THE DEBATE OVER THE CORPOREALITY OF DEMONS

IN ENGLAND, c. 1670-1700

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According to Walter Stephens, witch-theorists in the fifteenth century developed the witchcraft belief of demon copulation in order to prove the existence of demons and therefore the existence of God. In England, during the mid-seventeenth century, Cartesian and materialist philosophies spread. These new philosophies stated there was nothing in the world but corporeal substances, and these substances had to conform to natural law. This, the philosophers argued, meant witchcraft was impossible. Certain other philosophers believed a denial of any incorporeal substance would lead to atheism, and so used witchcraft as proof of incorporeal spirits to refute what they felt was a growing atheism in the world.

By examining this debate we can better understand the decline of witchcraft. This debate between corporeal and incorporeal was part of the larger debate over the existence of witchcraft. It occurred at a time in England when the persecution of witches was declining. Using witchcraft as proof of incorporeal substances was one of the last uses of witchcraft before it disappeared as a valid belief. Therefore, a better understanding of this debate adds to a better understanding of witchcraft during its decline.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

During the European witch-hunts, people, usually rural and female, were accused of causing *malificium*, or harmful magic. Their fellow members of the lower orders of society commonly made this allegation. *Malificium* was a main concern for early modern Europeans, although the social and political elites more likely believed witches to be criminals of a much different nature. For those who theorized about witches, the crime of witchcraft was diabolic, i.e. the witches were agents of Satan. The witch theorists studied and contributed to what is known as demonolatry, and a large part of this field of study included a belief in the corporeality of demons. Witch theorists proved the nature of demons in different ways and for different reasons. In England, even after people were no longer executed legally for the crime of witchcraft, believers in witchcraft continued to write on demonolatry and used the belief in demons to prove to skeptics, atheists, and so-called Sadducees that God existed.

This thesis explores a debate which occurred in England during the late seventeenth century. The debate was over whether demons were corporeal or incorporeal. Believers in witchcraft claimed that witches provided proof of demons and those demons were incorporeal substances that could affect the temporal world. Skeptics and nonbelievers in witchcraft claimed that demons were corporeal, which meant the demons must follow the laws of nature, and therefore were unable to perform the feats attributed to them. Other skeptics and nonbelievers claimed that demons were incorporeal but unable to affect the temporal world. This debate is part of the larger movement occurring in Europe that some historians have termed the disenchantment of the world.¹ This disenchantment refers to the gradual replacement of

superstitious beliefs with more rational thinking. However, the terms superstitious and rational are anachronistic for this period. During the debate over spirit corporeality, those participating in the debate were each arguing that their arguments were rational and the opposing view was superstitious, i.e. what beliefs were orthodox and what beliefs were heterodox. By examining witchcraft and how demon corporeality fit into witchcraft beliefs, this thesis adds to the larger study of the decline of witchcraft and related magical beliefs.

The European witch-hunts began in the early fifteenth century, though large witch trials did not become the norm until after 1560. The largest witch-hunts before 1560 were in the duchies of Savoy, Valais, and Dauphine with an estimate of 500 victims in each of these areas. There may have been a hunt in the Duchy of Milan between 1480 and 1520 that claimed 2,000 victims, but this number is not certain. The witch-hunts cannot be described as a continuous hunt, but rather a series of hunts in various areas claiming differing amounts of victims. But if a generality can be made for the witch-hunts, it would be that there were two separate campaigns. There were geographically limited campaigns with fewer victims in the fifteenth century and widespread, more intense, campaigns in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Most witch-hunts began to die out between the years 1675 to 1750. It was during the first campaigns that a large number of witch treatises appeared that would help form the witch beliefs in the second wave of campaigns. During the second campaigns, perhaps as much as 75 percent of the witchcraft prosecutions took place in what is now Germany, France, Switzerland, and the Low Countries. These areas contained approximately one half of the European population.

Nicolson, 1971), 786-794; both historians are referring to the work by Max Weber, The Sociology of Religion.


Central to the witch-hunts was a fantasy about a society of witches that threatened Christian society and participated in abominable practices. Norman Cohn describes this fantasy as the witch stereotype, which consisted of renouncing the Christian faith, attending the sabbat to worship (as well as copulate with) the Devil and have orgies, practicing cannibalism and infanticide, and causing harmful magic. This stereotype can be traced back to antiquity in the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire. Through the centuries, the fantasy changed and applied to various groups until finally becoming the witch stereotype in the fifteenth century. The Romans believed Christians met at night to have incestuous orgies and participate in infanticidal cannibalism. As Christian theology was formulated, Satan and his demons became central figures in its dogma as well as in the witch stereotype later on. In the Middle Ages, inquisitors believed heretical sects such as the Waldensians and Fraticelli participated in the fantasy. In the early fourteenth century, King Phillip the Fair of France used the stereotype to have the Knights Templar arrested in order to seize their property. The confessions of the knights included denial of Jesus, the worship of Satan, and homosexual (instead of incestuous) orgies. These confessions added the novel feature of copulation with demons to the stereotype. For the *malificium* aspect of the stereotype, one has only to look to the ritual magic of the fourteenth century. Educated men who believed they could invoke and control demons performed ritual magic. Eventually, the view of ritual magic changed from controlling demons to demons controlling the practitioner. Accusations against those persecuted were for both worshipping demons and using the demons to perform *malificium*.4

New legal procedures adopted in Europe between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries made the witch-hunts possible. These new procedures were the inquisitorial system, the right to

use torture in witchcraft cases, and placing witchcraft cases under the jurisdiction of secular courts. The inquisitorial procedure’s law of proof required either two eyewitnesses to the crime or the accused’s confession for conviction. Because the crime of witchcraft was impossible to prove through eyewitnesses, courts relied solely on confessions. The use, or merely the threat, of torture made the acquisition of the confessions possible. Torture and leading questions allowed inquisitors to confirm the witch stereotype through confessions, increased the likelihood of the witches’ convictions, and increased the chances of the witch naming alleged accomplices. The naming of other witches in confessions relates directly to the witch stereotype of attending the sabbat. The accused named people allegedly seen at the sabbat practicing witchcraft. Witchcraft crimes coming under the jurisdiction of secular courts allowed lay officials to locate, arrest, and execute witches on the basis of secular law.⁵

According to Walter Stephens, witch theorists promulgated the belief that witches copulated with demons, along with other beliefs such as using the Eucharist to create their *maleficium*. The witch theorists used these beliefs to bolster their own beliefs in Catholic dogma. They achieved a strengthening of their beliefs in this way by proving the negative. Copulation with demons proved their corporeality through carnal knowledge, which by proving *their* existence proved the existence of God.⁶

However, the belief in the corporeality of demons has not been a constant in Christian history. In the first three centuries of the Christian era, it was assumed that demons were corporeal due to the church fathers’ interpretation of the fall of the angels as a sexual offence. Even when subsequent theologians saw this offence as stemming from pride, they did not

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question the corporeality of demons. In the seventh century, Gregory the Great, in *Moralia in Job*, asks “why humanity should eventually be forgiven its transgression while demons never would be,” and his explanation begins with the disembodiment of demons. For Gregory, demons are spirits and do not “bear the infirmity of flesh and were therefore not vulnerable in the same way as Adam and his heirs.” But even at this point, a demon’s incorporeality is only relative since it is spirit only as compared to man, yet as compared to God it is corporeal.  

In the thirteenth century, when theologians were still concerned with the plight of demons, demons became completely incorporeal. Now their lack of a body did not make the sin of their fall unforgivable, but instead prevented them from performing penance for their sin. Such theologians as Caesarius of Heisterbach and Stephen of Bourbon developed this belief in their texts involving demons speaking through the medium of possessed persons. The demons admit that they would perform intense penance to get back into heaven but are unable to perform penance due to their incorporeality. For theologians, demons remain incorporeal until the fifteenth century with the publishing of the *Malleus Maleficarum* (The Hammer of Witches, 1486).  

The transition from incorporeal to corporeal was not so abrupt. During the Middle Ages, concern grew over the issue of demonic possession. This concern brought forth writings on anatomy to explain the predominance of women possessed by demons and how this possession occurred. Demonic possession primarily affected women according to medieval physiology, where all of creation was formed by the four elements- fire, air, water, and earth (in descending order from the most immaterial, and therefore noblest). These elements were present in some

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8 Ibid, Chap. 6.
combination in the human body, where the four humors carried them. Yellow bile was predominately fire, blood was air, phlegm was water, and black bile was earth. In the medieval mind, a mixture of yellow bile and blood characterized men, associated with fire and air, the two nobler elements. Women were characterized by phlegm and black bile, or water and earth, the baser elements.

Theologians used this physiology to explain why and how women were the more likely to be possessed by demons. Because a woman’s dominate elements were water and earth, she was considered colder, a sign of moral lacking, and also moist, which made her more impressionable. In this manner, the humors made her more vulnerable to demonic possession. But the humors also caused her physical body to become susceptible as well. Coolness and moistness caused the female body to be more porous, or open, for the demon to enter. Albertus Magnus argued that spirits had very fine bodies and needed physical passages to enter the body, which the porous bodies of women provided. As this type of thinking persisted, so did the belief in the materiality of spirits. By the thirteenth century, not only did the spirits’ fine bodies need porous bodies to enter, they also needed empty spaces, or caverns, to reside in the body. For demons, this open space in the body was usually the bowels, while the heart was reserved for God alone.9 In this way, debate over demonic possession became a step towards the corporeality of demons. Demons were given “fine bodies” to explain why a woman’s physiology made her more likely to be possessed, which in turn caused the demons to need space within the body to inhabit. The demon needed open space within the body because the demon was no longer incorporeal.

Possession cases involved an important question of whether the possession was divine or diabolic. With Johannes Nider’s work, Formicarius, a new option became available: the witch.

Like the demonically possessed, witches were also surrounded by demonic forces that invaded their bodies and controlled their actions. What made the witch different was that she freely yielded to the spirits and worked along with them as part of a demonic conspiracy. Nider discusses Joan of Arc as an example of this new choice. At her trial, the judges wondered “what spirit she was ruled by,” that is, was she divinely or demonically possessed. In the end, she confessed to having “a familiar angel from God,” which was judged to be an evil spirit. The interpretation of this spirit as evil transformed Joan of Arc into a witch.10

In England, the legal system was different from that on the continent. Rather than Roman law, England had common law and trials were by jury with, hopefully, an experienced, centrally appointed judge. Courts did not employ torture to obtain evidence in criminal cases (except in cases of treason until the reign of Charles I and where the Privy Council issued a writ), though the procedures used to detect witchcraft could arguably be considered torture. These aspects of the legal system are key factors in the relatively lesser number of witches executed in England.11 Another factor minimizing witchcraft executions in England was the three Parliamentary Witchcraft Acts in 1542 (repealed in 1547), 1563 (repealed in 1604), and 1604 (repealed in 1736). The Witchcraft Act of 1542 made *malificium* and the conjuring of spirits a felony, if the conjuring of spirits resulted in harmful actions or was used to find stolen or lost goods. This Act did not make witchcraft a diabolic crime, as it was on the Continent, but rather a crime against the community. Conjuring spirits to find lost or stolen goods was not in itself harmful, but it was most likely considered a crime because it was thought to be fraudulent. The second witchcraft statute made the invocation of evil spirits a felony, no matter what the purpose.

10 Ibid, 318-319.
Yet witchcraft was only punishable by death if it caused the death of a human, with one year in prison if no death was caused. This still did not connect witchcraft to the diabolic, and it was not until the final statute of 1604 that it was deemed a capital offense to “consult, covenant with, entertain, employ, feed, or reward any evil and wicked spirit to or for any intent or purpose.” Despite being the closest that English law would ever come to the witch theories of the Continent, the Witchcraft Act of 1604 still implied the possibility that magic could be performed, with harmful intent or not, without any pact made with the Devil.12

English witch theorists used demons, whose existence was proven through witchcraft and the occult, in order to prove the existence of God. However, in East Anglia between 1645 and 1647, when England experienced its greatest witch-hunt, with approximately 200 executions in a six-month period,13 the corporeality of demons served to justify the witch-hunt. Two men, Mathew Hopkins and John Stearne, instigated this witch-hunt. According to James Sharpe, there seems to have been no other motivation behind Hopkins’ and Stearne’s hunt besides a “major concern…with the eradication of witches.”14 Walter Stephens, on the other hand, believes these witch finders’ technique of sitting the accused on a stool for long periods of time without food in the hope that their familiars would appear simply for proof seems naïve. Rather, this much effort for a view of a demon in corporeal form, as familiars are, demonstrates a desire in the witch finders for genuine proof of their beliefs.15 Witch theorists used the confessions from the Hopkins’ trials later in the century to prove the existence of God.

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12 Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, 525-527.
13 Sharpe, Instruments of Darkness, 130.
14 Ibid, 142.
15 Stephens, Demon Lovers, 104-105.
Hopkins’ and Stearne’s witch-hunt occurred during the English Civil War. King Charles I was dealing with a Calvinist rebellion and was forced him to call Parliament to raise money for the first time in eleven years. He met opposition from Puritan zealots and was eventually forced to leave London and raise an army in Nottingham. The war was fraught with religious ideology, and for the Puritans involved in Parliament’s camp, the war signaled the end times and the king was an agent of the Antichrist. Stories of omens and prophecies abounded, causing an atmosphere ripe for witch-hunts. By July 1645, some believed witches were not only sending their familiars to help the king’s army, but were actually making up large regiments of it. While Royalist papers used similes and metaphors to describe the opposition, Puritans believed executing witches was as much a part of the war effort as enlisting as a soldier.

Though Hopkins and Stearne instigated the witch-hunt, they were not the sole catalysts. In 1626, when Charles I became king, most witch trials ended in acquittal due to “exposure of the accuser as a fraud; insufficient evidence; or a natural medical explanation.” Thus in 1645, when the majority of those conducting trials were Puritan, those suspected of witchcraft decades earlier became more likely to be charged and executed. The location of the hunts was also a factor in their success. Since the first Witchcraft Act in 1542, Essex (where Hopkins and Stearne began their hunt) had already conducted more witch trials than any other region in England. By 1644, the Essex courts already tried 180 suspects of witchcraft with the majority found guilty of the crime. It was also in these eastern counties that William Dowsing began his work. Dowsing was a Puritan yeoman commissioned by the Earl of Manchester to purge the churches of East Anglia of religious idols. These idols included “altar rails, candlesticks and crucifixes.”

