Angelic Organization: Hierarchy and the Tyranny of Heaven.

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Abstract

This paper suggests that one of the first influential legitimations of hierarchy comes from the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, about 1500 years ago. Despite the fact that he was ordering angels, he suggests both ontological and political reasons for accepting that organization must equal hierarchy. This is an assumption that is rarely contested even today, and the idea of hierarchy is central to theories of organization, and justifications of managerialism. However, angels have been mutable creatures, and I employ some of their various incarnations in order to open up this 5th century common sense. I conclude by suggesting that angelic obedience should be treated with suspicion, and that other sorts of angels, particularly the fallen ones, might lead us away from the tyranny of hierarchy.

Keywords

Angels; Hierarchy; Pseudo-Dionysius; Alternatives; History

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'They, all together, singing in harmony and moving round the heaven in their measured dance, unite in one harmony whose cause is one and whose end is one: it is this harmony which entitles the All be called 'order' and not disorder.' *De Mundo*, Anon. 1st Century (in Lamborn Wilson 1980: 79)

'There is no reason why good cannot triumph as often as evil. The triumph of anything is a matter of organization. If there are such things as angels, I hope that they are organized along the lines of the Mafia.' (Kurt Vonnegut, in Griffiths 1980: 107)

Introduction

Angels are rarely thought relevant to theories of organization[1]. In this paper I will survey their various incarnations, from violent monsters to contemporary spirit guides, but paying particular attention to one of the first descriptions of hierarchy. This comes from the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, about 1500 years ago. Despite the fact that he was ordering the world of angels, he suggests both ontological and political reasons for accepting that both celestial and secular organization must equal hierarchy. This is an assumption that is rarely contested even today, and the idea of hierarchy is central to theories of organization, and justifications of the managerial prerogative. However, angels have been mutable creatures, and I employ their differences in order to open up this 5th century common sense. I conclude by suggesting that angelic obedience should be treated with suspicion, and that other sorts of angels, particularly the fallen ones, might lead us away from the tyranny of hierarchy.

The key argument of this paper is to *show* that mediaeval debates about angels translated theological concerns into political legitimations, and to *suggest* that contemporary managerialism still operates within the shadow of these assumptions. There seem to me to be two implications of these arguments. First, that an understanding of 'organization' can be drawn from a wide range of cultural sources. Second, that interrogating central concepts in organization studies in this manner can weaken their power as a form of common sense. There is no necessary connection between the former argument, which merely extends the domain of organization studies, and the latter, which reads critique into the results of such an extension. It is quite possible that some readers will translate 5th century angelic hierarchy into a lesson concerning proper forms of contemporary governance and order. However, I choose to side with Lucifer, and to position the angels as enemies of a critical project, particularly if the project involves the extension and celebration of more local and less hierarchical organizational forms (Parker, Fournier and Reedy 2007).

'Organization' is a concept that refers generally to any sort of patterning, a fairly durable set of relations between people and things. However, it seems that dominant contemporary understandings of organization make this concept almost equivalent to concepts such as management, and hierarchy, and even capitalism (Blaug 1999, Parker 2002a). Fournier and Grey (2000) suggest that one of the features of critical work in management studies is 'denaturalisation'. That is to say, when someone suggests that something is inevitable or eternal, it is helpful if the concept can be historicised and even shown to be contingent. It seems to me that hierarchy is one such concept, and that the story of Pseudo-Dionysius and the angels helps us to denaturalise hierarchy, and think more clearly about what this concept involves. However, in this paper I do not offer an alternative theory of organization, but will (at the end) simply point to places where alternatives might be found. My purpose here is not to build new theory, but to place a particular word back into history, where it belongs. But first, we need to meet the angels.

Monsters

Angels can be found in Judaism (including Kabbalism), Catholicism, Orthodox and Protestant Christianity, Islam, Mormonism and many denominations, sects and cults. Angelic and demonic spirits (*devas* and *asuras*) can be found in Hinduism, and angelic spirits (*devas*) in Buddism.

'Without committing myself religiously I could conceive of the possibility of there being, in dimensions and worlds other than our own, powers and intelligences outside our present apprehension, and in this sense angels are not to be ruled out as a part of reality - always

remembering that *we create what we believe*. Indeed, I am prepared to say that if enough of us believe in angels, then angels exist.' (Davidson 1971: xii)

So, in a real sense angels exist. But are they humans, with wings? Ornithanthropus? In the Mervyn Peake novel, *Mr Pye*, our hero oscillates between growing wings and horns, depending on whether he has been good or bad. Both are freakish, 'for after all wings are not the monopoly of the seraphim but equally to be found upon the backs of ducks' (1972: 136)[2] Mr Pye's wings result in strange bulges under his shirt, whilst his horns have to be covered by a hat. Both present him with severe social problems. Whatever the shamans of the contemporary new age might claim, angels are also monstrous.

We might begin with winged Egyptian gods from three and a half thousand years ago, the Zoroastrian Gods of 600 BCE Persia, and the ancient Greek Eros. The Etruscan and Greek angels of death were winged too, Charun and Thanatos (Ward and Steeds 2005: 225). Or perhaps we should look towards the Assyrian or Akkadian *Kerubim* (winged bulls) who, according to Theodorus, Bishop of Heraclea in the 4th century, were 'horrible visions of Beasts, which might terrifie Adam from the entrance of paradise' (in Davidson 1971: 86). Lamborn Wilson, borrowing from a variety of Islamic sources, suggests that 'From the soles of his feet to his head, Israfil, the Angel of the Day of Judgment, has hairs and tongues over which are stretched veils'. Mika'il is covered with saffron coloured hairs. 'On each hair he has a million faces and each face a million eyes and a million tongues. Each tongue speaks a million languages and from each eye falls 70,000 tears.' Jibra'il has the sun between his eyes and wings that stretch from the East to the West. The Angel of Death, Azreal, has four faces, four wings and his body is covered with innumerable eyes. 'When one of these eyes closes, a creature dies' (1980: 35-36)

