθα, καὶ ἐν τῷ Εὐαγγελίῳ ὀφθαλμὸν πονηρὸν τὸ αὐτὸ δηλοῦντα, μὴ τοῦτο νομίσης, ὅτι ἢ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν βολὴ τοὺς ὀρώντας βλάπτειν πέφυκεν· ὀφθαλμὸς γὰρ οὐκ ἂν εἴη πονηρός, αὐτὸ τὸ μέλος.

⁴² *Ibid.*: ἀλλ' ἐνταῦθα ὁ Χριστὸς οὕτω τὸν φθόνον λέγει. ὀφθαλμὸν μὲν γὰρ τὸ ἀπλῶς ὀρᾶν τῆς ἔνδον διεστραμμένης γίνεται γνώμης. ἐπειδὴ γὰρ διὰ τῆς αἰσθήσεως ταύτης εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν ἡμῶν εἰσρεῖ τῶν ὀρωμένων ἢ θεωρία, καὶ ὡς ἐπὶ πολὺ ἐν πλοῦτῳ μάλιστα ὁ φθόνος τίκτεται, ὁ δὲ πλοῦτος ἀπὸ ὀφθαλμῶν ὀρᾶται, καὶ αἱ δυναστεῖαι καὶ αἱ δορυφορίαι· διὰ τοῦτο πονηρὸν ὀφθαλμὸν ἐκάλεσεν, οὐ τὸν ὀρώντα, ἀλλὰ τὸν μετὰ βασκανίας ὀρώντα ἀπὸ τῆς κατὰ ψυχὴν πονηρίας.

the sense that envy distorts the vision and causes it to put an evil construction on what is seen.⁴³

Chrysostom's position on Galatians 3:1 is, accordingly, that the verse refers to a demonic assault on the Galatians motivated by envy and not to some human being's having cast an evil eye on them. The argument presented in support of this conclusion is an attack not only on the popular belief that the eyes of the envious can harm but also on those such as Plutarch, who try to provide a reasoned defense of it. There are two indications that this is what he is doing: (1) an element of the proposition that he bids us not believe (i.e., that the eyes of the person hurt have to catch the cast of the eyes of the envious party for harm to be done) is a feature of most ancient explanations of the evil eye, including that of Plutarch,⁴⁴ but, in popular belief, is not presumably considered a necessary factor since there not only are humans and animals bewitched but also trees and crops; (2) Chrysostom is emphatic that the eye itself does nothing but acts as the passive instrument through which what is seen flows into the soul; this view of visual perception stands in marked contrast to the theory of vision underlying Plutarch's explanation of the evil eye, in which something flows out of the eyes to impinge on the object perceived.⁴⁵

I am unable to demonstrate that Chrysostom knew the *Quaestiones convivales*, but, like Basil, he knew Plutarch's *De tranquillitate animi*, as M. Pohlenz showed long ago. A strong case can also be made for Chrysostom's having drawn on the *De invidia et odio* in his homily *De invidia*.⁴⁶ The points in common here between Chrysostom and Plutarch are not the same as those between Basil and Plutarch, a fair indication that Chrysostom, though he may have read Basil, is not dependent on him in this matter.⁴⁷

⁴³ Cf. John Chrysostom, *De Christi divinitate*, PG 48, col. 808: οἱ γὰρ τῶν φθορονούτων ὀφθαλμοὶ ὑγιᾶς οὐδὲν βλέπουσι.

⁴⁴ Cf. Ap. Rhod., *Arg.*, 4.1669–70 (dependent on Democritus): ἐχθοδοποῖσιν / ὄμμασι χαλκείοιο Τάλω ἐμέγηρεν ὀπωπᾶς; [Alex. Aphrod.], *Probl.*, 2.53: ὥσπερ ἰώδης τις καὶ φθοροποιὸς ἀκτίς ἐξείσιν ἀπὸ τῆς κόρης αὐτῶν· καὶ αὐτὴ εἰσιούσα διὰ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν τοῦ φθονουμένου τρέψει τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ τὴν φύσιν.