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17 Ibid, 149-150.
18 Ibid, 32.
area Dowsing performed these purges often experienced “spontaneous outbursts of iconoclasm” where “Catholics were attacked and their property destroyed.” He had previously visited most of the towns that welcomed Hopkins or Stearne and it is no coincidence that a village desiring images destroyed would also be prone to make accusations of witchcraft. Idolatry and witchcraft are closely related in the Bible in Deuteronomy, Chronicles, Micah, and the Book of Revelations.19

Walter Stephens’ hypothesis on witchcraft and anxieties is applicable to the witch-hunts that occurred in areas recently visited by the iconoclast. Stephens suggests that during the early Reformation both Protestant and Catholic communities vented their anxieties by means of polemics against an outside enemy. Witchcraft persecution declined during the early Reformation, but once attempts of reunification failed and Catholic and Protestant areas were firmly established, persecutions recommenced in Europe. The denominations still had anxieties, but, without an outside enemy, were forced to look within the community, where they found witches.20 A similar phenomenon could have occurred in East Anglia. After Dowsing destroyed the idols of the outside Catholic enemy, the anxieties of the villagers remained. The villagers then vented these anxieties by accusing their neighbors of witchcraft.

While there is no evidence that either Hopkins or Stearne read witchcraft treatises from the Continent, their belief in diabolic witchcraft was similar to those of Continental witch theorists. Yet both men claim their knowledge of witchcraft came solely from experience and scripture.21 Their first experience with witchcraft occurred at the trial of Elizabeth Clarke in

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19 Ibid, 24-26; On areas of witch-hunting previously visited by Dowsing, see 82, 101, 182-183.
20 Stephens, Demon Lovers, 100-101.
Manningtree, whom they discovered to have teats, or the witches’ marks, on her body. Familiars visited her while Hopkins and Stearne watched. She confessed to copulating with the Devil and being part of a witches’ coven, i.e. she met with other witches at a sabbat. Before leaving Essex on their mission against witches, Hopkins and Stearne accused thirty-three witches they believed to be part of this coven. They also accused these witches of entertaining familiars and copulating with evil spirits.22

Hopkins and Stearne cite biblical verses used previously in many witch treatises. Hopkins had printed on the title page of his treatise “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live, (Exod. 22. 18).”23 Stearne uses more biblical citations than Hopkins because his treatise concerns witchcraft in general. Stearne did not simply refute objections to the methods he and Hopkins employed to uncover witches. Stearne cites Deut. 18. 10,11,12 for “the lawes that God himselfe hath made against them,” as well as Exod. 7, 2 Tim. 3.8, Dan. 2.5.7, Isa. 47.12, Numb. 22, King. 9.22, 2 Chron. 33.6, and Eze. 21.21 as proof that witches exist.24 More relevant is his use of Sam. 28 7.1, where Saul says “Seeke one out, a woman that hath a familiar spirit.”25 A more modern bible translates this verse as Saul saying, “Seek out for me a woman who is a medium.”26 A bible published in 1611 translates the verse as Stearne does with the woman possessing a familiar spirit instead of simply being a medium.27 Stearne’s use of a biblical passage involving familiar spirits was not the cause of a belief in familiars, but it helped strengthened such a belief.

23 Hopkins, The Discovery of Witches, title page.
24 Stearne, A Confirmation and Discovery of Witch-craft, 3-4.
25 Ibid, 10.
The Hopkins’ trials are considered by many historians to be Continental in character, i.e. the predominantly diabolic nature of the crime. The cause of the diabolic aspects of witchcraft in the Hopkins’ trials is related to Hopkins’ and Stearne’s involvement, which is evident in their belief that any harm the witch is accused of performing had a natural cause. Hopkins explains that Satan, who is “above 6,000 years” and therefore “must needs be the best Scholar in all knowledges of arts and tongues and so have the best skill in Physicke, judgment in Physiognomie, and knowledge of what disease is reigning or predominant in this or that mans body, (and so for cattell too).” Satan used this knowledge to trick the witch into entering into a covenant with him in exchange for his promise to kill certain people. “Next newes is heard the partie is dead, he [Satan] comes to the witch, and gets a world of reverence, credence and respect for his power and activeness, when and indeed the disease kills the party, not the Witch, nor the Devill.” The only act considered criminal was the pact made with Satan, because, according to Hopkins’ statement, neither the witch nor Satan has actually had any effect on the temporal world.

Stearne also makes the pact the focus of the confessions as, for example, when he recounts the interrogation of Anne Randall of Lauenham in Suffolk: “she had confessed the Covenant, for still you must remember, that is first done, before the Devill, or their Familiars, or Impes, act, or doe any thing.” While Stearne believes the pact made with the Devil is the crime, he is not refuting the view that the familiars are still capable of causing malificia. While there is a slight difference between the two men’s theories (Hopkins does not believe in malificia while Stearne believes the familiars can cause malificia), both view the greatest crime to be worshipping the Devil. Stearne makes this view clear from the beginning of his treatise when he

29 Stearne, A Confirmation and Discovery of Witch-craft, 22.
states that “Witches worship Devills…and they do it not to stackes and stones, and so mediately to the Devill, as other Idolaters doe, but immediately to the Devill himfelfe, and therefore the greatest Idolaters that can be; and are not they more worthy of death.”

It is because of this demonizing of the crime of witchcraft that Satan becomes such a standard character in the confessions. Without Satan there is no crime, whether because the pact made with Satan is the only crime, as Hopkins believes, or because the crime of malificia cannot be committed without being in league with Satan, as Stearne believes. Thus, the accused must include the Devil in the confession, as did Joane Wallis of Keyston, in Huntingtonshire, when she “confessed the Devill came to her in the likenes of a man, in blackish clothing, but [with] cloven feet…and [had] the use of her body.” There are other confessions from the Hopkins’ trials in which the accused admitted to sexual relations with the Devil. For witch theorists, carnal knowledge is the ultimate proof that Satan exists and is involved in witchcraft. Recollectio casus (1460), a document that sought to prove that heretical sects were in league with the Devil, states: “An assertion [accusation] is already certain when based on sight; more certain when based on hearing and sight; but it is most certain and vehement and of greatest possible weight when based on touch-particularly that of carnal embraces-along with sight and hearing.”

Hopkins and Stearne believed witches were deserving of death because witches worshipped Satan, and therefore a witch’s carnal knowledge of Satan was important for the witch-finders because it was ultimate proof that Satan exists and was the major component of witchcraft. Without the Devil’s involvement in the confessions, Hopkins and Stearne were left with only the crime of malificia, and the witch-hunts would no doubt not have taken as many

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30 Ibid, Preface, i-ii.
32 Recollectio casus, 175-176, as quoted in Stephens, Demon Lovers, 21.
victims. Not all of the confessions Stearne quotes contain the crime of *malificia*, but they all contain the pact with the Devil. While he may have omitted *malificia* to focus on the pact, it is more likely that many of the accused were suspected of witchcraft only because they were named in a previous witch’s confession as attending the sabbat. John Wynick in Tilbrooke confessed to a meeting of “above twenty at one time”; Anne Leech in Chelmsford confessed to something resembling a sabbat where “about twenty eight” were said to have gathered. Stearne exaggerated that there were approximately two hundred witches executed in Chelmsford and the surrounding area. A belief in the sabbat caused a larger witch-hunt because it implied that the witch in custody was not the only witch, but was part of a larger society of witches that needed to be sought out.

The witch-hunt of Hopkins and Stearne was in part possible because of the English Civil War. Yet it ended five years before the end of war, in 1647. The war was a catalyst for the witch-hunt because of the disruption it caused in governmental institutions, thus allowing for men like Hopkins and Stearne to gain authority. The cost of war for villages like those in East Anglia helped bring an end to witch-hunts, which were expensive. Hopkins claimed he only charged 20 shillings “a town and doth sometimes ride 20. miles for that, and hath no more for all his charges thither and back again (and it may be stayes a weeke there) and finde thee 3. or 4. witches, or if it be but one, cheap enough, and this is the great summe he takes to maintaine his Companie with 3. horses.” Yet according to the records of towns he visited, his payment was usually a flat fee of two pounds. (The village of Stowmarket paid Hopkins twenty-three pounds for finding many witches there.) This fee did not include payments for witch searchers and

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33 Stearne, *A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft*, 11.
witch watchers (those who searched a witch’s body for marks and those who sat up with the witch to see if her familiars visited). In Bury St. Edmunds, the witch searcher, Mary Phillips, was paid twenty shillings and the witch watchers were paid thirteen shillings and ten pence. Additionally, there were expenses for the trial, burying the dead, building gallows, and paying the executioner. The witch-hunt cost the town of Aldeburgh forty pounds.

Since those accused usually derived most of their income from begging, seizer of their property could not pay for the witch-hunts. Inhabitants of the town were taxed to pay for the hunts. Copdock, Stowmarket, Athelington, Horham, and Brandeston all experienced resistance to extra taxation to pay for their witch-hunts. The towns eventually paid off the debt, but not without first being threatened with legal action, i.e. defaulters would be taken to jail to wait for the assize judges. These expenses only added to an already unbearable situation where towns were being taxed more than usual for the war and villages were suffering through outbreaks of plague and smallpox. Town records indicate the collection of taxes for repairing firearms, building gun carriages, and caring for wounded soldiers. The Puritans viewed the war, the diseases, and the witch-hunts as all connected phenomena due to the religious atmosphere in which they occurred. In the minds of the Puritans in these towns, war, disease and witches were all signs of the end times and God’s wrath. People saw war, poverty, and diseases resulting from witchcraft. Witch-hunting could increase the poverty, which made the war and diseases more unbearable. Just as witch-persecution seemed to be the only course of action available (as the people were unable to control war, disease, and poverty) putting a stop to the hunts was also the only remedy they had control over. In this way, England’s great witch-hunt came to an end, but

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37 Ibid, 184.
38 Ibid, 182, 187.
not because the belief in witchcraft disappeared. The witch-hunts simply became too much a strain on communities.

The witch-hunt was over, but the belief in witchcraft persisted. England continued to experience witch trials, though none would have the number of victims as did the hunts under Hopkins and Stearne. By the 1680s, there were no more legal executions of witches. The cessation was primarily due to a growing skepticism among both judges and writers. But some authors continued to believe in witchcraft and wrote collections of stories about witches and the occult. These authors believed certain trends in thinking existed that would inevitably lead to atheism. They, therefore, used witchcraft beliefs to prove the existence of God.

The following chapters will discuss witchcraft and the belief in the corporeality of demons in England. Chapter one will discuss the belief in familiar spirits, from their appearance in Continental witch treatises and trials to their role as animals in English demonolatry. Chapter two concentrates on the period c.a. 1650 to 1700. This chapter analyzes the English intellectual and cultural atmosphere as it pertains to witchcraft and the debate over demon corporeality in England. Chapter three focuses on individual witchcraft thinkers between c.a. 1670 to 1700, and will analyze the debate between the believers and the skeptics. The conclusion of this thesis identifies the debates’ importance on demon corporeality for English intellectuals, Christianity, and the continued belief in witchcraft and magic.
CHAPTER 2
FAMILIAR SPIRITS

The debate over demons from the beginnings of Christianity to the Middle Ages has been briefly discussed in the introduction. During the European witch-hunts, witch theorists firmly believed demons to have corporeal bodies, which made it possible for the demons to copulate with witches. As Walter Stephens points out, “sexual relations do imply the acquisition of knowledge as well as pleasure. Sex is the most intense and intimate possible form of interpersonal contact.”

By taking the witch’s confession of demon copulation, the witch theorist had material proof that demons exist. But in some confessions, particularly those in England, the corporeality of demons manifested itself in another way. Confessions involving demons in animal form, known as familiars, proved demon corporeality in England. The belief in animal familiars was not established in learned demonolatry at the beginnings of the witch-hunts because it did not come from above, but from below, i.e. the animal familiar was a belief of the common people that gradually made its way into learned demonolatry.

Heinrich Kramer’s Malleus Maleficarum (1486) was an influential work on witchcraft that many witch theorists and witch hunters consulted. Historians have argued that the book’s republishing was the cause of the larger witch-hunts, though it is more likely the other way around, i.e. the larger witch-hunts caused a demand for republications. In either case, the Malleus represents contemporary demonolatry, but it did not include familiars or the witches’ or Devil’s mark because Kramer wrote during the early stages of the witch-hunts. Theory tended to lag behind the actual trials. While Kramer was himself an inquisitor, most witch theorists had

39 Stephens, Demon Lovers, 16.
40 Behringer, Witches and Witch-Hunts, 74-77.
no experience with witch trials. Some aspects of the witch-hunts appeared more in the trials than in the treatises.42

Early witchcraft treatises did not include animal familiars because this aspect was folkloric and came into demonolatry from popular culture. Ideas of “infanticidal witch-cats,” where witches sent cats or changed themselves into cats to kill babies, illustrate familiar spirits as a folkloric belief. This belief existed as early as the fifteenth century in Europe and was recorded by the witch theorist Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who recorded such beliefs as folklore and did not accept them.43 For some witch theorists, the familiar gradually became part of demonolatry. In Francesco Maria Guazzo’s *Compendium Maleficarum* (1608), the beginnings of a belief in familiar spirits is detectable. He describes beliefs in witches having individual demons and some beliefs connecting animals and demons, but he does not include animal familiars. This treatise is similar to the *Malleus Maleficarum*, with questions, answers, and examples dealing with different facets of witchcraft.

When discussing the pact witches made with the Devil, Guazzo mentions the Devil’s mark, which are in the shape of animals: “at times it is like the footprint of a hare, sometimes like that of a toad or a spider or a dog or a dormouse.”44 Guazzo writes that the witches sit at tables at the sabbats to eat, “each…next to his own Familiar Spirit; sometimes the witches on one side, and the demons opposite them.” And once “the banquet is done each demon takes by the hand the disciple under his guardianships.”45 While these familiar spirits are not pet demons in animal form, as they would later become in England, the belief in witches having their own

42 Ibid, 243.
personal demon is present in *The Compendium Malificarum*.

Guazzo states that “the demon manifests himself in many various forms of specters, such as dogs, cats, goats, oxen, men, women, or a horned owl.” Yet he does not describe these demons as being the witches’ familiars in these forms. In his last chapter of the second book, “Of superstitious folk,” Guazzo states that Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa “at the point of death…drove from him his dog, a familiar, saying: ‘Depart evil beast! You have destroyed me’.” Yet in the footnote, Guazzo says that Weyer, a student of Agrippa who wrote against witchcraft, “lived for some years in daily attendance upon Agrippa, and the black dog; ‘Monsieur,’ …was a perfectly innocent animal.” It seems that while Guazzo was willing to include many aspects similar to the creature familiar, he still considered the animal familiar, as it became known in English demonolatry, to be superstitious.

These beliefs in animal familiars did not remain simply folkloric beliefs. The Spanish Inquisition uncovered a witch sect in Zugarramurdi in the Basque Country in the early seventeenth century. Two inquisitors, Alonso Becerra Hoguin and Juan Valle Alvarado, took the confessions of six witches. The precise dates of the confessions are unknown, though due to certain Inquisitorial records, it is safely assumed they occurred before September 4, 1609. These confessions included basic witchcraft beliefs such as the sabbat, using unguents to fly to the sabbat, the Devil attending the sabbat to be worshipped, and the denial of faith to enter the sect.