In the Bible, angels are terrifying too. Perhaps as an ironic joke, 'Fear not!' is usually the first thing that they say to the wide-eyed mortal. The Angel who came to Daniel had a face like lightening, eyes like flaming torches, and spoke with the roar of a crowd (*Daniel* 10). *Ezekiel* 1 has a depiction of an angel with four faces like animals, crossed wings, wheels within wheels adorned with eyes, flaming fire and so on. These angels are also mass murderers. In *II Kings* 19, an Angel kills 135 000 Assyrian soldiers in one night, whilst in *I Chronicles* 21 70 000 Israelites are slaughtered. In *Exodus* 12, an angel kills the first born child of every Egyptian and Israeli family that has not offered a blood sacrifice by midnight. In *Matthew* 13, we are told that it will be the angels who separate us into those who will be saved, and those to be cast into the furnace of fire. Indeed, in several places in the bible we are told that the day of judgement will be one in which the angels will be causing wailing and gnashing of teeth as they dispose of those who have refused to obey.

The point is that it took a while before these monsters and psychopaths became transformed into gentle superheroes with white wings. Gilles Néret allows us to see this change from about 400 years ago. The 'promoted genies' (such as cherubim and seraphim) can be seen in Christian myth from around the 4th century, but their wings were often blue, green, red, striped, or peacock, or the cherubim were slickly red all over (see Néret 2004 for illustrations). In Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *The Fall of the Rebel Angels* from 1562, and Frans Floris's painting of the same title from 1600, the rebels are shown as mutants with heads like fish or lions, wings of butterflies, arms like crabs, bellies bursting with eggs. But, at the top of the picture, the good angels are looking serious and wearing partly white clothing, and their wings are mostly white. The fallen angels can have the wings of bats, as in Gustav Doré's 19th century illustrations of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but the closer we get to the present, the prettier the good angels get.

Hierarchy

> 'God and nature bid the same.
> When he who rules is worthiest, and excels
> Them whom he governs.'
> *Paradise Lost* VI, 176-178

Within the Abrahamic religions, and is those that I will be concentrating on from now on in this paper, there is a good reason for the angels to be rather stern. It is simply that they are only following orders. Angels (apart from the fallen ones) do not have free will. Made by God, they follow His instructions[3]. They are His representatives, and their existence helps human beings solve a major epistemological problem. How can humans know God? We are small and limited, whilst God is entire and complete. Our

being, our substance can only allow us to glimpse the smallest part of Him. If we got any closer to His light of infinite brightness and heat we would simply shrivel like moths. This is clearly a problem. The usual solution is to suggest that re/presentation is needed to relay His glory. Hence, in the Christian tradition, 'theophany', the showing of God, the symbolization or presence of God in some other thing. This is the moment where difference comes into the world, when representation is needed[4], and when angels become important. The first Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 325 legitimated angels as part of God's creation, whilst another, in 342, asserted that angels should not be worshipped. This oscillation is crucial to later angelology. Are angels different from God, or different from Man, or different from both?

For Pseudo-Dionysius, (or Dionysius, or Denys) the Areopagite, in the 5th or early 6th century, the re-presentation of God must be ordered in order that relations between things could be properly understood[5]. Angels filled an entire universe of re-presentation, spreading His light downwards but taking a little brilliance off it with each step. At the bottom, humble humans could now enjoy His light without contradiction. The *Corpus Areopagiticum* is first mentioned in 532 CE, but no-one knows who wrote it, and hence what the author's real name was (see Pelikan 1987, Keck 1998: 55). He was possibly a Bishop, but whether of Paris, or Antioch, or Athens, is not known. He may have been a Syrian monk, or Peter the Iberian, a Georgian theologian. There is a legend that he was the same Dionysius who was converted by Paul in Athens (*Acts* 17), and was seen at the death of the Virgin Mary, standing between Gabriel and Michael. Indeed, it was precisely this near apostolic authority that gave his schema legitimacy within Medieval angelology (Keck 1998: 56).

This confusion seems appropriate, for the origins of hierarchy should not be too clear. If origins were not shrouded in mystery, they might be questioned as mere fabulation. Perhaps mindful of such difficulties, even Pseudo-Dionysius does something to cover his tracks by claiming that his teacher, the 'most Holy Hierotheus', who wrote *The Elements of Theology*, inspired most of his ideas. There is no record of such a person, or of such a book, and Luibheid (1987: 69) suggests that this was merely part of the overall fiction, a strategy that often appeared to involve naming other fictional texts, or writing as if this were a letter to someone else. Exactly why Pseudo-Dionysius was concealing his identity, and the provenance of his ideas, is unclear, but when accusations of unorthodoxy were so dangerous to court, anonymity was probably not a bad idea. (This is a strategy employed by many later utopian authors.) Even if the cover was blown, the old Hierotheus could be blamed, since they could be claimed to be his ideas in the first place. The displacement of responsibility was hence nicely emplaced, which seems appropriate where angels are concerned.

The key philosophical problem that Pseudo-Dionysius deals with in writings such as 'The Divine Names' and 'The Mystical Theology' is how to understand and praise 'the name which is above every name', 'the source, and the cause, the number and the order of the one, of number, and of all being' (in Luibheid 1987: 54, 129). How could vulgar words or symbols capture 'the Cause of all things who is beyond things'? (*op cit*: 138). How can we describe the indescribable, understand the transcendent? The heresy of idolatry always lurks, in which we worship the symbol, not God. One of Pseudo-Dionysius's strategies to avoid such errors was to proceed by refining language in order that, by dismissing its earthy referents, we could move towards that which cannot be grasped through language, but can be glimpsed. Such a purifying process he describes as climbing higher or clearing aside. However, there is another strategy that he puts forward, which is to proceed downwards from that which cannot be grasped, to its imperfect manifestations on earth. Since He has made the heavenly hierarchies known to us in various ways, these must be ordered theophanies, and this in turn suggests that 'Order and rank here below are a sign of harmonious ordering toward the divine realm.' (*op cit*: 146).