⁴⁵ *Quaest. conviv.*, 681a: πολυκίνητος γὰρ ἡ ὄψις οὐσα μετὰ πνεύματος αὐγῆν ἀφιέντος πυρώδη θαυμαστὴν τινα διασπείρει δύναμιν, ὥστε πολλὰ καὶ πάσχειν καὶ ποιεῖν δι' αὐτῆς τὸν ἄνθρωπον.

⁴⁶ Pohlenz, "Nachklänge," 91–94.

⁴⁷ The case for Chrysostom's indebtedness in the *De invid.* (PG 63, cols. 677–82) to Plutarch's *De invid. et od.* rests on the presence in both of the following topics: animals do not envy each other and, though they may go to war with each other, the hatred is provoked by a cause: John Chrys., *De invid.*, PG 63, col. 677 = Plut., *De*

It turns out then that Basil and Chrysostom take very much the same line in interpreting the evil eye and are both concerned to reject not only popular belief but also the rationalization of the belief devised by Plutarch. It is not surprising that there should be a measure of agreement on this point between Chrysostom and his older contemporary, Basil. That Chrysostom should resort to detailed philosophical argument to support his rejection, and Basil should not, reflects the differing requirements of a popular address and a learned commentary. Finally, both Chrysostom and Basil present a unified voice in seeing *βασκανία* as a form of envious demonic assault.

Jerome's commentary on Galatians was probably written along with commentaries on three other Pauline epistles in A.D. 387/88. It was composed in a hasty fashion and draws on the work of earlier commentators.⁴⁸ Jerome takes a somewhat different approach to Galatians 3:1 from Chrysostom: he argues that Paul uses the language of the people in this matter, but not because Paul supposes there is such a thing as *fascinum* in its vulgar acceptance.⁴⁹ He goes on to adduce two passages from the Septuagint in which the terms *βασκανία* and *βάσκανος* are used,⁵⁰ and to conclude that they teach us that a man may be tortured in his envy by another's good luck or that a man who is in possession of some good may be harmed by another's fascinating him, that is, envying him. Of this latter belief, Jerome says that *fascinum* is supposed particularly to harm infants, the young, and those whose step is not yet firm.⁵¹ As an example of the belief he cites a verse from Vergil's Third Eclogue, ascribing it not to Vergil by name but to a certain pagan: "nescio quis teneros oculus mihi fascinat agnos" (103). Whether the belief is true or not, he will leave to God to see, he says. Jerome makes himself seem more open-minded on this issue than in fact

invid. et od., 537b–c; misfortunes of envied put an end to envy: John Chrys., *De invid.*, PG 63, col. 677 = Plut., *De invid. et od.*, 538b; the reason for enmities disappears: John Chrys., *De invid.*, PG 63, col. 678 = Plut., *De invid. et od.*, 538c.

⁴⁸ See J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome* (London, 1975), 145.

⁴⁹ Jerome, *Comm. in Gal.*, PL 26, cols. 372–73: "quod autem sequitur: Qui vos fascinavit, digne Paulo (qui etsi imperitus est sermone, non tamen scientia) debemus exponere, non quo scierit esse fascinum, qui vulgo putatur nocere; sed usus sermone sit trivii, et ut in ceteris, ita et in hoc quoque loco, verbum quotidianae sermocinationis assumpserit."

⁵⁰ Sirach 18:18.2; Sapientia Salomonis 4:12.

⁵¹ Jerome, *ibid.*: "dicitur fascinus proprie infantibus nocere, et aetati parvulae, et his qui necdum firmo vestigio figant gradum."

he turns out to be, since the possibility he goes on to raise is that demons may serve this sin and may turn away from their good works whomsoever they know to have made a beginning or some progress in the work of God.⁵² Jerome seems to have in mind a position identical to that of Basil, namely, that demons will use the eyes of the envious to further their own purposes.⁵³ He appears to employ it to explain what has happened to the Galatians. He now offers a fuller interpretation of the passage that is based on the assumption that Paul is exploiting the vulgar notion of *fascinus*: just as those of tender years are said to be harmed by *fascinus*, so too have the Galatians, who have recently been born in the faith of Christ and have been nourished on milk, been harmed as it were by someone fascinating them, with the result that they had become nauseated in the faith and had vomited forth the food of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁴

What emerges from all of this is Jerome's concern that Paul not be thought to subscribe to belief in *fascinatio* in what Jerome imagines is its popular acceptance, and at the same time his willingness to entertain the possibility that demons may use envious men to further their own purposes, presumably acting through their envious gaze. *Fascinus* in its popular acceptance for Jerome apparently means a person's being able to harm someone else, though the means by which this is done are not specified.