The difference between these confessions and those in other European witch-hunts was the presence of familiar spirits in the form of toads. The inquisitors accepted the witches’

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46 Ibid, 73.
confessions as fact instead of folklore (perhaps due to the consistency of the confessions). The witches did not have teats where the familiar fed, as in England, and the familiars did not come in any form other than a toad. The closest confession involving a toad familiar to the English animal familiars was from Beltrana de la Fargua, who claimed to breast-feed her toad. But all six confessions included a toad with the toads having clothing. Most of the confessions included the color in which the toads were dressed. The witches did not claim to have any magical powers of their own besides the ability to transform into various animals. Instead, the witches performed their *malificium* through the help of demons or the Devil. Their toads were given to them as advisors. If the witches did not feed their toads on “maize, bread, and wine…[the toads] complained and threatened to tell the Devil.” The only magical element the toads possessed was that they made the flight to the sabbat possible. The witches had to whip the toad after feeding it until it swelled up. The witch would then step on it to make a greenish-black excrement burst out of both ends of the toad. Witches used this excrement as the salve that allowed them to fly to the sabbats. At the sabbats, the witches confessed that there were herds of toads present. Some of the witches claimed these were the dressed toads while others claimed they were different toads collected by the witches to be made into poison. The toad familiars of Zugarramurdi were limited to the Basque Country witch-hunts.

In England the animal familiars were most prevalent. Familiars, sometimes called imps by witch theorists and in confessions, first appeared in England in 1510 with the trial of John Steward, who kept three familiars in the shape of bumblebees and allowed them to suck blood from his finger. In 1566, Elizabeth Frauncis confessed that her grandmother gave her a

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49 Ibid, 155.
50 Ibid, 73-79.
familiar spirit in the form of a “white-spotted cat” named Satan. The cat performed tasks for her and was rewarded each time “with a drop of her blood.” She also “killed her child and lamed her husband by means of a toad.” Elizabeth eventually gave the cat to Agnes Waterhouse, “with instructions for its treatment.” Agnes confessed to using the cat and rewarding it each time with “a chicken [and] with a drop of [her] blood.” She also confessed to turning “the cat into a toad by praying ‘in the name of the father, the sonne, and the holy ghost’.” During the trial, Agnes’ eighteen-year-old daughter, Joan, also made a confession. Joan claimed to have seen her mother carrying “the thing” in the form of a toad in her hands. Joan also confessed to have used the familiar, this time in the form of a dog, “to frighten a girl named Anges Browne.” Agnes Browne, aged 12, was also questioned and claimed to have been frightened by a creature “like a black dog with a face like an ape, a short tail, a chain and a silver whistle about his neck, [and] a pair of horns on his head.”

In the trials of Elizabeth Frauncis and Agnes Waterhouse, there was no mention of where the familiar originated, except that Elizabeth’s grandmother gave it to her and that Elizabeth passed it on to Agnes. Agnes’ daughter, Joan, then used it. The belief in sabbats was not popular in English witch trials. Because familiars could be passed on to others, whether intentionally or not, one accusation could lead to the discovery of other witches. On the Continent, the naming of other witches at sabbats in confessions was a major cause for a witch-hunt to take larger numbers of victims. Walter Stephens gives as a reason inquisitors searched for more witches was that “fantasies of the Sabbat [were] driven by the satisfaction of discovering human enemies.”

If witch-hunters and judges in England also received satisfaction from finding these enemies, then the passing of familiars from one witch to another provided

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them a cause for larger-scale witch-hunts. The trials of Elizabeth Frauncis and Agnes Waterhouse illustrate how confessions of passing a familiar onto another person would lead to interrogations of other people. By the nineteenth century, it was still believed witchcraft could be passed on to others through familiars or books of magic.  

Just as Elizabeth received her familiar from her grandmother, the story she told was most likely also from previous generations. As Diane Purkiss points out in her study of fairy stories and witchcraft in Scotland, “If you are asked about what you do not know, you talk about what you do know.” A woman’s confession in a witch trial was not simply answering the questions of her interrogator. It was probably the only time in her life she had the audience of someone with such authority. She may repeat a story she had been told for entertainment before, but fitted by her or the interrogator for witchcraft.  

To suggest that the familiars were originally the “dwarves, fairies, trolls, kobolds, or other small spirits of northern folklore” that the Church interpreted as minor demons is not a new point among witchcraft historians. For the most part, folk stories were not written down and only survive through an oral tradition. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, to trace a folk story in order to discern how well known it was. Because the familiars are products of folklore, it is the confessions involving them that provide the historian with a diluted written folk story.

An example of what is most likely folklore mixed with learned demonolatry can be seen in the confession of John Walsh of Netherbury in 1566. Walsh had been taught “physic and surgery” by “Sir Robert Draiton (a papish priest).” Walsh’s confession consists of information

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about fairies and what he had learned in a book from his late master. What he says of fairies is basic fairy lore, such as that they can only be talked to “on hills between the hours of twelve and one by day or night.” Walsh describes the rituals he learned either from his master or the book (the confession is not clear whether Walsh received his knowledge from the book or Sir Draiton) for the raising of “the familiar spirite, of whom he would then aske for any thing stolen.” The rituals he describes, such as using candles and drawing circles, were similar to the learned magic of medieval court magicians. In the most interesting part of his confession, when compared to the confessions of the Basque Country witches, he describes the making of wax pictures for the purpose of \textit{malificia}. Among other parts of the ritual, the pictures must be “tempered all in water in which toads have been washed.” The pictures are burned or pricked to cause injury to the bewitched party, but for this to have any efficacy, witches must first “strike the toad with two withy spears on both sides of its head…[and] unless the toad swell he will not perform any evil act.”\footnote{Ewen, \textit{Witchcraft and Demonism}, 146-147. ; On fairy lore, see Purkiss, Diane. “\textit{Fairies and Incest in Scottish Witchcraft Stories},” 82 ; On medieval magicians, see Cohn, \textit{Europe’s Inner Demons}, 104.}

The whipping of toads to make them swell and perform magic is found in Walsh’s confession as well as those of the witches in Zugarramurdi. This is, to be sure, an odd belief and difficult to write off as a coincidence. A perceivable connection between the two was Sir Robert Draiton, Walsh’s teacher, who was reported to be a Catholic priest. But this does not seem enough to explain such an odd belief as whipping toads to cause them to swell and perform magic. It would be more likely that both Walsh and the Basque Country witches were familiar with folklore in which toads are used in such a way.

Animal familiars appeared infrequently among early English demonologists. Henry Holland, in \textit{A Treaties Against Witchcraft} (1590), only mentions the familiar by name once when
discussing the pact witches made “with the Devill, or a familiar (as they call him).” Holland regards the familiar not as a minor demon that assists the witch, but rather as another name witches have given to the Devil when describing the pact made with him. As for the familiar in the form of a creature, the most similar belief found in Holland’s work is when he discusses the witches’ journey to the sabbat and remarks that “they are carried away, and sometimes without oystment, upon a goate, or winged horse, or a broome, or a staffe, and sometimes without a staffe or any beaste.” Thus animal familiars were a common feature in witch trials as early as 1566. Holland failed to mention animal familiars because he was not using English witch trials as his source, but instead witch theorists on the Continent, such as Jean Bodin.

In *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* (1608), William Perkins includes familiars, but not to great extent. It is only when discussing how one can discern a witch that Perkins mentions the Devil’s mark. Yet he does not describe the mark in the context of familiar spirits, i.e. it is only a mark given to the witch by Satan and not a teat that the animal familiar sucks. Perkins does, however, mention animal familiars as providing sufficient evidence to convict a witch. His description of the manner in which Satan became a corporeal animal familiar was more important for the English witch theorists. Perkins describes this process as not simply “deluding the senses” but by “having gathered together fit matter, to joyne member to member, and to make a true bodie, either after the leknesse of man, or some other creature; and having so done, to enter into it, to move and stirre it up and downe, and therein visibly and

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59 Ibid, 40.
60 Ibid, 41.
sensibly to appeare unto man.”

Perkins spends more time discussing familiars and Satan’s ability to become corporeal because, four years before his book appeared, the Witchcraft Act of 1604 had been enacted. This law made criminal the entertaining of a familiar spirit for any purpose.

After the new law of 1604, animal familiars continued to appear in confessions at trials. Witch theorists such as Perkins included familiars in their witch treatises. With the instability during England’s Civil War, Hopkins and Stearne were able to help instigate England’s great witch-hunt, and with it came an abundance of source material pertaining to creature familiars and English demonolatry. The Hopkins’ trials illustrate how the learned and popular beliefs mixed to create the type of demonolatry characteristic to England. The association of witchcraft with the diabolic led to confessions of copulation with demons and to the signing of pacts with the Devil and sabbats, where the witches congregated and worshipped the Devil. But the majority of these trials dealt with witches keeping familiar spirits, or imps, and having a witches’ mark (teat) somewhere on their bodies. Of the 110 narratives from these witch trials, seventy-eight involves familiar spirits. The English believed that protuberances on witches’ body were marks or teats that their familiars sucked. Witch finders searched for these marks by pricking. They also kept the accused awake for days while watching for the familiars to appear. The marks constituted proof that the accused were indeed witches.

The witch-finders had not invented this method, but rather it was an outcome of the development of English medical studies. During the Lancashire trials in 1634, four accused women were brought to London to be inspected by the king’s own physician, William Harvey.

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64 Hopkins, *The Discovery of Witches*, 2-3
In this particular case, the judge acquitted the women after the physician reported that three of the women had no marks and those found on the fourth were, in his opinion, natural. However, this outcome, along with other medical studies, began to make English criminal law more inquisitorial. The investigation of suspected witches became more official with the introduction of professional witch-searchers and witch-watchers. It was not full inquisitorial procedure because jurors still decided the final verdict. Witchcraft trials were no longer determined on hearsay and rumor, but instead on material proof. The acquittal of the Lancashire witches due to a lack of teats (or marks believed to be natural) set a precedent in which teats believed to be unnatural were sufficient proof. The methods Hopkins and Stearne used provided this proof.

The diabolical aspects of the Hopkins’ trials were typical of most continental witch-hunts. While belief in sexual intercourse with demons can be found in early witch treatises such as the *Malleus Maleficarum*, this idea is rare in English witch beliefs. Ideas of witches keeping familiar spirits appeared outside of England “in the activities of elite magicians and sorcerers in the Middle Ages” and with the witches in the Basque Country. Yet these familiars were not believed to suck blood from the witches, as they did in England. By the end of King James I’s reign, the place where the familiar sucked the witches’ blood was more often thought to be located near the witches’ genitalia, and thus became linked to copulation with demons.

But where did this belief in familiars originate and how did it become such a mainstay in English demonolatry? The trial of Dame Alice Kyteler in Ireland in 1324 provides an example of how familiar spirits were a part of the learned magic practiced by some magicians in the Middle Ages. She was accused of keeping a demon as an incubus, which she had sexual relations with and “from whom she admitted that she received her wealth and whatever she owned.”

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interesting is the claim that “he appeared to her in the shape of a cat, sometimes in the shape of a
shaggy black dog, sometimes as a black man.”\textsuperscript{67} The widow Bush of Barton confessed that “the
Devill appeared to her in the shape of a young black man…and had the use of her body,” while
Anne Hammer in Suffolke admitted “the Devill in the likenesse of a black man us’d to come in at
the key hole, and to bed to her, and have the use of her body.”\textsuperscript{68} Animal familiars were more
common in confessions. Thus Susan Scot of Lauenbam had two familiars come as cats and dogs;
the Devil came to Anne Goodfellow of Woodford as a white cat; Anne Parker was visited by the
Devil “in the likenesse of a dun Dog.”\textsuperscript{69}

The Bible was another source for the belief in familiars. In 1 Samuel, Saul calls for a
woman (the Witch of Endor) with a familiar spirit. Perhaps witch interrogators used this verse
while questioning a supposed witch and thus the leading question that would cause the
confession involving familiars. However, this biblical verse does not explain why the familiars
would appear to the witch as animals nor does a theory of learned demonolatry forced onto the
confessor from above explain animal familiars.

Rather, the presence of animal familiars indicates a mix of both learned and popular
beliefs on witchcraft. The conformity of the confessions indicates leading questions were
involved in the interrogations. But it is also possible that the populace had demonological beliefs
of their own and the confessions were not entirely forced from above.\textsuperscript{70} It was common for the
different magical beliefs in the early modern period to be blurred in the popular mind. As Keith
Thomas points out, it was not atypical for Anne Baker, in 1619, to describe the four colors of

\textsuperscript{67} The Trial of Dame Alice Kyteler, 1324 in The Witchcraft Sourcebook, 41.
\textsuperscript{68} Stearne, A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft, 29, 32.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid, 30-31, 36.
\textsuperscript{70} Sharpe, Instruments of Darkness, 138.
planets when she discussed her notion of astrology. “[S]he had seen the blue planet strike one Thomas Fairebarne. Here ‘planets’ seem to have grown into familiars or evil spirits.”

The familiar spirit in the form of a creature was a creation of the uneducated, or popular, mind. English witch theorists may have accepted a belief in familiar spirits because it served the purpose of proving corporeal interaction with demons, which was the ultimate proof that Satan existed and was involved in the temporal world.

On the Continent, copulation with demons or the Devil tended to serve this purpose of ultimate proof. Since demon copulation is impossible, confessions involving sex with demons in Europe implies the use of torture or the threat of torture (in some cases, the accused may have also dreamed they had sex with a demon). The courts allowed torture in witch interrogations because the crime of witchcraft was a crimen exceptum (exceptional crime). This meant that the courts recognized witchcraft as a difficult crime to prove and therefore procedures such as requiring witnesses were rather unlikely, as witchcraft was a crime that one could not see. Although there were procedures to be followed in the application of torture in order to avoid fabricated confessions, officials largely ignored these rules. In England, torture was not used in witchcraft cases. But the presence of demon copulation in the confessions of the Hopkins’ trials indicates that forms of torture were applied (sitting the accused on a stool for days at a time to be watched, forced to stay awake, and pricking the body with a pin until the witches’ mark was found.) Confessions of demon copulation, while rare in England, appeared often in the Hopkins’ trials. Therefore, the interrogations in these trials were probably more intense than usual.

Except for the Hopkins’ trials, demonic copulation was not part of English demonolatry.

71 Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, 758.
The trials provide a collection of confessions involving familiar spirits. Familiar spirits were proof of demon corporeality in the same way as copulation with demons due to the belief that the familiars sucked blood from the teats, or witches’ marks, and that these marks could be found on the witch’s body. In a way, the familiar provided better proof of demon corporeality than demon copulation, since the teat acted as physical evidence that the witch had been sucked, while proof of copulation relied exclusively on the witch’s confession. Because the idea of the familiar spirit seems to have been a product of the popular mind, it is likely that the English witch theorists accepted this belief into their demonolatry. Familiars fulfilled the same requirement for witch theorists as demon copulation, i.e. physical interaction with demons, but because it was a belief commoners often freely offered, intense torture was not necessary to attain it.