The two main parts of Pseudo-Dionysius's writings that are of interest to us here are 'The Celestial Hierarchy' and 'The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy'. These are arguments for cultivated men, not superstitions about monsters. The vulgar beliefs of the masses are dismissed as mad fantasies, in which animal-like creatures roam the skies with 'great moos' (*op cit*: 148). Real knowledge is not for everyone, because not everyone has the subtlety to comprehend the sacred, or the ability to see behind appearances. In fact, it seems, only those people who are already part of the hierarchy could really understand it because 'a hierarchy is a sacred order, a state of understanding and an activity approximating as closely as possible to the divine' (*op cit*: 153). The whole point of hierarchy is its perfection, its distribution of representations of the divine.

'The goal of a hierarchy, then, is to enable beings to be as like as possible to God and to be at one with him. A hierarchy has God as its leader of all understanding and action. It is forever looking directly at the comeliness of God. A hierarchy bears in itself the mark of God. Hierarchy causes its members to be images of God in all respects, to be clear and spotless mirrors reflecting the glow of primordial light and indeed of God himself. It ensures that when its members have received this full and divine splendour they can then pass on this light generously and in accordance with God's will to beings further down the scale.' (*op cit*: 154)

There is an interesting logical trick going on here, as well as the legitimation of earthly social order. By claiming that hierarchy is a 'perfect arrangement', it becomes both one thing and many, an organization that is greater than the sum of its parts. The representation problem is not actually solved, but dissolved into a state of affairs where the many (the empirical world) reflects the one (God) through their very relations (angels).

'Therefore, when the hierarchic order lays it on some to be purified and on others to do the purifying, on some to receive illumination and on others to cause illumination, on some to be perfected and on others to bring about perfection, each will actually imitate God in the way suitable to whatever role it has.' (*op cit*)

This solution is fascinating, making organization into the mediating term between perfectionist monism and an atomism that allows humans to be humans. It allows both to be, and the question becomes one of scale, symbolised as vertical elevation, or centrality. The One, despite the fact that it is everything, is positioned at the top of a two or three dimensional space. A space that places all other locations in a subordinate position to it. This is not a necessary implication of organization, as a relation between things, but it is the one chosen here.

In detail, what Pseudo-Dionysius announces is an arrangement of threes, a number beloved of Neo-Platonists. In the first hierarchy we have the thrones, cherubim and seraphim; in the second, the authorities, dominions (or dominations) and powers, and in the third, the angels, archangels, and principalities. Each rank of celestial being has distinct capacities and responsibilities, and these are described with considerable confidence. While he begins by insisting that within each hierarchy there is equality between the three orders, by the time he gets to describing the last order, 'every hierarchy has first, middle and last powers' (*op cit*: 170). Each ranks functions as a messenger for the one above it, and each subordinate is uplifted and held in place by the message that they receive. In his work 'The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy', Pseudo-Dionysius applies this logic to the powers of the church on earth and shows how superior and subordinate relationships echo the arrangements of the divine. Here it also becomes clear that the older term 'hierarch', a high priest or leader (etymologically, *heiros* and *arche*, or holy rule), is being appropriated. Hierarchy is no longer merely about a single charismatic leader, but is a generalised organizational relation in which we are all embedded, whether we like it or not. 'For not everyone is holy and, as scripture affirms, knowledge is not for everyone.' (*op cit*: 199). 'The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy' then goes on to describe, in generous detail, the rites and mysteries proper to different roles. Certain sorts of people say particular things to other sorts of people in particular places; symbols and ointment are deployed; and there is some singing at times. The three-fold order of Heirarchs, Priests and Deacons is paralleled by different sorts of people seeking purification - catchahumens, possessed and penitents. (Though in other places 'sacred people' and monks are added too.) There are clear divisions of labour, and a ranking of beings that allows us to stretch from the dullest catchahumens, who are still being 'incubated' by the scriptures, to the divine light, via between fifteen and seventeen orders along the way.

Pseudo-Dionysius was not the first, or the last, to propose some sort of vertical ordering of things, and I am not proposing him as an origin of all ideas about hierarchy. The notion of the visionary ascending to God, negotiating angelic guardians along the way, can also be found in the Kabbalistic *Hekhalot* ('Palaces') from the 2nd century. Both St Ambrose and St Jerome put forward versions of the angelic order in the 4th century. St Augustine speculated on the relative places of animals, humans, angels and God at around the same time as Pseudo-Dionysius. Nonetheless, Pseudo-Dionysius was by far the most influential of these writers. In 787, the second Council of Nicea proclaimed an official 'Dogma of Archangels', mostly based on the *Corpus Areopagiticum*. The earliest Latin translation from the original Greek was made in Paris in 838, with a second following a few years later. Yet his real fame and influence coincides with the birth of the modern European university in the 12th century (Keck 1998: 50, 75 *passim*). Urbanization and the expanding professional classes had led to the beginnings of specialised religious institutions to teach

interpretation, logic and argument. These institutions then became involved in countering various heresies and defending *doxa* with reason. But such deployments of reason also led to an interrogation of the mechanisms of His order, through natural philosophy, and the search for legitimation of social orders, through angelology and hermeneutics[6].

Angelology became a way to engage with philosophical debates, and also a method for teaching logic and discipline. As David Keck put it -

> 'Of all God's creatures, human beings are nearest the angels, and angelology thus promises to illuminate anthropology. In the modern world, the impulse to learn about human nature from closely related beings has shifted subjects from seraphim to simians. Whereas modern scientists study the origins of the apes to uncover clues about humanity, medieval theologians investigated angels.' (1998: 16)

Duns Scotus suggested that angels were denser than God, and that they could independently think and reason. Bonaventure argued that angels were both matter and form. Thomas Aquinas responded by arguing that angels were entirely form, pure intellect, but that they could inhabit human bodies. Though the question of angels and pinheads comes from a later Rabelaisian parody, it does echo Aquinas' question as to whether two angels could occupy the same space (Marshall and Walsham 2006: 1). Questions concerning the agency, substance and free will of angels were central here, and some serious philosophical and social issues were at stake. Should angels be worshipped, or was this itself a heresy? Could good and legitimately constituted authority produce evil?

