

## Passez Outre: The Trial of Jeanne d'Arc

Roger M. Cooke 1 Nov, 2023

Confronted with extra ordinary phenomena, the mind tries to place them by projecting beliefs and expectations. Jeanne d'Arc was extra ordinary in the extreme. [George Bernard Shaw](#) said that Jeanne's voices and visions prove nothing, "*but the variety of the conclusions reached show how little our matter-of-fact historians know about other people's minds, or even about their own*". Knowing his own mind, he concluded that "*Joan got a far fairer trial from the Church and the Inquisition than any prisoner of her type and in her situation gets nowadays in any official secular court; and the decision was strictly according to law*" (still smarting George?). Mark Twain considered his [historical novel on Jeanne](#) his best work. It is ignored today. Philosophers should study Jeanne's trial, for it raises questions more profound than those raised by the trials of Socrates, Giordano Bruno or Galileo.

### History

The divine rights of Medieval kings were so tangled that god could make known his preference only through war. After the battle of Agincourt (1415) the English control most of France north of the Loire, affirming Henry V's claim to the French throne through his maternal grandmother (maternal succession was not generally recognized). King Charles VI of France is insane and before dying in 1422, signs the Treaty of Troyes disinheriting his son Charles VII and giving the kingdom to Henry V, who dies before his coronation. On March 4, 1429 a peasant maid of (she thinks) 17 named Jeanne (no last name) tells Charles VII that she has been ordered by god to conduct him to his coronation in Reims. She is examined by the Archbishop of Reims (ecclesiastic superior of Pierre Cauchon see below) at Poitiers who finds her without blemish but recommends that she first give a sign. With troops from Charles VII she lifts the 6 month siege of the key Loire city of Orleans in 4 days. Before the battle she orders all her soldiers on their knees to confess their sins; a sinful heart fears death. Jeanne never unsheathes her sword in battle but leads with her banner. A succession of stunning English defeats leads to Reims in 70 days where Charles VII is crowned. Charles VII wants to negotiate with the English but Jeanne adamantly insists on pursuing the war. While Charles VII dithers, Jeanne writes to the Hussites in Bavaria who question papal authority: "I shall destroy your empty and abominable superstition and strip you of either your heresy or your lives". For context, Jeanne wasn't the only visionary. Jeanne-Marie de Maillé, a woman of noble birth had visions and made prophecies – one concerning the multiple popes. In September 1430 a woman named Pieronne announced in Paris that she talked with god and that what Jeanne "did was well done and was God's will". For refusing to recant Pieronne was burned at the stake.

At Compiègne the French are pushed back to their ramparts. Jeanne covers the retreat but the city gates suddenly close leaving her to be captured by the faux French Burgundians fighting for England. God's fickle preferences changed. The Burgundians want a handsome ransom but Charles VII offers none and remains deafeningly silent. The archbishop of Reims reports that a new emissary from god, William the Shepherd, is with Charles' forces. The shepherd disappears in English captivity a few months later. The English don't want Jeanne to live but don't want her blood on their hands. They bankroll Burgundian Bishop Pierre Cauchon and pay a ransom equivalent to 1000 first class war steeds (the English paid Cauchon 100 equivalent steeds per year). Although Jeanne has already been investigated by his ecclesiastic superior, on 9 Jan 1430 Cauchon initiates an unauthorized ecclesiastical trial at Rouen whose verdict is never in doubt. After 5 months of interrogation Jeanne is convicted of dressing like a man and "listening to voices". Faced with incineration she confesses. Her voices then admonish her that she has sold her soul to save her body. She retracts her confession on May 30, 1431 and is burned at the stake. She is 19 years old. On July 7, 1456, after taking possession of the transcripts at Rouen, the church reverses the 1431 verdict. Cauchon is excommunicated post mortem, his body is retrieved from his recent grave and tossed into a public sewer. On May 16, 1920, 500 years after her death, Jeanne is canonized.

### Philosophy

Transcripts of her [examination at Poitiers](#), her [trial at Rouen](#) and [extensive eye witness testimony](#) during her rehabilitation of 1456 are all available (the Book of the Poitiers examination is lost, but recounts of participants survive).

Here are few snippets from her interrogation at Poitiers and Rouen:

Asked why god needed soldiers "*In the name of God, the soldiers will fight and God will give victory.*"

Asked by a prelate from Limousin whether her voices spoke French: "*Better than you.*"

Asked if she believed in God: "*Verily, more than you!*"

Asked why they should believe her without a sign to support her claims: "*In the name of God, I have not come to Poitiers to give signs; but take me to Orléans, and I will show you signs of the purpose for which I am sent.*"

At her trial at Rouen, Cauchon asked who advised her to dress like a man: “*Passez outre*”<sup>1</sup> – her answer to many of Cauchon’s questions..