This lack of intense torture allowed the introduction of familiars into English trial and demonolatry. The belief can be seen almost as a compromise. On the Continent, torture was more severe, making it easier for the inquisitors to obtain the confessions they wanted to hear. More specifically, they could obtain confessions in which the accused admitted to sexual relations with demons or the Devil. Animal familiars fit into learned demonolatry and were proof that demons had corporeal bodies if the Devil gave them to the witches and they sucked blood from the witch’s mark. Guazzo and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola discussed animal familiars, but only as superstition or folklore and not as learned demonolatry. These folkloric beliefs did not include any diabolic element and so were not useful to witch theorists.

In England, folklore about harmful magic with the use of a creature familiar mixed with diabolic elements to make the animal not simply a tool of the witch, but something of a gift from Satan to perform *malificia* and also to seal, or continually reseal, the covenant made with Satan by sucking blood from the witches’ marks. Such was the case of Meribell Bedford of Ratlesden,
who confessed that “[t]here came a black thing to her…which asked her to denie God, and Christ, and told her, if she would, she should never want, but should bee avenged of all her enemies, which she consented to; then she said, he had bloud of one of her little fingers, to seale the Covenant, which being done, she said, foure more came…These she confessed were at her command, to performe the Covenant…and did much harme.” Cherrie of Thrapton confessed to harmful magic, but without mentioning familiars. As the interrogation continued, he then admitted that the reason for his malificia was that “his Imps must be employed, else they would not let him be quiet, but torment him.” Finally, before his confession could be complete, Cherrie had to admit to “the sealing of the Covenant with the devil with his blood, to deny God and Christ, and to serve him the devil for revenge, with promise of freedom from hell-torments.”\textsuperscript{73}

These confessions exemplify the compromise made by English witch theorists in order to turn a belief of the common people into diabolism. The witch performed harmful magic with the help of her familiar, after first making a covenant with the Devil sealed with her blood. Harmful magic by means of a familiar came from below, while making a pact with Satan sealed with blood came from above.

Cherrie’s confession provides another insight into the popular belief in familiars, i.e. he had to perform malificia or else his familiars would torment him. Ellen Greenliefe’s familiar was said to have come to her in the form of a mole (though it was invisible to her interrogators) while she confessed “and tore her as she confessed, as if he would have torne her in pieces, because she confessed.” She related that her imp came to her one day in the shape of a rat “wishing to lame Ralph Roggards Horse and Mare.” Parson Lowis told how while he was watching ships sail “one of his three Impes…forthwith appeared to him, and asked him what hee

\textsuperscript{73} Stearne, \textit{A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft}, 26.
should doe, and he bade it goe and sinke such a Ship."\textsuperscript{74} In these confessions, the familiar was not only the means by which \textit{malificia} was performed, but also suggested the \textit{malificia} to the witch and attacked the accused for confessing. In this way accused witches were able to take a part of the blame away from themselves and put it on their familiars. While witch theorists, such as Hopkins and Stearne, viewed the familiar as a servant given to the witch to perform harmful magic in exchange for the pact, these confessions reveal that, for some of the accused, familiars had power over them. The purpose of a belief in a familiar spirit may have been to shift the blame from the accused to their familiars.

The Hopkins’ trials were the only witch-hunt to occur in England, and its large number of victims acted as a break on subsequent trials. The Hopkins’ trials provided much information on witch beliefs that influenced contemporaries and may have reinforced their own beliefs in witches. The diabolic beliefs of the learned combined with the folkloric beliefs of the populace to create an England filled with familiars. Hopkins and Stearne did not write their treatises in response to a skeptic of witchcraft, but rather to refute John Gaule, a Puritan minister who questioned their methods for detecting witches. Gaule believed that sabbats and actual signings of pacts with the Devil were simply papist superstitions. He did not, however, throw out beliefs of familiars and witches’ marks, but only left them as impossible to know for certain and therefore unreliable as evidence for a true conviction.\textsuperscript{75} Therefore, Stearne and Hopkins were not writing to convince their readers that God existed by proving the existence of the Devil through his involvement with witches, but were only defending their techniques in discovering witches.

However, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, English witch theorists,

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, 24,28.
\textsuperscript{75} John Gaule, \textit{Select Cases of Conscience touching Witches and Witchcrafts} (London, 1646), 57-65, 74-85.
such as Henry More, Joseph Glanville, George Sinclair, and others used beliefs similar to those held by Hopkins and Stearne to fight what they felt was a growing trend of atheism. Hopkins’ and Stearne’s books provided proof of God in the negative, i.e. demon copulation and familiar spirits showed the corporeality of demons, thus proving the existence of Satan, and therefore the existence of God. Even though Hopkins and Stearne were not attempting to prove the existence of God, the demonic nature of familiars confirmed by their witch-hunt would be used the next forty to fifty years to buttress proof of the existence of the Devil and of God.
CHAPTER 3
DECLINE IN WITCHCRAFT AND CHANGE IN COPOREALITY

This chapter’s focus is the legal and intellectual climate in which the witch theorists debated demonic corporeality, examining both the courts, where the common beliefs confronted the skeptical judges, and the learned circles, where changing ideals tore away at the cosmology in which witches existed. The next chapter will analyze debate over demonic corporeality circa 1670 to 1700, and how English witch theorists attempted to keep witch beliefs alive in learned circles during this period.

In the second half of the seventeenth century, the belief over the corporeality of demons changed. Natural philosophers propagated beliefs in atomism that denied the existence of any substance that was not corporeal. Some Christians feared a denial of the incorporeal could lead to a denial of God and replied with arguments to prove the existence of incorporeal substances. Witch theorists used witchcraft beliefs as evidence of incorporeal substances by proving demons without corporeal bodies were able to affect the physical world. At approximately the same time, beginning in the 1680s, witchcraft trials started to decline. Authors collected the surviving accounts of witchcraft and other supernatural beliefs to sort out those that could be explained by natural means and those that supported a belief in incorporeal beings. Controlling what constituted valid spirit testimony upheld the legitimacy of supernatural beliefs. 76

In the early 1680s, England witnessed its last legal execution for the crime of witchcraft. 77 This was not the end of witchcraft beliefs, or the end of witch trials. People still blamed witches for their misfortunes and brought witches to court. Alice Molland was the last

person executed for witchcraft in England at Devonshire in 1684. Jane Wenham was the last person convicted of witchcraft in 1712. The skeptical judge, Sir John Powell, granted Jane Wenham a reprieve, though the jury found her guilty. The last witchcraft trial in England occurred in 1717. In the witch trials that took place between 1680 and 1720, the diabolic aspects of English demonolatry remained. People continued to bring witches to trial but the accused rarely received a guilty verdict. The belief in witchcraft existed in certain circles but was considered either improvable or a nonexistent crime in others. Hopkins and Stearne were the only professional witch finders to have worked in England, other than a witch-pricker operating around 1650 in the Northeast. Therefore, the presence of English demonolatry in the last witchcraft trials in England pointed to either a witch theorist present at the trials or to the knowledge of English demonolatry. The amalgamation of learned and popular witchcraft beliefs in English demonolatry furthered the dispersion of witchcraft beliefs throughout England. Because witchcraft beliefs in England interwove with diabolism and religion at all social levels, witchcraft advocates feared that a dismissal of witch beliefs would lead to atheism.

Witch trials continued in the courts during the late seventeenth century, as did confessions and accusations of having animal familiars. In Surrey, at the trial of Joan Butts in March 1682, Elizabeth Burrige testified that a goose only she could see frightened her and stones were thrown at her and those she was with, though they could not see from where the stones came. At the sessions in Old Bailey in June of the same year, Jane Kent had “a Teat on her back, and unusual Holes behind her ears.” Both women were found not guilty. 78

In August 1682, in Bideford, the jury found Temperance Lloyd guilty of witchcraft and sentenced her to death. Anne Wakely searched her and testified that “in her secret parts” she

found “two teats, hanging nigh together like unto a piece of flesh that a child had suckt.” Grace Thomas claimed that six weeks earlier, “some thing in the shape of a magpie” flew to the window and Temperance said it was “the Black Man in the shape of a bird.” After Grace testified, Temperance confessed she “met the Devil in the shape of a black man, who tempted her to go to the house of Thomas Eastchurch to torment the body of Grace Thomas.” After eventually consenting to the Devil, “she saw a grey or braget cat enter the shop of Thomas Eastchurch.” She also confessed to allowing the Devil to suck “the teats in her secret parts” and described him as being “about the length of her arm and his eyes were very big.” Temperance then confessed to being able to take the form of a cat and a “red pig.”

At the same assizes, the jury found Susanna Edwards and Mary Trembles guilty of witchcraft and sentenced them to be executed along with Temperance Lloyd. Susanna confessed to meeting the Devil “in the shape of a gentleman appareled in black” who promised that she “should neither want for meat, drink, nor clothes” if she “would grant him one request.” Upon agreement, the Devil vanished but appeared again afterwards “in the shape of a little boy” which “did lie with her and did suck at her breast.” The Devil tempted her to kill Grace Barnes and appeared to her a second time “in the shape of a lion.” Susanna persuaded her servant, Mary Trembles, to become a witch and the Devil came to her, also in the shape of a lion, and “had carnal knowledge of her body and sucked her, causing her to cry out for the pain.” Both women confessed the ability to travel to other places, either “invincibly” or “in spirit,” though this did not refer to attending sabbats.

These court cases occurred in 1682, but only those accused of witchcraft in Bideford received a sentence of execution. Cases in the English judicial system depended on juries, not

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judges, for the outcomes. This aspect of the English judicial system caused both a relatively lesser number of witchcraft executions while causing trials and convictions to continue into the eighteenth century. There were fewer executions because there were no inquisitors actively searching for witches and bringing them to court. Yet the belief remained among the common people who continued to make accusations of witchcraft.81 In Surrey and Old Bailey, the only diabolic aspects of the trials were an invisible goose, stones being thrown from an unknown source, and teats. Yet, in Bideford, the diabolic aspects included copulation with the Devil.

Sir Francis North, who judged the trial of Temperance Lloyd and was present at the trial of Susanna Edwards and Mary Trembles, believed the diabolic aspect persuaded the jurors to condemn the women as witches. In a letter to the secretary of state, Sir Leoline Jenkins, North wrote, “Their descriptions of the sucking devils with saucer-eyes were so natural that the jury could not choose but believe them.” Judge North also appears to have been of the opinion that there were other explanations for the crime when he wrote, “some of the virtuosi may think these things the effects of confederacy, melancholy, or delusion.” Yet he was unwilling to reprieve the condemned, as it would “appear[e] to deny the very being of witches, which, as it is contrary to law…it may give the faction occasion to set afoot the old trade of witch finding that may cost many innocent persons their lives.”82

This letter indicates that Judge North allowed the execution of these women because he believed that if the courts did not uphold the verdict of the jurors, more people might be lynched. This is a typical attitude for judges at this time. If the jurors were strong believers in witchcraft, there would often be a guilty verdict, even if the judge recommended acquittal. If the judge

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81 Levack, “The Decline and End of Witchcraft Prosecutions,” 54, 57.
82 “Letter from Sir Francis North to Sir Leoline Jenkins,” in Ewen, Witchcraft and Demonism, 371-373.
reprieved the accused, he could be subject to accusations of irreligion. When the confessions involved “sucking devils,” a reprieve not only appeared to deny the existence of witches, but also the existence of demons. The denial of demons was still, for many, a denial of Scripture and of God.

However, this sentiment was declining. Skeptical judges, such as Sir John Powell and Sir John Holt, were not afraid to grant a reprieve or influence the jurors. Judge Powell granted Jane Wenham, the last person convicted of witchcraft in England, a reprieve after the jury found her guilty in 1712. According to Francis Bragge, who wrote the majority of pamphlets about this case, the indictment of Jane Wenham was not for bewitchment. Rather, “she was indicted only for conversing familiarly with the Devil in the shape of a cat.”

Judge Holt oversaw a number of witch trials resulting in acquittals, despite the Witchcraft Act of 1604, which declared the entertaining of evil spirits a felony. The accusation of Philippa Munnings of Hartest, Suffolk, was for such malificium as “spoiling wort, hurting cattle,” and striking Sarah Wagers “dumb and lame” after a quarrel. Yet the “indictments … preferred against Philippa Munnings” were the “bewitching to death” of three people and “consulting and entertaining an evil spirit.” The jury found Philippa Munnings not guilty.

Even at the last legal English witch trial held at Leicestershire against Jane Clarke and her children in 1717, there was evidence of a belief in animal familiars. The cause of the accusations was “several persons suffer[ing] from strange illnesses.” Among the odd symptoms were “great black bees…[that] flew out of their mouths and noses.” When prayer did not work,
physicians boiled the patient’s urine, which “always caused the witches to appear in shape of dog or cat, grinning furiously, and, giving the bewitched persons great pain before effecting a mysterious disappearance.” The evidence against Jane and her children came “by swimming them, and by discovery of witch marks.” The jury found them not guilty.\textsuperscript{87}

Judges no longer convicted accused witches. Trial records after 1717 indicate the belief in familiar spirits remained part of the accusations. In the trial of Jane Wenham, her only indictment was entertaining a familiar spirit. Skeptical judges no longer believed in familiars. Familiar spirits appeared as evidence at trials only because the common people believed in them. Common people perhaps knew it was against the law to entertain familiar spirits and so used them in trials to guarantee the execution of perceived witches. However, this is unlikely, since there are fictitious accounts of trials that still involved familiars. The two accounts from 1705 of the trial of Eleanor Shaw and Mary Philips, mentions creature familiars that sucked blood from the teats of the witches and the Devil gave to witches. Wallace Notestein believes the accounts are “a purely fictitious narrative.”\textsuperscript{88} C. L’Estrange Ewen believes that only the second account (a letter from Ralph Davies relating the trial to William Simons) was fabricated and “merely contains the idle gossip which abounded on such occasions.”\textsuperscript{89} In either case, the insertion of creature familiars in a fictitious account was not for the purpose of convincing jurors to condemn witches at trials. The belief in creature familiars came from folklore and remained part of people’s witchcraft beliefs long after skeptical judges dismissed them. A belief in animal familiars in popular culture remained, especially in East Anglia, throughout the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-centuries. The belief lost much of its diabolic character over the years and

\textsuperscript{87} “The Final Commitment,” in Ibid, 390.
\textsuperscript{88} Wallace Notestein, quoted in Ewen, Witchcraft and Demonism, n.1.
\textsuperscript{89} “A discredited Account,” in Ibid, 381-384, n. 1.
familiars usually appeared as mice. The related belief of witches having strange teats on their bodies also remained. In 1827, the attack on Mary Nicholas, of Abergavenny, included stripping and searching her for an unnatural teat.  