The interpretation or interpretations of Galatians 3:1 given by Jerome are almost certainly not wholly of his own devising. However, they are not to be found in either Marius Victorinus or Ambrosiaster, both of whose commentaries he uses, though without acknowledgment. We know that he also used the Greek commentary of Eusebius of Emesa, extant only in fragments, none of which have any bearing on Galatians 3:1. It is nonetheless possible that Eusebius is one of his sources here.

Jerome does not say why he is not prepared to countenance the idea that Paul could have used *fascinus* in its ordinary acceptance, and there is no hint in his commentary of what he found objectionable in the idea. The sources on

⁵² Ibid.: "hoc utrum verum, necne sit, Deus viderit: quia potest fieri, ut et daemones huic peccato serviant; et quoscunque in Dei opere vel coepisse, vel profecisse cognoverint, eos a bonis operibus avertant."

⁵³ Cf. Dörrie, *Königskult*, 110 note 4.

⁵⁴ Jerome, *ibid.*: "nunc illud in causa est, quod ex opinione vulgi sumptum putamus exemplum, ut quomodo tenera aetas noceri dicitur fascino: sic etiam Galatae in Christo fide nuper nati, et nutriti lacte, et non solido cibo, velut quodam fascinante sint nociti: et stomacho fidei nauseante Spiritus sancti cibum evomuerint."

which he drew may have explained their position more fully. Jerome's commentary does nonetheless provide an indication that Chrysostom had predecessors in rejecting the possibility of reading Galatians 3:1 literally and in interpreting instances of fascination as demonic rather than human assaults.

The tradition of interpretation that we find in Chrysostom and Jerome was by no means universal. The two early Latin commentaries on Galatians, that of Marius Victorinus and that of the writer given the name Ambrosiaster by Erasmus, both explain what ἐβόσκαθεν means, but have nothing to say either about whether Paul subscribes to the belief that men can fascinate or whether there is anything to the belief.⁵⁵ Victorinus, in fact, writes in such a way as to suggest that he accepts the belief.⁵⁶ Augustine in his commentary quotes the verse but has nothing to say about it (*Expositio in Galatas*, PL 35, col. 2116).

If expressions of disbelief in the evil eye were only to be found in Basil, Chrysostom, and Jerome, we might be inclined to suppose that the evil eye was a matter of limited and local concern and that it was an issue only in the minds of those who had read Plutarch or had in some way been influenced by him. There is, however, evidence of a more widespread concern with fascination in Christian circles in both the East and West.

Two generations or more before Basil, the North African father Tertullian, a convert to Christianity from paganism, had already in effect rejected what he called *fascinum* in its pagan understanding. The language he employs suggests the position he adopts was already one that had some standing among Christians. In the *De virginibus velandis*, a tract denouncing the action of a group of young Carthaginian women who had decided to remain unmarried and who had been persuaded to stand in church with their heads uncovered and their faces unveiled,⁵⁷ he maintains that among the benefits a virgin acquires from veiling herself from the eyes of others is that she protects herself against scandalous talk, suspicion, whispering, emulation, and envy itself.⁵⁸ Mention of envy leads Tertullian to go on to say that there is also something feared among

⁵⁵ Marius Victorinus: *In epistolam Pauli ad Galatas liber I*, PL 8, cols. 1166–67; Ambrosiaster: PL 17, col. 372.

⁵⁶ Victorinus, *ibid.*: “non patiuntur fascinum, nisi qui in bono aliquo pollent, et patiuntur a malignis et invidis.”

⁵⁷ On the circumstances that gave rise to this tract, see Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (New York, 1988), 80.