In all of human history there is no one remotely comparable to Jeanne, not [Boudica](#), not [Semiramis](#), not [Hippolyta](#). A hundred years war with untold death and misery could not reveal god’s regal preference. An illiterate penniless maid of 17 accomplished in 70 days what these armies could not. The church found her a heretic then a saint. According to their rules she is both (*cogitare de illo*). Her perfection of purpose was born of her apodictic experience of visions and voices. The problem with apodictic experiences is that one cannot transfer them to others. Jeanne can tell others about her visions but she can’t cause others to have them. Yet these are social constructs – had she heard voices of [Hypatia](#) and [Sumayyah bint Khayyat](#) instead of [St Catherine](#) and [St. Margret](#) no one would have listened. She cannot transfer, she can only attest. If under threat of painful death she disavows her voices, then they are invented by Satan who is finally purged –or did she really disavow god to save her body? If she prefers death to abjuration the voices are from god–or did Satan prevail after all. At the end of her trial in 1431, asked if her voices were good or evil spirits she replied “*Soint bons, soint mauvais esperits, ilz me sont apparus.*” God or Satan, its irrelevant and herewith also the church’s judgment.

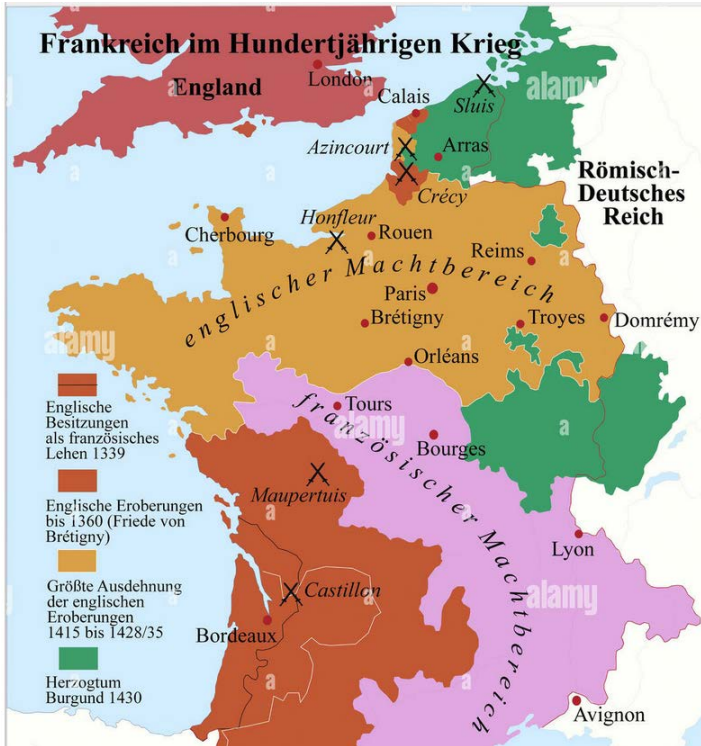
Plato, channeling Socrates, based the highest knowledge on direct intuition of the Good. Like Jeanne’s visions such intuition is apodictic and non-transferable. Plato never asked if his Good was really good. Why should he? That’s the point of apodicticity. Otherwise he would need a meta-intuition certifying his intuition...ad infinitum. Plato, in the person of Socrates, attested. Poet, philosopher and early heliocentric advocate [Giordano Bruno](#) was imprisoned in Rome during his 7 year trial for heresy. He recanted but then repudiated his recantation and was burned at the Campo de ‘Fiori in 1600. He attested. [Galileo](#) was convicted of the heliocentric heresy in 1633. Rather than attest he publicly denied that the Earth moved. His truth didn’t require his martyrdom, just his telescope, which is transferable. Galileo’s conviction was annulled in 1992 after 359 short years. In 2000 [Pope Paul II apologized for burning Bruno](#), without reversing their [verdict of heresy](#).

What ended the Middle Ages? Some say the fall of Constantinople in 1453, some say the Gutenberg Bible in 1455, some say the rehabilitation of Jeanne d’Arc in 1456 when the world finally understood *Passez Outre*.

We’ve gone from apodicticity through *passez outre* to telescopes. Is the age of attestation behind us? I doubt it, but attestation needs to morph into something more transferable...stay tuned. However, all that won’t help us place Jeanne. Mark Twain’s effort is the best so far IMO. Maybe novelists are better at transferring experiences than “matter-of-fact” historians..

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<sup>1</sup> No simple English equivalent, suggestions include: *bypass, carry on regardless, circumvent, dispense with, disregard, ignore, go beyond, get over it, get past, override, overcome, overlook, overrule, skip,....*



Jeanne's capture: Cathedral at Orleans



Jeanne's banner



Jeanne's statue at Orleans