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Maurizio Gotti, Stefania M. Maci, Michele Sala (eds)

The Language of Medicine: Science, Practice and Academia

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Contents

Focus on medical communication

PAOLA BASEOTTO

Ideological Uses of Medical Discourses in Early Modern English Plague Writings

> Death […] hath pitcht his tents, (being nothing but a heape of winding sheetes tackt together) in the sinfully-polluted Suburbes: the Plague is Muster-maister and marshall of the field […]. The maine Army consisting (like *Dunkirke*) of a mingle-mangle, viz. dumpish Mourners, merry Sextons, hungry Coffin-sellers, scrubbing Bearers, and nastie Graue-makers […]. No parley will be graunted. (Dekker 1603: D)

1. Introduction

From the Black Death of 1348-9 to the Great Plague of London in 1665, England experienced a series of plague epidemics characterized by very high mortality which caused depopulation and economic disasters for families and communities.[1] The dominant perception which emerges from written testimonies of all kinds ─ personal, devotional, medical ─ is that of an endless, exhausting war. Consideration of the abundant early modern English literature on plague shows how various texts, or various sections in the same text, inflect specific streams of the general, grand metaphor of war: some writings focus on the epidemiological element of conflict, and stress the helplessness of people at war with a sanguinary and invincible enemy, a disease of unknown origin and exceptional morbidity; others emphasize views of plague as a punishment meted out by a furious God at war with sin-

1 For a comprehensive study of the demographic, social and economic contours of recurrent plague epidemics in England, see Shrewsbury (1970).

ners; the rest call attention to a more subtle conflict of diverging ideas regarding the origin of plague and its remedies.

As Ranger and Slack (1992: 3) suggest, epidemics "support, test, undermine or reshape religious, social and political assumptions and attitudes". My study sets out to examine an important aspect concerning the process of shaping of ideologies and mentalities in Elizabethan and Stuart England by analyzing the co-existence, clash and partial accommodation in miscellaneous writings of competing notions of plague entailing varying degrees of compliance with official policies of cure and containment of the disease.[2] In particular, the focus of my attention is upon distinctive uses of medical language and the reception, adaptation and manipulation of current medical notions for ideological purposes.

Early modern English literature on plague is vast and varied.[3] Its abundance and wide circulation across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries signify the magnitude of the impact of epidemics on England and the English. The fact that the majority of such works were intended for a middle-class audience more than a cultural or social élite seems to point to a general demand for this type of literature and to a sustained effort to offer tentative and often ideologically oriented answers to people's questions, along with consolation and practical instructions. The majority of plague writing is in the form of sermons or religious tracts and medical handbooks by lay or clerical physicians. A large number of pamphlets, broadsides and bills of mortality with records of weekly burials also survive. Of great relevance considering their universal propagation are official collections of specific prayers for use in every church and household, as well as Privy Council's public orders posted in every market and church throughout the country.

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2 Although I have examined hundreds of plague writings by a large number of authors, my quotations are taken from a restricted group of individuals. This is due partly to authors' influence, as in the case of Bishop Hooper, and partly to the superior rhetorical gifts of some of them like Thomas Pullein.

3 For information on the impressive number of Elizabethan and early Stuart plague texts, see Healy (2001: 54) and Slack (1985: 23-24). Significantly, as Slack (1985: 23) points out, "the very first printed work on medicine in English was a *Little Book* on plague" of 1486.

The leitmotif in plague writings across genres and decades is the notion of plague as a product of divine wrath. While the role of miasma, humoral unbalance or celestial influences receives varying degrees of attention according to the specific standpoint of the author and the purpose of the work, all texts, whether medical, devotional or lay, invariably indicate God's anger as the primary source of pestilences. This shared view is clearly a legacy of Hebrew and classical conceptions of plague as God's punishment for human transgressions (Healy 2001: Gilman 2009). The Bible in particular, from Genesis to Psalms and in the prophetic voices of Jeremiah, Zechariah and Hosea, includes abundant and varied references to God's promise to punish human disobedience with plague visitations. A typical example of the medical endorsement of this discourse is found in a health manual penned by surgeon William Boraston who describes plague as a "whip, which GOD out of his indignation useth to chastice men for their transgressions, as it is written in the 28. of Deut." (1630: 1).[4] As regards governmental documents, in a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury prefacing the July 1563 edition of official plague prayers and orders for public fasting, Queen Elizabeth remarks that "it hath pleased the most highest, for thamendment [sic] of us and our people, to visite cartaine places of our Realme with more contagious sicknesse then lately hath ben" (Church of England 1563: A1^{v}). Particularly felicitous is the use of a doctrinal metaphor by the nonconformist preacher Henoch Clapham who specifies that "famine, sword and pestilence, are a Trinitie of punishments prepared of the Lord, for consuming a people that haue sinned against him" (1603: C1^{v}). Authors often underline how plague's unique terribility derives from its more direct correlation with divine wrath: "the plague is more immediately from God, than any other Sicknesse or Disease for it is the immediate stroke of God" (Brooks 1666: A3v).