⁵⁸ Tertullian, *De virginibus velandis*, 15, PL 2, col. 959: “confugit ad velamen capitis, quasi ad galeam, quasi ad clypeum, qui bonum suum protegat adversus ictus

pagans, to which they give the name of *fascinus*; it is the unhappy outcome of too great praise and glory.⁵⁹ This, Tertullian says, Christians sometimes interpret by the devil and sometimes by God; in the one case as a hatred of what is good and in the other as a judgment on arrogance that raises up the humble and lays low those who have got above themselves.⁶⁰ A pious virgin, he concludes, will therefore fear, under the heading of *fascinus*, the envious temper of the Adversary and the censorious eye of God.⁶¹ That is to say, a virgin will veil herself so that her beauty may not incur the envious eye of the devil and so that the pride she takes in her beauty may not draw God's wrath on her head.

How many Christians interpreted *fascinus* in quite this way we cannot say, and we may suspect that Tertullian is recommending rather than reporting a widely accepted interpretation of the notion. That said, it does nonetheless sound as though he is appealing to a recognized position. He does not explain in any detail what the nature of the *fascinus* feared by pagans was.⁶² His insistence that it is to be understood as God's punishment of pride or the envy of the devil would seem to indicate that he is taking issue with an understanding of the term that attributed special powers to human beings. On the other hand, his definition of *fascinus* as the unhappy outcome of too great praise and glory does suggest not only that he is thinking of men casting the evil eye but also of their fascinating by praising.⁶³ He has, accordingly, in mind a conception of

tentationum, adversus iacula scandalorum, adversus suspiciones, et susurros, et aemulationem, ipsum quoque livorem."

⁵⁹ Ibid.: "nam est aliquid etiam apud ethnicos metuendum, quod fascinum vocant, infeliciorem laudis et gloriae enormioris eventum."

⁶⁰ Ibid.: "hoc nos interdum diabolo interpretamur: ipsius est enim, boni odium, interdum Deo deputamus: illius est enim superbiae iudicium, extollentis humiles, et deprimentis elatos."

⁶¹ Ibid.: "timebit itaque virgo sanctior, vel in nomine fascini, hinc adversarium, inde Deum: illius lividum ingenium, huius censorium lumen."

⁶² Thee, *Julius Africanus*, 403 note 3, thinks that Tertullian's position is ambiguous and that he refers to the evil eye "in a sort of ad hominem argument, as a pagan idea which at least served to reinforce his ideas about virgins wearing veils." Robin Lane Fox's (*Pagans and Christians* [Harmondsworth, 1986], 370) paraphrase of the intent of the passage is also somewhat misleading: "Tertullian drew attention to the continuing risks of the pagans' 'evil eye' as a counter to the virgins' self-congratulation."

⁶³ There is an instance of *fascinare* used meaning "to fascinate by praising" in Tertullian's account of Marcion's attack on Luke's version of the nativity of Jesus: "ta-

fascinus rather wider than that with which Basil, John Chrysostom, and Jerome were to take issue. Furthermore, his interpretation of it differs somewhat from theirs. What he does have in common with them is that he would deny that there is anything to *fascinus* as it was understood by pagans. He would also agree with them in imputing at least some instances of *fascinus* to the devil. There is then already in Tertullian the germ of the doctrine on fascination by the evil eye that we find in later authors.

Tertullian gives us some impression of what a preacher not influenced by pagan philosophical discussion of the topic might say to his flock about fascination by the evil eye and in what sort of context the issue would arise. Some further light on these points is shed by a homily attributed to Eusebius of Alexandria on the observance of the Sabbath (*Sermo VII: De Neomeniis et Sabbatis et de non observandis avium vocibus*, PG 86.1, cols. 354–57).⁶⁴ The sermon is an attack on those Christians who give as their reason for performing some act of charity that it is the Sabbath or the first day of a new month or a birthday, or again who say that Easter is coming and that they are watching the birds. Such conduct, Eusebius declares, is characteristic of Jews, not Christians. He goes on to criticize a number of other practices that take place on these occasions: not giving fire to a neighbor after sunset, paying attention to the cries of birds, and treating men's utterances as prophetic.⁶⁵ He summarizes the intent of this section of his argument by declaring that Christians ought not to spend their time on such days paying close attention to the cries of birds, to what day and hour it is, and to being on their guard against men (*παρατηρεῖν ἀνθρώπους*).

What Eusebius now goes on to attack are men who, instead of blaming the devil for what has gone wrong, when Satan destroys some fine work they have made, assert that so-and-so as he went past fascinated it.⁶⁶ This leads Eusebius to exclaim at the way in which men ascribe *βασκανία* to their fellow men when the devil has from the beginning been envious and is at war with

ceat et anus illa" (sc. Anna, Luke 2:36–38), "ne fascinet puerum" (*De carne Christi*, PL 2, col. 800).

