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## The Modern Greek Devil: Cosmology or Rhetoric?\*

Ἦθελα να γίνω παπάς  
να σώσω την ψυχή μου  
αλλά δεν μ'άφηγε ο διάολος  
που έχω στη βρακίμ μου.

I wanted to become a priest  
to save my soul,  
but he didn't let me, that devil  
I have in my underpants.  
[ 70-year-old Naxos man ]

A 1968 Gallup Poll found that 96% of people surveyed in Greece answered 'yes' to the question 'Do you believe in God?' For comparison, the same poll reported 73% responding affirmatively in France, 77% in Britain and 98% in the USA (Sigelman 1977). When asked if they believed in the devil, only 61% of Greek respondents replied 'yes' (17% for France, 21% for Britain and 60% for the USA). Clearly belief in God does not entail belief in the devil, although a theological approach suggests that, within Greek Orthodoxy and Catholicism at least, God, Christ and the saints structurally depend on the existence of the devil as a force of opposition. Christ reveals his godly nature by resisting the temptations of the devil. Saints and ordinary humans go through similar trials on the way to establishing their holiness or worthiness for

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\* I am grateful to Martin Holbraad and Jenny Roussou for discussing some of the ideas presented here. And to Basil Arabos for his application of Barthes, which has stayed with me so many years.

ultimate salvation. The continuing logic of Christian practice is in some degree predicated on the existence of the devil.

The incongruence between belief in God and belief in the devil shows that people are not governed by the theological strictures and logic of Christianity. Rather, they customize their own Christianities, which must minimally recognize God to qualify as such. The embrace of concepts such as heaven, hell and the existence of souls after death depends more on personal preference. The marginal, or inconsistent, relevance of doctrine to daily religious practice is further illustrated by another statistic from the 1968 Gallup Poll (Sigelman 1977:292): 22% of people in Greece believe in reincarnation (France 23%, Britain 18%, USA 20%), even though this belief was anathematized and rejected by the Church long ago. It clashes with the central doctrine of the Second Coming. Of course, there is always the possibility that people did not understand what was meant by 'reincarnation'; and the further possibility that they did not understand 'belief' either.

Clearly people mix and match their religious ideas and worry about logical/theological inconsistencies only if they have to. Furthermore, people do not necessarily acquire their religious ideas as isolated doctrinal or conceptual units that can even be called 'beliefs' in the first place. That is why the polling data with which I opened this paper are no more than interesting curiosities. People come to hold a great number of suppositions about gods and spirits that can be identified as religious, but they acquire them in the course of childhood socialization and everyday life – they are part of a social habitus, to use Bourdieu's vocabulary. It is only when someone asks them if they *believe* in one idea or another that they isolate them and denominate them as beliefs, in a sort of command performance. Ordinarily the majority of

people just operate in a world where various religious ideas are taken for granted as common social knowledge.

In any case, the attempt to establish what a people believe has largely been rejected as researchers realized that 'belief' is not a useful analytical concept. Needham (1972) demonstrated that the standard Western concept of 'belief' denotes a particular interior state that cannot be verified, or even confidently supposed to exist cross-culturally since it might not be a type of experience for many people outside the Christian West. The only cases where we may confidently establish a belief is a propos of performative utterances in English or some other European language steeped in the Christian tradition where people say 'I believe in...'. Otherwise, it is impossible to infer belief. Religious 'belief' in the modern West has a very particular historical trajectory, from an attitude toward God/Christianity that everyone unquestioningly shared during the Middle Ages to one which, after the Enlightenment, a great many doubted. To believe post-Enlightenment is to uphold an article of faith *even though* many others may doubt it; it is an affirmation of belief in a context of widespread unbelief, rather than unquestioning, and unquestionable, faith in God (Smith 1977). In this genealogical line of development belief came to involve voluntary assent to certain (debateable) propositions. Finally, the Protestant Reformation turned belief into something utterly personal, heartfelt and sincere. Luther certainly saw belief this way, but belief always was and still remains more than a subjective disposition (Ruel 1982). In the early Church it was a political sign or identity badge – a marker of participation in a particular social group. The analytical tendency to think of belief as exclusively an interior psychological state arises from this particular Protestant twist in Western cultural history. This does not make it a necessarily given human experience.