All texts invariably construct the discourse of human culpability and active agency in connection with God's pestilential punishment by for example reiterating references to human 'wilful consenting' to

4 I have not modernized the spelling in my quotations from early texts or corrected any printing mistakes. Emphases are in the original unless otherwise stated.

Satan (Grindal 1563: 480) and enlarging on the numerosity and hatefulness of the transgressions that have fuelled divine wrath. This seems, I think, to serve two main purposes. The first is to further prayer and repentance: writings which elaborate on wilful sinning aim to stimulate energetic personal initiatives towards reformation. Another aim of the discourse of human culpability may be to chase any suspicion of divine unfairness or cruelty to humans. Indeed, great care is always taken to associate descriptions of plague as God's scourge with accents on its quality as a just and deserved retribution, a pestilential visitation sent by a just God to his creatures who have 'justly deserved' it (Grindal 1563: 484). A text of exceptional persuasive character and capillary dissemination, the collection of plague prayers published in 1563 by the Bishop of London Edmund Grindal for use in each English church and household, includes this invocation: "turn away from us this his plague and punishment, most justly poured upon us for our sins and unthankfulness" (1563: 78).

The discourse of divine clemency and fairness in association with open or implied references to human culpability is furthered by stress on divine patience: God has repeatedly forgiven sinners and has urged repentance; only "at length" has he begun "to stretch forth his punishing hande" (Pullein 1608: D2^{v}). In this light, texts abound in allusions to God's anger and indignation at human deafness to his warnings. Other writings propose the same notion of a merciful God by presenting plague as the product of divine love: "God most mercifully chastiseth his Children for their sinnes […] that they might […] flee vnto him for help" (I. W. 1603: A3).

2. Semantic fields in the discourse of plague

Within the discourse of plague as punishment, two semantic fields – one concerning communication, the other law – are worth noting. As regards the first, the disease is frequently presented as God's means of communication with his disobedient creatures, as a sort of "messen-

ger" (Hooper 1553: A2). An evocative treatment of this function of pestilence is found in the first-hand account of the great London epidemic of 1665 by the nonconforming preacher Thomas Vincent. His work, which bears the expressive title *God's Terrible Voice in the City*, includes a forceful metaphor of plague as God's means of communication. In a passage characterized by a didactic and pedantic tone, the London minister points out that "God being a Spirit, hath no Mouth nor Tongue properly as men have, […] therefore his way of speaking is not like ours"; indeed, he speaks "by terrible things" and his voice is "loud and full of terrour". "When God lifteth up his hand and strikes," Vincent argues, "he openeth his mouth also and speaks": ergo, plague is a "*speaking* Judgment" (1667: 3, 23, 9-10).

Concerning the semantic field of law, equations of plague with a judgment recur throughout writings. As if reading a list of charges in court, authors compile long and detailed catalogues of sins which have occasioned an "awakening judgment" (Vincent 1667: 21), a "fearfull iudgement of the Lord" (Pullein 1608: E) in the form of a pestilential visitation.[5] Metaphors used to describe plague often include terms from the judicial area: plague is an "extra ordinary magistrate to reforme and punish […] synne" (Hooper 1553: B3^{v}) and a "Nimble executioner of the Diuine *Iustice*" (Dekker 1630: A4^{v}).

While all texts, in connection with characterizations of plague as punishment, refer to some extent to divine wrath, some writings inflect this theme and depict the terrible image of a pitiless, bloodthirsty God at war with humanity. As with the discourse of human culpability discussed above, emphases on God's fearfulness are generally more numerous and forceful in texts designed, by rousing terror, to convince people of the extreme virulence of the present epidemic requiring an extraordinary effort in terms of universal prayer and fasting, or in writings, especially by nonconformist ministers, which lay stress exclusively or predominantly on the supernatural origin of plague.