⁶⁴ I am deeply indebted to Dirk Krausmüller for pointing out the homily to me. I fear that, but for him, I would never have come across it.

⁶⁵ ἄλλοι φυλάσσουνται φωνὰς ὄρνέων, καὶ κληδονισμοὺς ἀνθρώπων.

⁶⁶ ὁ δεῖνα ἄνθρωπος παράγων ἐβάσκανε. For the evil eye being cast by one passing by, cf. the exorcism from early 19th-century Crete quoted in Curt Wachsmuth, *Das alte Griechenland im Neuen* (Bonn, 1864), 60–61: καὶ περάσασ' οἱ ἄγγελοι κ' ἰ ἀρχάγγελοι καὶ φθαρμίσασι την.

mankind. Eusebius proceeds to explain how the devil contrives to get men to blame their ills on the βασκανία of their fellows: if he should see a man doing good work in his field, he conceives envy of him and strives to break him; but since he is invisible, he contrives to have the responsibility ascribed to others who are without guilt; again when he sees a fine ox exerting itself pulling a cart and people admiring it and praising it, he causes it to collapse; its master does not blame the devil but a man who is without guilt. A further exclamation at the power of the devil follows: how the devil is always able, whenever he wants to do ill, to get one of those persons whom men are on their guard against (ὄν μέλλουσιν παραφυλάττεσθαι) to be present; thus a man going on a journey away from home, from which he will return without having accomplished his goal, will say that he met so-and-so as he left and that was the reason for his failure. Eusebius ends the homily with the observation that we have a phylactery against the βασκανία of the devil in the form of the cross.

The connecting thread that ties Eusebius' denunciation of Judaizing practices to his criticism of those men who blame their misfortunes on the βασκανία of their fellows rather than the devil is that these men are guilty of being on their watch against their fellows. It is possible that a similar underlying connection in thought is to be discerned in John Chrysostom: in two homilies he lumps together with the observance of the cries of birds and the utterances of men the use of incantations and amulets, to which in one case he adds engaging in magic-working (*In epistulam 1 ad Corinthios*, PG 61, col. 38; *In epistulam 1 ad Timotheum*, PG 62, col. 552). To Chrysostom's way of thinking these practices were clearly all of a piece. It is worth mentioning that he also attacks paying attention to the cries of birds and the utterances of men (κληδονισμοὶ καὶ οἰωνισμοί) on the same ground as does Eusebius, namely, that the Christians who do this are guilty of Judaizing (*Comm. in ep. ad Gal.*, PG 61, col. 623). Whatever the connecting thread may be that ties these practices together for Chrysostom, we can at least be confident that attention to the cries of birds and to men's utterances was in the eyes of Chrysostom very closely connected with engaging in such magical practices as wearing amulets and uttering incantations.

Eusebius, accordingly, provides us with another context in which a congregation might be urged to put aside the belief that their fellow men could fascinate them, either by their looks or by their praise: denunciation of such Judaizing practices as attending to birds' cries and to the utterances of men as though they were fraught with significance. For Eusebius the same mistaken

view of the world is to be seen in finding significance in the calls of birds as is apparent in thinking that men can harm by their looks or praise. Eusebius does not say why he thinks this is a wrong-headed point of view. He evidently imagines it sufficient for the purpose of a sermon to denounce it as a piece of trickery on the part of the devil. Like Tertullian, Eusebius takes a larger view of what men mean by βασκανία than do Basil and John Chrysostom: he deals with both acts of fascination done through the eyes and fascinating by praising. He certainly still continues to believe in a form of fascination in attributing the misfortunes that men blame on their fellows to the envy of the devil. He adds, however, a twist to that thesis, not found elsewhere: the devil deliberately tricks men into thinking that the ills they suffer are to be attributed to the envious gaze of a passerby or someone's admiring praise.