The angelogical shift towards philosophy that we see from the 12th century onwards also supported the idea that angels were gradually being withdrawn from the vulgar miracle work that the masses expected (and which had so disgusted Pseudo-Dionysius seven centuries previously), and towards higher pursuits. Henry Mayr-Harting nicely termed this the 'aetherialisation' of angels (Marshall and Walsham 2006: 8), but it also had some concrete political implications. One of the most consistent themes in later angelology is the idea that the hierarchy of heaven echoes the proper hierarchy on earth. Honorius of Autun, Bonaventure, Bernard of Clairvaux and many others, used these sort of arguments in order to justify a wide range of 'natural' orders. All were hierarchically organized - the levels of spiritual enlightenment that someone must pass through; the relation of man to the natural world; the hierarchy of the church on earth; the relation of the church to the state; of Rome to the monastic orders; the organization of monastic orders and so on (Keck 1998: 53 *passim*). Heresies (whether political or theological) could be put in their place by a form of argument that stressed vertical authority and stability. Mobility and monstrosity were immediately classified as illogical (and dangerous) because, as Aquinas put it 'no creature of a lower nature can ever covet the grade of a higher nature, just as an ass does not desire to be a horse.'

Any symbolization of movement must be highly controlled, and teleological in nature. Jacob, in *Genesis* 28, dreams of a ladder which reaches to heaven, with (according to *Paradise Lost*) 'angels ascending and descending'. This is an escalator for the messengers, the servants of God, which allows them to visit the earth without themselves being changed. Yet there are also versions of movement that imply human mobility. In Merkabah mysticism, the pious mortal Enoch so pleased God that he was transformed into the angel Metatron (Astel 2005: 154). *Matthew* 22 suggests that the fallen angels left vacant thrones that can be occupied by the elect among men. St Francis of Assisi is supposed to have been awarded the throne of Lucifer himself (Lamborn Wilson 1980: 179). Néret even refers to a similar career amongst angels, beginning as singing and dancing cherubs ('chubby aeronauts'), then messengers, then part of the celestial armies (2004: 5).

Visually, from the medieval period onwards, hierarchy became ubiquitous. The soaring front of a cathedral, with niches for each rank of being. The illustrations and paintings of near-identical attentive upturned faces in linear rows. Ranks of halos painted gold in horizontal lines. See, for example, Fra Angelico's painting 'Christ Glorified in Heaven', from 1423-4. It contains the prophets on the top row, then a row of male martyrs, then (on the bottom row) the female martyrs (Ward and Steeds 2005: 26). Or, Lorenzo Costa's 'The Adoration of the Shepherds with Archangels' from c1499, where the full nine orders, holding associated symbols, are arranged vertically along each edge of the painting (Marshall and Walsham 2006: 7). Quite simply, Pseudo-Dionysius' conception of organization had triumphed. Diego Laynez, General of the Jesuits from 1558-1565 expressed the logic in *De Hierarchia, on the Divine Origin of Hierarchy* (Quattrone 2004: 647). Since hierarchy means jurisdiction over everything, any authority that

requires jurisdiction must be hierarchically based. Since A equals B, then all B's must be A. As above, so below. God was in His heaven, and all was right with the world.

Popular Orderings

Yet, contra Diego Laynez and *De Mundo*, a hierarchical understanding of organization is not the only one. Conceptually, hierarchy is a particular species of ordering. The angels have long been implicated in some much more complex forms of organizing, even though it is true to say that the vertical one became dominant after Pseudo-Dionysius. Yet even then, the organization of hierarchy seems to have been mutable. Various writers - John of Damascus, Gregory the Great, Isidore of Seville, Bernard of Clairvaux, Edmund Spenser, Drummond of Hawthornden - proposed different arrangements of the nine, a different nine orders, or even schemas of between seven or twelve orders including 'aeons', 'innocents', 'confessors' 'flames', 'warriors', 'entities', 'seats', 'hosts', and 'lordships' (Davidson 1971: 336 *passim*). And, in case we imagine these as merely alterations in the bureaucratic organogram, the 12th century Breviary of St Hildegard, Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Robert Fludd's *History of the Macrocosm* (1617) all translate these orders into Aristolelian concentric circles, or even spheres. For the Jewish mystics there were seven levels of heaven - clouds and winds; sinners awaiting judgement; Eden; sun, moon and stars; the fallen angels; the radiant angels; and the archangels and ineffable light (Lamborn Wilson 1980: 74-78). For Dante Alighieri, there were nine nested spheres of Paradise, each with its own angel. In the *Paradiso* VIII, he explicitly acknowledges Pseudo-Dionysius, and his Beatrice is a theophany of the Empyrean light, the light of the Primum Mobile.

But these vertical or centralising maps were only one of the imaginative topologies. In fact, the angels proliferated, both in terms of their different imaginative geographies, and also their connections with the day-to-day matters that concerned common people. As noted above, even though Pseudo-Dionysius and later angelologists were keen to draw a line between popular superstition and true enlightenment, the line was impossible to police. So, in angelological writings we have many different versions of the identity of the seven archangels; lists of the ruling princes of the nine celestial orders; of the throne angels; and of the sixty four wardens of the seven celestial halls (Davidson 1971). This 'internal' proliferation of categories and classifications was related to a dizzying variety of connections between angels and other elements of earthly life. There are governing angels of the seasons, of the zodiac, of the months, of the days, the hours of the day and night; the intelligences or governors of the seven planets; of the cardinal points on the globe and the altitudes of the globe. Add to this angels that bear mystical names, amulet angels, guardian angels, archons and the angels who rule the twenty eight mansions of the moon and we have a panopoly of categories. Calvin may have dismissed such writings as 'the vain babblings of idle men' (Davidson 1971: xxiii)[7] but it did nothing to stop angels being good to think with.