I suggest that frequent and often particularly vehement references to God's cruelty and fearfulness may also function as more or

5 Interesting lists are found in Vincent (1667: 51) and Church of England (1603: C3^{v}).

less conscious attempts at making sense or at least mitigate the psychological impact of a disease of unknown origin and unparalleled virulence by accounting for it in familiar terms. In this light, plague's characters of ferocity and mercilessness are attributed to a rightly furious and exasperated God. Drawing inspiration from and at the same time adding to a repertoire of scriptural images, numerous plague writings lay stress on God's bellicose attitude. Hence, the epidemiological weaponry of the pestilential bacillus ─ the intensity of pain, the horror of signs, the rapid demise of victims ─ is transfigured in depictions of God's weapons: sharp arrows, for a precise, mortal wound, a sword, a rod. These arm God's hand which is typically mentioned in connection with the attribute *punishing* as for example in Pullein 1608, D2^{v} quoted above. The semantic field of military operations is evoked by frequent occurrences of expressions within the *battle* domain: thus God is cast as a "furious enemy" (Vincent 1667: 176) who negotiates "the retrait from the battell" (Pullein 1608: E) with his afflicted creatures. The terrifying sounds of the battlefield echo in plague writings which often include mentions of the "drum of God's wrath" and the "Trumpet vnto the Lord's battels" (Pullein 1608: E). This image of a bellicose God is a commonplace of all texts, including those by lay authors, like Kellwaye, a "Gentleman" writing for "the loue and benefit of his fellow countrymen", who warns that God "hath determined to strike vs at the quicke" (1593: A3). Plague writings seem to document a general attempt to make sense of the enormity of the calamity in recognizable and acceptable terms as a no quarter war declared by God who typically *destroys*, *smites*, *strikes*, *slaughters*, *slays* and *kills*. He is an invincible enemy whose records on the battlefield include the annihilation of thousands in just three days with a pestilential visitation in response to David's trespasses as Bishop Grindal reminds the English people (1563: 479).

Military vocabulary and imagery extend to God's ministers: since their vehement urgings to repent and hence parry the divine blow have fallen on deaf ears, they have joined the exterminating army: "now must you heare vs strike vp the drum of God's wrath, and sound out the Trumpet vnto the Lords battels" (Pullein 1608: E). In addition to these volunteer drummers and trumpeters, God's army in-

cludes redoubtable fighters like "venimous Aspes, and bloodie Lyons, Sathan and his wicked spirites" (Holland 1603: 53).

The discourse of God's enmity and bellicosity had universal currency, conveyed as it was not just through repeated elaborations in sermons and miscellaneous texts on Scriptural warnings that "the arrowes of the Lord are drunke with blood and his sword doth not cease deuoring of mans flesh" (Pullein 1608: E), but also in the iconographical apparatus of widely circulated broadsheets and bills of mortality which was characterized by a version of the medieval *danse macabre*: God's angel brandishes a sword and hovers from a pestilential cloud over cities and villages while a triumphant Death with his usual attributes, the hourglass and dart, is surrounded by coffins and corpses.

3. The origin of plague: natural vs. supernatural explanations

While divine wrath was universally indicated as plague's "chiefest cause" (Boraston 1630: 1), the epidemiological reality of the disease, the evidence of its contagious nature and the fact of its inclination to spread in specific environmental and climatic contexts required additional tentative explications. As Sheils points out: "explanations of disease in terms of God's will to punish and in terms of natural phenomena could be reconciled by theories of primary and secondary causation" (1982: 89). Unsurprisingly, the balance between supernatural and natural explanations fluctuates in a remarkable way according to the characters and purposes of texts. Hence surgeon William Boraston, after a prefatory mention of sin as plague's primary cause, first enlarges on the secondary means used by God to infect villages and cities, "astrall Impression", "the coniunction of Saturne and Mars", "Eclipses", then alerts readers on the role of "the breath, heat, sweat, smell, habitation, and garments from the sicke" in contagion (1630: 1-3). Bishop Hooper, on the other hand, while allowing for causes

"naturall and consonaunte to reason" (1553: A3^{v}) like corrupt air which generates pestilential vapours from water or unbalance of the four humours, lays great stress on the supernatural origin of plague when he admonishes that "yuell humors" cannot be "engendered of any meates, were not the man that useth them corrupte and first infected with sinne; […] and soo altereth not by chaunce, nor by the influence of starres, the holesomnes of the ayer intoo pestylente and contagyouse infectyon" but because of "synne and contempte of gooddes holye woorde" (1553: B3, B3^{v}).