Conclusions

We would go rather further than the evidence warrants were we to suggest that all of the prominent men in the upper reaches of the hierarchy of the church in both East and West were agreed that human beings did not have the capacity to fascinate others, whether by casting their envious eyes on them or by praising them. So far as we can see, this was not an issue that troubled everyone equally. The commentaries on Galatians 3:1 that make no mention of the issue are an indication that not everybody was sensitive to the problem. On the other hand, the testimony of Tertullian and Eusebius is proof that it was not only very highly educated Christians, such as Basil and John Chrysostom, who found the idea that one man could harm another with his envious gaze incredible. It looks rather as if there was, in the hierarchy of the church from at least the end of the third century A.D., a widely shared hostility to belief in βασκανία and *fascinatio*, to which Basil and John Chrysostom subscribe, though their conception of βασκανία has been influenced by Plutarch and what they take issue with is his explanation of it.

All of the fathers of the church who do attack belief in the evil eye take it for granted that Christians do have reason to fear a supernatural force, envious of good fortune, prosperity, beauty, and virtue. They naturally identify that force with the devil. Two of them, Basil and Jerome, go further and maintain or suggest that the devil or his demons use men's envious eyes to accomplish their own envious purposes. Others such as Tertullian, John Chrysostom, and

Eusebius exclude the action of human intermediaries and put down the reverses that the fortunate suffer to the direct action of the devil. Only Eusebius puts forward the view that the devil deliberately contrives to make his envious assaults on the fortunate when there are men around on whose envious gaze or praise the catastrophe can be blamed.

For most ordinary Christians it was probably a matter only of academic interest whether the harm their neighbor's envious eye inflicted on them was his own unaided doing or whether he was the instrument of the devil and his demons. The author of a Christian magical papyrus of the sixth century A.D., intended to protect a house and those dwelling in it from all ill and from fascination by the spirits of the air and the human eye, clearly remained unaffected and is in fact, with that concern for differentiation characteristic of late antique magic, anxious to distinguish between fascination by the spirits of the air and fascination by the human eye, so that he might the better be able to counter them (*PGM P 9*).⁶⁷ Nor again does the author of an inscription from I'gâz in Syria that dates to the middle of the fifth century A.D. betray any awareness that he contravenes Christian doctrine when, after calling on the Trinity and God to drive Φθόνος far off, he declares that because Christ's hand relieves pain, he will not fear the plans of the demon who wreaks ill nor the hate-filled and unlawful eye of man (*IGLSyr 1599.6–7*).⁶⁸

Even John Chrysostom when his guard is down speaks as if the eyes of envious men can harm. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, in a discussion of what apotropaic devices a Christian may use without allowing himself to be entrapped by the devil, he roundly condemns the practice followed by nurses and maidservants of anointing a child's forehead with mud when they take it to the baths to ward off as they say the ὀφθαλμὸς πονηρὸς, βασκανία, and φθόνος (*Comm. in ep. 1 ad Cor.*, PG 61, col. 106).⁶⁹ Do they imagine, he asks,

⁶⁷ διαφύλαξον τὸν οἶκον τοῦτον μετὰ τῶν ἐνοικούντων ἀπὸ παντὸς κακοῦ, ἀπὸ βασκοσύνης πάσης ἀερίνων πνευμάτων καὶ ἀνθρωπίνου ὀφθαλ[μοῦ].

⁶⁸ τοῦνεκεν οὐ τρομέοιμι κακορρέ(κ)τοιο (μ)ενοινιάς / δαίμονος, οὐδ' ἀνδρὸς στυγερὸν καὶ ἀθέσμιον.

⁶⁹ βόρβορον αἱ γυναῖκες ἐν τῷ βαλανεῖῳ λαμβάνουσαι τροφοὶ καὶ θεραπαινίδες, καὶ τῷ δακτύλῳ χρίσασαι, κατὰ τοῦ μετώπου τυποῦσι τοῦ παιδίου· κἂν ἐρηται τις, τί βούλεται ὁ βόρβορος, τί δὲ ὁ πηλός; ὀφθαλμὸν πονηρὸν ἀποστρέφει, φησί, καὶ βασκανίαν καὶ φθόνον. For the practice of anointing the forehead with a mixture of mud and spittle using the middle finger (*digitus infamis*) to apply it and of using the colored threads Chrysostom mentions earlier in the same passage (PG 61, cols. 105–6)

