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978-1-107-02845-6 - A History of Balance, 1250–1375: The Emergence of a New Model of Equilibrium and its Impact on Thought

Joel Kaye

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A History of Balance, 1250–1375

The ideal of balance and its association with what is ordered, just, and healthful remained unchanged throughout the medieval period. The central place allotted to balance in the workings of nature and society also remained unchanged. What changed within the culture of scholasticism, between approximately 1280 and 1360, was the emergence of a greatly expanded sense of what balance is and can be. In this groundbreaking history of balance, Joel Kaye reveals that this new sense of balance and its potentialities became the basis of a new model of equilibrium, shaped and shared by the most acute and innovative thinkers of the period. Through a focus on four disciplines – scholastic economic thought, political thought, medical thought, and natural philosophy – Kaye's book reveals that this new model of equilibrium opened up striking new vistas of imaginative and speculative possibility, making possible a profound rethinking of the world and its workings.

JOEL KAYE is Professor in the Department of History at Barnard College, Columbia University. His previous publications include *Economy and Nature in the Fourteenth Century: Money, Market Exchange, and the Emergence of Scientific Thought* (Cambridge, 1998).

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and its Impact on Thought*

Joel Kaye

Barnard College, Columbia University



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Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> vi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	vii
Introduction	1
1 Equality and equalization in the economic sphere, part 1: The scholastic discourse on usury to 1300	20
2 Equality and equalization in the economic sphere, part 2: The scholastic discourse on price and value to 1300	76
3 Balance in medieval medical theory, part 1: The legacy of Galen	128
4 Balance in medieval medical theory, part 2: The scholastic reception and refinement of Galenic balance to c. 1315	183
5 Evolving models of equalization in medieval political thought, c. 1250–1325	241
6 The new model of equilibrium in medieval political thought, part 1: The <i>Defensor pacis</i> of Marsilius of Padua	299
7 The new model of equilibrium in medieval political thought, part 2: The writings of Nicole Oresme	345
8 The new model of equilibrium in scholastic natural philosophy, c. 1325–1375	398
Conclusion	463
<i>Bibliography</i>	485
<i>Index</i>	512

Illustrations

1	Paris scene, c. 1315; Traffic on the Seine, showing the Grand Pont and the Petit Pont. <i>La vie de Saint Denys</i> , BNF ms. Français 2091, fol. 99r	page 271
2	Paris scene, c. 1315; Traffic on the Seine, showing the Grand Pont and the Petit Pont. <i>La vie de Saint Denys</i> , BNF ms. Français 2091, fol. 125r	272
3	Paris scene, c. 1315; Traffic on the Seine, showing the Grand Pont and the Petit Pont. <i>La vie de Saint Denys</i> , BNF ms. Français 2092, fol. 6v	273
4	Paris scene, c. 1315; Traffic on the Seine, showing the Grand Pont and the Petit Pont. <i>La vie de Saint Denys</i> , BNF ms. Français 2092, fol. 10v	275
5	Paris scene, c. 1315; Traffic on the Seine, showing the Grand Pont and the Petit Pont. <i>La vie de Saint Denys</i> , BNF ms. Français 2091, fol. 111r	278
6	Paris scene, c. 1315; Traffic on the Seine, showing the Grand Pont and the Petit Pont. <i>La vie de Saint Denys</i> , BNF ms. Français 2092, fol. 37v	280

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgments

In the dozen years that I have been working on this book, I have relied on the help and support of many people and institutions, and I have accumulated many large debts of gratitude. I realize that by listing their names I can provide them only a very partial requital and an equally partial sense of what I owe them, but at the least it is a start. To begin with, I could not have brought this project to conclusion without the help of those colleagues who read and offered insightful comments on one or more chapters over the years: Caroline Bynum (whose wisdom I have relied on from beginning to end), Paul Freedman, Joanne Freeman, Martha Howell, Adam Kosto, Michael McVaugh, Edward Peters, David Reisman, Neslihan Senocak, Nancy Siraisi, Pamela Smith, Heinrich von Staden, Paul Strohm, Edith Sylla, Simon Teuscher, Lisa Tiersten, Giacomo Todeschini, Peter Travis, Carl Wennerlind, and my anonymous readers at Cambridge University Press.

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978-1-107-02845-6 - A History of Balance, 1250–1375: The Emergence of a New Model of Equilibrium and its Impact on Thought

Joel Kaye

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii Acknowledgments

As important as my friends, family, and colleagues have been, I could never have completed a project of this size without the generous support of research institutions and funding agencies, along with the people who serve and direct them. My project began with a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) fellowship in 2000, during which I sketched a research plan for my project on the history of balance and began to look in the direction of medieval medicine. Holding, as I did, the vague notion that Galenic medicine was associated with “the balance of the humors,” I thought I would investigate further. At the end of this semester’s leave, after having spent six weeks as a visitor at the American Academy at Rome (at the invitation of its director, Lester Little) researching medical manuscripts at the Biblioteca Vaticana, I began to realize how vast and bountiful was the intellectual landscape I had wandered into. On the basis of this first foray into medicine, I applied for and was awarded a year-long National Science Foundation (NSF) book-project grant for 2001–2 to continue my studies of this subject. I spent much of the NSF year reading early printed editions of Galenic writings and their scholastic commentaries in the Rare Book Room of the New York Academy of Medicine, where I relied on the kind assistance of its librarians, Miriam Mandelbaum and Arlene Shaner.

To the extent that my teaching allowed, I continued my study of medicine until 2003–4, when I was admitted as a scholar in residence to the Institute for Advanced Studies, School of Historical Studies. That year I wrote the book’s first chapter (the current Chapter 3) on the legacy of Galenic balance and I made a start on the scholastic reception of Galenic balance. I cannot thank everyone who made my stay at the Institute so rewarding, but I must mention two who helped me more than I can say: Caroline Bynum, in her key role as the faculty member in European medieval history, and Marian Zelazny, the indispensable administrative officer of the School of Historical Studies.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgments

ix

summer in Princeton as a visitor at the Institute for Advanced Study, School of Historical Studies.

Over the last two years, I wrote the concluding chapter on balance in scholastic natural philosophy, and I composed the book's Introduction and Conclusion. To do so, I relied on the library of Smith College in the summers and on Columbia's Butler Library and the library of the General Theological Seminary in Chelsea during the school year (aided by several course releases from Barnard College). I am deeply grateful to each of these fine libraries and institutions.

In a time when historians and even whole departments of history have begun to be assessed in terms of quantitative production, judged in terms of the number of articles (or even pages) published yearly: when as a result scholars (particularly young scholars) are increasingly urged to publish often, and consequently early; and when academic presses are ever more intent on enforcing shrinking word limits on manuscripts they will accept, I offer my sincere thanks to Barnard College for its unhesitating support over the many years of this project, and to Cambridge University Press for accepting a manuscript that greatly exceeds the length dictated by current norms.

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