Some writings transcend the discourse of primary and secondary causes by postulating the existence of two kinds of plague, one utterly supernatural, the other entirely natural. The first proceeds directly from God's blow and therefore is not infectious, the other is spread by natural means like corrupt air and contact with victims. Widely read physicians enlarge on this view in their handbooks. Hence for instance Bradwell subtly distinguishes a "simple" kind of plague deriving from the "immediate stroke of Gods punishing Angell" and entailing no "distemper of Blood, putrifaction of Humors, or influence of Starres" and a "putrid" kind (1636: 2). In their endorsements of this thesis some influential churchmen went as far as to argue that "wilfull sinners" catch the supernatural kind of plague, an "incurable […] pestilence" against which no medicine is effective (Hooper 1553: C1). This theory must have roused confusion and is likely to have encouraged resistance to plague-control measures. Because the idea of a wholly supernatural type of the disease implied inefficacy of natural remedies, a compromise was found to allow for both supernatural and natural salves: the two kinds of plague, often occurring at the same time and in the same geographical area, were generally declared to be hardly distinguishable one from the other.

While official writings like plague orders by the Privy Council and specific forms of prayers by Church of England authorities accommodate both natural and supernatural explanations allowing for natural and supernatural remedies ─ medicaments and quarantine, prayers and fasts respectively ─ other texts, especially by nonconforming preachers, are markedly biased in favour of the supernatural element and further a providential and predestinarian view of plague. This view encouraged fatalistic attitudes and presented medi-

cal and governmental measures as ineffective and ungodly: "they see many preserued in the midst of the plague, who haue vsed no phisicall meanes. What will they make the cause of their deliuerance? No other thing, but the diuine pleasure of God" (Clapham 1603: B2^{v}). Typical of such writings are general pronouncements which depict epidemics as a matter-of-fact divine initiative requiring godly submission, rather than resistance: "that so many thousands dies [sic] […] of pestilence, it is fore-ordained in heaven. The hand of the Lord is in all" (Brooks 1666: 55). The randomness of the disease, which wiped out whole households and spared their neighbours, devastated some geographical areas and was absent or hardly present in others, is also frequently referred to as proof of its providential nature.

Worth careful note are interpretations and descriptions of the physiological marks of plague in spiritual terms aimed at propagating the notion of the utterly supernatural quality of the disease requiring spiritual salves only. Recalling the etymology of plague from Latin *plaga*, a stroke or blow, and offering a literal reading of Scriptural metaphors, some passages describe buboes as marks left by God's sword or arrows, as the visible tokens of sin which is the source of infection.[6] Clapham reports that many "so smitten, haue felt and heard the noyse of a blow and some of them haue upon such a blow found the plain print of a blew hand left behind upon the flesh". His account closes with a telling cause-and-effect statement: "the Angels stroke so is the Cause, the plague-sores and marks arising and appearing are the effect" (1603: B^{v}). Oxford vicar Thomas Pullein proposes a paradigmatic example of spiritual understandings of the evolution of the disease. Drawing on the dominant metaphor used in connection with plague, that of war, he typifies it as a victorious "Captaine" or "Tyraunt" who "displayes his Ensignes on the Wals of our bodies" (1608: E4). Pullein goes on to describe with scientific accuracy the swift transformation of the buboes, the captain's ensigns, from their

6 "Our word plague is derived from the Latin word *plaga*, which originally meant a blow or a stroke, but which acquired in late Latin the additional meaning of pestilence, because a pestilence – irrespective of its nature – was regarded by the pagan Romans as a blow from the gods and by the Christianized Romans as a stroke expressive of the divine wrath" (Shrewsbury 1970: 1).

first appearance to the moment of the victim's death: at first these swellings are red "shewing his cruelty", then they turn blue, "shewing death to approach" and finally they grow black, "whereby wee are put in mind of those horrible torments that followe after death in the fire of hel" (1608: E4).[7] Other expressive spiritual readings of the epidemiological realities of plague include transcriptions of public orders regarding burial of victims at night with "no neighbours nor friends […] to accompany the Coarse" (Royal College of Physicians 1636: H2) in order to prevent the spread of contagion, as retribution for sin. Capitalizing on well-established fears of anomalous and dishonourable burial, some authors in their exhortations to repentance invite people to visualize their own funeral: "Which of your neighbors will accompany your corpes to the graue?" The implied answer is "none" and the explanation follows. "thus, by the iust iudgement of GOD, those that haue sinned wilfully, are buried shamefully." (Pullein 1608: E4).