These various criticisms of 'belief' have been valuable for those working in small-scale societies not practicing a textual 'world religion'. My ethnographic research, however, focuses on Greece, one of the first areas to convert to Christianity; a country now speaking a language directly descended from the Koine Greek of the New Testament. The vocabulary for terms like belief (*písti*), God (*Theós*) and devil (*diávolos*) are exactly what they were in the time of St. Paul. The Creed, beginning 'I believe in one God...' (*Pistévo eis éna Theó...*) is learned by children and recited every Sunday in church. It would be hard to deny that such professions of belief expressed anything other than, well, belief. If belief means anything and can be found anywhere then Greece, the *fons et origo* of western civilization, might be a place where we can accept that people do master the concept of 'belief' -- in God, at least.

Yet, in a country where more than 95% of the population belong to the Orthodox Church belief goes largely unstated; it is so deeply assumed that no one debates or discusses it. I found this out once quite painfully while spending time with a shepherd at his sheepfold in a remote corner of the Greek Cycladic island of Naxos. His daughter and son-in-law had come for a summer visit to the island from Athens where they work as medical doctors. At one point they turned to me, a fellow university graduate, and demanded to know how I could seriously entertain stories about *exotiká*, a class of demons and spirits – manifestations of the devil -- that bring madness and misfortune. Belief in these fairytale supernatural figures amounted to nonsense in their view. Did I really believe in such things? To this I said, well, *we* might not take them seriously but other people do, and besides what is belief in God if not investment in a similar supernatural figure? I was trying to challenge my educated peers to either say they did not believe in God, or else to realize that the *exotiká* were just as 'real' and just as credible as the Orthodox holy figures.



**Figure 1** The goat-footed *exotikó* known as *kallikántzaros* urinating on a tray of Christmas sweets. Picture by G. Gliátas, courtesy of T. Velloúdios.

I quickly realized that there was no way they could deny a belief in God in front of their father/in-law. Respect would not allow it, but I also intuited that they were unlikely to express scepticism of God under any circumstances. There is nothing to gain by denying God verbally; it would be to make the wrong bet in Pascal's wager. One may not really 'believe' in God

intellectually, but one does not say that since one somehow must remain within the church, which is to say, within the community. All of this flashed through my mind in a fraction of a second. An ominous silence descended on the room until the burly shepherd intervened on my behalf: 'Karlo [as he called me] is a good person (*eínai kaló paidí*), of course he believes in God. Isn't that right, Karlo?' I nodded assent to this and that put an end to the conversation. A rationalistic interrogation of belief had ended with the reassuring ethico-aesthetic judgement that I was a good person. As a foreigner I could be excused the *faux pas* of bringing the topic up in such an awkward way, but as a friend and temporary/honorary group insider (*dikós mas*) my *bona fides* were not in doubt. When I met an atheist, politically leftwing Greek student at church one Easter in England he assured me that he was not there because he believed, but because he was Greek. Even though Greeks can make potentially credible statements of belief, in many cases, perhaps the majority of cases, it is not handled as a matter of personal piety and sincerity, but more as a matter of social solidarity.

### **The Devil as Para-Discourse**

While belief in God may make one an Orthodox Christian and Greek national, belief in the devil is not required. This may be one reason why the Gallup Poll reported that only two-thirds of those who believe in God believe in the devil. Consequently, the operation of the devil, or the various demonic *exotiká*, may be submitted to more rational analysis and rejected as the Athenian doctors did. The devil is, furthermore, contained *within* Orthodox Christianity. Acceptance of the transcendent, uncreated God at the pinnacle of Orthodox cosmology means that one need not independently activate belief in the devil by a separate profession of faith. The devil is already there once one embraces Christianity. The devil presupposes the larger discursive framework of Orthodox Christianity and draws its vital force from this larger body.

Talk of the devil may thus be considered a parasitic discourse. This is not the only image that fits. In Greek the prefix *pará-* can mean not only 'beside' (as in 'parasite', an organism living on or beside another organism) but also 'against' (e.g. *parálogos*, literally 'against reason', 'irrational'). This prefix may also have a third sense of 'too much, exceed' (e.g. *paratrógo*, 'to overeat'). The semantics of this Greek prefix illuminate the multiple senses I wish to convey with the coinage 'para-discourse'. It is a discourse, a body of thought and opinion, which draws its force and coherence by relation to a larger and better-established discourse. From this position it both attacks and exceeds the host discourse.