This proliferating tendency predates the *Corpus Areopagiticum*. For example, *Enoch* 3 (part of the Pseudepigraphia) identifies 'Ram'amiel, who is in charge of thunder; Ra'asiel, who is in charge of earhquakes; Shalgiel, who is charge of snow', and so on. Each ruling prince of the nine angelic hierarchies has particular responsibilities and capacities. There may be seven archangels, but four are above the rest - Michael, Gabriel, Raphael and Uriel. Each archangel carries certain things, and is associated with particular practices. The seven can also be called the planetary angels (if we delete Uriel but add in Hagiel, Camael, Zadkiel and Cassiel) and have associations with particular elements, metals, numbers, ancient deities, animals, birds, insects, stones, spices, incense, flowers, trees, foods, healing plants, body parts, bodily functions, virtues, professions[8], activities and keywords. Or, from Kabbalistic literature, there are ten divine energies (*sefirot*) each associated with a particular angel. Things and concepts can also have patron angels, whilst some emotions or desires have assisting angels. There is even an angel for business ventures - Teoael, who happens to be a prince of the Choir of Thrones. In order to get his assistance, write your petition on company letterheaded paper, or include a business card (Meville 2001).

So the hierarchies seemed to float on the surface of a much more ramified and complex will to classify, organize, and order. The angels were not merely 'up there', singing, but 'down here' too. They were in the middle of things, being (as they are now) attached to things, and becoming part of popular culture, charms, superstitions and curses (Keck 1998). No wonder that the universities and the church needed to elevate the angels away from the masses, and to construct a place for everything, and keep everyone in their place.

War, Surveillance, Seduction

The entanglements between angelic and human organization were not restricted to a relation between church *doxa* and popular *heterodoxa*. Through the millennium they become manifested in some specific organized contexts too. Each positions a relation between a hidden celestial order, and the human. In all three cases which I discuss here, the human is more or less subordinate to the celestial, whether watching, being watched, or being watchful.

One of these images is that of the army, which (perhaps since Rome) had been imagined as a hierarchy. Milton's angels are arranged in squadrons, and follow their great commanders (*Paradise Lost*, Book I). They have fluttering banners and are deployed under their hierarchs. The huge battle that takes place in Book VI is a civil war being fought on behalf of mortals. These military and evangelical organizations are clashing in a fight in which we are mere onlookers, civilians. Chapter five in Billy Graham's *Angels*, 'Angelic Organization', runs through what Matthew Henry calls their 'offices and employments'. Archangel Michael he describes as 'the Prime Minister in God's administration of the universe' (1976: 54-55). The point is that some sort of organization already exists, and it will defend us in the battle against evil. 'Singly or corporately, angels are for real. They are better organized than were the armies of Alexander the Great, Napoleon or Eisenhower.' (1976: 30) This is the language of an evangelist but, despite all this sound and fury, triumph is guaranteed. 'The Bible declares that righteousness will eventually triumph, Utopia will come to earth, the Kingdom of God will ultimately prevail. In bringing all this about angels will have a prominent part.' (1976: 127) Such guarantees of victory must be comforting for those who know that they are going to win. Like the seventh cavalry, you know that angels will be riding to the rescue. According to some, during the 1914-1918 War, St George and his angels protected the 3rd and 4th Divisions of the British Expeditionary Force from the German First Army during their retreat from Mons. During the 1939-46 war, the British Air Chief Marshall Lord Dowding was supposed to have claimed that angels flew some planes after the pilots had been killed (Graham 1976: 149). The devil may be 'the master-organizer and strategist' (Graham *op cit*: 133), but it is certain that triumph and victory will go to the angels, nonetheless. Then, we will be able to rest from our 'labours' and 'works' (*op cit*: 144). But if we are going to win anyway, then why bother with the intervening struggle? Why not sit back and enjoy the show? It is probably for this reason that it is more common for mortals to be implicated, the objects of heavenly organization.

Often, rather than being onlookers of a heavenly battle, we are surveilled by the eyes of angels. This second entanglement is a common trope in films. Powell and Pressburger's 1946 *A Matter of Life and Death* had heaven full of well coiffured receptionists in modern offices, and rows of desks. More recently we have seen solemn people in overcoats, looking over our shoulders, listening to our thoughts, or harassed miracle workers on a mission from above. Nabu, the Babylonian winged god of wisdom (who invented writing) used to write down the decisions about humanity's future each year on the sacred tablets of fate (Ward and Steeds 2005: 33). In The Koran, we have the twin *hafaza*, 'recording angels', one for the day, the good, and one for the night, the bad, who write down your every act in a book that will presented at the day of judgement. In al-Qazwini's *Wonders of Creation* from 1208, we can see the angels searching through the scrolls of human deeds (Lamborn Wilson 1980: 62). These are angelic bureaucrats, consulting lists of who is damned and who is saved, as in the orthodox 15th century icon of the last judgement from the Novgorod school (in Ward and Steeds 2005: 48). William Blake drew Metatron as The Recording Angel in his illustrations for the Divine Comedy (Astel 2005: 155). Or consider the angel in Byron's 1822 viciously satirical poem 'The Vision of Judgment'. Sitting at a black bureau, he had pulled all his wings out to make quills to write down the names of the dead during King George III's reign. Even having a further six angels and twelve saints as clerks didn't help, since they eventually 'threw their pens down in divine disgust' after Waterloo (lines 16-40). Like Benjamin's angel of history, they watch, and record. There is no intervention, and perhaps even a certain impassive despair. Benjamin's angel faces the past, and sees 'one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet'. At the same time a storm blows from Paradise, pushing the angel of history backwards 'into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skywards. This storm is what we call progress.' (Benjamin 1999: 249)[9].