that it has the power to ward off the devil's regiments, and then goes on to ask a further question, apparently addressing his reader, in which he attempts to reduce to the absurd the practice of anointing a child's forehead with mud: if mud is so efficacious even on the forehead, why do we not anoint all of our bodies with mud, since we are full-grown men in the prime of life who have more people who envy us than a child?⁷⁰ It is possible to argue that the mention of the devil's regiment shows that in Chrysostom's view bewitchment by an envious eye is always the devil's work. That may well be so, in some sense, but there is a difference between saying that those men who cast an envious look are doing the devil's work and saying that the devil or his demons, in their envious hatred of the good, bestow on the eyes of envious men the capacity to harm. However that may be, we should remember that Chrysostom's attack is not directed at the maidservants and nurses who believe that the envious eyes of those around them may harm their charges but at the measures they take to protect the child. Chrysostom certainly believes that measures are needed and that the child is under threat; he recommends that the infant from its first years be protected by the weapons of the spirit, which it turns out means teaching the child to make the sign of the cross on its forehead and, before it is able to do that with its own hand, to impress the shape of the cross on the child's forehead.⁷¹

to cure someone under a spell, cf. Petr., *Sat.*, 131.4: "illa (sc. anicula) de sinu licium protulit varii coloris filis intortum cervicemque vinxit meam. mox turbatum sputo pulverem medio sustulit digito frontemque repugnantis signavit"; on the danger that a body completely exposed to view in a bath risked of being fascinated, see K. M. D. Dunbabin, "*Baiarum Grata Voluptas*: Pleasures and Dangers of the Baths," *PBSR* 57 (1989), 33–46.

⁷⁰ ὀλόκληρον τοῦ διαβόλου παράταξιν ἀποστρέφει . . . εἰ γὰρ ὁ βόρβορος τοῦτο ποιεῖ, διὰ τί μὴ καὶ σὺ τοῦτο ποιεῖς ἐπὶ τοῦ σαυτοῦ μετώπου, ἀνὴρ ὦν καὶ ἐν ἔξει γεγώνως, καὶ μᾶλλον τοῦ παιδίου τοὺς φθονοῦντας ἔχων; διὰ τί μὴ καὶ ὄλον βορβοροῖς τὸ σῶμα; εἰ γὰρ ἐπὶ τοῦ μετώπου τοσαύτην ἔχει ἰσχὺν, τίνας ἔνεκεν οὐχ ὄλον σεαυτὸν βορβόρῳ καταχρίεις; on the danger that those whose bodies are in the peak of physical condition face of falling seriously ill, if they are fascinated, cf. Plut., *Quaest. conviv.*, 692e.

⁷¹ ἀλλ' ἐκ πρώτης ἡλικίας πνευματικοῖς αὐτὰ περιφράττετε ὄλοις, καὶ τῇ χειρὶ παιδεύετε σφραγίζεῖν τὸ μέτωπον· καὶ πρὶν ἢ δυνηθῆναι τῇ χειρὶ τοῦτο ποιεῖν, αὐτοὶ ἐντυποῦτε αὐτοῖς τὸν σταυρόν. On the value of the cross as apotropaeum: John Chrys., *Ad illum catech.*, PG 49, col. 246, *De adoratione pretiosae crucis*, PG 58, col. 838, *Comm. in ep. ad Eph.*, PG 62, cols. 357–59. See also F. J. Dölger, *Antike und Christentum*, III (Münster, 1932), 81–116.

John Chrysostom says quite explicitly elsewhere that magic-working may cause its victim to waste away. In his commentary on Ephesians, one of the categories of magic-worker whom he credits with having this capacity are the envious; to illustrate his contention that the soul can harm without needing the body's help, he speaks of sorcerers, magicians, the envious, and wizards having the power to cause the body to waste away (*Commentarius in epistulam ad Ephesios*, PG 62, cols. 41–42).⁷²

We probably do not do Chrysostom too much of an injustice, if we conclude that when his mind is not directed to the implications of what he is saying, he is quite prepared to speak as if the eyes of the envious presented a real danger. At the same time we should bear in mind that in concentrating our attention on this one narrow aspect of fear of envy, we misrepresent the nature of the unseen threat that a Christian living in late fourth-century Antioch or Constantinople felt surrounded him. The women who daub mud on the foreheads of the children in their charge and then reply, when asked why they do it, that it turns away the ὀφθαλμὸς πονηρός, βασκανία, and φθόνος do not necessarily have a specific threat in mind, much less assign a separate identity to these three expressions. In their minds, the identities of these dangers will have overlapped and in some measure fused with each other.