The years circa 1680 to 1720 in England witnessed a decline in witchcraft convictions. Many factors led to this decline, including the natural philosophies of the mid-seventeenth century. Some Christians viewed natural philosophy as the best proof for religion because it could substantiate the existence of God by explaining the laws of nature He had created. However, there was the danger that the natural philosopher would exclude God by finding secondary causes, such as atomism, a philosophy revived from antiquity by natural philosophers with a core belief that “matter was formed of an infinite number of indivisibles.”  

Cartesianism and the materialism of Thomas Hobbes were the two philosophies that had the greatest effect on the debate over corporeality. Cartesian dualism separated the material and spiritual worlds, making interaction between spirits and man impossible. Christian thinkers believed atomist philosophies could lead to atheism because of their assertion of purely mechanical and material causation and thus the rejection of spiritual forces.  

Subscribers to atomism were not necessarily advocates of anti-Christian philosophy. Robert Boyle, a Puritan scientist in the 1650s, created a Christianized atomism. This defined the world as made up of atoms, but with a providential God giving the atoms motion, rather than the atoms coming together by chance.  

This form of atomism was acceptable to Christians. The philosophy became unacceptable when coupled with materialism.

93 Ibid, 81.
In France, during the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, Cartesian and Aristotelian philosophers began a debate that eventually created an atmosphere of disbelief. The two schools debated which philosophy was best for understanding the physical and metaphysical Christian worlds, and, in their debates, each attempted to show that the competing philosophy could lead to atheism. The followers of both schools of thought inserted imaginary atheists in their dialogues in order to debate the fictional enemy. Each school gave the arguments they believed the atheists would use to disprove the competing philosophy. In the end, neither side was victorious. Instead, Catholic France found itself facing deists, such as Voltaire and Montesquieu, and actual atheists, such as the Baron d’Holbach. The Aristotelian-Cartesian debates not only created disbelief through rejection of their opponents’ proofs, but also created the arguments later used by the deists and atheists.94

During the Interregnum (1649-1660), the philosophies of materialism and atomism spread in England. These philosophies became associated with Descartes and Hobbes, both of whom scientists in Restoration England viewed as catalysts of the perceived atheism and libertinism of their times. The various religious sects that abounded during the Interregnum also created a backlash against enthusiasm. English scientists reacted against enthusiasm by arguing that the Anglican Church and science were compatible, but they also feared any association with the philosophies of Descartes and Hobbes, as these would lead to an association with atheism. This view is evident in their attack of such philosophies to dissociate themselves from them.95

The materialists, like Hobbes and the followers of Descartes, rejected the concept of

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incorporeal substances. By rejecting incorporeal substances, materialists made witchcraft, as defined by contemporaries, an impossible crime. Hobbes’ *Leviathan* (1651) is an example of the materialistic, mechanical world that atomism could lead to. Hobbes stated “that there [are] angels and spirits, good and evil, but not that they are incorporeal, as are the apparitions men see in the dark or in a dream or vision.” Hobbes argued that spirits are corporeal, “though subtle and invisible,” and because of their corporeality, nobody “was ever possessed with any other corporeal spirit but that of his own by which his body is naturally moved.” Rather, when Jesus exercised demons in the Bible, the demoniacs should be understood as being “madmen or lunatics.” Hobbes denied incorporeal substances and conformed the corporeal substances to natural law, thus abolishing much of the miraculous from Christianity. Previously, demons were corporeal but not constrained by natural law or they were able to manipulate the natural laws in ways beyond human understanding. If corporeal substances had to work within the natural laws, the demons witches received their power from had to be incorporeal.

Other atomists theorized about motion in atoms, using an attractive or repellant force, such as gravity, to put movement into atoms. If atoms could be moved mechanically, there would be no need for God as a first cause. The religiously inclined natural philosophers believed that atomists and materialists, who theorized about a cosmology without God or spirits, were creating philosophies leading to atheism. Henry More, the Cambridge Platonist, viewed those who believed nothing in the world existed but matter to be atheists.

In *An Antidote Against Atheism* (1653), More uses a variety of arguments in his defense

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of God, from the platonic argument that the mind has an innate idea of God, and therefore God must exist, to arguments of natural philosophy, where God illustrates his existence through his creations, such as plants, animals, and the structure of Earth. More also defends the existence of the soul, arguing that man possesses “other faculties of knowledge besides the senses” and that these must come from the soul. He refutes ideas that the brain “can pretend to such noble operations as free Imagination and sagacious collections of Reason,” and that it is only mass that works through “Motion of loosned parts” and this motion must therefore come from the soul. After proving that the faculties attributed to the soul are “incompatible to any part of the Body,” More states that the soul must therefore be “an Immaterial Substance distinct from the Body.”

Ralph Cudworth was another Cambridge Platonist who wrote against philosophies he believed led to atheism. In *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678), Cudworth argues uses atheists’ using philosophies to show that the atheists wrongly interpreted those philosophies. Cudworth even adopts the atheist philosophy of a plastic nature, the belief that nature regulates all motion of matter. Cudworth believes this is a very reasonable explanation “since neither all things are produced Fortuitously, or by the Unguided Mechanism of Matter, nor God himself may reasonably be thought to do all things Immediately and Miraculously…there is a Plastick Nature under him, which [is] an Inferior and Subordinate Instrument.” Cudworth believes in a plastic nature that only operates because God created it in order that it works in such a way. Cudworth champions this philosophy over atheistic philosophies and then proceeds to show how “the Notion of [plastic nature] hath been Mistaken, Perverted and Abused by those Atheists, who would make it to be the only God Almighty, or

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100 Ibid, 17-19, 43-86.
101 Ibid, 24, 36-41.
First Principle of all things.”

Cudworth also argues for incorporeal substances against the materialists that claim nothing exists but things corporeal. He starts with the “Democriticks and Epicureans” and their philosophy that there does exist “Space or Vacuum: a Nature, according to them, really distinct from Body, and the only Incorporeal Thing that is.” From here Cudworth goes on to show that since space is infinite and distinct from the body, it must come from an incorporeal substance that is infinite; “and because there can be nothing Infinite, but only the Deity, that [space] is the Infinite Extension of an Incorporeal Deity.”

In *Eight Boyle Lectures on Atheism* (1692), Richard Bentley also refutes the theory of innate movement in atoms. Bentley’s purpose in these lectures was to refute the atheists on their own grounds. He debates the atheists one argument at a time with the purpose of proving that the world is not strictly material, but that incorporeal substances must exist to explain thought and motion. He uses the Epicurean and Democritean atomism (the ancient philosophies English atomists based their theories on) to prove atomism requires God to explain movement and thought. Bentley defines matter as having three properties: “that any particular quantity of Matter doth hinder all other from intruding into its place…that it may be divided and broken into numerous parts of different sizes and figures…that if it be once bereaved of Motion, it cannot of it self acquire it again.” Therefore, an atom can only “be intrinsically moved by an immaterial self-active Substance, that can penetrate and pervade it.” Bentley then proceeded to prove that gravity “is not it self Mechanical,” contrary to the atheists’ claim that gravity is what moves atoms. Bentley argues “that Bodies have not the power of tending towards a Center, either from

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103 Ibid, 758.
104 Ibid, 767-770.
other Bodies or from themselves.\textsuperscript{105}

These works by More, Cudworth, and Bentley exemplify the debate over corporeal and incorporeal substances among natural philosophers in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The atomists’ and materialists’ denial of incorporeal substances meant there could be no spirits or soul. Incorporeal substances had to be defended and part of this defense came from believers in witchcraft. More and Cudworth used accounts of the supernatural to bolster their arguments.

More contends his accounts are proof of the spirit or soul. For example, More accepts accounts that witches travel to sabbats in spirit, while their bodies remain behind, due to the ointments witch theorists believed witches used for this purpose: “which ointment filling the pores keeps out the cold and keeps in the heat and Spirits, that the frame and temper of the Body may continue in fit case to entertain the Soul again at her return.” More also accepts that the Devil can transform witches into wolves and other creatures because “it is as easy for him to work it [the witch’s body] into what Shape he pleaseth, as it is to work the Aire into such forms and figures as he ordinarily doth.”\textsuperscript{106} For More, the witches’ flight to sabbats is proof that the soul is real and distinct from the body. The transformation into other creatures is possible because the Devil is incorporeal, and therefore can affect matter. Cudworth does not give specific accounts as More did, nor does he use his discussion of apparitions as proof of incorporeal substances. Instead, he describes apparitions to refute atheist philosophy. If atheists deny apparitions, then they “contradict one Main Fundamental Principle of their own Philosophy, that sense is the only Ground of Certainty… for if Prudent and Intelligent persons


\textsuperscript{106} More, \textit{An Antidote Against Atheism}, 134-135.
may be so frequently mistaken…how can there be any Certainty of knowledge at all from Sense?”\textsuperscript{107}

In the years c.a. 1680 to 1720, some writers argued against belief of a corporeal universe using only accounts of witchcraft and apparitions. Glanvill defended incorporeal substances by arguing for the existence of witches because witches derived their power from spirits.\textsuperscript{108} A judge may have been unwilling to see a person accused of witchcraft receive a sentence of execution, but certain writers could still use the belief in witchcraft to prove the existence of spirits. Despite the skepticism in the courts, witches still served a purpose in challenging atheism. In response to the atomists and materialists, demons had to be immaterial to prove the existence of incorporeal substances. The corporeality debate changed and witch theorists began arguing for incorporeal substances on the bases of witchcraft accounts.

\textsuperscript{107} Cudworth, \textit{The True Intellectual System of the Universe}, 700.

CHAPTER 4

CORPOREAL-INCORPOREAL DEBATE

Depending on their agenda theologians, divines, and witch theorists defined demons as corporeal or incorporeal. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in England, this agenda used witchcraft to prove to atheists and Sadducees, both of whom did not believe in spirits, that incorporeal substances existed. This chapter examines the thinkers who argued both for and against the corporeality of spirits. Believers in witchcraft used accounts of witchcraft and the supernatural to prove that incorporeal substances existed and interacted in the material world. Those who wrote to disprove the belief in witchcraft argued that only corporeal substances existed. Nonbelievers in witchcraft argued that, if demons were corporeal and had to conform to the laws of nature as do all corporeal substances, then the accounts of witchcraft were impossible.

Meric Casaubon’s *Of Credulity and Incredulity; In things Divine and Spiritual* (1670) argued for the existence of incorporeal substances. In his arguments, Casaubon uses Platonic philosophy, but not without first defending his use of the pagan philosopher, Plato. He makes this defense through Augustine, who read books of Platonic philosophy “where he had found God, and his Word, which he had not found in the writings of any other philosophers.” Casaubon uses Plato because Plato refuted the belief “that nothing is truly existent, which is not corporeal...which it seems in Plato’s time, was the opinion of many.” Plato’s argument was “what account they made of virtues, which had no bodies?” From virtues, Plato then discusses generations, which Casaubon “conceive[s] he doth intend the miraculous invisible power of God.” Casaubon interprets Plato’s meaning to be “that God, though invisible to bodily eyes; yet by the effects of his power upon man, in generations, &c. we may see him as plainly and
certainly, as we see and discern…the cause of the elevation, or depression of any weight.”

Casaubon ends his argument for incorporeal substances through Plato by stating “that those who are so grossely conceited, as that they cannot conceive any thing to be really, that is not corporeal, are generally Atheists.”

Casaubon argues those generations, i.e. God’s effects on the world, are incorporeal substances that prove the existence of God. Just as there are visible, though incorporeal, effects made by God, so also are there “supernatural operations,” or effects made by the Devil through witchcraft and magic. These are also proof of God, because “if there be false miracles, that is, supernatural operations, by the power of Devils; there must of necessity be true miracles also, by the power of God.” Casaubon argues, therefore, that witchcraft “is a point of excellent use, to convince incredulity.”

Joseph Glanvill also believed that witchcraft and the supernatural were excellent proofs against atheism. Glanvill received support from Henry More and Robert Boyle for an endeavor to collect accounts of witchcraft and the supernatural in order to conduct an investigation into the operations of the spirit world. Similar to the works of More and Cudworth, Glanvill’s work responded to the materialism associated with Hobbes. Unlike More and Cudworth, Glanvill’s only proof was the existence of spirits found in stories of witchcraft and the occult. Previous natural philosophers explained the operations of spirits through the inadequacy of human understanding. By collecting stories involving spirits, Glanvill believed he could discover a scientific pattern to spiritual operations in order to counter arguments of the impossibility of acts.

109 Meric Casaubon, Of Credulity and Incredulity, In things Divine and Spiritual: Wherein, (among other things) A true and faithful account is given of the Platonick Philosophy, As it hath reference to Christianity: As also the business of Witches and Witchcraft, Against a late Writer, fully Argued and Disputed (London, 1670), 111-124, 165-170.

110 Ibid, 171.
of witchcraft, such as flying through the air, raising tempests, and being sucked by familiars.\textsuperscript{111} Glanvill published \textit{A Blow at Modern Sadducism} numerous times with additions and different titles. This chapter examines the first publication, 1668, and then the additions added in the publication of 1689, written in response to John Webster’s work, after first examining Webster’s arguments.

Glanvill’s treatise begins with skepticism of the materialistic philosophies in order to set the tone for the possibility of spirits and witches. According to Moody Prior, Glanvill argued against the extreme skeptics who deny spirits with his own “scientific skepticism,” a form of scientific thought he developed in his previous works, \textit{Vanity of Dogmatizing} (1661) and \textit{Scepsis scientifica} (1671).\textsuperscript{112} This skepticism of materialism pointed out that, if the world were made of only atoms, then “the world was jumbled into this elegant and orderly Fabrick by chance.” Glanvill states that it is this philosophy, and not that of “substance immaterial,” that contains “the grossest impossibilities, and absurdities.” If there were inhabitants discovered in all parts of the world, why does it not follow that “the superiour and lower Continents of the Universe have their inhabitants also?” If this is accepted, then the inhabitants of these parts of the universe should consist of “at least some of the Rational, and Intellectual Orders.”\textsuperscript{113}

Glanvill’s purpose is to make the existence of witches working with incorporeal beings a possibility, rather than to state any absolutes. In this vein, he gives some hypotheses to counter arguments against witchcraft. For example, to the argument that it is absurd to assume Satan works in this world through the agency of witches, Glanvill suggests that the spirits witches

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[112] Ibid, 189.
\item[113] Joseph Glanvill, \textit{A Blow at Modern Sadducism In Some Philosophical Considerations about Witchcraft. And the Relation of the Famed Disturbance at the House of M. Mompesson, with Reflections on Droller, and Atheisme} (London, 1668), 8-10.
\end{enumerate}
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receive their power from may be “departed humane spirits, forsaken of God and goodness.”