The third entanglement with organization makes us active agents in resisting the strategies of the devil. Here we are not onlookers or objects, but active participants in a complex conspiracy of temptation and fortitude. As Elizabeth Reis (2001) argues, in 17th century Massachusetts, puritans like Cotton Mather and his father Increase Mather (the author of the 1696 *Angelographia*) were continually on their guard against Satan disguising himself as an angel. The Mathers thought that women were particularly vulnerable to the blandishments of the devil. They were susceptible to naive belief and weak of will, when what was required was male strength and moral fibre. Christopher Marlowe's, rather annoying, good and bad 'Angells' in his (c1588-92) *Doctor Faustus* act to guide, or to tempt.

> 'GOOD ANGELL. Sweet *Faustus* think of heaven and heavenly things
> BAD ANGELL. No *Faustus* thinks of honour and of wealth'
> (Act II, scene i)

Power and sex and money and desire swim before our eyes, even though (we know that) this will be a bargain with the devil. Work and the public sphere are the site of many temptations, but those who get sucked into them rarely escape, and end up chained to work, whipped by demons. Dante, in canto XXI of 'L'Inferno', the first book of *The Divine Comedy*, summons up the metaphor of the complex labour and boiling black pitch used in the Venice Arsenal, the largest form of industrial organization that a 14th century Florentine would have been aware of. He describes the fifth trench of the eighth circle of hell as like a shipbuilders, just as so many more recent 'gothic' images of work organizations summon dark corridors, fiery furnaces and the endless labours of Sisyphus (Höpfl 2005, Parker 2005). The good life must be one that escapes the jaws of Mammon, the prince of tempters and demon of avarice.

> '... even in Heaven his looks and thoughts
> Were always downward bent, admiring more
> The riches of Heaven's pavement, trodden gold
> Than aught divine or holy' (*Paradise Lost* I, 678)[10]

Nowadays, the temptation is the job offer and dream of career advancement. Jean Lhermitte puts it well in his 1963 *True and False Possession*

> 'The Prince of Darkness no longer appears as a personage... but disguises himself willingly, even
> preferably, under the appearance of corporate personalities or institutions.' (in Davidson 1971: xiv)

In Glen Duncan's novel *I, Lucifer*, the devil celebrates 'systems', as opposed to individual devilish acts of torture or vandalism. With the system he reminds his fellow fallen angels that evil can achieve 'a state where despair can flourish with barely any interference from us, when they do it to and for themselves, when that's the way the world is' (2002: 145). Then, the inhabitants of hell can lean back and watch, and the angels and the humans will have lost.

Angels Now

Contemporary angels seem to have come closer to the human. They are less like soldiers, bureaucrats or spies and more like mysterious friends. But, perhaps to avoid accusations of interference and the violation of our free will, the angels intervene in minor ways, usually just by delivering messages. The origin of the word administration comes from minister, a servant. A ministry was hence a role, responsibility or mission, or an institution or person who took on such a mission. The angels minister to human beings, they administer the earth.

> 'They superintend the events of your life and protect the interest of Lord God, always working to
> promote his plans to bring about His highest will for you.' (Graham 1976: 90)

Graham calls Angelic communication 'terse'. They often urge haste, and do so with simple and direct commands (*op cit*: 116). The angel Moroni told Joseph Smith three times where he could find the tablets of The Book of Mormon. In a dream, Gabriel (*Jibra'il*) came to Muhammad in the cave of Hira in about 610 and told him to 'recite!' three times, and when he awoke, the beginnings of The Koran were inscribed upon his heart. Most etymologies of angel involve a reference to the concept or personification of communication. In Sanskrit *angiras* means spirit, in Persian *angaros* means courier. From there we get the Greek *aggelos* and the Latin *angelus*, both meaning messenger. In Hebrew an angel is *mal'ach*, from the Arabic *mal'ak*, which is in turn from *la'aka*, to send on a mission.

Increase Mather knew that Satan could disguise himself as angel, but he also knew that the world was shaped in certain angelic ways (Reis 2001). Angels operated 'behind the curtain', not curing people miraculously, but giving the doctor ideas about how to cure the patient by 'insensible manuduction'. Angels, he said, 'love secrecy in their Administrations'. Reis suggests that 17th century Massachusetts saw

a rash of angel sightings which, by the 19th century, were becoming more gentle and feminine in appearance. The fearsome monsters had become putti, cherubic decoration for paintings, and kindly counsellors dressed in white. Popular imagery connected them with innocent children, pre-Raphaelite radiance and a sentimental notion of comfort. To a certain extent, this had been prefigured by what David Keck calls 'the Christianization of fortune' during the medieval period (1998: 161-3), an echo of Mayr-Harting's 'aetherialisation'. The culture of the people invoked angels as everyday charms and spells, whilst at the same time the angelologists attempted to legitimate them as categories for interrogating the divine. But the popular ordering of fetishes becomes a threat to those that elevate celestial and intellectual hierarchies. Even Pseudo-Dionysius himself had complained about the vulgar understandings of his 5th century populus.

> 'High-flown shapes could well mislead someone into thinking that the heavenly beings are golden or gleaming men, glamorous, wearing lustrous clothing, giving off flames which cause no harm...'
> (in Luibheid 1987: 150)

Angels were ideas, not things, and he dismissed 'the sheer crassness of the signs' which showed that too many human beings were willing 'to be lazily satisfied by base images' (*op cit*).

It would seem that condemnations of popular angel worship are not at all new, and indeed that the angels of the New Age are not that new either. Nowadays, the shelves of bookshops and the pages of the internet have plenty of angels, often combining in remarkable ways with crystals, Native American spirit guides, and cultural bric-a-brac from any place and time. These angels leave messages in dreams, they heal, warn, or appear on slippery corners in the middle of rainstorms. They encourage us to treat everyone we meet as if they were an angel, and to notice when we see a single white feather left rocking in the breeze. Or, on 'World Angel Day' to 'work harmoniously alongside them in their mission to heal the planet' (Astel 2005: 73). Sharon Linnéa, who was a contributing editor to *Angels on Earth* magazine, suggests various theories that might explain an intensification of angelic activity now (Beliefnet 2003: 10-11). Angels might be busier now than they were, which suggests that their activity might go in cycles. That in turn might be because science is revealing cosmic and microscopic mysteries that drive humans to seek further explanations. Or, perhaps we are becoming more receptive to the quiet voices, the messages left that we are often too busy to notice. Or, it might be simply because there is so much evil in the world now that we are seeking help and guidance in order to resist the temptations of the flesh and the violence of humankind.