4. Views on medicine and official policies of epidemics containment

Some writings by the champions of providential attitudes to plague include noteworthy uses of language illustrative of conflicting views. Binary oppositions of terms in the *natural* and *supernatural* fields, less frequently in the *terrestrial* and *celestial* fields, are of particular interest. Significant examples are found in the *Epistle* of the Calvinist divine Henoch Clapham who served a prison term for his vehement attacks on the 1603 plague orders. Elaborating on the "two-fold consideration" of plague, "the first *Supernaturall*, the second *Naturall*", Clapham interestingly equates "atheists" with "naturians", suggesting that notions of the natural origin of plague entail ignorance and lack of faith: "Atheists, meere Naturians and other ignorant persons, do hold

7 A powerfully imaginative description of buboes as marks of divine punishment is found in Dekker: "the purple whip of vengeance" (1609: B).

it to be a natural disease" (1603: B3, A4^{v}). The syntactic coordination of "atheists", "naturians" and "ignorant persons" is expressive of Clapham's contempt of supporters of the natural or Galenic theory of plague. The hyphen in his description of plague as a "super-naturall stroke" (B1^{v}) renders explicit the limits of natural interpretations. The opposition *Galenist/Christian* in Clapham's warning that "To speake and act in such cases, as sole Naturians, is of Christian to become *Galenists*, and of spirituall to become carnall" (A3) points to his open challenge of the official stand of mainstream Anglicanism which stressed God's blessing of medical practices. His contempt of medicine is conveyed by the verb *to creepe* in the following quotation: "we should not creepe on the earth herein with Galen, Hippocrates and such" (B^{v}). Clapham's use of the verb *to creepe*, by evoking creatures from the lower section of the great chain of being, dehumanizes Galen, Hippocrates and their followers. While the repulsiveness generally associated with creeping creatures like worms and snakes is clearly implied, the verb is also suggestive, I think, of the serpentiform Satan of Genesis.

Whereas frontal attacks like that of Clapham were uncommon, critical views of reliance on medical help are variously expressed in some writings. The supporters of the providential notion of plague usually dared not challenge openly the official stand of the national Church on the divine sanction of medical practices. Instead, exploiting the universal awareness of extraordinary mortality rates during epidemics, they often insinuated suspicion of medical regimens' efficacy and suggested that survivors owed their lives to spiritual medicine and God's inscrutable will since: "when God shoots these arrows […] none can pull them out but God himself". (Brooks 1666: 2). Writings by people holding these views are characterized by frequent recourse to terms within the semantic field of *inscrutable* events and *incurable* or *inescapable* scourges. Some distinctive features of plague, like the rapidity of its spread and the swiftness of death after contagion, are also used in connection to discourses of medical impotence and people's helplessness.[8] Hence variations of *sudden* and *unexpected*

8 As Boeckl (2000: 12) points out, the incubation period of septicemic and pneumonic forms of plague "lasts only a few hours. […] Both forms of plague

recur in some texts. In his reminder that "the Plague usually killeth within a few daies; sometimes within a few hours after its first approach", Vincent admonishes: "suddenly the arrow is shot which woundeth unto the heart, so it gives little time of preparation before it brings to the Grave" (1667: 10-11). There is no time to take medicaments or repent of sins. Vincent turns into account Scriptural descriptions of plague as the "Terrour by night, Psalm 91.5.6" (1667: 10) which exploit people's instinctive fear of the dark to lay stress on the uncertainty about the means of transmission of the disease which, as a thief or murderer, attacks suddenly under cover of darkness. Pullein warns that the young and healthy should not feel out of danger, since it is for all to see "how men and Women, that were lusty and strong are suddenly laide along in the dust of the earth" (1608: E3^{v}).