Glanvill believes this hypothesis may be more acceptable because “no such thing is affirm’d in any Sacred Record” against departed souls interacting in this world. Glanvill further asserts that “the Familiars of Witches are a vile kinde of spirits, of a very inferiour constitution and nature, and none of those that were once of the highest Hierarchy.” By making such statements, Glanvill is able to answer arguments against witchcraft without denying the existence of spirits. He is able not only to maintain the existence of spirits, but also to demonstrate that there is a “variety of Intellectual creatures in the invisible world.”

These assertions questioned those authors who claimed witchcraft was impossible because the witches’ actions did not follow the laws of nature. Glanvill argued that, because witches performed their actions through confederacy with evil spirits, natural law did not apply. For “to affirm that those evil spirits cannot do that which we conceit impossible, is boldly to stint the powers of Creatures, whose natures and faculties we know not.” Therefore, Glanvill suggests some possible means by which the spirits operate. He admits that these are only hypotheses and he makes them only to illustrate that it is possible “to form an apprehension of the manner of these odd performances.”

Glanvill believed the best argument for proof of witchcraft, and therefore proof of spirits, came from accounts of witchcraft and apparitions. He presented these accounts as empirical data used as evidence of the reality of spirits. His most well known account was “The Demon of Tedworth,” which told of an apparition haunting the house of M. Mompesson. He prefaces this account with a letter to William Brereton, a member of the Royal Society, in which he suggests a “way of speculating immaterial nature...[through] a Cautious, and Faithful History made of

those certain, and uncommon appearances.” The account describes the beating of a drum with no source, the moving of boards by something invisible, terrible smells left behind by the spirit, and other such events. Glanvill claims he received the story “from M. Mompesson’s own Letters,” and that Mompesson was “a discreet, sagacious, and manly person…[without] the least ground for suspicion.” He attempts to prove that his source is credible in order to argue by authority. Glanvill claims that an individual cannot argue against apparitions if the individual has never seen one because “by the same rule of consequence [he] may say, that there were never any Robbers upon Salisbury Plains, because [he had] often traveled over them, and never met any of those forts of Violence.” It would be “poor Logick to conclude in matters of Fact from a single Negative, and such a one against numerous Affirmatives,” which Glanvill believes his accounts provide.116

Glanvill included other accounts in his original work and continued to add more in subsequent editions. He believed these were important because they followed a pattern. Glanvill argued that “it cannot be supposed that all Travellers that come into those parts…should tell the same story.” He believed the more fantastical stories were the more believable, because the “more absurd and unaccountable these actions seem, the greater confirmations are they…of the truth of those Relations.”117 Glanvill believed the truth of the stories lay in the fact that they all seemed impossible, but impossible in the same ways.

Glanvill does not address the corporeality-incorporeality debate directly in the arguments of the first edition. However, in a section entitled “Reflections on Drollery and Atheism,” he states his belief that the atheism of his age resulted from the Sadducees’ disbelief in witches. The Sadducees “believe there are no Spirits; and they are so persuaded because they own no Being in

116 Ibid, 116-143.
117 Ibid, 11-12.
the world, but matter, and the results of motion, and consequently, can acknowledge nothing of a God.”\textsuperscript{118} Therefore, Glanvill gives accounts of witchcraft and apparitions as proof of spirits to disprove those who believe in only matter, i.e. corporeal substances. In the later edition of 1689, he gives arguments directly pertaining to the debate, discussed below. In order to examine the debate in the chronological order it occurred, we turn to the arguments of Glanvill’s opponent, John Webster.

In \textit{The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft} (1677), John Webster argues against the belief in devil-worshipping witches. He wrote this work primarily in response to the witch theorists Meric Casaubon and Joseph Glanvill. Webster’s purpose was to disprove the belief in witchcraft and in so doing, he had to confront Glanville’s and Casaubon’s main objection, i.e. that to deny witchcraft was to deny spirits and the denial of spirits was a denial of God. Webster confronts the objection by defending Reginald Scot, and others who wrote against the belief in witchcraft from charges of atheism. Webster argues that “the denying of the Existence of Witches, doth not infer the denial of the Being of Spirits, for in the priority of duration Spirits were existent before Witches.” Concerning the denial of spirits, he states, “…he that denieth the Existence of Angels and Spirits, doth not therefore necessarily take away or deny the Being of a God, because the Being of a God is independent of either Angel or Spirit, and doth exist solely by it self.”\textsuperscript{119}

Webster makes this argument in order that he may deny the existence of witchcraft without being accused of atheism.

Witch trials began to wane by the late seventeenth century in England. Therefore, a work denying the existence of witchcraft at this time was not primarily for saving the innocent from accusations of witchcraft. Rather, Webster denied witchcraft because he believed it was an

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid, 177.
\textsuperscript{119} John Webster, \textit{The Desplaying of Supposed Witchcraft} (London, 1677), 39.
obstacle to the goal of the Christian faith. He sees Christianity as waring against the devil, which is not unlike the view of witch theorists. However, Webster considers “the nature of this Warfare…[as] spiritual and against spiritual wickedness in high places, and not against flesh and blood.” Webster describes Scripture as providing “a compleat and perfect Armor.” Because Scripture does not mention Satan having “a visible League with Witches, or the sucking of their bodies, or the having carnal Copulation with them,” it stands that the armor provided is spiritual, and so must be the warfare.\textsuperscript{120} Webster wants to end the belief in witchcraft because he believes mankind is unable to wage a spiritual war against Satan if a corporeal enemy in witches distracts it.

Webster appears inconsistent in desiring the battle against Satan to be spiritual while still arguing for the corporeality of spirits. Yet he devotes the tenth chapter of his work to maintain that spirits are corporeal. Just as Hobbes did before him, Webster debates this point because, by claiming spirits are corporeal, he shows that they must follow certain laws of nature and that witchcraft beliefs are therefore impossible. Webster directs his arguments primarily towards Henry More, though he begins the chapter with a disclaimer that he is sensible to the criticism he expected to receive for claiming spirit corporeality. This was because Cartesian philosophy found opposition in England during the second half of the seventeenth century, especially among the Cambridge Platonists.\textsuperscript{121}

Webster begins with Cartesian philosophy to dispute spirit incorporeality. Spirits are corporeal because man has no notion of the immaterial. Knowledge can only come from the senses and the “being of an immaterial and spiritual substance can no way incur into the senses nor affect them, because it is manifest (as Descartes hath sufficiently proved) that all sensation is

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid, 47-49.

\textsuperscript{121} Jacob, \textit{The Cultural Meaning of the Scientific Revolution}, 86.
procured by corporeal contact.”

From here, Webster proceeds to prove by means of Scripture that the only incorporeal spirit is God. He quotes John 4: 24, “God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth,” and then from 2 Corinthians 3:17, “Now the Lord is that spirit, and where the spirit of the Lord is there is liberty.” God is therefore incorporeal and is the only incorporeal substance “in whom there is no corporeality or composition at all.” Spirits are created substances, and as such “are not simply and absolutely incorporeal, but if they be by any called or accounted spirits, it can but be in a relative and respective sense, but that really and truly they are corporeal.”

After arguing that spirits must be corporeal, Webster goes on to discuss the impossibilities involved if spirits were incorporeal. If they were incorporeal, “then they cannot be contained or circumscribed in place.” More claimed there are two types of space, “one being imaginary space, the other that place in the concave superficies of one body immediately environing another body.” Webster counters that “imaginary space hath no existence in nature” and, as Descartes taught, “the names of place or space, do not signifie any thing different from a body that is said to be in a place, but only do design the magnitude, figure and site of it amongst other bodies.” Webster is arguing that spirits are corporeal and therefore occupy space. Both Webster and Hobbes make this point for the same reason, i.e. that if spirits take up space of their own, then they cannot take up space in another’s body, meaning possession.

Spirits having their own bodies and not being capable of taking up space in another body leads Webster to the purpose of his tenth chapter pertaining to witchcraft beliefs. Webster argues

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122 Webster, *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, 197-198.
124 Ibid, 208, 209.
spirits are corporeal and have their own bodies and therefore “assuming bodies of the Elements here below, is a meer figment…[because] if they did assume any such bodies it must but be as we put on and off our Garments.” They cannot be “invested with those bodies, as are humane souls with their bodies” because there is no evidence of this in “Scripture, or sound rational consequence.” In addition, if they were permitted to assume bodies, then “who are the Taylors that shape and frame them these vestments?” If spirits are incorporeal, “then they can make no contact with corporeal matter, and without a corporeal contact there can be no alteration nor organization of matter… [nor] can any other actor or agent be assigned that can frame them.” Webster argues that even if it is allowed that demons can create bodies “framed of the inferior Elements,” and that these bodies were solid enough to carry witches through the air, then “they cannot suddenly be wasted and dissipated, and then doubtlessly we should find them sometimes.” Webster claims that by this logic it is impossible “that the Devil should appear to a Witch in the assumed shape of a Cat, Dog, Foal or such like, and walk and talk with him or her.”

The witch theorists argued that spirits are incorporeal because if demons were corporeal, it would be impossible for them to possess demoniacs or perform other actions involved in witchcraft belief. The proof of this impossibility resulted from advances in natural philosophy and the materialism of Hobbes and the Cartesian philosophers. The proponents of witchcraft were not attempting to maintain a belief in witches simply to continue a persecution of witches, already in decline. They wanted to maintain a belief in witchcraft because they believed it provided proof of incorporeal beings that then refuted materialist philosophies that they believed led to atheism. Although Hobbes believed in punishing witches for their beliefs because

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126 Webster, The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft, 214, 215.
witchcraft was a form of rebellion, despite witches not being capable of the actions they believed they performed,\(^\text{127}\) opponents of witchcraft continued to use his ideas. The opponents wanted to disprove the belief in witchcraft because they believed it was a superstition standing in the way of true Christianity.

One year after Webster’s work appeared, Benjamin Camfield published *A Theological Discourse of Angels and Their Ministries* (1678). In the appendix, Camfield added a refutation of Webster’s claim that spirits are corporeal. In the main body of the work, Camfield defines the nature of angels as spirits, “as the word Angel more properly relates to their Office.” He then defines a spirit as an “incorporeal or bodyless Being, endued with understanding, will, and active power.” Camfield is aware of the debate over whether spirits are corporeal or incorporeal and mentions “some haughty scorners” who claim “the Notion of an immaterial or incorporeal substance” are “words that flatly contradicted and destroyed each other.” This is all he mentions of the debate and states that his purpose is not to “enter upon that Controversie.”\(^\text{128}\) So Camfield enters into this debate only in the appendix, where he attacks Webster’s work because he did not read it until he had finished *A Theological Discourse of Angels, and Their Ministries*. Camfield wrote the appendix while his book was still on the press.\(^\text{129}\)

The main body of Camfield’s work pertains to the nature of angels and helps clarify his arguments against Webster. Camfield uses a variety of sources, such as Scripture, Church Fathers, and ancient philosophers. He quotes from Luke 24:39, in which the disciples see Jesus and believe he is a spirit. Jesus responds saying, “it is I my self: handle me and see, for a Spirit

\(^\text{127}\) Levack, *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*, 300.

\(^\text{128}\) Benjamin Camfield, *A Theological Discourse of Angels, and Their Ministries, wherein Their Existence, Nature, Number, Order and Offices, are modestly treated of: With the Character of those, for whose benefit especially they are Commissioned, and such Practical Inferences deduced, as are most proper to the Premises. Also an Appendix containing some Reflections upon Mr. Webster’s Displaying supposed Witchcraft* (London, 1678), 11-13.

\(^\text{129}\) Ibid, 169.
hath not Flesh and bones, as ye see me have.” He compares this verse to how “Homer speaks of
the Souls of the dead,” and to the Platonists, who describe spirits as “not flesh, nor bone, nor
blood, nor any thing else that is corruptible and capable of dissolution or liquefaction.” Camfield
discusses passages in the Hebrew Bible that refer to angels as men, such as Genesis 18, which
states, “Three men appeared to Abraham.” Camfield explains that while these men were actually
angels, calling them men was because of the form in which they appeared. Where it is written
that Abraham fed these angels, Camfield explains that it was because “those things seemed to be
done; but were consumed in another manner.” When things are “spoken of Angels, which
border upon Body,” it is because “it was the property of the Jews Language...to give
denomination to things unseen from analogical and borrowed expressions of things visible.”

Camfield grants that angels “may not yet for a time really assume a Body, and make
use of it; or whether they have not also some corporeal Vehicles of their own,” but that the
angels differ from the corporeal Vehicles, “as the Soul from it’s Body, or the Inhabitant from the
House he lodgeth in.” Camfield often uses the soul in his arguments because he believes “[t]he
soul separated from the Body is the clearest representation we can have of a Spirit or Angel.”
This is because God is a pure spirit “and the Spirit of Man his imperfect image.” Angels are also
spirits, but are “capable in a more eminent way and manner than our Souls are, (by reason of
their bodily clogs and impediments) of Knowledge, Will and Action.”

Camfield uses this comparison of the soul and spirits to debate Webster. While Camfield
does not accuse Webster of atheism, he fears that Webster’s arguments could lead others to
atheism. He begins with Webster’s defense of Reginald Scot, wherein Webster claimed that the
denying of spirits does not imply a denial of God because God existed before spirits. Camfield

fears that “those that deny in general the being of Spirits, do therein implicitly impugn the being of God, who is a Spirit, whether themselves know and consider it, or no.” His main objection is Webster’s claim that humans are unable to conceive of an immaterial substance. Camfield believes that atheists will take up the argument of “Incorporeal Beings…as mere jargon, and a thing, which no man…can possibly understand”.132

He challenges Webster’s notion that incorporeal substances are impossible to know. If “[a]ll substances are known by their properties and Modifications,” then to find “any such properties or attributes, as are no ways agreeable unto matter” would prove the notion of an incorporeal substance. Camfield finds this substance in “reflecting upon our own thoughts” which is “a power of moving and determining our own wills, as well as bodies…For where is there any thing of Matter, that can possibly reflect upon its individual self, or freely move itself?”133

Camfield uses the majority of the appendix to discuss the human soul as he argues against Webster’s assertions. Webster wrote that the soul was exempt from his arguments because of its “peculiar kind of Creation.” Because of man’s weak understanding of the soul, one should leave such questions to faith.134 Camfield finds this exemption “extremely unreasonable,” claiming that it “seems like the odd practice of cunning men at Law, who secure such as are like to give in a casting evidence against their cause.” Therefore, Camfield debates the reasons Webster gives for the exemption of the human soul. First, against Webster’s assertion that the soul’s creation was different from other creations, Camfield claims this difference is only a difference between man and animal. Second, against the argument that man

133 Ibid, 176-177.
134 Webster, The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft, 202.
does not have the understanding of the human soul to ask such questions, but instead must leave it to faith, Camfield retorts that man has as little understanding of angels as of the soul. After Camfield debates the exemption of the human soul in this argument, he is able to claim “that our Author [Webster] had some notion of an incorporeal Being, because he plainly and often asserts the reasonable or humane Soul to be such.” Camfield refers the reader to the second chapter of his work, where he compares souls and angels.135

Camfield then turns to the affects of Webster’s reasoning as it pertains to man’s notion of God. First, he challenges Webster’s assumption that God is the only incorporeal spirit, because while God “is the most simple and excellent Spirit…it is no-where in our Bible said, that God is the only Spirit; or that there are no other Spirits, but God.” By Webster’s reasoning, claims Camfield, God “may be really corporeal, since other Beings, that are also stiled Spirits there [in Scripture], are avouched so to be.” If God is corporeal, then it “is a dull and strange idea of that omniperfect Being,” and the next step would be “down-right Atheism.”136

Second, Camfield responds to Webster’s reasoning that if “the Devil be consider’d as an incorporeal Nature…then it will follow, that he cannot act upon any corporeal matter.” Camfield’s answer is that it is a mistake to apply “the Rules and Laws, proper and peculiar unto Bodies, unto Spirits also.” Rather, one should accept this as “that ignorance we must be contented with in other matters of occult Philosophy, where we subscribe often to the thing, though we cannot declare the manner of it.” Camfield also challenges Webster to explain how God is able to act upon matter, since Webster accepts that God is incorporeal, or how “the immaterial and incorporeal Soul of Man moveth upon the body.”137 Concerning Webster’s claim

135 Camfield, A Theological Discourse of Angels and Their Ministries, 179-194.
136 Ibid, 197.
137 Ibid, 202-205.
that incorporeal substances cannot take up space, Camfield simply refers back to the human soul as an incorporeal substance and challenges Webster to “tell us, how the incorporeal spirit of man is in it’s body, and that so as to perform undeniably Physical operations there, and we shall soon inform him of the Ubi [where] of Angels.”