Linnéa might be right. In a world of Business Schools and Business Angels, Hells Angels and AGM 114L Hellfire air to ground missiles, perhaps we do need angels more than ever (Lange 1998). Perhaps when we see the angels 'fleeing with tattered wings before the outrages of modern art' (Néret 2004: 6)[11] some people feel the need to call these nineteenth century creatures back. These are not the avenging monsters of old, with thousands of eyes and voices like crowds. Like lucky heather or a rabbit's foot, they whistle in the wind for us, asking fate to protect us from evil. These are creatures of an age dominated by romantic and therapeutic conceptions of the human, but endlessly threatened by the impersonal violence of the urban, the commercial and the realistic. Edward Burne-Jones put it well when, in a letter to Oscar Wilde, he wrote 'the more materialistic science becomes, the more angels shall I paint' (Graham 1976: 9)[12].

Hard Liberty, or Servile Pomp

The metaphors of angelic organization shift to fit the time of their origin. So lets finish with one more. In this, most abstracted, sense of angelic organization it becomes a verb. As St Augustine put it '*angelus est nomen officii*', 'angel is the name of the office'. It is a function, a movement, a transmission. Not something that we humans merely watch, or that merely watches us, or that we have any agency over, but a way of describing our entanglement in the movements of the world. In the breath of wind, a half heard whisper, the chance meeting, the ordering and organizing that just happens in us and around us. For Aquinas, these were 'powers' and 'immaterial spirits', 'a succession of contacts of power at diverse places', in time but not in a necessary location. Angels were pure agency, and the question was not 'What is an Angel?' but 'What does an Angel Do?' (Lamborn Wilson 1980: 49). Eight centuries later this is echoed by Michel Serres, a contemporary angelologist at a Parisian university, in his essay on interchangers, intermediaries, and exchange between networks. He describes airports as full of 'angels of steel, carrying angels of flesh and blood, who in turn send angel signals across angel air waves' (1995: 8) The world is a general message bearing system, and 'angel' is the name for that part of it that is more mobile than the rest. Or Massimo

Cacciari, a contemporary neo-Platonist who wishes us to see angels as that which always escapes expression, of the 'idea in the name' (1994: 48). Of that which escapes from language, but is always necessary for language to begin - a kind of utopian no-place which is always imaginary and which propels communication.

In some rather obvious ways, this takes us back to Pseudo-Dionysius. His world was a connected one too, one in which the divine light, angels, human beings and beasts were all a part. His solution to the problem of wholes and parts was that they must be arranged hierarchically. This is not the only solution to his problem. Serres prefers the idea of a network of actants, and Cacciari the mobility and mutability of poststructuralism. All three are modes of organizing, yet the angelic hierarchies are the only ones that can and have been used to justify the proto-bureaucratic life. Serres makes this particularly clear. For him, the messenger should disappear once the message is delivered. Who can tell the message from the messenger? In a network, or in a language for that matter, the two are one. This means that the humble intermediary must always dematerialise, and not get sucked into becoming a self-important machine for manufacturing stable myths (1995: 105) In Serres' network of interchangers -
> '"... All hierarchy collapses.'
> 'And at that point, the machine for fabricating gods (the machine which also produces violence and war) comes to a standstill.'"
> (1995: 290)

Yet most of the time angels *are* known for their obedience, satisfaction with a place in the order of things, piety and chastity (Keck 1998: 118). Angels tend to represent order amidst disorder, the pattern behind the chaos, and a guarantee of the status quo. In his *The Vision of Judgment* Byron claims, 'for by many stories, and true, we learn the Angels are all Tories' (line 206-7). Byron sees them as on the side of conservatism, recording the outrages of power, and washing their hands of any guilt or complicity. During the long hours of monastic and ecclesiastical lives they sing in unison for harmony, unitarism, living according to the rule, and duty, without wild hatreds or passions. Even Billy Graham seems to be a little impatient with their coolness. He claims Biblical authority for the idea that man is in a 'temporary lower position' than angels, which will be amended once the Kingdom of God has come in its fullness. Man was made higher than the animals, and angels have been commanded to help us because we will be higher than them after the resurrection (1976: 43) 'Someday man will be as perfect as angels are now' (*op cit*: 47). Man struggles, and will experience salvation, faith and God, and hence have an experience that angels can never possess, but 'no angel can be an evangelist' (Graham 1976: 106). Even if we might not agree with Graham that he is better than the angels, we can recognise his irritation at their condescension. In Theodore Sturgeon's short story 'It Opens the Sky', their composure becomes deeply annoying. Angels are sanctimonious creatures who 'Just went around smiling and being helpful and reminding people to be kind to one another.' (1970: 112) When they look at you with those big, open, compassionate eyes, they deserve a punch.

The really terrible thing about all this, the thing that makes you want to shake them, is that they *were* offered a choice. According to Aquinas, at the moment of their creation, all the angels were offered liberty. Two thirds chose to become servants of God and to sing praise to Him until the end of their days. Beings with wings that gave them the freedom to become a bird - to soar over the earth, looping the loop and becoming part of networks, multitudes, alternatives - chose to become servants. One third chose freedom -
> '...preferring
> Hard liberty before the easy yoke
> Of servile pomp.' (Milton *Paradise Lost* II, 255-57)

Once Lucifer and the others had made their choice, had chosen will and the overthrowing of established order, there was no way back to the 'tyranny of heaven'.
> 'Suppose He should relent
> And publish grace to all, on promise made
> Of new subjection; with what eyes could we
> Stand in His presence humble, and receive
> Strict laws imposed, to celebrate His throne
> With warbled hymns, and to His Godhead sing
> Forced hallelujahs, while he lordly sits

Our envied sovereign, and his altar breathes
        Ambrosial odours and ambrosial flowers,
        Our servile offerings?' (II, 237-46)

Of course, the hierarchical angels reply that Satan is proud, and bent on our destruction. In the Koran, Iblis (Satan) refuses to bow before a being made from clay. On his banishment, he tells the creator that he will deceive and exterminate these low creatures. Such refusal to bow when told to is jealousy, arrogance, and even (in a pre-Foucauldian twist) a further form of slavery.