**Figure 2** At left is written: 'The whore who leads other women to prostitution'. In the centre: 'The punishment of those who stay in bed on the Lord's feast days'. Fresco by the Greek artist Pagónis dated 1802. Church of St. Marina, Kissós, Pileion. Courtesy of A. Xydis.

According to the Bible, God created the angels and Satan stirred up a group of them to rebel against God. They were defeated and cast down onto and into the earth (Luke 10:18;

Bamberger 1952). Since the devil and his demons do not dispose of a power equal to that of God they may only affect human beings if given an opening to do so via individual failure: weakness, lapses in judgement or will. Otherwise God encompasses the devil within the celestial hierarchy and, although evil, he cannot work harm unless permitted by God.

Every mature Orthodox Christian in Greece is familiar with the figures of God and the devil and aware of their opposed positions within Christian cosmology. People meet the devil formally at their own baptism. The baptism service involves four exorcisms of the devil, a relic of the formation of this ritual as the means of converting mature adults to Christianity and expelling the demons of their previous faith. Nowadays children are baptized in early childhood. The priest meets the child just inside the doors of the church to conduct the exorcisms at the start of the ceremony. The first thing he does is make the sign of the cross over the child several times, which is understood as exorcistic, and he breathes on the child, to blow away the evil spirits lingering on this not-yet-Christian individual. The godparent (*koumbáros/a* from the point of view of the parents, *nonós/a* from the child's perspective) holding the child, is asked three times (on behalf of the child): 'Do you renounce Satan, and all his works, and all his service and all his angels and all his retinue?' The godparent responds each time: 'I renounce him (*Apotássomai*).'<sup>1</sup> Granted that people must renounce Satan to become Christian it is not surprising that fewer should state that they 'believe' in him than in God.

The initiate is too young, of course, to remember this encounter with the devil, but each baptism possibly reminds those present not only of the existence of the devil, but somehow of their own moment of baptism however many years earlier. In this respect socialization is not a linear phenomenon where skills or knowledge are gained in progressive sequence, such as

learning language or mathematics. Knowledge of the devil is precisely not gained at age two. A ritual is undergone at that time; an experience is had, but the meaning of this is only realized retrospectively in adulthood while participating in other baptisms, and/or in the general context of mature reflection. The periodic repetition of rituals of initiation must be understood in this diachronic perspective as providing opportunities to retroject subjectivity into the past, in alignment with one's present. The devil is in people's lives in this convoluted temporal manner, which Freud termed *Nachträglichkeit*.

The devil is a negative force, an entity to be exorcised if one can discern his presence. There is no liturgy or doxology celebrating the devil, as there is for the various saints. Nor is there even a very large body of theological literature about him. Unlike many northern European countries, Greece never experienced a phase of witch persecutions during the late middle ages and renaissance. No one publicly accused anyone of worshipping the devil at witches' Sabbaths; no one imagined that there were covert groups of people in league with the devil. The satanic abuse fantasy, which Frankfurter (2006) found in such rich, perennial form in western Europe and America remains conspicuously absent in Greece. In recent memory the only case would be that of the so-called 'Satanists of Pallini', a northeastern suburb of Athens. In the early 1990s a group murdered two women as part of a satanic ritual sacrifice. Granted the absence of indigenous forerunners, those involved had probably been influenced by foreign examples such as the Manson cult, witchcraft of the Aleister Crowley variety, or the dark overtones of heavy metal music. The Greek public showed relatively little interest in the content of the group's 'satanism' and rather more in the sexual dimension of their crimes. The rising credence in the devil in America, and the popularity of neo-paganism are bound to stimulate further cults of the devil in Greece and elsewhere as part of the general global flow of culture.