Another rhetorical strategy employed to subtly criticize current policies for public health while avoiding open criticism is a highly emotional and suggestive rendering of the human cost and social consequences of the official strategies of containment of the epidemic through quarantine of the infected enforced by local authorities with full backing by the Church.[9] Vincent is perhaps the most gifted author of such narratives: his depiction of the despair of segregated people "crying and roaring at their windows" (1667: 38) is powerful. I think that the verb *to roar*, apart from being suggestive of anguish, in view of its relation to wild, dangerous beasts, performs two additional functions: it points to the dehumanizing character of a policy entailing segregation of human beings like beasts in cages and rejects medical notions of the life-threatening character of contact with the infected. Vincent adds to the current uses discussed above of the metaphor of war in connection to plague (humans versus disease and God versus sinners) by suggesting that quarantine sparks off a conflict between the healthy and the diseased: people cast a fearful look at infected

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can kill patients within a day, causing apparently healthy persons to collapse suddenly".

9 Healy rightly argues that the mainstream Anglican approach in this respect was characterized by "wide consent on the fact that people, primarily, spread disease and so had a moral, Christian obligation to isolate themselves if knowingly infected" (2001: 54).

houses marked by red crosses, "as if they had been lined with enemies in ambush, that waited to destroy them" (1667: 32).

Alarm about disruption of affective and social ties because of fear of contagion ─ people "begin to fear whom they converse with and deal withall, […] least they should have come out of infected places" (Vincent 1667: 31) ─ and the segregation of whole families is often associated in the writings of critics of official policies with stern censure of another strategy of containment of epidemics: flight from infected areas. The issue of the ethical legitimacy and epidemiological efficacy of flight is a major topic in most plague writings which resonate with questions of this kind: since plague is a well deserved divine punishment, is it morally acceptable to evade it? Do decisions to flee denounce lack of faith and trust in Grace? Totaro (2005: 39) puts the moral dilemma into focus:

> No one could determine whether God wanted people to remain within a plague-infested city and have faith in his protection or whether God wanted people to care for their bodies and families by fleeing from the infection.

The topic must have been in the forefront of people's mind if physicians like Cogan often devote space in their widely read health manuals to the debate on "whether it be lawefull to flie from the plague" (1584: 266); notably, the adjective *lawful* in this context is used with reference to ethics, not laws. One party endorsed Galen's teaching regarding the crucial role of miasma in plague epidemics and the efficacy of flight to avoid infection, the other recalled Moses' warning "flee whether thou wylte, in case thou take with thee the contempt of god and breache of his commaundement, god shall fynde thee out" (Hooper 1553: C1) and stressed providential and predestinarian views: "If it bee Gods will, you shall bee safe any where, if it be not Gods will, you shall be safe no where" (Pullein 1608: F2).

Besides signalling a lack of faith, its opponents argued, flight denounced also a lack of charity. Some texts aim to rouse sympathy for the abandoned diseased, as does the following passage which censures the behaviour of those who flee infected areas. Fear of contagion

> Hath rased out of their hearts, for the while, all affections of love and pity to their nearest Relations and dearest Friends; so that when the Disease hath first seized upon them, and they have had the greatest need of succour, they have left their friends in distress, and flown away from them, as if they had been their Enemies (Vincent 1667: 12).

The official stand was that churchmen and magistrates should stay at their posts during epidemics, although they should not risk their lives by visiting the sick. Hooper's warning that "bishops, vicars, curates" who abandon the sick "flee from goddes people into god's high indignation" (1553: C2) seems reflective of the fact that clergymen in the Church of England very often fled (see Totaro 2005: 46). It is worth noting, as Wallis suggests (2006: 15), that on the occasion of outbreaks of plague many nonconformist clergymen who had been ejected from their parishes after the Restoration stayed in plague-infected areas to assist the diseased and preach, thus circumventing the statutory prohibition of public preaching by the dissenting clergy.