        'This is servitude:
        To serve the unwise, or him who hath rebelled
        Against his worthier - as thine now serve thee,
        Thyself not free, but to thyself enthralled;' (VI, 179-181)

But they would say that, wouldn't they? To justify their place in the order of things, and avoid 'His wrath, which He calls justice' (Book II, l733). Because the hierarchical angels are Tories, advocates for secular and celestial sclerosis, for the great chain of being and the order of things. The point of hierarchy is to stop movement, or at the very least slow it and make it predictable. It is to chain the universe with something that ties all being together, and ensures that the only movement is that which is already determined at the moment of creation by the first mover. No wonder the popular and polymorphous angels were treated with suspicion, and why Serres' and Cacciari's angels are endless movements, not obedient employees. Glen Duncan's Lucifer understands this problem in a way that Pseudo-Dionysius never could - 'for an angel there is only one true freedom, and that, I'm honestly sad to say, is freedom from God.' (2002: 210).

The precondition for freedom is a consciousness that things could be otherwise. The myth of the Areopagite, in its incarnations of stone, paint and institution, tells us that things are eternally the same. Pseudo-Dionysius is not the sole origin of this version of organization, though certainly an important relay, but his version of angelic organization has spent a millennium struggling with the popular angels. In my view, this struggle is still continuing, even though the ontology of angels is no longer the central terrain, and it is now Western managerialism, as well as many churches, attempting to hold the high ground. Unsuprisingly, those who benefit from hierarchy are busy naturalising it, and claiming some sort of inevitability to the function, cadre and discipline of management that supports it. This paper has sought to historicise one of the foundations of this account, and hence begin to de-naturalise hierarchy, in the sense of proving its contingency. There *are* other accounts and practices of organization that assume that hierarchy is not inevitable – anarchism, feminism, forms of environmentalism and communitarianism (Marshall 1993, Feree and Martin 1995, Naess 1989, Lovink and Scholz 2007). There are histories of rebellion and popular orderings, a multitude of intentional communities, and many, many utopias that imagine worlds in which power is not concentrated at the top of a chain of beings (Parker 2002b, Parker, Fournier and Reedy 2007). There is not *one* alternative to Pseudo-Dionysius's cosmology, but many.

In Thomas More's *Utopia*, there is a type of person who 'rather than live in wretched poverty at home, volunteers for slavery in Utopia.' (1965: 102). That is what organization means to them. A steady job, shops with food in them, and a police force that enforces the law. This has its attractions, and anyone who studies organization will understand the importance of certain sorts of predictability. Lucifer would rather 'reign in hell than serve in heaven' (I, 263). That is what angelic organization means to him. It means preferring disobedience to the boredom of condescending angels, to the inevitability of hierarchy, the asymmetry of power, and the machine that endlessly manufactures false Gods. As Kurt Vonnegut beautifully observes, there is no reason why good cannot triumph as often as evil, and the triumph of anything is a matter of organization. So organization is not one thing, whatever 'the most Holy Hierotheus' might claim.

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[2] In A.S. Byatt's *Angels and Insects*, one of the characters suggests that angels would need a breastbone protruding by several feet to counterbalance the wings, and another remembers her brother commenting that 'angels are only a clumsy form of poultry' (1993: 202). My colleague Peter Armstrong calculated that the average angel would have a wing loading of about 35ib per square foot, about the same as a WW2 Spitfire. This would require a takeoff speed of about 110 mph, which means they would have to be able to run quite quickly.

[3] I will follow convention here, and assume that God is a male, and that he is insecure enough to demand capitalisation. The two assumptions may be related.

[4] Just why God needed to set representation going is unclear. Some accounts might suggest that he wanted to be known, others that he was simply an insecure control freak who desired undilted adultation, ad nauseum, ad infinitum. That's why he filled the universe with '301, 655, 722 extramundane brown-nosers for - He's - a - jolly - good - fellowing Him in deafening celestial harmony' (Duncan 2002: 9)

[5] I am not alone in mentioning Pseudo-Dionysius here. See Burrell 1997: 68, and particularly Kornberger *et al* 2006, both also attempts to historicise the theory of organizations.

[6] And, perhaps, a few centuries later, to Cartesian ideas about a hierarchy of knowing through reason which would be capable of resisting the mystifications of an evil demon, and placing man in relation to the natural world (Jones 2006).

[7] It is worth noting that the classifications of demons in demonology are just as complex. Mediaeval 'Grimoires', such as that written by Bishop Pierre Binsfield, often contain descriptions

of demons of each deadly sin, of different layers of the earth and air, of hierarchies, of months, of different forms and so on.

[8] For academics and writers, the angel is probably Raphael, who represents communication and science. You are also encouraged to eat celery, and pay attention to the number eight, and monkeys.

[9] Though, as Maeseneer points out, the function of Benjamin's angel is ambivalent. He may have begun with the notion that the angel symbolised the necessary violence of revolution, an angel of destruction (2003a: 513-6), which later mutates into an angel of witness (2003b: 378).

[10] In De Plancy's *Dictionnaire Infernal* (1825-6), Mammon is said to be hell's ambassador to England, the most industrialised country in the world at the time (Davidson 1971: 182).

[11] Compare the antique angels in Néret 2004 with the contemporary devils in Néret 2003 for some proof of this.

[12] It is worth noting that (in addition to the ape) another figure enters the picture here too, the alien. What Maeseneer calls the 'phantasmagoric anthropology' (2003b: 383) that sustained angelology has, to some extent, relocated to UFOlogy. See Appleyard 2006.