What Christians of this time are afraid of and what they blame their misfortunes on is envy. In this they are no different from their pagan contemporaries and pagan ancestors. Sometimes the danger will have seemed to come from a particular direction, in which case it will be given a specific identity, but mostly it will have had no particular focus. When Gregory of Nyssa speaks, in a consolatory or funeral oration or in his biography of his sister Macrina, of a young woman's having been snatched away by φθόνος, he speaks in exactly the same language that a pagan would have used in an epitaph, when confronted by a similarly premature death.⁷³ There is no reason to think that φθόνος meant anything very different to him from what it did to a pagan. If, on the other

⁷² καθάπερ οἱ γόητες ἐκεῖνοι, οἱ μάγοι, οἱ φθονοῦντες, οἱ φαρμακοὶ, μάλιστα τήκουσιν αὐτόν.

⁷³ ὁ φθόνος ἀφῆρασεν: *Oratio consolatoria in Pulcheriam*, PG 46, col. 865, *Oratio funebris in Flaccum*, PG 46, col. 884. *Vita Macrinae*, PG 46, col. 964; cf. Greg. Naz., *Oratio funebris in Caesarem*, PG 35, col. 764, *Ep.* 30.3, PG 37, col. 68. In pagan epitaphs: *MAMA*, VII.257a; *Griechische Versinschriften*, I: *Grabepigramme* (Berlin, 1955), 856, 971, 1941.

hand, the misfortune affects the church or one of its dignitaries, then the attribution of responsibility becomes more specific: the φθόνος is that of the devil, or it is implied that the devil and φθόνος have worked hand in hand. Thus Gregory of Nyssa, in his *Encomium in xl martyres*, speaks first of the φθόνος that was aroused by the surpassing virtue of the martyrs and then goes on to say that just as the Adversary saw Job's renown as a wrong against himself, so the one born by nature to oppose the good looked with an evil eye on these mighty opponents and was unable to endure such maturity of character in ones so young (PG 46, col. 760).⁷⁴

This tendency to blame the reverses that the church and its servants suffered on the envy of the devil or his demons makes perfectly good sense within a theological system in which the primary defining characteristic of the devil and his demons is their envious resentment of all that is good. That premature death should be blamed on an envious force of an indeterminate nature, and not on the envy of the devil, is from one point of view not surprising since the devil's envy should not in theory be directed at the merely young and beautiful but at those whose virtue throws his own moral failure into relief. On the other hand, there is no obvious place in the Christian scheme of things for an envious force of indeterminate identity. That men should still continue to appeal to it shows how powerful a hold a pagan way of looking at the world had over even theologically sophisticated men.

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⁷⁴ εἰς τοσοῦτον μεγαλοφυΐας ἐπήρθησαν, ὥστε τῷ περιόντι τῆς ἀρετῆς καθ' ἑαυτῶν ἀναστήσαι τὸν φθόνον. καθάπερ γὰρ . . . ἐμάθομεν, ὅτι ἀδίκημα ἑαυτοῦ ἐποίει ὁ ἀντίπαλος τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ζωῆς τῆν τοῦ Ἰωβ εὐδοκίμησιν, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἐζητεῖτο πρὸς αἰκισμὸν, ὅτι ἐλύπει αὐτὸν ὁ Ἰωβ, ἀληθινὸς καὶ δίκαιος καὶ ἀμειπτος ἄν· τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον εἶδε πονηρῶ ὀφθαλμῷ ὁ τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς ἐπιφύομενος τοὺς μεγάλους τούτους ἀγωνιστάς, καὶ οὐκ ἤνεγκε πολιὰν ἐν ἡλικίας νεότητι. Cf. Greg. Naz., *Orat. fun. in Mel.*, PG 46, col. 856; Euseb., *Praeparatio evangelica*, 7.10.14–16 GCS, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 8.1.6, 12.2–3, 10.4.14; *Vita Constantini*, 4.41.1–2 GCS.