The tone of the many references to the stands of nonconforming preachers in official documents by the Privy Council and Church of England authorities seems to indicate a deep preoccupation with their impact on common people's acceptance of medical care and compliance with government plague-control measures. The plague orders issued in 1603, which replicate those promulgated by Queen Elizabeth in 1578, are eloquent in this regard:

> If there be any person Ecclesiasticall or Lay, that shall hold and publish any opinions (as in some places report is made) that it is a vain thing to forbeare to resort to the Infected, or that it is not charitable to forbid the same, pretending that no person shall die but at their time prefixed, these persons shall be not only reprehended, but by order of the Bishop, if they be Ecclesiasticall, shall be forbidden to preach, and being Lay, shall also be enioyned to forbear to utter such dangerous opinions upon pain of imprisonment. (*Orders* 1603: G2^{v}).

The correspondence between Bishop Grindal and Lord William Cecil, Queen Elizabeth's Secretary of State, attests to a common worry and effort at opposing such views (1563: 270). Indeed, the official stand of the national Church in this respect was clear, as was its backing of public health policies. While nonconformists tended to inflect passa-

ges of the Bible which seemed to endorse their predestinarian and providential views and laid great stress on extrapolations from Calvin's wider teaching like "it is only in his hand to apoint lyfe or death: and therefore thys mater ought onely to be refferred to hys wil" (1561: F6), the mainstream Church of England clergy emphasized the abundant Scriptural evidence regarding the divine sanction of medical practices and recalled Calvin's numerous and unambiguous references to it.[10] An obligatory element of their plague writings (as of those, it should be noted, by medical and lay authors) is a reminder of the reiteration throughout the Bible of God's blessing on healing plants and remedies used by physicians who thus function as instruments of divine mercy. All authors quoted from Ecclesiasticus (Book of Sirach) 38 which opens with the exhortation "Honour the physician for the need thou hast of him: for the most High hath created him" then specifies that "all healing is from God. […] The most High hath created medicines out of the earth, and a wise man will not abhor them". Vehement attacks on preachers holding the opposite view are penned by influential churchmen like John Sanford who admonishes that those who trust only in "God's protection" and "neglect the good meanes of [their] preseruation" become "homicides and willfull murtherers" of themselves (1604: 50). The inclusion and prominence of such warnings in the various editions of official prayers for universal reading and repetition endow them with the quality of expressions of the official stand of the national Church. The tone of these pronouncements is often harsh and lapidary as in a reference to the attitude of those who refuse medicaments and stay in infected places trusting that their faith will save them: "this is not faith in God, but a grosse, ignorant, and foole-hardy presumption" (Church of England 1603: D1^{v}).

While, as Slack notes (1985: 230), Nowell's homily in the first edition of the official plague prayers urged godly submission to God's will and endorsed ─ at least partly ─ providential interpretations of and attitudes to plague, the "Exhortation" in the third edition of 1603 stressed the role of contagion requiring containment measures and offered a particularly forceful statement of ecclesiastical energetic back-

10 On Calvin's and more generally the Anglican Church's endorsement of medical practices see Harley (1993).

ing of governmental policies and stern censure of criticism of the same. A general reference to the efficacy and legitimacy of compliance with health regulations, "the good use of ordinarie meanes, and the wary and carefull carriage of our selues out of the danger of contagion" is followed by exposure of the ungodliness of opposite approaches: "the desperate securitie of those, that seeme neither to feare, nor to flie from this infection, is but a tempting and prouoking of the iudgement of God". Their behaviour makes them guilty of "willfull murder both of themselues, their children, their families, and neighbours, which hatefull crueltie against their owne kind, Turkes and infidels would abhorre." The good Christian instead complies with "those good and wholesome orders, and decrees already published for preuenting the further infection of this calamities" and uses "all good meanes, and medicinable helpe made knowne unto us for our better preseruation" (Church of England 1603: D2, D2^{v}).

5. Concluding remarks

The synergic effort of the national Church and the English government in containment of plague seems to mark a turning point in the shaping of a mentality that prepared breeding ground for a new attention to human nature in its relation to the physical world. Plague epidemics in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England sparked off a conflict of opposed ideological views regarding the efficacy and legitimacy of human initiative on the occasion of medical emergencies. Faced with a universal, collective catastrophe of apocalyptic proportion, the vigorous endorsement of health regulations by the mainstream Anglican authorities and their inclusion of instruction for the preparation of plague medicaments in official prayers had a great impact on containment of the disease. It also produced a less easily documentable but no less crucial effect on developments of a new scientific understanding of the human body and its environment as a subject worth study and experiment not despite theology and its view

of the pre-eminence of the spiritual or immaterial component of human nature, but in harmony with it.

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