Camfield’s response to Webster exemplifies the debate between corporeal and incorporeal beings. Camfield did not read Webster’s treatise until he completed his own, yet he used arguments from the main body of *A Theological Discourse of Angels and Their Ministries*, particularly those discussing the human soul as an incorporeal substance. He was not arguing for incorporeal substances to prove the existence of witchcraft, and in fact commended Webster for his “[o]bservations, worthy to be considered of for the improving Knowledge, and rendring all men cautious, how they pronounce of such abstruse Subjects.” Camfield’s purpose was to illustrate that incorporeal substances existed because he feared a denial of the incorporeal could lead to atheism. This was the same purpose of the witch theorists, who used accounts of witchcraft and apparitions to prove the existence of incorporeal substances.

Also in response to Webster’s work were the additions to Glanvill’s *Saducismus Triumphatus* (1689). This is a posthumous work and the additions are both manuscripts taken by Henry More from Glanvill’s home after his death, or written by More. It is in these additions that Glanvill and More directly address the corporeality-incorporeality debate. The debate begins with a section by More entitled “The true Notion of a Spirit.” His argument begins with a definition of the body as “Substance Material, of it self altogether destitute of all Perception, Life, and Motion.” Further, it is “impenetrable, and Physically divisible into parts.” More defines body, which is corporeal, in order to define spirit as its opposite. Thus, he defines spirit

138 Ibid, 206.
139 Ibid, 169.
as “an Immaterial Substance intrinsically endued with Life and the faculty of Motion…And moreover, That it can penetrate the Matter, and (which the Matter cannot do) penetrate things of its own kind.” More’s purpose in defining spirit in this manner is to refute Webster’s use of Cartesian philosophy, i.e. that incorporeal substance is unknowable because the attainment of knowledge is only through the senses. More argues that, through the senses, one can obtain knowledge of matter, and then through “their mutual opposition,” one gains an understanding of incorporeal substance.140

Webster argues that incorporeal substances cannot move matter. Proponents of incorporeal substance viewed this argument as dangerous because it implied that matter is capable of moving matter, thus removing God as a first cause. More, therefore, devotes a section to showing “the mode or way that a Spirit moves Matter.” More bases his argument on the principle that a spirit “is according to the common Opinion of all men to be acknowledged [as] the true Principle and Fountain of all Life and Motion.” Therefore, “if a Spirit could be united, and as it were cohere with the Matter…it might easily move Matter,” which More attempts to prove is possible. He attempts this proof through the opposition between matter and spirit. A corporeal substance is impenetrable, therefore its opposite, incorporeal substance, is penetrable and able to penetrate. Matter can move matter by contact, but “the contact of the parts of Matter is every where only superficial” because it cannot penetrate matter. Spirit, however, “penetrates and possesses the whole Matter at once.” Therefore, “if two parts of Matter…will always with the least impulse slide one upon another, do yet notwithstanding adhere to one another with a most firm and almost invincible union, why may not then a Spirit…be united to a Body with equal firmness.” Because “the Penetrability of a Spirit is not repugnant with its union with

Matter, it is manifest, that its faculty of moving Body is not at all repugnant with its penetrability.”\textsuperscript{141}

More’s explanation of the manner in which spirits moved matter disproved the workings of natural law by secondary causes alone, and also explained the mechanics of certain witchcraft and apparition accounts, which were the empirical data for the existence of spirits. Many of the accounts involve the movement of matter by some invisible force, which the author implies to be a spirit. The bewitchment of Richard Jones by the witch Jane Brooks includes an account of the boy “ris[ing] up from the ground…till he passed in the Air over the Garden-Wall, and was carried so above ground more than 30 Yards.” Elizabeth Style bewitched Elizabeth Hill and “though held in a Chair by four or five People, sometimes six, by the Arms Legs, and Shoulders, she would rise out of the Chair, and raise her body about three or four foot high.” Also, Mary Longdon, tormented by the witch, Florence Newton, claimed “several (and very many) small stones would fall upon her as she went up and down, and would follow her from place to place, and from one room to another, and would hit her on the head, shoulders, and arms.”\textsuperscript{142} These accounts were examples of evil spirits moving matter, and More explained the mechanics involved.

Witchcraft was not the issue at stake for these men. They did not fear simply a disbelief in witches, but rather that a disbelief in witches would cause a disbelief in spirits leading to a disbelief in God. It was necessary to maintain a belief in witchcraft because it was undeniable proof of spirits interacting in the world, which was proof of God. The new philosophies promulgating only corporeal substances threatened a belief in spirits, and therefore a belief in

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid, 184-186.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid, 342, 346, 374.
witchcraft. Witchcraft was the means by which More and Glanvill believed they could disprove the materialist philosophies.

More and Glanvill were not alone in this belief. Other proponents of witchcraft used collections of witchcraft and apparition accounts as empirical data for the proof of spirits. Although they did not enter the corporeal-incorporeal debate as directly as More and Glanvill, their works show that the authors were aware of the debate. Richard Baxter, a Puritan preacher, published *The Certainty of the Worlds of Spirits* (1691), a large collection of accounts in the same style as Glanvill’s work. Baxter and Glanvill were acquaintances and shared some of their manuscripts with each other before publishing them. They did not agree in their philosophical ideas, especially about atomism. Yet they maintained a mutual respect for each other.\(^{143}\)

Baxter’s work is primarily a collection of accounts with little of his own arguments or explanations included. In his introductions, he claims, as Glanvill did, that “the State, Converse, Policy, Laws of the Aerial World, or Regions, are much (though not wholly) unknown to us here.” Baxter does not accept that the natural laws can apply to spirits, but also does not claim to know “as to their having Bodies, or no Bodies.” However, he does not believe “that Individuation is only by Corporeal Matter,” but rather that “Devis and wicked Souls have their Numerical Individuation.”\(^{144}\) This logic implies evil spirits are incorporeal or, at most, that Baxter believes in incorporeal substance. In his conclusion, Baxter discusses angels and their infrequent appearances compared to evil spirits. He claims this is because “Corporeal Craffitude is an abasement, and therefore fittest for the more Ignoble sort of Spirits: We that dwell here in


Bodies, are of a lower Order, than those of the more high and invisible Regions." Therefore, Baxter believes angels, being of a higher order, are incorporeal, and the term “Corporeal Craffitude” implies that evil spirits are incorporeal but can take on a corporeal body. Baxter was aware of the corporeal-incorporeal debate, but did not participate in it. Instead, his demonological beliefs allowed the incorporeal to merge with the corporeal. Other believers in witchcraft such as Henry Power and the judge Mathew Hale accepted this possibility.  

Another collector of witchcraft stories was George Sinclair, a Scottish Presbyterian. Sinclair’s work, *Satan’s Invisible World Discovered* (1685), is a collection of stories without any arguments of their own, except in his preface. There he states that his purpose in providing such a collection is the refutation of atheism. Sinclair blames the rise of atheism on two sources. The first are followers of the “Hobbesian and Spinosian Principles.” These followers, he claims, believe “that all contained in the Universe comes under the notion of things material, and bodies only; and consequently, no GOD, no Devil, no Spirit, no Witch.” The second source is Cartesian philosophy because of its principle that “we must doubt of all things, before we can come to any clear distinct knowledge of them.” Sinclair believes this philosophy, “when its put to the Test…[is] not found sufficient, nor able to convince Atheists.”

Baxter and Sinclair were both familiar with Glanvill’s and More’s works, and agreed that the empirical data of witchcraft and apparition accounts should be able to disprove the atheists. At this time, in learned circles, proving that witchcraft existed was a matter of theology and not law. The witch theorists used witchcraft to prove the existence of spirits, not to bring those accused of witchcraft to trial. They feared a denial of witches would lead to a denial of spirits,

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145 Ibid, 221.
which would then lead to atheism. Witchcraft was important to the witch theorists because it provided evidence of demonic interaction in the temporal world.

Balthasar Bekker, a Dutch Calvinist theologian, lived during the Aristotelian-Cartesian debates in the Dutch Reformed Church from the 1640s to the 1680s. These debates did not reach the level of polarization as they had in France. Most Dutch Cartesians were moderate philosophers and separated the use of Cartesian philosophy from theology, believing faith to depend on revelation and reason on sense experience. The purpose of faith was salvation, while the purpose of reason was utility. Bekker was originally a moderate Cartesian until he applied Cartesian philosophy to the theological topic of spirits in his controversial four volume work, *The World Bewitched*, (1691). Bekker approved an English translation in 1695.148

*The World Bewitched* is Bekker’s attempt to disprove the belief in witchcraft and spirit involvement in the temporal world. Volume 1 does this through a history of the belief in witches, in order to show that it came from pagan ideas. Volume 3 discusses the impossibility of magic through agreements made with the Devil, and Volume 4 is a denial of witchcraft accounts as empirical evidence based on his previous arguments.149 Volume 2 of Bekker’s work applies Cartesian philosophy to theology. Bekker explains that he must do this because Scripture is silent on the issue. He previously explained that the words spirit, angel, and demon, should be interpreted in Scripture as the action, not the being. The word “angel” meant “messenger,” “devil” meant “slanderer,” and “Satan” meant “opponent.” None of these words specified a man

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or a spirit. Therefore, the application of reason, through Cartesian philosophy, was necessary to understand the nature of spirits.\textsuperscript{150}

Bekker defined a spirit as “a being that is immaterial and has not the least thing in common with a body.” To understand spirits, Bekker examines the only spirit man has any contact with: the human soul. The soul can act with the body, such as through seeing and hearing, but can also act without the body, such as in thinking and willing. Therefore, because it can act without the body, it can also exist without the body. Bekker emphasizes that the soul is a special case, as God unites it with a body. The actions upon the body make its existence known. If a spirit exists other than the soul, it is not united to a body and therefore its actions are unknowable. The soul acts on its own body, but not on another body except by means of its own body. Therefore, a spirit without a body is unable to act on a body. Bekker concluded that the actions of angels and devils were completely unknown to man and a belief in their existence is one of faith. His opponents interpreted his logic to mean that, because there can be no proof of spirits by reason, they do not exist, or the belief in them is irrational.\textsuperscript{151}

Bekker’s work was controversial, in both Holland and other parts of Europe. There are 131 books or pamphlets written against \textit{The World Bewitched} and forty-four written in support.\textsuperscript{152} Bekker agreed that spirits are incorporeal, but stated that because they are incorporeal, so are their actions. They only posses the ability of cogitation, and without a body, these actions are unknowable. Bekker stressed the separation between the spirit world and the world of matter, claiming neither has any effect on the other. This view destroyed any proof the material world could have of the spirit world through witchcraft and apparitions.

\textsuperscript{150} Fix, \textit{Fallen Angels}, 52-53.

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid, 53-56.

\textsuperscript{152} Bostridge, \textit{Witchcraft and Its Transformations}, 241.
John Beaumont, an Englishman who refuted Bekker, believed he could disprove the inability of spirits to interact with matter. Beaumont categorized his witchcraft and apparition accounts into spirit interaction on each of the five senses. He uses both ancient and recent accounts of spirit interaction, but what is unusual about his work is his claim that he experienced interaction with spirits personally. By making himself a witness to spirits, Beaumont believed he could make the accounts more believable and not simply the second-hand accounts he had collected. Beaumont does not give the reader accounts he deemed believable, but rather accounts he experienced first-hand. Glanvill attempted something similar by personally investigating the haunted house in his account of *The Demon of Tedworth*.154

Beaumont needs his accounts to be as creditable as possible because they are the proof that distinguishes his position from Bekker’s. Beaumont argues for the existence of immaterial substance in a manner similar to Bekker’s use of the soul. Effects that one cannot attribute to the body must be attributed to an incorporeal substance. Bekker discusses the affects of the soul, such as hearing, seeing, and thinking, but claims the knowledge of these actions is a result of the body serving as an intermediary for the soul. Beaumont asserts that his accounts are “those extraordinary Effects which can neither be called in doubt, nor be Attributed to God, or to Bodies, [and] are an Incontestable proof that we must admit created Spirits capable of amusing Men, and seducing them by Deceits.”155

Despite his insistence on the proof that his empirical data provides, Beaumont argues that systems of knowledge cannot be applied to the understanding of spirits. Reason is for understanding the material world, but, with regard to spirits, one should rely on “a decisive and


infallible Authority.” Beaumont refers to early Church Fathers for this authority, who “have taught, that distinct Spiritual Substances presided over differing Corporeal Things.” Just as Bekker claimed the belief in the existence of spirits is based on faith, Beaumont states, “It’s of Faith that they [demons] have Power, and that they attack Men.”

Beaumont also uses Scripture to reject Bekker. Bekker’s conclusion that immaterial spirits existed but could not perform visible actions without a body meant they could not do what Scripture reported. Therefore, he had to reject a literal interpretation of Scripture. Beaumont insists on a literal interpretation. This was one outcome of the corporeality debate. If spirits were corporeal, they could not assume bodies (as supposed with familiar spirits) or possess individuals. If they were incorporeal but unable to have a tangible effect without a body, then spirits in Scripture must be interpreted allegorically. It is only when spirits were incorporeal but still able to interact in the corporeal world that Scripture could be read literally.