The Orthodox Church explicitly rejects the idea of dualism. Satan may be opposed to God and the Christian holy figures but, as mentioned above, he is an inferior, encompassed force, not an equally powerful opponent. The devil is only a tempter, as his name suggests, a slanderer (from the verb *diavállei*, 'to defame, slander'). The Church does not technically accept the existence of ambiguous, part-evil, part-good, spirits such as the *neráides* – beautiful, blonde female spirits who may steal a person's voice or cause insanity, but also sometimes heal a person or endow him with special talents such as an ability to play the lyre (Stewart 1991: 175). The devil and his attendant demons should be unambiguously evil, but this would be a very narrow niche to occupy. In order for the devil to fulfil his archetypal function of deceiving people he must occasionally adopt disguises and feign a friendly demeanour. As St. Paul declared in his letter to the Corinthians (II, 11:13): 'For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the Apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.' Although theologically designated as the prince of evil, the devil proves to be more of a trickster. This is no less true in Greece where Christianity has developed over 1500 years as an indigenous tradition, than it is in more recently converted societies. Examples would be the Yoruba of Nigeria who understood the Christian devil in terms of their mediatory god Esu, or Elegbara (Peel 1990: 19), and the Ewe of Ghana whose translation of the devil, Abosam, taps into local ideas about witchcraft, which involves evil deception (Meyer 1992).

The practical ambiguity exhibited by the devil makes it hard to distinguish him from the various *exotiká*, which have been carried along in oral traditions. Some of these, like the *neráida* and the *gorgóna*, may date back to antiquity. Indeed the Christian devil absorbed features such as goat form and ability to metamorphose from just such ancient chthonic, non-

Olympian characters, which further include Pan, the Satyrs, nymphs and spirits of place (*stoikheía*). The contemporary *exotiká* may generically be referred to in popular usage as demons (*dáimones*) or as devils (*diávoloι, diavólisses*). Linguistically, and in terms of form and action, they merge with the Orthodox devil and his demons. The *exotiká* may not form part of



**Figure 3** Fresco titled: 'Whichever monk smokes is being served by devils'. Ossuary chapel, Grigoriou Monastery, Mt. Athos, 1739.

standard, official Orthodoxy, but they nonetheless uphold a consistent Orthodox orientation. Like the devil, they may be fended off by Christian symbols. One of the surest ways to repel an attack by an *exotikó* is to recite a short prayer or passage from scripture such as 'In the beginning was the Word', or even just 'I see Christ.' Alternatively people may carry bread blessed at the Sunday liturgy, a cross or an amulet prepared by a monk or a nun as apotropaics. The *exotiká* thus activate Christian faith every bit as much as do attacks by the devil, and people cannot

easily tell the difference between acceptable Christian demons and the *exotiká* (Stewart 1991:151). This is why I translate *exotiká* as 'demons'. In practice, they are not always outside the framework of Christianity as their name might imply.

Standing in the courtyard of the church in the village of Philóti on Naxos, an elderly woman explained to me that a generation or two ago many people used to have encounters with the *exotiká*.<sup>1</sup> She attributed this to the fact that people believed more firmly in God and the Church. They were more faithful. In the last generation or so people have lost their faith and effectively gone over to the side of the devil. The devil, she explained, now has no need to come in search of them. Statements such as these show how the *exotiká* are not just marginal 'superstitions' – although the Greek word for superstitions, *deisidaimoníes*, literally 'fear of demons', does describe the situation. The periodic fear, as this woman expresses it, is that the demons can exceed their relegated, para-discursive status and predominate.

### **Cosmology and Rhetoric**

Thus far the modern Greek devil has emerged as a paradoxical, oxymoronic figure: a powerless power; renounced yet believed in; both real and unreal. He crops up periodically in Orthodox texts and rituals, most notably baptism and exorcism, but beyond those sporadic instances people do not much encounter him or debate him per se. The split in opinion creates a situation where cynical members of society may 'use' the devil against more credulous co-citizens. The devil thus offers a mode of social manipulation continuous with the trickster aspect of the devil considered above. On Rhodes and neighbouring islands people explain *exotiká* as, in reality, deviant members of the community dressed up in disguises in order to

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<sup>1</sup> For more ethnographic context on Naxos see Stewart (1991).

carry out illicit or immoral activities. One woman, for example, reportedly dressed up as a *neráida* to visit her lover at night (Herzfeld 1979: 295). The circulation of such stories points to communities divided between faithful believers, those cunning enough to deceive them, and a third category prepared to exercise scepticism. On Naxos, *exotiká* accounts are always weighed for what they might be concealing. Shepherds at the remote spot of *Ágios Theós* in the centre of the island said that thieves tell the most stories about *exotiká* for two reasons: 1) People will be afraid to venture out at night and will thus be unlikely to catch them stealing; 2) If people do see them they will think that they are *exotiká* and not attempt to identify them and bring charges of theft.