As a last attempt to prove spirit interaction with the temporal world, Beaumont interprets dreams to defend the belief that witches attend sabbats. Beaumont does not argue that the witches actually attend the sabbat in body, but that the witches’ transportation to the sabbat only happens in dreams. However, Beaumont argues, the dreams have a supernatural source because “it cannot be that there should be so great an Agreement in Dreams of Persons…that in one Night, and at the same Hour they should clearly agree of the Place, Number, and Quality of the Persons, and the like Circumstances.” Rather, these dreams “are suggested from a supernatural Cause, viz. from the Devil to his Confederates, God permitting it.”

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156 Ibid, 332-333.
157 Fix, *Fallen Angels*, 55.
Bekker denied incorporeal substances the ability to interact in the corporeal world. Beaumont used witchcraft accounts as best he could to disprove this notion. If these accounts were not believable, then dreams worked as a last resort to prove spirit intervention. Dreams were of an immaterial nature. They are uncontrollable thoughts, and if an incorporeal substance is unable to affect the corporeal, then perhaps incorporeal substance can affect the incorporeal. In this way, Beaumont attempts to maintain the possibility of man having some knowledge of the spirit world. This is what the debate was really about- knowledge that spirits exist so that they cannot be denied.

This debate was not one between an old belief system and a new one. It was a debate using an old belief, witchcraft, and making it compatible with the new beliefs, materialism and Cartesian philosophy. The purpose of the witch theorists was not to disprove materialism completely. Materialism was acceptable to Christianity because it defined matter as inert and unable to perform motion or cogitation on its own. This still allowed for a cosmology involving God. However, the witch theorists feared the philosophy was not far from atheism, and so a belief in witchcraft was necessary to buttress the materialist and Cartesian philosophies so that they remained acceptable to Anglican theology. Materialism’s lack of explanation for movement in matter made God necessary, yet it was an insufficient explanation. Witchcraft explained what materialism did not explain by proving spirit involvement. The manner in which the witch theorists presented witchcraft as evidence for this proof (collections of accounts) makes apparent their attempt to reconcile witchcraft beliefs with materialist philosophies. They treated the accounts as empirical data collected by natural philosophers. The accounts were not superstitious stories, but scientific evidence collected in a manner suitable for the scientific
culture of the time. The witch theorists ultimately failed to make this reconciliation between witchcraft beliefs and materialism, but this failure is more appropriately a result of the decline in witchcraft.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

The debate over corporeal and incorporeal substances was only one factor in the witchcraft debate. Hobbes claimed only corporeal substances existed, and used this principle to prove witchcraft was impossible. Advocates of incorporeal substances attempted to prove through witchcraft beliefs that incorporeal substances existed. Hobbes’ reputation as an atheist did not help his position in this controversy. Some viewed his materialism as a philosophy leading to atheism, and therefore imagined that a large number of atheists existed. A part of this imagined atheism was a denial of spirits. A group of writers agreed with Glanvill and viewed witchcraft as proof of the reality of spirits. However, they used witchcraft as evidence of incorporeal substances when the belief of witchcraft itself was in question.

Witch persecution was declining in seventeenth century England. The judges became skeptical and guilty verdicts became more difficult to reach. While many judges and jurymen did not deny the existence of witchcraft, they did view the possibility of proof of witchcraft to be difficult or impossible to provide. A belief in witches remained among lower social groups, but without the ability to convict, accusations of witchcraft dwindled. Some among the educated completely denied the possibility of witchcraft, but the majority simply ceased viewing witchcraft as a threat. The decline was primarily an issue of irrelevance in contemporary society. Witchcraft changed from being a threat to society to becoming a useful belief for other agendas. One such agenda was disproving atheism through the belief of spirit involvement in witchcraft.

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The accounts of witchcraft and apparitions used to prove the existence of spirits did not involve the more fantastic and terrifying parts of demonology, such as infanticide and demon copulation. These beliefs were more in line with continental witchcraft beliefs and were difficult to prove in the framework of proving incorporeal substances. The accounts more often involved spirits as mere annoyances, rarely leading to death. Instead of disproving the skeptics, who did not believe the “evidence” to begin with, these accounts only caused ridicule.  

However, a belief in witchcraft was not a dead point at this time. It still had other uses, for example, during the rage of party in the early eighteenth century when the politics of the Whig and Tory political parties dominated British government. Daniel Defoe believed he could use witchcraft to unite the political groups in England. He did not discuss the technicalities of witchcraft belief, but instead argued for a belief in a more general type of witchcraft. He used the witch as an Other that the parties could agree on as a common enemy. Joseph Addison used witchcraft in a similar manner, except he argued that a denial of witchcraft was a point that all party members could agree on. Defoe and Addison both used witchcraft to unite the parties, but neither entered into a debate on how exactly witchcraft should be believed to work.

The repeal of the Witchcraft Act of 1604 occurred in 1736. Some historians have viewed this repeal as simply the removal of an old law from a more superstitious time. Yet, there was opposition to the bill by James Erskine, and further investigation has shown that one should not write off Erskine as an eccentric individual. He was a believer in the supernatural, but this was not his objective in opposing the repeal. Erskine was Scottish, and opposed the bill because he believed it intruded on Scottish rights. His opposition was not as much superstition as national

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161 Cope, Joseph Glanvill: Anglican Apologist, 103.
162 Bostridge, Witchcraft and Its Transformations, 118-132.
pride, a desire for Scottish independence, and a form of resistance to what he viewed as deism and irreligion in England.\textsuperscript{163}

Long after witch persecution ceased, witchcraft beliefs retained a function. It became an ideology used in politics, though not often successfully. During its decline, witchcraft became an idea that represented different agendas. However, by the beginning of the eighteenth century, using it to prove corporeality was no longer possible. Witchcraft could be accepted or denied at this time, but it was not an issue relevant enough to base metaphysical theories on. The use of witchcraft to prove incorporeal substances was destined to fail because it occurred at a time when witchcraft beliefs were declining. The proponents of incorporeal substances used a belief already becoming outdated to refute a new argument.

During the eighteenth century, the intellectual movements known as the Enlightenment spread throughout Europe. Enlightenment writers praised the scientific accomplishments of the previous century as the destroyers of superstition and champions of reason. However, this praise was for their own purposes, to gain support for their own use of reason.\textsuperscript{164} The proponents of witchcraft and incorporeal substance wrote primarily against Hobbes, with Webster being the only other Englishman discussed who wrote in favor of only corporeal substances in the world. This is not a result of ignoring other supporters of a corporeal world. The debate in England was simply very one-sided. It was also not the only debate in England involving witchcraft. The debate over the existence of witchcraft was primarily one of theology and interpretation of scripture.

Other writers wrote against witchcraft, but did not consider the corporeal-incorporeal arguments. In The Question of Witchcraft Debated (1669), John Wagstaffe denied witchcraft, but

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid, 184-191.
\textsuperscript{164} Sharpe, Instruments of Darkness, 256-257.
not by any arguments concerning the nature of demons. Rather, Wagstaffe argues that through Scriptural interpretation witches do not exist, claiming the types of witchcraft discussed in Scripture do not match the witchcraft beliefs of contemporary witches. These beliefs, Wagstaffe argues, derive from pagan superstitions that the Catholic Church adopted for its own gains.\textsuperscript{165} Arguments of this sort contributed more to the decline of witchcraft because they remained in a Christian context without involving any philosophy that could be interpreted to promote or lead to atheism.

The fear of charges of atheism was a deterrent to promoters of materialist and Cartesian philosophy. In 1697, Thomas Aikenhead, a university student in Edinburgh, was executed for blasphemy. The execution received attention in both Scotland and England, and Aikenhead achieved a reputation as an atheist.\textsuperscript{166} Atheism was a controversial subject. If one were proven to be an atheist, there could be serious consequences. This is why Webster defended Reginald Scot against such charges. Hobbes was branded an atheist. England banned his work \textit{Behemoth}, while English bishops prevented \textit{Leviathan} from being republished.\textsuperscript{167} Descartes received accusations of atheism for doubting the existence of God in his work, \textit{Meditations on First Philosophy}.\textsuperscript{168} The philosophies of these men were dangerous to those who espoused them and there were arguments against witchcraft available that did not risk charges of atheism.

The corporeal-incorporeal debate took place among intellectuals. The changes in the intellectual climate affected the courts, which in turn affected the social environment. Judges and jurymen were aware of a growing trend to believe that the Devil did not interact with people

\textsuperscript{165} John Wagstaffe, \textit{The Question of Witchcraft Debated; Or a discourse against their Opinion that affirm Witches}, (London, 1669).

\textsuperscript{166} Hunter, \textit{Science and the Shape of Orthodoxy}, 308.

\textsuperscript{167} Sharpe, \textit{Instruments of Darkness}, 264.

\textsuperscript{168} Fix, \textit{Fallen Angels}, 41–42.
and so they became less inclined to convict witches. Enlightenment writers who claimed the Scientific Revolution ended superstition believed this because they were well educated in philosophy and the new sciences. They understood the arguments, and, for them, these were the arguments that ended superstition.

Witchcraft beliefs remained among the populace but the presence of the Devil and demons involved in witchcraft faded. This is because the lower social groups did not ask how the magic was performed. The mechanics of witchcraft, i.e. through demons, was a question answered by theologians and witch theorists. When the educated classes stopped providing the diabolic aspects of witchcraft, this aspect gradually faded from common witchcraft beliefs. During the witch-hunts, witches performed evil acts by means of their confederacy with Satan. In England, the populace believed witches made this confederacy by means of familiars. After the belief in Satan’s involvement faded from popular tradition, the witch changed from an instrument by which Satan performed his evil acts into simply an evil person. It is much easier to believe accounts of evil acts when Satan is involved because Satan is the source of the evil. When Satan is not involved, one must interpret the nature of humans as simply evil without any outside source to explain the evil acts purported in witch accusations.

Hobbes could believe man capable of such evils without the involvement of demons because he viewed man as brutish by nature. Other writers attempted to distance themselves as far from Hobbes as possible. This distancing from Hobbes created a shift in interpretation of man and society. Locke’s social contract theory replaced Hobbes’ interpretation of society as everyone against everyone. Natural philosophers created an atmosphere of optimism about knowing and controlling the natural environment. With the development of knowledge, the

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world was becoming a more understandable and less terrifying environment in which the role of witchcraft to explain evil and hardships was less necessary. The corporeal-incorporeal debate, along with arguments from Scripture and claims that witchcraft was a pagan belief, removed the diabolic aspects of witchcraft, and so contributed to the gradual decline of witchcraft beliefs as a whole.

There was no clear victor in the corporeal-incorporeal debate. None of the writers who contributed to the debate ever published any work in which they recanted their opinions. As Michael Hunter observed, “It is almost as if intellectual change does not really occur through arguments at all…People just made up their minds and then grasped at arguments to substantiate their preconceived ideas.” Much of this situation had to do with a miscommunication among the debaters. Those who argued for only corporeal substances, as the belief pertained to the belief in witchcraft, did so to end what they considered a Christian superstition. Those who used witchcraft to defend incorporeal substances did so to refute a philosophy they believed led to atheism. Yet, the failure of the witch theorists to prove incorporeal substances through witchcraft did not end the corporeal-incorporeal debate. Witchcraft simply became a failed means for the debate.

In 1777, Joseph Priestly published Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit, in which he argued there were no substance in the world but corporeal substance. His main argument is “when the nature of matter is rightly understood, there be [no] reason to think that there is in man any substance essentially different from it.” He argues that matter, along with the principals of “attraction and repulsion,” account for “all the known properties of man,” and therefore, the existence of any other substance is “manifestly unnecessary.” Yet, Priestly understands that

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170 Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, 785-794; Sharpe, Instruments of Darkness, 275.
171 Hunter, Science and the Shape of Orthodoxy, 305.
holding such a belief could expose him to charges of being “an unbeliever, and a favourer of atheism.” Priestly published this work long after the witchcraft debate ended. However, the fear that materialism led to atheism did not end with the belief in witchcraft. Priestly claims that “The only reason why it has been so earnestly contended for, that there is some principle in man that is not material, is that it might subsist, and be capable of sensation and action, when the body was dead.” Therefore, Priestly uses most of his work to prove that materialism is not only compatible with Christianity, but that it is advantageous to Christianity. For example, his argument that the “immaterial system…makes it necessary to provide some receptacle for the souls of the dead,’ and this is the cause of “the doctrines of purgatory, and the worship of the dead.”172

Priestly’s work illustrates that the corporeal-incorporeal debate continued after the witchcraft debate ended. It also demonstrates that after the witchcraft debate ended, claiming that only corporeal substances existed was still a dangerous philosophy to hold, as it could still imply atheism. No author attempted to refute Priestly with witchcraft beliefs. More, Cudworth, and Bentley refuted a world consisting of only corporeal substances with arguments other than witchcraft a century earlier (More and Cudworth used witchcraft along with other arguments). Witchcraft was only one means to argue that incorporeal substances existed. When witchcraft failed, the debate did not end.

Hobbes and Webster were the only Englishmen to use the corporeal argument to disprove witchcraft. They claimed that, because only corporeal substances existed, witches could not perform witchcraft by means of demons. The witch theorists believed they could counter these arguments primarily through accounts of witchcraft and apparitions. This was the empirical data

they believed could not be doubted if they provided it along with proof of credible authority from which they received it, and explanations for how the spirits performed the acts. Bekker believed in incorporeal spirits, but argued that it was impossible for them to interact in the corporeal world. This separation between the corporeal and incorporeal worlds dealt the hardest blow to spirit beliefs. It placed the belief in spirits in strictly faith-based terms. If spirits could not interact, there could be no proof from empirical data.

The corporeal-incorporeal debate of the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-centuries was part of a paradigm shift in European thought. Reason became the sole means for finding truth among certain writers. Thinkers were no longer content to leave the mysteries of religion unexplained, and to apply the word “mystery” to religion, for some, became synonymous with superstition. By refuting superstitions, a blow was also struck at religion. Miracles and the supernatural were no longer exempt from understanding by human reason. More and Glanvill attempted to reconcile witchcraft beliefs with the new paradigm by explaining them with the new scientific thought, but failed. In educated circles, witchcraft was quickly becoming a superstition.

Walter Stephens argues that witch theorists expounded witchcraft beliefs because they had a crisis of belief and needed witches to provide negative proof that there is a God. The witch theorists of late seventeenth-century England were still using witchcraft beliefs for this reason. They were more open about their purpose, and there is no need to conjecture about the crisis of belief. The English witch theorists stated plainly that they were using witchcraft to disprove atheism. Yet the fear was the same in both the fifteenth-century witch theorists Stephens examines and those in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century England. It is a doubting of the

strength of faith. If there were no tangible proof that spirits exist, people would not believe in spirits, and the witch theorists believed this was a step toward atheism. For the common people, witchcraft provided an explanation for the hardships in their daily lives. For the educated classes, it provided proof of Christianity.
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