In the mountain village of *Apeíranthos* on Naxos a young man explained the origins of his nickname, *Gavrílis* (Stewart 1991: 113). It originally belonged to his grandfather on whom it was bestowed during the Italian occupation in the early 1940s. Everyone in the village was starving and the grandfather went with a friend late one night to steal grapes from the courtyard of a house in the village. He climbed on top of the trellis above the door of the house just in case the owner should come out. His partner was below cutting the grapes and trying to be as quiet as possible. At a certain point, however, the owner awoke and emerged to find out what was going on. He could not see very well as he had just woken up, so swift action was necessary before they were recognized. The man cutting grapes called out, 'Throw down red hot ash, Gabriel, and burn him to a crisp!' My friend's grandfather then made a rustling sound in the trellis right above the owner's head. The householder fled back inside with a fright and they finished their thieving unmolested. From then on the grandfather was called '*Gavrílis*'.

Although in this example the thief pretended to be an angel rather than a demon, the principle is the same. People may utilize either one in order to deceive the credulous. This conforms to the description the Philóti woman earlier gave to the situation. The devil does not come to people and corrupt them and cause them to do evil deeds. Rather, they proactively come to the devil all by themselves. The independent supernatural existence of the devil, or the *exotiká* or even the angels becomes a space of calculating fabrication and exploitation rather than a cornerstone of cultural belief. The devil in this domain becomes a figure of rhetorical persuasion rather than a cosmological given. As Paul Veyne pointed out, cynicism and belief regarding the gods have long co-existed in the Greek-speaking world (1983: 57, 66). We are on the cusp here between stories and figures unreflectingly held to be true and powerful (i.e. myth) and the denial of that position and thus the drive to analyse what these stories really mean (i.e. mythology, the study of myth). The devil and his manifestations work particularly well as a persuasive idiom precisely because Orthodoxy proposes them as very real and threatening. My title can perhaps better be posed as a statement: First cosmology, and then the rhetorical exploitation of that cosmology. Children on Naxos were told that if they didn't nap, the *mesimerís*, the midday bogeyman, would kidnap them. The very mothers and grandmothers responsible for telling the stories about the *mesimerís* that inculcated conviction in his existence, were the first ones to exploit this credulity to their advantage.

The situation described here for the devil actually coincides with that of religion generally. Societies have created panoplies of supernatural figures and then lost control and fallen under the spell of these figments of their own imagination. The interplay between firm conviction in cosmological figures, and the rhetorical exploitation of these figures, possibly for mundane political advantage, is basically always already a permanent condition. Societies

everywhere are trapped in religious rhetoric of their own making. Although I suggested a sequential movement from cosmology to rhetoric in the case of the *mesimerís* above, cosmology and rhetoric cannot really be hierarchized in that way. The two are, rather, mutually implicative and totally interdependent. Rhetoric inheres in cosmology and vice versa. The real answer to the question in my title, then, is: 'both'. The devil thus proves to be an 'amphibology', to use a term popularized by Roland Barthes (1975: 76) to refer to words with two meanings, such as 'intelligence' (*faculté d'intellection, complicité*). Normally context forces one to choose one meaning, but in certain situations the two possibilities must be entertained simultaneously, 'preciously ambiguous' (*précieusement ambigu*), as if '*l'un d'eux clignait de l'oeil à l'autre et que le sens du mot fût ce clin d'oeil*'. Amphibology (from Ancient Greek *amphibolía* 'doubt') differs from polysemy (alternative meanings) precisely in this uncertainty between different meanings.

The amphibological nature of the Greek devil means that society does not neatly split into believers and non-believers. People shift between the two all the time and even manage to be both as in the case of a man who denied that vampires existed and offered to drive a nail into a grave to prove it. Well drunk at the time, he and his companions trooped to the graveyard straight from the tavern. Inadvertently he sent the nail through the baggy breeches (*vrákes*) that he was wearing. When he went to stand up he couldn't and he died of a heart attack on the spot. Even sceptics may harbour deep and unvoiced uncertainties about the existence of demons.

Unusual insight into this personal tension between faith and scepticism may be gained from Kostas Taktis's novel, *The Third Wedding*, which is remarkable for the way in which it

captures the tone of everyday Greek life around the time of the Second World War. In the passage cited below, the narrator, Nina, describes the religious outlook of her husband Andonis:

At the time we were married, he was even more godless than the demon [*exapedó*, a synonym for *exotiká* – both mean 'things from beyond'. Here a circumlocution for the devil.] I have never in my life seen a more blasphemous person. It's not that he was godless just because he used to curse. There are reverent people who cut loose with Oh Christs! and Holy Virgins! with the greatest ease in the world. Then there are others who really are godless, but who never curse – like my poor father. It is, you understand, a question of upbringing. Andonis belonged to neither one group or the other. He used to curse with passion, and he meant every word that he said. He ridiculed everything relating to God or the Church (Taktis 1986: 29).

After Andonis suffers a devastating stroke, Nina describes how Andonis changes:

He was also a peasant, full of superstitions. In his heart of hearts he feared God. He believed in the agonies of hell (and he had reasons to worry that his soul would wind up there) and I think that this is why he used to curse. When he fell ill he remembered the words of Erasmia [their maid who told him he would be punished for swearing]... I watched Andonis cave in, and I could imagine the struggle going on in his soul and his thoughts. 'Erasmia is right. I sinned and God is punishing me', and so on. One evening I entered our bedroom and I caught him kneeling before the icon stand... I might not be able to stand priests, but I am not godless. I believe in this unknown force which governs the world (Taktis 1986: 29-30).

Nina's view expressed at the end corresponds well with the sense of village religion I acquired during my time in various parts of Greece. People mostly accept that there is a 'higher power' although they do not debate this matter theologically. Greek Orthodoxy forms the backdrop

against which life is lived. Even the leader of the Communist Party cannot avoid attending church on the day of the Annunciation of the Virgin (25 March), which is also Greek Independence Day. Should one attempt to deny credence in God or the Church – as I did that day at the sheepfold on Naxos -- those surrounding this person will attempt to assert that they actually do believe in God, but at some deeper, as-yet-unaccessed level. Certainly the unanimity of faith has been fractured by scepticism, itself in part the result of the progress of science and reason. People on Naxos say that the *exotiká* do not appear so much anymore because they are afraid of the lights, which now burn in most villages since electricity was installed in the period after World War II. The demons, furthermore, cannot cross the landscape easily at night because the lights of the cars scare them off. As the case of Andonis shows, however, it would be a mistake to think that the realism of Greek religious cosmology is draining out inexorably and irreversibly. Cosmology is not converting into rhetoric in a one-way process; rhetoricians may also be converted back into faithful religionists at any time.

## **Conclusion**

Earlier I suggested that the devil is only sporadically encountered in a few rituals in the course of social life. His presence remains marginal even if we factor in his appearance in religious iconography, or as he crops up periodically in bible passages read in church, such as the gospel account of Christ exorcising the Gadarene demoniac and sending the demons into a herd of swine, which jump into the sea and die (Mk 5.13, Mt 8.32, Lk 8.33). Yet, anyone who has so much as taken a taxi ride from the Athens airport into town knows that this is not an accurate picture. The devil is flying through the air all the time, propelled by angry shouts and open-palmed, gestural expletives (known as *móúntza*). Perhaps the most common curse in all of Greece, especially appropriate for use in the relative safety of one's own car against fellow

drivers, is: 'Go to the devil' (*ái sto diáolo*). It is significant, I think, that this expression retains force in Greece when the equivalent English expression lost power more than a generation ago. One only encounters it nowadays in films from the 1950s. Even the variation, 'Go to hell!' has become anodyne and dropped out of the repertoire of serious cursing in the last decades.

Although used arrogantly in interpersonal interactions – since only God determines who will go to the devil – 'Go to the devil' is relatively consistent with doctrinal Christianity. It upholds the idea that hell and the devil exist and bad people end up there. 'Go to the devil' falls into the Greek category of *vrisiés* (insults, abuse), a word derived from Ancient Greek *ývris* which, in its Erasmian transliteration, *hubris*, has become a normalized English word. Famous as the flaw of pride, which causes the downfall of characters in Ancient Greek tragedy, *hubris* was also the sin of Satan when he tried to raise his throne above that of God. It subsequently became one of the seven deadly sins of the medieval Church. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, when people, especially monks, fell victim to these sins they were conceived to be falling victim to demons who attacked them and caused them to give in to the sin (Greenfield 1988). The archetypal diabolical sin of *hubris* thus came to be identified with a demon who infected people and made them *hubristic*. In terms of historical semantics, then, 'Go to the devil' as a curse (*vrisiá*), expresses personal pride; it elevates the speaker by belittling others.

Apparently in antiquity (Fisher 1992) *hubris*, as a mode of social action, was similarly an interpersonal matter, humans against humans. But it was potentially upsetting to the gods and thus could provoke divine reactions. Currently, *vrisiés* such as 'Go to the devil' are also primarily social insults and only touch upon the sacred if publicly hurled at a priest or the institution of the Church. By contrast, the other common formula for cursing someone involves

variations on the formula: 'I fuck your God/Christ/Virgin Mary/Cross!' (Herzfeld 1984:659). The Greek Penal Code (Article 198) prescribes two years in jail for anyone 'insulting (*kathyvrizon*) God publicly and maliciously, by whatever means' (*Poinikós Kódix*, p. 649). An elucidatory note on this article specifically includes under the law: 'Curses and silly expressions uttered in everyday life, which even though not intended to insult God, are voiced to express excitement or disappointment with persons or things also fall under this law (par. 2). This is because they reflect a lack of respect toward the holy.' Offences in this category are punishable by three months imprisonment.

English usage is revealingly more streamlined. One commonly insults someone merely by saying 'Fuck you!' There is no detour through God or the saints and no question of blasphemy, unless one is addressing a priest. In Greece, cursing someone by sending them to the devil also works in this direct way, and this is a significant observation. The devil and demons have long been involved in the practice of cursing in Greece. Since late antiquity Greek-speaking people have ordered demons to carry curses or magic spells onto their targets (Betz 1986). One early magical compendium is known as the *Testament of Solomon* (McCown 1922, Frankfurter 2006: 25) since it offered readers the same power as King Solomon, who gained control over demons when building the Temple in Jerusalem. When commanded by name, or when 'bound' by particular verbal formulas, a demon cannot resist, but must immediately surrender to the control of the speaker. Curses involving demons were thus automatically effective, whereas prayers depended on the will of God or the saints. In blasphemy God and the saints are negated and the devil is invoked centre stage to give direct, unmediated insult.

We are on different territory now from the earlier consideration of rhetoric and cosmology. It is not a question of whether people sincerely believe in the devil as part of Orthodox cosmology, or manipulate others by invoking the devil in a rhetoric of persuasion. We are contemplating rhetoric in the simple sense of quotidian speech devices that bear the devil aloft in Greece and make him omnipresent. When someone spots a friend not seen for a long time he or she may say: 'Where have you been, devil! (*Pou eísai re diávole*). Mischievous little children are called 'little devils' (*diabolákia*). Someone very clever or cunning is 'devilish' (*diavoleménos*), or 'of the devil's sock' (*diavólou káltsa*). And children of priests are singled out in the anti-clerical expression 'Child of a priest, grandchild of the devil' (*Pappá paidí, diavólou engóni*). The list of familiar expressions involving the devil could be extended greatly. The contemporary Greek devil is at its most vital inside this everyday tropology.



**Figure 4** St. Marina striking the goat-form demon. Portable icon. Byzantine Museum, Athens. 17th Century.

Ultimately the devil is a great many things at once and none of these possibilities negates the others. The devil moves in several different and often contradictory directions at the same time. This, in itself, is diabolical -- *daimonikó*, as might be said in Greek. The expression 'the Greek genius', literally the Greek 'demon' (*to Ellinikó daimónio*), refers to the putative national character trait of finding ways to triumph over adversity, discovering unique solutions to intractable problems. It seems that the Greek demon created the devil. The devil is at once as deadly serious as the eternal fires of hell; a means of manipulating the credulous; an exclamation in the face of mystery, coincidence or wonder; and an idiom for addressing deep and embarrassing faults such as when someone excuses the irrational acts of another by saying that 'the devil took control of him' (*ton ékhei kyriéψει o diávolos*) or 'she has the devil inside her' (*ékhei to diávolο μέσα tis*). In the epigraph to this paper an elderly man uses the devil to make a self-deprecating joke about human fallibility. Semantically we cannot be sure how seriously this devil is to be taken. It is this pervasive amphibological tension that continues to bring out the devil in everyday life in Greece.

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